

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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|---------------------------------|---|
| Bilagsnr.: | 534 |
| Land: | Bangladesh |
| Kilde: | Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada |
| Titel: | Bangladesh: State and local police following the end of the Sheikh Hasina government, including whether they continue to take orders from or be influenced by the Awami League (AL); treatment of political opponents of the government, including low-ranking supporters and protesters, by the police; incidents of extortion or intimidation against political opponents or protesters (2024–May 2025) |
| Udgivet: | 28. maj 2025 |
| Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet: | 20. februar 2026 |

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28 May 2025

BGD202304.E

Bangladesh: State and local police following the end of the Sheikh Hasina government, including whether they continue to take orders from or be influenced by the Awami League (AL); treatment of political opponents of the government, including low-ranking supporters and

protesters, by the police; incidents of extortion or intimidation against political opponents or protesters (2024–May 2025)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. July-August 2024 Protest Movement

According to sources, in July 2024 the AL-led government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and its security forces attacked students demonstrating against a proposal to introduce a quota for government jobs (Human Rights Watch 2025-01-16; Odhikar 2025-02-10, 2). The annual report for 2024 from Human Rights Watch states that police used "excessive force, including tear gas, stun grenades, and rubber and live bullets" to break up protesters (2025-01-16). The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) indicates in its fact-finding report on the 2024 protests that the AL government and its security forces had "systematically engaged in serious human rights violations, including hundreds of extrajudicial killings" and "other use of force violations involving serious injuries to thousands of protesters," to "suppress the protests and related expressions of dissent" (UN 2025-02-12, i).

Sources report that the protests culminated in Hasina's resignation on 5 August 2024, after which she fled the country (Freedom House 2025-02-26, Sec. A1; Human Rights Watch 2025-01-16) and "[m]any" senior AL officials "went into hiding" (Freedom House 2025-02-26, Sec. A1).

The OCHCR fact-finding report indicates, based on cases "compiled by governmental and non-governmental sources" along with other "available evidence," that "as many as 1,400 people could have been killed during the protests, the vast majority of whom were killed by military rifles and shotguns" "commonly used" by the country's security forces (UN 2025-02-12, iii-iv). Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), a Bangladeshi organization established in 2014 which monitors and publishes reports on human rights issues in Bangladesh (HRSS n.d.), indicates based on data gathered from "victims' families, eyewitnesses, hospitals, and

national newspapers" that 1,013 individuals were "confirm[ed]" to have been killed during the uprising, including "[a]t least" 136 children, and 30,000 were injured (HRSS 2024-12-31). The same source adds that of those whose cause of death is known (858 of the 1,013 dead), 671 (78 percent) died from gunshots, 95 (11 percent) from injuries, 61 (7 percent) from being beaten to death, and 31 (4 percent) from other causes (HRSS 2024-12-31). HRSS further notes that of the 675 individuals whose deaths were known to involve police or other groups, "[o]ver" 85 percent were known to have died at the hands of "police and other law enforcement agencies," while 59 individuals (9 percent) were killed by members of the AL (2024-12-31). Cases reported in the OHCHR fact-finding report include a 4 August 2024 case in Sirajganj district, where an AL office building was burned down and 5 local AL officials and 1 journalist were killed by armed attackers; elsewhere in the same district on the same day, 15 police officers were killed in a separate attack on a police station carried out by a "large crowd of young men" (UN 2025-02-12, 52).

According to the OHCHR fact-finding report, the period at the end of the uprising and following Hasina's removal saw the "most serious incidents" of revenge violence targeting police and AL supporters (UN 2025-02-12, 52, 53). The same source notes that, according to the Bangladesh Police, 450 of the 639 police stations in the country "were destroyed or damaged" during retaliatory attacks, with some officers fleeing, and others who were "lynched or otherwise killed" (UN 2025-02-12, 53). Odhikar, a human rights organization in Bangladesh that documents and records rights violations, citing an article from the Bangla-language daily newspaper *Samakal* [1], reports that "plain clothes' operations" targeting law enforcement personnel have persisted after the installation of the interim government [2] following Hasina's removal, as has police involvement in "different criminal activities" such as extrajudicial killings (2025-02-10, 2, 5, 54).

2. AL Party Following End of Hasina Government

An opinion article by two members of Fortify Rights, an organization of human rights defenders that investigates rights violation (Fortify Rights n.d.), published in the *Diplomat*, a magazine that publishes analysis and commentary focusing on the Asia-Pacific region (*The Diplomat* n.d.), indicates that historically, the AL and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) [3], the country's 2 dominant political parties, "have played an unruly game of pass-the-parcel with political power," with every change of party in power accompanied by a "destructive pattern of retribution against political opponents, institutional capture, and political violence by state security forces" (Yap & Quinley 2025-03-03). For instance, Freedom House reports that while the interim government installed after Hasina's removal has "considerably" opened political space by removing bans on political parties and registering additional ones, the AL has "faced growing restrictions" under the new administration (2025-02-26, Sec. B1). Sources note that the AL's student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) [4], has been banned (AP 2025-02-06; Freedom House 2025-02-26, Sec. B1, D3; Al Jazeera 2025-05-11) since October 2024 (Al Jazeera 2025-05-11).

Sources report that in early May 2025, Bangladesh's interim government used the *Anti-Terrorism Act* to ban all AL activities (*The Business Standard* 2025-05-12; DW 2025-05-11; Al Jazeera 2025-05-11), as well as all affiliate organizations (*The Business Standard* 2025-05-12). According to sources, the government has indicated that the ban will remain in place until the trial of the AL party and leaders for the deaths during the 2024 protests is completed (DW 2025-05-11; Al Jazeera 2025-05-11).

OHCHR writes that after 5 August 2024, "many journalists and other civil society observers" have noted an environment of "reverse intimidation," resulting in journalists and media being "cautious about reporting anything that could be seen as favourable to the Awami League or critical

of its political opposition" (UN 2025-02-12, 55). The same source indicates that in a series of revenge attacks, mobs have vandalized, looted, and burned TV stations, as well physically assaulted staff and journalists seen as favourable to the AL (UN 2025-02-12, 9).

Odhikar notes that there have been reports of BNP leaders and activists "attacking" AL members, including "breaking into their homes and committing arson" (2025-02-10, 34-35). According to an Associated Press (AP) article, in early February 2025, "[m]obs ... vandalized homes and businesses" across Bangladesh, "[m]any" of which were owned by prominent AL members; the violence was "apparently ... part of a coordinated campaign" that also involved an attack on the former home of Hasina's father (2025-02-07). OHCHR indicates that female supporters of the AL and BCL have "received threats of rape, conveyed verbally and on social media," with "some" women in leadership or in publicly visible roles receiving threats of retaliation, compelling them "to cover their faces and hair in an attempt to disguise their identities" (UN 2025-02-12, 54). According to an article from the Press Trust of India (PTI), an English-language news agency in India [5], the Information Advisor of the interim government said that "'nearly'" 100,000 AL members have sought refuge in India (2025-04-02).

2.1 Relationship with Police and Security Forces

Information on whether ties are still maintained between members of the state and local police and AL party leaders, low-ranking members, or supporters since the fall of the AL government in August 2024 was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to a 2025 report by Human Rights Watch, after the Hasina government came to power in 2009, it "consolidated power by silencing critics, harassing activists, and arbitrarily arresting, forcibly disappearing,

and killing members of the opposition or civil society" (2025-01-27, 1). Odhikar similarly reports that during the 15-year period of the Hasina government's rule, enforced disappearances were leveraged "as an instrument of state oppression" to suppress political opposition and "to forcefully consolidate power"; in addition, "many" members of state security forces involved in human rights violations were never held accountable (2025-02-10, 3). OHCHR's fact-finding report describes security forces' violent response to the July-August 2024 protests as being done with the "knowledge, coordination and direction" of senior political and security officials (UN 2025-02-12, i).

According to sources, when the Hasina government fell, the Bangladesh police force "collapsed" (*The Diplomat* 2025-03-03) or "disintegrated" (*The Daily Star* 2024-12-30a) as officers fled in fear of reprisals from the public (*The Diplomat* 2025-03-03; *The Daily Star* 2024-12-30a). The *Daily Star*, an English-language daily newspaper in Bangladesh [6], indicates that "[m]any" police officers who supported the AL government have since been "transferred" (2024-12-30a). The *Diplomat* notes that "many" officers "sidelined" for political reasons under the AL regime have been "transferred to key positions" in the police force; however, they "face resistance from lower-ranking officers still loyal to the previous administration" (2025-03-03). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Freedom House reports that under the interim government, judges and justices perceived to be loyal to the former AL government "were replaced after either resigning or being forced out" of their posts (2025-02-26, Sec. F1). The *Daily Star* writes that according to BNP leaders, the interim government "removed pro-Awami people" from various government posts, as well as from academic institutions and financial companies (2024-09-19). Freedom House further notes that since the end of the Hasina regime some AL gatherings and supporters have been attacked and police have not provided protection (2025-02-26, Sec. E1).

Freedom House indicates that AL leaders have been arrested "for crimes based on little evidence," impeding the party's ability to operate [before the ban on AL activities] (2025-02-26, Sec. B1, D3). Similarly, Elaine Pearson, Human Rights Watch's Asia Director, writes in the *Daily Star* that since Hasina's removal more than 1,000 criminal complaints have been filed "without adequate evidence" "against tens of thousands of people, mainly AL members, accusing them of murder, corruption or other crimes" (Pearson 2025-03-03). According to a *Daily Star* article citing "sources" from the police headquarters, as of 25 September 2024 there had been 1,174 cases relating to anti-protester violence filed against former ministers, members of parliament, and advisors from the Hasina government as well as "city corporation mayors"; 59 of those accused have been arrested (2024-10-10).

3. Treatment of Political Opponents and Protesters by Police Under Interim Government

According to Freedom House, AL leaders and members face "significant violence and legal harassment" since the fall of the Hasina government (2025-02-26, Sec. B3). Human Rights Watch indicates, in its 2025 report, that despite Hasina's removal, police have "arbitrarily" arrested AL officials, supporters and journalists perceived to be pro-AL and lodged criminal complaints "against large numbers of 'unknown people'," which in practice "authorizes" the arrest and "re-arrest" of "almost anyone" (2025-01-27, 23). According to Odhikar, there has been a rise in criminal complaints filed across the country and local BNP leaders "were allegedly involved" in accusing "numerous" persons, "while trying to harass their political opponents by filing cases against them" (2025-02-10, 37). For example, the same source cites a *Samakal* article as indicating that deceased AL members have been criminally charged (Odhikar 2025-02-10, 37). Other media sources similarly report a case in which 3 AL leaders are among those accused of attacking protesters in

August 2024, despite having died before the alleged crime took place (*The Business Standard* 2024-10-05; *The Daily Star* 2024-10-07). The sources add that the case was filed by a coordinator from the Students Against Discrimination (SAD) movement [7] (*The Business Standard* 2024-10-05; *The Daily Star* 2024-10-07) and includes 96 AL members among the alleged perpetrators (*The Daily Star* 2024-10-07).

CIVICUS, a global network of civil society organizations headquartered in South Africa that advocates for strong "citizen action and civil society" (CIVICUS n.d.), indicates that in March 2025 a peaceful protest of students marching towards the home of Muhammad Yunus, the head of interim government, in response to "the recent incident of rape and death of a girl child," was halted by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) (CIVICUS 2025-03-25). A "scuffle" ensued between police and protesters, and 12 student leaders and other unnamed protestors "were charged under provisions of the Penal Code including unlawful assembly and rioting by the police" (CIVICUS 2025-03-25). In addition, 2 of the students charged were not present at the protest (CIVICUS 2025-03-25).

According to the Foundation for Human Rights Culture (Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation, MSF) [8], which publishes monthly statistics on violent incidents in Bangladesh with data gathered from media reports and verification of cases done by "local human rights defenders," January 2025 saw 72 new criminal cases filed against ex-AL government members for "killing and violence," with a total of 5,856 defendants named and accused in those cases, and 5,517 defendants marked as "unknown" (MSF 2025-02-28, 2, 10). The month of February 2025 saw a decrease in the number of cases filed to 4, with 360 named defendants and 200 "unknown" (MSF 2025-02-28, 2). Sources further report that the government of Bangladesh launched a security operation titled "Operation Devil Hunt" (Yap & Quinley 2025-03-03; MSF 2025-02-28, 5) on 8 February 2025 to "fight terrorism, improve the law and order situation in the country, and bring the terrorists under the law" (MSF 2025-02-28, 5). The *Daily Star* quotes the government's Home Affairs

Advisor as saying that the operation "will continue until all the 'devils are rooted out'," and Gazipur Metropolitan Police Commissioner as saying that "'Operation Devil Hunt will be conducted to combat Awami fascism'" (2025-02-10). More than 11,000 individuals had been arrested by the end of the month (*The Business Standard* 2025-02-27; MSF 2025-02-28, 5). "Mos[t]" (MSF 2025-02-28, 5; *The Daily Star* 2025-02-10) or "many" (Yap & Quinley 2025-03-03) of those arrested under the operation are associated with the AL (Yap & Quinley 2025-03-03; MSF 2025-02-28, 5). The *Daily Star* provides examples of some of the 1,308 detentions of "mostly" AL members and its "associate bodies" made on the operation's first day:

For instance, joint forces raided Hatia of Noakhali and arrested seven AL men, including a former union council chairman, on Saturday night.

Officer-in-Charge AKM Ajmal Huda of Hatia Police Station told *The Daily Star* that the operation involved members of the navy, the coast guard, naval police, and Hatia Police Station.

The Chattogram Metropolitan Police held 19 leaders and activists of the AL, Jubo League [the AL youth wing (CPJ 2023-11-22)], and the banned Chhatra League. (2025-02-10)

From August to December 2024, Odhikar documented 18 journalists injured while working, 6 harassed, 6 threatened, and 3 newspaper buildings attacked (2025-02-10, 37). According to MSF, in 21 incidents taking place in February 2025, 38 journalists faced "[t]orture, [a]ssault, [i]njury, [t]hreats and harassment" while working, including the following case:

Police attacked six journalists while performing professional duties during the protests of the students in Dhaka on February 9 [2025]. The members of the riot police kicked them and stabbed them. The injured

journalists said they were attacked even after showing their identity card. (2025-02-28, 2, 7)

4. Extortion and Intimidation of Political Opponents by Police, Political Parties, and Criminal Actors

Information on AL involvement in extortion and intimidation of political opponents in coordination with members of the security forces since the Hasina government fell in August 2024 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Human Rights Watch Asia Director writing in the *Daily Star*, police officers, fearing prosecution for acts committed under the Hasina government, have since its removal been "threatening families to keep them from giving evidence to the inquiry commission on enforced disappearances" set up by the interim government (Pearson 2025-03-03). Similarly, the OHCHR report indicates that in the wake of the 5 August 2024, security forces "intimidated victims, their families, lawyers, journalists and others who called for accountability or otherwise drew attention to killings by security forces," but adds that such activities have been done "less overtly than up to 5 August" (UN 2025-02-12, 59, 61). The source goes on to describe the situation of the family of an individual killed by police in July 2024 who "received an intimidating visit from a close family member of one of the accused officers, while intelligence officers tried to pressure the family's lawyer" (UN 2025-02-12, 61).

The information on police involved in and targeted by extortion in the following paragraph was provided by the *Daily Star*:

A police sub-inspector was extorted by a colleague who "informed him" that he must pay 10,000 Bangladesh taka (BDT) [C\$1,175] or "face the risk of being implicated in a murder case"; after he refused to pay, the sub-inspector was charged in the shooting of a protester. "Several other

police officers" accused in the same attempted murder case claimed that "a section of their colleagues, in collusion with local BNP men, were running rackets to extort vulnerable policemen." Additionally, there have been 7 incidents in which "policemen and others were extorted allegedly by police and local leaders of BNP." Individuals "close to many of these [targeted] officers" shared the following additional information on their cases with the paper:

They said extortionists mention "Tk 2" for inspectors and "Tk 1" for sub-inspectors. The officers later explained "Tk 1" in such extortion parlance means [10,000 BDT]. A former officer-in-charge of a police station in Dhaka told *The Daily Star* on condition of anonymity that he had personally mediated at least seven cases where his colleagues paid extortionists to avoid being named as accused in cases.

He pointed out that the transactions typically happened before the cases were filed since it is difficult to get the names off afterwards.

He also told this newspaper recently that such extortion rackets were running rampant within the police force. (*The Daily Star* 2024-12-30b)

The information on extortion in the context of criminal complaints in the following paragraph was provided by bdnews24.com, an online newspaper based in Bangladesh [9]:

Since the fall of the Hasina administration, media reports have emerged of complainants in criminal cases accepting bribes and subsequently "submitting affidavits declaring the accused innocent." The DMP Commissioner "confirmed" the existence of such situations and in turn "warned of counter-extortion cases against those who extort money through such lawsuits." An officer at the Mohammadpur police station interviewed in the same article stated that if the police refuse to accept a complaint, they "risk being labelled as 'allies of the Awami League', and that's a risk no one wants to take." Furthermore, with the end of the AL-

led regime, police were directed "to take all cases" filed, but in the 4 months since, "senior police officials are expressing frustration over the actions of many plaintiffs." The DMP Commissioner told journalists that "allegations of complainants using cases to extract money, pressuring for arrests, or preventing arrests, hold substantial truth" (bdnews24.com 2024-12-13).

The information in the following paragraph was provided by *Prothom Alo*, a Bangladesh daily newspaper [10], in a report on the paper's April 2025 investigation into irregularities in criminal case filings, which was based on a review of 40 cases related to the July 2024 protests and interviews with "over 100" individuals who were parties to those cases:

In 21 of the 40 cases investigated by the paper, accused individuals were "[a]llegedly" asked for money or money changed hands before or after the cases were filed. In the remaining 19 cases, the accused "alleged" that they had been named due to interpersonal, political, or business conflicts. In 14 of the cases, the plaintiffs were affiliated with the BNP and in 1 case the plaintiff was an AL Jubo League member (*Prothom Alo* 2025-04-27).

Media sources report instances of BNP leaders being expelled (*FE* 2025-01-02; *The Business Standard* 2025-05-15) or suspended (*Dhaka Tribune* 2025-03-23) from the party in response to allegations of extortion and other crimes (*FE* 2025-01-02; *Dhaka Tribune* 2025-03-23; *The Business Standard* 2025-05-15). The *Dhaka Tribune*, an English-language newspaper in Bangladesh [11], reports that since the AL was "ousted," BNP leaders have begun committing extortion and seizing control of businesses and plots of land (2024-08-30). The *Daily Sun*, an English-language daily newspaper in Bangladesh [12], quotes the President of the Bangladesh Truck-Covered Van Owners' Association as stating that, while AL members were previously "'primarily'" responsible

for highway extortion, the BNP and its affiliate organizations have become "'involved'" since the Hasina government was toppled (2025-02-08).

According to *New Age*, a Dhaka-based English-language daily newspaper [13], a journalist was beaten by a local BNP leader and his associates in Thakurgaon on 25 February 2025, who declared it to be in retaliation for the journalist's reporting on the politician's extortion activities (2025-02-27). Information indicating whether there was a response from the police regarding the BNP leader's actions could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. According to the OHCHR fact-finding report, a factory belonging to a "prominent" AL supporter was first attacked on 14 August 2024 by "a large group of men led by a local BNP supporter" who "assaulted" factory workers to "extort money from the owner"; the factory was burned down in a subsequent attack (UN 2025-02-12, 54). Both attacks went without a response from police or an investigation (UN 2025-02-12, 54).

Prothom Alo writes that the BNP secretary general denied allegations of the party's involvement in extortion, stating that those who are involved in such activities under the name of the BNP should be handed over to the authorities (2024-08-31).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] According to BBC Monitoring, *Samakal* is "generally critical" of AL and "known for" reporting on "corruption by ruling party politicians and workers" (BBC 2025-05-16). However, the *Daily Star* reports that after the Hasina government fell, Abul Kalam Azad, the owner of *Samakal* who is also an "Awami League-aligned" politician who became a member of parliament in the January 2024 national election (*The Daily Star* 2024-01-11), took over as acting editor of the *Samakal* (2025-01-31).

[2] Following the dissolution of the AL government, an interim government led by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, along with civil society leaders, academics, and "other notable citizens," took power with the support of the military and protesters (Freedom House 2025-02-26, overview, key developments in 2024).

[3] The BNP was the country's "biggest opposition party" under the Hasina regime (Al Jazeera 2024-10-27).

[4] The BCL was the student wing of the AL under Hasina's government (Al Jazeera 2024-10-27).

[5] PTI is a "not-for-profit" news agency, "owned by a group of Indian newspapers" who are also PTI's subscribers (PTI n.d.). PTI is "self-funded" through subscriptions and does not accept donations from any political party (PTI n.d.). The Wire, an Indian news website run by the non-profit Foundation for Independent Journalism (The Wire 2016-08-19), describes PTI as "independent" and "devoid of any political bias" (The Wire 2020-10-15).

[6] Sources indicate that the *Daily Star* is owned by Transcom Group, which also owns *Prothom Alo* (Shongjog MSP 2021-10-12; BBC 2025-05-16). Sources indicate that the *Daily Star* has a "reputation for non-partisan quality reportage" (Shongjog MSP 2021-10-12) or has been critical of the AL government on "various issues" (BBC 2016-02-18) or has "maintain[ed] a certain editorial independence" from the government (RSF [2025]).

[7] SAD spearheaded the July-August 2024 protests against the Hasina government (Al Jazeera 2024-10-27).

[8] The MSF is "an independent, non-government, non-partisan and non-profit" organization in Bangladesh which seeks to "protect and promote human rights across the country" (MSF n.d.).

[9] According to the Shongjog Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP), a "collaborative effort made up of government, international and national NGOs and other groups" and funded by UK Aid that "ensure[s] that there are identified credible sources of information" and "aim[s] to promote trust between communities and the disaster response sector" (Shongjog MSP n.d.), bdnews24.com is run by a former BBC broadcaster and "draws bipartisan support" (Shongjog MSP 2021-10-12).

[10] Sources indicate that *Prothom Alo* is owned by Transcom Group, which also owns the *Daily Star* (BBC 2025-05-16; Shongjog MSP 2021-10-12). Sources indicate that *Prothom Alo* has "maintain[ed] a certain editorial independence" from the government (RSF [2025]) or "does not exhibit a particular political leaning," but has been critical of the AL government for corruption and other issues (BBC 2025-05-16).

[11] According to the Shongjog MSP, the *Dhaka Tribune's* parent company is 2A Media Limited, a subsidiary of Gemcon Group, which is owned by an AL politician (Shongjog MSP 2021-10-12). However, BBC Monitoring indicates that the *Dhaka Tribune* is "known to be liberal and impartial" (BBC 2025-05-16).

[12] The *Daily Sun* is owned by the East West Media Group (East West Media Group n.d.). After the fall of the Hasina government, a member of the BNP Media Cell was put in charge of East West Media Group as a deputy managing director (*The Daily Star* 2025-04-07).

[13] Sources describe *New Age* as "anti-establishment" (*Nieman Reports* 2024-07-16; Genilo, Asiuzzaman & Osmani 2016-12-30, 131) or its editor as being perceived to be critical to the then ruling party AL and the

government (Hasan & Islam 2017-06-21, 4).

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Date modified:

2024-01-23