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The State of the World's Human Rights; Bangladesh 2025

Freedom of expression, association and assembly remained unnecessarily restricted under the interim government. Individuals, including human rights defenders, were subjected to arbitrary arrests and harassment for exercising their right to freedom of expression. The interim government's ban on the Awami League political party brought into question their commitment to upholding freedom of association. The Cyber Security Act of 2023 continued to be used until it was replaced by the Cyber Security Ordinance in 2025. Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal sentenced former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death, after convicting them in their absence, of crimes against humanity for their roles in using unlawful force against protesters in 2024. The interim government proposed a draft ordinance on enforced disappearances and extended the mandate of the national commission appointed to investigate cases. For the first time, former military officers were arrested on charges of enforced disappearance. Proposed reforms aimed at protecting women's rights faced pushback from Islamist groups. The humanitarian crisis for Rohingya refugees deepened due to cutbacks in humanitarian funding, despite Cox's Bazar sheltering new arrivals from Rakhine State. At least 59 members of the Indigenous Bawm community remained in detention on baseless terrorism charges. Negotiations continued between the interim government and labour rights and trade union leaders over the urgent need to reform labour laws and improve wages and working conditions. Workers protested against low wages, harassment and anti-union repression. The climate crisis entrenched gender and caste-based inequalities.

Background

An interim government took office in August 2024, following the ousting of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League administration, comprising advisers led by Muhammad Yunus. Over the course of the year, it established 11 reform commissions and announced general elections to appoint a new government, scheduled for February 2026. In February, a National Consensus Commission was set up to facilitate agreement among political parties on key reforms. To commemorate the one-year anniversary of the protests, the interim government announced the "July National Charter", outlining its reform aspirations.

After facing allegations of serious human rights violations during the 2024 protests, police reportedly became relatively inactive in addressing crime, leading to a breakdown of law and order for much of the year.

At the invitation of the interim government, the UN human rights office, OHCHR, conducted an independent fact-finding inquiry into alleged human rights violations and abuses

committed during the protests between 1 July and 15 August 2024. In July, OHCHR signed a three-year Memorandum of Understanding with the government to establish an office in the country to support the protection and promotion of human rights. On 17 July, Bangladesh acceded to the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture.

Freedom of expression, association and assembly

Incidents of harassment, violence and arrests targeting individuals exercising their right to freedom of expression – including human rights defenders, journalists, authors, bloggers and poets – continued throughout the year.¹ The Cyber Security Act of 2023, a law used by the former government against critics in a manner that contravened the right to freedom of expression, continued to be utilized by the interim government to deter activism. The Act was repealed and replaced by the Cyber Security Ordinance, which took effect in May, intended to apply until its formal approval and adoption into law by a future parliament.² The ordinance carried undefined, broad provisions such as “obscene video” and “sexual harassment”, while “cyber terrorism” was defined vaguely, all provisions that could be abused.

In May, the interim government banned all activities of the Awami League political party, using an amendment to the Anti-Terrorism Act, pending trials of its leaders linked to the deaths of protesters in 2024. Subsequently, the Election Commission also suspended the party’s registration.

In August, the High Court dismissed a case filed in 2018 under the Information and Communication Technology Act against activist photographer and Amnesty International prisoner of conscience Shahidul Alam.

In December, journalist Anis Alamgir was arrested under the Anti-Terrorism Act following a complaint alleging that he and four others had used their social media accounts and other media platforms to support the Awami League.

On 18 December, following the killing of Sharif Osman Hadi, a prominent leader of the July Uprising, violent protests erupted. The offices of two media outlets, The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, were attacked and set alight, the editor of the New Age newspaper was harassed, and Chhayanaut, a cultural institution, was attacked.

Oppressive restrictions continued to be imposed on the right to unionize, including excessive requirements required for union registration, State interference in union activities and arbitrary or unduly controlling registration process.³

Enforced disappearances

After forming a commission to investigate enforced disappearances and signing the International Convention Against Enforced Disappearance in 2024, the interim government sought to give effect to the Convention through a new ordinance. The draft ordinance was initially criticized for not aligning with international human rights standards, including around

the death penalty. Additionally, it was faulted for its provisions limiting command responsibility, and for its lack of recognition of the continuing nature of the crime of enforced disappearance. Some of these concerns were rectified in later drafts, and the ordinance was approved by the government in December. The adoption of the ordinance into law was left to a future legislature.

The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances conducted a four-day technical visit in June, during which they met with government stakeholders and victims of enforced disappearances. The Working Group issued technical advice on the urgent need to establish a victim and witness protection system and strengthen the national Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, and expressed its deep concern about continued widespread impunity for enforced disappearances.

Also in June, the national Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances submitted its second interim report to Chief Adviser Yunus. The Commission reported that it had received 1,837 complaints regarding enforced disappearances. As a result, after an initial review, 1,772 active cases were entered into the Commission's database. Among these, 1,427 victims were reported to have been found alive, while 345 individuals remained missing. Based on the number of complaints in their database, the Commission found 67% of enforced disappearances were linked to state agencies such as the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). They also noted a "widespread and systematic culture of torture". The Commission's mandate was extended until the end of the year.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

In February, the UN released the findings of its fact-finding investigation. The inquiry found reasonable grounds to believe that the former government and its security and intelligence apparatus, together with violent elements associated with the Awami League political party, systematically engaged in serious human rights violations. These included hundreds of extrajudicial killings, other use of force violations resulting in serious injuries to thousands of protesters, extensive arbitrary arrests and detention, and torture and other forms of ill-treatment. Verified leaked audio suggested former prime minister Sheikh Hasina authorized security forces to use lethal weapons against protesters.

In July, the domestic International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) sentenced the former prime minister to six months in prison for contempt of court, after the release of an audio recording in which she declared that she had a "licence to kill" 227 people since there were 227 murder cases against her. The sentence was issued in her absence, as she had fled to India in 2024 amid protests. The ICT also issued arrest warrants in October for several former military officers in connection with alleged enforced disappearances that occurred during the tenure of the former prime minister. This was the first time formal charges were brought for enforced disappearances.

In November, the ICT sentenced former prime minister Hasina, former home affairs minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, and former inspector general of police Chowdhury Abdullah al-Mamun on counts of crimes against humanity relating to the 2024 protest crackdown. Hasina

and Asaduzzaman were sentenced to death in their absence while Chowdhury, who turned into a state witness, was sentenced to five years in prison after he pleaded guilty.

The scope and operations of the ICT, established by Sheikh Hasina's government in 2009, continued to raise concerns regarding due process rights. NGOs urged the interim government to declare a moratorium on the death penalty and ensure the ICT had the legal framework, resources and independence needed to conduct impartial prosecutions in accordance with international standards for all alleged perpetrators, regardless of their institutional or political affiliations.

The rights of victims to justice and reparations were further undermined by the absence of an effective national human rights mechanism to support their claims for redress.⁴ The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) remained vacant following the resignation of all its commissioners at once in November 2024. In September, the government invited public comments on a draft National Human Rights Commission Ordinance 2025, intended to replace the National Human Rights Commission Act of 2009. When the new draft NHRC ordinance was unveiled, the UN and NGOs emphasized the need for a strengthened and independent NHRC, compliant with international standards such as the Paris Principles. In November, the Advisory Council approved the NHRC ordinance. However, Transparency International reported that in December the ordinance was amended to permit "bureaucratic control".

Women's and girls' rights

In May, thousands of Islamist protesters led by Hefazat-e-Islam, a coalition of Islamic advocacy groups, gathered in the capital, Dhaka, to protest against the reforms proposed by the Women's Affairs Reform Commission. The Commission had made numerous recommendations, including recognizing equal inheritance rights for women, increasing women's political participation, criminalizing marital rape, and protecting the rights of sex workers. The protesters deemed these proposals to be "anti-Islamic".

Refugees' and migrants' rights

Cuts in USAID funding severely affected the Rohingya people in Bangladesh. A UN report highlighted that only 35% of the funding needs for the Rohingya in Bangladesh were being met, and that there was a 17% cut to the programmes run by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency. Food insecurity, overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, and limited access to education and healthcare were all worsened by the aid cuts, while insecurity and protection issues were exacerbated. The UN Secretary-General visited the camps at Cox's Bazar in March.

With the situation in Rakhine State in Myanmar deteriorating due to escalation of the armed conflict between the Arakan army and the Myanmar military, an increase in Rohingya arrivals further strained an already precarious humanitarian crisis. The UN estimated that 150,000 new arrivals entered Bangladesh between January 2024 and July 2025. Rohingya people seeking refuge by crossing the border into Bangladesh were reportedly turned away by the Border

Guard after a period of detention, raising concerns around violations of the principle of non-refoulement. In September, a UN high-level conference on the situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar was held, where the USA and the UK announced that they would provide USD 96 million in further assistance to support the refugee camps in Bangladesh.⁵

Indigenous Peoples' rights

At least 59 Indigenous Bawm people continued to be detained without trial after their arrest in April 2024 under the pretext of being part of, or supporters of, the military group Kuki-Chin National Front. Throughout the year, reports emerged about deaths in custody and the denial of necessary medical care to detainees.

Workers' rights

Unrest in the garment industry persisted as workers protested against low wages, harassment and anti-union repression.⁶ Extensive discussions and negotiations continued between the interim government and union leaders regarding the urgent need to reform labour laws and improve wages and working conditions. In November, the interim government promulgated the Bangladesh Labour Act (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025.

Right to a healthy environment

The climate crisis intensified barriers to the realization of the rights to water and sanitation for Dalit sanitation workers in Khulna and Satkhira, trapping them in a cycle of vulnerability.⁷ Dalit women, who face compounded discrimination based on caste, gender and occupation, were among the most affected, yet least visible, in climate and water, sanitation and hygiene policy responses by the government.

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1. ["Bangladesh: Interim government should protect freedom of expression and opinion", 21 March ↩](#)
 2. ["Bangladesh: Interim government's actions inconsistent with July Declaration", 12 August ↩](#)
 3. [South Asia: Stitched Up: Denial of Freedom of Association for Garment Workers in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, 27 November ↩](#)
 4. ["Bangladesh: National Human Rights Commission must not be forgotten amid reform agenda", 27 May ↩](#)
 5. [UN Member States Must Step-Up Efforts to Protect and Meet the Urgent Humanitarian Needs of the Rohingyas at the High-Level Conference, 26 September ↩](#)
 6. [South Asia: Stitched Up: Denial of Freedom of Association for Garment Workers in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, 27 November ↩](#)

7. *Bangladesh: Left Behind in the Storm: Dalit Women Sanitation Workers and the Fight for Water and Dignity*, 16 October ↩

