Bangladesh - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Monday 25 June 2018

Information on the current political situation including stability of government

In December 2017 the *European Asylum Support Office* states in a report that:

> "Bangladesh is a multi-party democracy and the political culture is characterised by violence and confrontation" (European Asylum Support Office (20 December 2017) *Bangladesh Country Overview*, p.26).

A report released in 2018 by *Freedom House* commenting on events of 2017 points out that:

> "Bangladesh has a two-party system in which power alternates between political coalitions led by the AL and BNP; third parties have traditionally had difficulty achieving traction. Both parties are non-democratic in terms of internal structure, and are led by families that have competed to lead Bangladesh since independence, along with a small coterie of advisers" (Freedom House (2018) *Freedom in the World 2018, Bangladesh*, p.3).

A report issued in April 2018 by the *United States Department of State* reviewing events of 2017 notes that:

> "BNP, the main opposition party, boycotted the 2014 parliamentary elections in protest of the ruling party's refusal to hold the elections under a neutral, caretaker government. This left more than half of all seats uncontested and many more only nominally contested. Prime Minister Hasina and the ruling Awami League party retained power with 235 of 300 elected seats. Because of its boycott, the BNP held no seats in parliament. The official opposition party, the Jatiya Party, which had 36 elected seats, was also part of the ruling coalition. Parties that supported the government held most of the remaining seats. Sheikh Hasina's cabinet included representatives from the other parties in her coalition. International observers regarded these elections as flawed" (United States Department of State (20 April 2018) *2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh*, p.16).

A report issued in January 2018 by *Bertelsmann Stiftung* states that:

> "The government, which had looked a little shaky in 2014, consolidated power" (Bertelsmann Stiftung (January 2018) *BTI 2018; Bangladesh Country Report*, p.8).

This report also states that:

> "Bangladesh has all the trappings of any normal democratic country. However, after the flawed 2014 election, the parliament is essentially controlled by the ruling Awami League. Increasingly, democratic institutions are exhibiting partisan tendencies. Bureaucracy remains highly politicized, causing erosion to the institutional structure and capacity to perform in a professional manner. As a result, friction between various institutions is less and the heavy dependence on the prime minister for policy direction has led to centralization. After the introduction of political parties in the

chairman election, politicization on the basis of party lines has seeped deep into the local government system that functions on patronage politics. In some case the internal division within the ruling party at the local level also undermines the capacity of local government to deliver" (ibid,p.12).

It is also stated in this report that:

"While the government appears to be strongly entrenched in power and there is political stability, frequent clashes with supporters of opposition parties and factional fights within the party challenges stability at the local level" (ibid, p.13).

In February 2018 the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia* states that:

"Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy. The unicameral National Parliament and the largely ceremonial presidency both have fiveyear terms. Parliament comprises 350 seats, of which 300 are directly elected and 50 are reserved for female members nominated by political parties based on their share of elected seats. The president is elected by a simple parliamentary majority, and can be impeached by a twothirds majority. A simple majority passes legislation, but constitutional amendments require a twothirds majority. In practice, Bangladesh has a twoparty system in which power alternates between political coalitions led by the AL or the Bangladesh National Party (BNP)" (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia (2 February 2018) *DFAT Country Information Report Bangladesh*, p.8).

The *International Crisis Group* in February 2018 notes:

"…Bangladesh's deeply polarised politics…" (International Crisis Group (28 February 2018) *Countering Jihadist Militancy in Bangladesh*, p.6).

A document issued in March 2018 by the *World Organisation Against Torture* states that:

"Starting on 30 January 2018, authorities began arresting supporters of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), ahead of the verdict in the alleged corruption case against BNP leader Khaleda Begum Zia, which was delivered on 8 February. Over the course of a month, almost 5,000 opposition supporters, including ordinary people who were suspected of being opposition sympathizers, were arrested throughout almost all of the country's districts. Most of them remain detained in prisons throughout Bangladesh. This large-scale crackdown on opposition parties, government critics, and activists is one of the most severe attacks on fundamental freedoms in Bangladesh over the past few years. While authorities claim the arrests were carried out to prevent violence from erupting in connection with the verdict, it is apparent that these actions were politically motivated. In addition, there have been numerous reports of torture and ill-treatment of those detained" (World Organisation Against Torture (22 March 2018) *Bangladesh: Civil society decries mass arrests amid worsening human rights situation*,p.1).

In April 2018 the *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project* states that:

"From mid-2017 through March 2018, Bangladesh experienced a moderate level of political violence and protest relative to the rest of South and Southeast Asia. About half of all events recorded in Bangladesh have been riots and protests. The majority of these occur in the capital, Dhaka. The number of riots and protests has fallen

since the high numbers reported in early 2015, which largely involved the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Although, more recently, in late-2017 there was a spike in demonstrations involving the BNP, which was likely a response to multiple attacks on the motorcade of BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia. Compared to most other South and Southeast Asian countries, battles and violence against civilians are more common occurrences. These events occur throughout the country and tend to involve political militias and student wings of the major political parties; the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), associated with the Bangladesh Awami League (AL), and Bangladesh Jatiotabadi Chatra Dal (JCD), associated with BNP" (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (12 April 2018) *Bangladesh Conflict Brief*, p.1).

This document also states that:

"Aside from the February 8 clashes between BNP demonstrators and police in Dhaka city, there has not been any substantial violence involving BNP actors in connection with Zia's conviction or the country's upcoming elections" (ibid, p.2).

An article issued by the *Telegraph* in June 2018 notes:

"More than 120 people have been killed in just over a fortnight and thousands arrested in what the country says is a campaign to stem the trade of addictive stimulant pills known as yaba flowing to Bangladesh's addicts. But as the death toll soars there are growing allegations the campaign is a cover for a wave of extrajudicial killings and political intimidation ahead of a general election later this year" (Telegraph (1 June 2018) *Bangladesh accused of using drugs war to hide political assassinations*

In June 2018 *Odhikar* states that:

"The country"s human rights situation was found to be deteriorating since 2009, which has since become of serious concern due to the repressive attitude and policies of the government; while has returned to power through the farcical elections of 5 January 2014" (Odhikar (2 June 2018) *Human Rights Monitoring Report 1–31 May 2018*, p.5).

A report issued in June 2018 by the *Economist Intelligence Unit* notes that:

"Bangladesh's fundamental political instability is rooted in the highly personalised conflict between the two main parties, the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and the two women who lead them, the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, and Khaleda Zia, respectively" (Economist Intelligence Unit (19 June 2018) *Bangladesh risk: Political stability risk*).

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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