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COI QUERY RESPONSE

BANGLADESH - POLITICAL PERSECUTION

The *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)* in November 2024 reported on the protests stating: “To curtail protests, on 20 July 2024, the government deployed military forces [23] and imposed a national curfew [24] with a shoot-on-sight order. [25] There were also reports of the police firing tear gas and rubber bullets against protesters. [26] On 25 July 2024, Amnesty International (AI) verified three video-recorded incidents of law enforcement agencies making use of 'lethal and less lethal weapons' while policing the protests, and actions that 'clearly constitute unlawful and unnecessary use of force.' [27] The government relaxed the curfew on 26 July 2024 [28] and then extended it indefinitely from 5 August 2024.”¹

Odhikar (Bangladesh) in its report for July-September 2024 stated: “The student movement against the authoritarian regime of Sheikh Hasina is a historical event in Bangladesh. Seeking to repress the movement with a heavy hand, the then-government unleashed its affiliates, such as Chhatra League [5], Jubo League [6] and Swechchasebak League [7], against the student protestors. During this time, even a UN-labelled armed vehicle was deployed to quell protests. [8] Members of law enforcement agencies and security personnel shot at student protesters indiscriminately. 1581 people, including children, were killed [9], over 18,000 [10] were injured, and 550 people [11] sustained injuries that damaged their eyesight. These numbers are expected to be much higher as the tally continues. The mass killings perpetrated in July-August 2024 are the largest in Bangladesh's history of repression during protests. Alongside the mass killings, members of law enforcement agencies also disappeared, arrested, and tortured student protesters.”²

International Crisis Group in November 2024 reported on a recent political development stating: “Months after prevailing in a stage-managed general election, the unpopular premier, Sheikh

¹ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (15 November 2024) EUAA COI Query - Bangladesh: The protests in July and August 2024 and their aftermath, p.3

² Odhikar (Bangladesh) (14 November 2024) Bangladesh - Third Quarterly Human Rights Report: July-September 2024, p.3

Hasina, was forced to give up power by student demonstrations that turned into a mass uprising. Her government's attempts to quell the student protests with deadly force backfired, as the bloodshed brought Bangladeshis from all walks of life into the streets to call for her ouster. On 5 August, she fled for India as thousands of protesters closed in on her Dhaka residence.”³

It went on to report: “After fifteen years in office, Sheikh Hasina's administration had grown deeply unpopular. To hold on to power, her government systematically undermined the independence of Bangladesh's institutions, particularly the police, judiciary and bureaucracy. Widespread human rights violations and regular crackdowns on her opponents, coupled with economic mismanagement, stark social inequality and worsening corruption, had weakened support for her party, the Awami League (AL), particularly in the past five years.”⁴

On political violence it reported: “In the wake of Hasina's departure, many police had abandoned their posts, in part due to fear of reprisal from protesters (see Section III.A). Around 250 people are thought to have been killed between 5-11 August, mainly in attacks on people linked to Hasina's regime, especially AL members. Members of religious minorities, particularly Hindus, have also been targets, but primarily because of their AL affiliation rather than religion.”⁵

CIVICUS in October 2024 stated: “Bangladesh's civic space is rated 'closed' by the CIVICUS Monitor, its worst rating. It was downgraded in December 2023 as a result of a massive government crackdown on opposition politicians and independent critics in the run-up to national elections. Over the year, the authorities targeted human rights defenders, protesters and other critics, using intimidation, violence, arrest and torture. Authorities also targeted journalists exposing state abuses and shut down critical media outlets.”⁶

Odhikar (Bangladesh) in its report for April-June 2024 stated: “Corruption, malfeasance and violence of Awami League and its affiliated organisations are still ongoing. The leaders and activists of the ruling party are involved in various acts of violence including murder, but most of them are enjoying impunity.”⁷

It also stated: “Between April and June 2024, at least 46 people killed and 1,884 people injured in political violence.”⁸

The *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)* in July 2024 reported on the treatment of opposition and critics that: “Dissidents and critics have been suppressed through harassment, surveillance, arbitrary arrest, and enforced disappearance. [744] State authorities have also reportedly harassed family members of such individuals [745] for example through arrests [746] or showing up at their houses in the middle of the night to interrogate them. [747] In a joint statement, a group of twelve local and international human rights organisation said that the government had been using enforced disappearance as 'a tool to suppress political movements and silence dissenting voices, creating a climate of fear'. [748] Meanwhile, Bertelsmann Stiftung reported that enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings had been 'instrumentalized' in order to 'spread fear and muzzle criticism', [749]

³ International Crisis Group (14 November 2024) A New Era in Bangladesh? The First Hundred Days of Reform, p.4

⁴ Ibid, p.4

⁵ Ibid, pp.8-9

⁶ CIVICUS (30 October 2024) Bangladesh: Interim government commits to human rights reforms as they release activists, protesters and investigate past crimes, p.1

⁷ Odhikar (Bangladesh) (31 July 2024) Bangladesh Three Month Human Rights Report: April - June 2024, p.5

⁸ Ibid, p.7

while Human Rights Watch described enforced disappearances as a 'hallmark' of Sheikh Hasina's rule. [750]"⁹

On political activists it stated: "Political activists have been subjected to different forms of violence ahead of elections, [763] and sources reported on a crackdown on political activism and protests of BNP supporters. [764] Some protests have turned violent, leading to deaths and injuries when supporters of different parties have clashed with each other [765] and also with the police. [766] Protesters have been met with excessive use of force by the police, [767] and there were also reports of the police coordinating attacks against the opposition together with supporters of the ruling party. [768] Protests have been followed by extensive arrests of opposition members and supporters, [769] while AL affiliates have seemingly enjoyed impunity for their part in the violence. [770] In 2022, ASK recorded 70 deaths and 6 914 injured due to political violence, and 45 deaths and 7 121 injured 2023. ASK further recorded 27 deaths and 2 471 injured in January–April 2024. [771]"¹⁰

In April 2024 the *US Department of State* in its annual report on the preceding year stated: "Arbitrary arrests occurred, often in conjunction with political demonstrations or speech, or as part of security force responses to alleged terrorist activity, and the government held persons in detention without specific charges, sometimes to collect information regarding other suspects. The expansiveness of the 1974 Special Powers Act granted legal justification for arrests that would often otherwise be considered arbitrary, since it removed the requirement that arrests be based on crimes that have occurred previously. Human rights activists claimed police falsely constructed cases to target opposition leaders, workers, and supporters, and that the government used law enforcement agencies to crack down on political rivals."¹¹

The *Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Germany)* reported on Jun-Dec 2023 events including: "A report by human rights organisation HRW accuses the government of using violence against members of the opposition and critics of the government. According to the report, since the beginning of the protests by the largest opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), on 28.10.23 some 10,000 opposition activists have been arrested, at least 16 people – including two police officers – have been killed and more than 5,500 people have been injured."¹²

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⁹ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (3 July 2024) *EUAA COI Report - Bangladesh - Country Focus [4.1. Political activists, journalists, and human rights defenders]*, p.4

¹⁰ Ibid, p.5

¹¹ US Department of State (22 April 2024) 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, p.7

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