Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

DFAT COUNTRY INFORMATION REPORT BANGLADESH

23 JULY 2025

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

APBn	Armed Police Battalion (a unit of the Bangladeshi Police)
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
AUD	Australian Dollar
BCL	Bangladesh Chhatra League
BDRIS	Birth and Death Registration Information System
BEC	Bangladesh Election Commission
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DGFI	Directorate General of Forces Intelligence
JI	Jamaat-e-Islami
JMB	Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen
KNF	Kuki-Chin National Front
LDC	Least Developed Country
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and/or Asexual
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NIC	National Identity Card
NSI	National Security Intelligence
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PCJSS	Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion
RSO	Rohingya Solidarity Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USD	United States Dollar
WFP	World Food Programme

GLOSSARY

Hartal	General strike, a form of protest intended to disrupt roads, businesses, etc.
Hijra	A transgender identity in South Asia, typically a person who was born male but whose gender expression is female. *Hijra* often live in all-*hijra* communities and participate in social customs such as blessing newlyweds and newborn babies.
Madrassa	Islamic school
Mahji	Rohingya community leader
Sharia	Islamic law
Upazila	Local government area and its government, a sub-division of a District

Terms used in this report

High risk	DFAT is aware of a strong pattern of incidents
Moderate risk	DFAT is aware of sufficient incidents to suggest a pattern of behaviour
Low risk	DFAT is aware of incidents but has insufficient evidence to conclude they form a pattern

Official discrimination

1. legal or regulatory measures applying to a particular group that impede access to state protection or services that are available to other sections of the population (examples might include but are not limited to difficulties in obtaining personal registrations or identity papers, difficulties in having papers recognised, arbitrary arrest and detention)
2. behaviour by state employees towards a particular group that impedes access to state protection or services otherwise available, including by failure to implement legislative or administrative measures

Societal discrimination

1. behaviour by members of society (including family members, employers or service providers) that impedes access by a particular group to goods or services normally available to other sections of society (examples could include but are not limited to refusal to rent property, refusal to sell goods or services, or employment discrimination)
2. ostracism or exclusion by members of society (including family, acquaintances, employers, colleagues or service providers).

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 This report was prepared for protection status decision makers by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). It provides a factual overview distinct from Australian Government policy and does not contain policy guidance for decision makers.

1.2 According to Ministerial Direction 84 of 24 June 2019, issued under the *Migration Act 1958*:

> Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared [a] country information assessment expressly for protection status determination processes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country.

1.3 The report was prepared with regard to the current protection visa caseload without reference to individual applications. It provides DFAT's best assessment at the time of writing.

1.4 The report draws on in-country knowledge and discussions. It takes into account reporting from a range of credible sources including: other governments, United Nations agencies, human rights and civil society organisations, local and international media and academia. Source details may be omitted to protect sources.

1.5 This Bangladesh Country Information Report replaces the previous DFAT report on Bangladesh published on 30 November 2022.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

2.1 Modern-day Bangladesh became an independent political entity in 1971. Under British rule, the Bengali-speaking northeastern region of India was administered as Bengal Province. This region was home to large numbers of both Hindus and Muslims. Following the partition of British India in 1947, the Hindu-majority western part of Bengal became the Indian state of West Bengal, while the Muslim-majority eastern part joined Pakistan as East Pakistan.

2.2 As Pakistani citizens, the Bengali-speaking people of East Pakistan experienced discrimination and repression, fuelling a Bengali nationalist movement. Tensions escalated following the 1970 election. West Pakistan responded with military force. The ensuing Bangladesh Liberation War involved widespread atrocities and the deaths of up to 3 million people. Following Indian military intervention, independence forces prevailed and the nation of Bangladesh was formed in 1971.

2.3 Bangladesh was initially governed by the Awami League, under the leadership of independence figure Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Sheikh Mujibur was killed in a military coup in August 1975, beginning a 16-year period of military rule. Democracy was restored in 1991. Over the next 17 years, power alternated between the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur's daughter, Sheikh Hasina, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Khaleda Zia, widow of former President Ziaur Rahman. After winning the 2008 election, the Awami League consolidated power and curbed civil liberties.

2.4 The Awami League won elections in 2014, 2018 and 2024. These victories were criticised by local and international observers for vote rigging, media suppression and attacks on opposition parties. The BNP boycotted the 2024 election following the mass arrest of its supporters. As a result, the Awami League came to dominate parliament and exert strong influence over most state institutions.

2.5 In June 2024, a High Court decision to reinstate civil service employment quotas seen as unfairly favouring those aligned with the Awami League triggered student-led anti-government protests. These were met with force and morphed into a mass uprising against Sheikh Hasina's rule known as the 'Monsoon Revolution'. Hasina fled Bangladesh on 5 August 2024 after the military withdrew its support. The military announced an interim administration would be formed in consultation with the President, student leaders and opposition political parties.

2.6 On 8 August 2024, Dr Muhammad Yunus was sworn in as 'Chief Adviser' of a civilian Interim Government. Chief Adviser Yunus appointed a diverse cabinet, including student leaders, prominent civil society figures and members of minority communities. Chief Adviser Yunus is not aligned with any political party. His stated priorities include strengthening human rights protections, pursuing accountability for violations committed during the Monsoon Revolution, stabilising the economy and paving the way for fresh elections. Elections are slated for April 2026 but may be held earlier.

2.7 A February 2025 report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) estimated 1,400 protest-related deaths between 15 July and 5 August 2024, caused mostly by state security forces. Thousands more were injured. The Awami League was banned in May 2025, pending the outcome of legal proceedings against the party and its leaders.

DEMOGRAPHY

2.8 The United Nations estimates Bangladesh's population at 171 million. Almost the entire population is ethnically Bengali (98 per cent) and speaks Bengali ('Bangla'). Sixty-one per cent of the population live in rural areas, especially flood-prone delta areas. The capital, Dhaka, is home to more than 21 million people. Of Bangladesh's estimated 75 ethnic indigenous groups, 27 are officially recognised. For religious demography, see Religion.

ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

2.9 Sustained economic growth transformed Bangladesh from one of the poorest countries in the world in 1971 to a lower-middle income country by 2015. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita was USD2,800 (AUD4,300) in

2024. Human development indicators like life expectancy, infant mortality and average years of education have improved significantly. Poverty has declined but remains widespread. The World Bank projects a poverty rate of 22.9 per cent in 2025.

2.10 The economy is stabilising after disruptions caused by the 2024 Monsoon Revolution and contractions in private and public investment. Multilateral development banks project GDP growth of approximately 3.5 per cent for the 2024-25 financial year, down from previous forecasts. Growth of up to 6.5 per cent is projected for the 2025-26 financial year, supported by improvements to macroeconomic management, financial sector stability and fiscal sustainability initiated by the Interim Government. Economic challenges remain, including high inflation, fuel and electricity shortages and persistent inequality, particularly in rural areas. Global trade disruptions pose further risk to the outlook.

2.11 More than half the population is employed in the agriculture sector, with rice the most widespread crop. Manufacturing and services also play an important role. Bangladesh is one of the largest garment producers in the world. The garment industry accounts for 83 per cent of Bangladesh's total export revenue and employs an estimated 4 million people, 80 per cent of them women. Remittances from overseas workers (USD22 billion in 2023) represent Bangladesh's second-largest source of foreign exchange after exports of textiles and garments and account for 6 per cent of GDP.

2.12 Bangladesh is due to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status in November 2026. Absent significant reforms to boost private sector competitiveness and investment, in-country sources said Bangladesh would struggle to remain competitive should it lose the preferential market access it enjoys as an LDC.

Employment

2.13 Bangladesh's overall unemployment rate is 4.5 per cent, with a labour force participation rate of 60 per cent. Youth unemployment levels (defined in Bangladesh as people aged between 15 and 29) are higher. According to the Bureau of Statistics, up to 85 per cent of employed persons work in the informal sector. There are few limitations to obtaining informal employment, although conditions are generally poor. Informal work is often physically demanding and includes labouring on construction sites, breaking bricks, working in shipyards, transporting goods or pulling rickshaws. There are not enough jobs to absorb all new labour market entrants, so many Bangladeshis move abroad for employment.

Welfare

2.14 Some government welfare programs exist including for the elderly, widows and people with disability. Payments are small, typically AUD6-18 per month. In-country sources said the public welfare system was inefficient and corruption occurred. A 2021 World Bank report found many people who received welfare payments were technically ineligible, while many needier people missed out. Programs run by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) are often more efficient but the scale of demand means these programs are not available to everyone.

Health

2.15 Healthcare services are of variable quality and accessibility. Limitations include inadequate funding, corruption, shortages of doctors and nurses and high out-of-pocket costs. According to the World Bank, only 61 per cent of Bangladeshis had access to basic healthcare services in 2022. Public hospitals are frequently overcrowded and have long wait times, forcing some to forego care or use the more expensive private system. Wealthier Bangladeshis tend to seek healthcare in private clinics or abroad. Healthcare is much less available in rural areas where some people seek help from so-called 'village doctors' who have no formal medical training.

2.16 The prevalence of communicable diseases such as malaria, diphtheria, tetanus and measles has reduced greatly in the last 30 years thanks to improved vaccination and treatment. The burden of non-communicable diseases has increased. A study published in *The Lancet* in 2023 found 'concerning' rates of cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease and malnutrition. In-country sources reported US aid cuts announced in February 2025 would result in fewer screenings and delayed treatment for tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/AIDS, particularly in rural and underserved areas of the country.

2.17 The COVID-19 pandemic infected more than 2 million people and killed approximately 30,000. As of October 2023, more than 90 per cent of the population had received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccination. Other public health problems in Bangladesh include road injuries and drownings.

Mental Health

2.18 A 2019 Bangladeshi Government survey on mental health found 17 per cent of respondents had a mental health condition, with depression and anxiety the most common. Most were not receiving treatment. Studies found the prevalence of mental illness increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among adolescents.

2.19 Mental healthcare is generally inadequate. There is a lack of public mental health facilities and professionals. Bangladesh has one dedicated mental health facility, the National Institute of Mental Health in Dhaka. According to a 2021 study published in the *BJPsych International* journal, there were only 260 psychiatrists in a country with 169 million people. The same study found basic psychiatric medications were widely unavailable.

2.20 There is a strong stigma associated with mental illness, which can lead to ostracism from families and communities. Many people ascribe mental illness to supernatural causes (e.g. curses, evil spirits). Some seek treatment from traditional shamans or faith healers. As with other forms of disability, in-country sources said people with mental illness were sometimes hidden away by their families out of a sense of shame or for their own protection.

People with Disability

2.21 The *Rights and Protection of Persons with Disability Act 2013* calls for the protection of the rights of people with disability and their equal opportunity to participate in education, training and employment. It also contains provisions to promote employment of people with disability in the public and private sectors. Implementation of the law lags and in-country sources reported services and protections for people with disability were inadequate.

2.22 In-country sources said disability accessible facilities were generally lacking. Most private and many public buildings are inaccessible to people with disability, as are most public toilets and forms of public transport. Most public schools have wheelchair ramps. There is some awareness of and services for Autistic people.

2.23 Some services are provided by NGOs. This includes programs funded by overseas development assistance for people with sensory disabilities such as blindness or deafness and those with mobility restrictions. While these services provide practical assistance and community education, access is not guaranteed due to funding and capacity constraints and high demand.

2.24 People with disability experience stigma. There are pervasive beliefs disability is a curse or punishment for sinful behaviour (or punishment of parents in the case of children with disability). Some families keep people with disability hidden. Stigma discourages some families from accessing services such as healthcare and education for family members with disability. In-country sources reported sexual abuse of people with disability, particularly young girls, was common.

HIV/AIDS

2.25 Bangladesh has a low rate of HIV infection, even among at-risk populations like intravenous drug users and sex workers (only 1 per cent of these groups has HIV). Studies have attributed low rates to prevention efforts, including programs to encourage condom use and safe injecting practices among at-risk groups. Nevertheless, the United Nations Population Fund warns some populations, including young men, have low levels of condom use and HIV awareness meaning they remain vulnerable.

2.26 Bangladesh provides free treatment and counselling for all HIV-positive people. Testing rates are relatively low and only half of those estimated to be HIV-positive are aware of their HIV-positive status. Of individuals who know they are HIV-positive, three-quarters are on antiretroviral treatment.

Education

2.27 Bangladesh has greatly expanded access to education in recent decades, although quality remains low. Classrooms are overcrowded and there is a shortage of trained teachers. School attendance is compulsory until Grade five and free until Grade eight. According to the Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, up to

14 per cent of students fail to complete primary school. Around 36 per cent of Bangladeshis do not complete high school. Slightly more girls attend secondary school than boys. The adult literacy rate is 76 per cent.

2.28 Bangladesh's education system is highly privatised. A quarter of primary students and more than 90 per cent of secondary students attend private schools. One-third of all students attend *madrassas*, Islamic schools emphasising the study of the Quran and Islamic traditions. The government has introduced reforms to ensure *madrassa* education is of sufficient quality and increasing numbers of *madrassa* graduates are able to gain jobs or university admission.

2.29 There is significant social and family pressure to obtain a university education, even though many university graduates cannot obtain employment as there are more graduates than jobs. Opportunities for vocational and trades education are limited and often of poor quality. Politicisation and corruption are rife in the higher education sector. Gaining admission to university and obtaining good grades often relies on the payment of bribes or affiliation with the ruling party.

2.30 Student wings of political parties hold strong influence at Bangladeshi universities and often pressure new students to affiliate with them to secure accommodation and other benefits. According to in-country sources, people belonging to indigenous groups and students affiliated with opposition political parties frequently experienced discrimination at universities during Awami League rule. Since the Awami League's ouster this has been inverted, with Awami League-affiliated students now experiencing discrimination. In response, and to support social cohesion, several universities have banned political activities on their grounds. See also Political Opinion, Race/Nationality and Women.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

2.31 Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy. The unicameral National Parliament and the largely ceremonial presidency both have five-year terms. Parliament comprises 350 seats. Of these, 300 are directly elected and 50 are reserved for women nominated by political parties based on their share of elected seats. The most recent election was held in January 2024 and was won by the Awami League in controversial circumstances.

2.32 Following weeks of deadly protests, then-Prime Minister Hasina fled for India on 5 August 2024. Parliament was dissolved the next day. Following talks between the military, President, student leaders and opposition political parties, on 8 August 2024 Nobel laureate, Dr Muhammad Yunus, was appointed head ('Chief Adviser') of a new civilian Interim Government. While there are no specific articles in the Constitution providing for the establishment of an Interim Government, the Supreme Court issued a ruling affirming the temporary arrangement's constitutionality. In June 2025, Chief Adviser Yunus announced elections would be held in April 2026 (Yunus later indicated elections may be held earlier, in February 2026). See also Country Overview.

2.33 Bangladesh is divided into eight administrative divisions, which are divided into 64 districts headed by a District Council (*Zila Parishad*). Each District is divided into numerous sub-districts (*Upazila*, formerly *Thana*) and councils at the village (*Union Parishad*), town (Municipal) and city (City Corporation) levels. Elections for five-year terms on local government bodies are conducted in phases. Local governments, even at the *Union Parishad* level, can significantly influence the day-to-day lives of citizens as they deal with matters of community development, social welfare and law and order.

Corruption

2.34 In 2024, Transparency International ranked Bangladesh 151st out of 180 countries in its *Corruption Perceptions Index*. GAN Integrity, an international ethics and compliance analysis firm, reports investors and individuals are at high risk of encountering corruption in the legal system, the public service and when dealing with police. A 2022 survey by Transparency International found more than 70 per cent of households paid bribes to obtain public services in the previous year, most commonly to police, passport officials and the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority. In-country sources said corruption was prevalent.

2.35 The *Code of Criminal Procedure 1898*, the *Prevention of Corruption Act 1947*, the *Penal Code 1860* and the *Money Laundering Prevention Act 2012* criminalise most forms of corruption. International observers and in-country sources report these laws are weakly enforced. In-country sources said corruption was endemic in the bureaucracy

and the social protection and health systems under the Hasina Government. They also highlighted the prevalence of corruption in large, government-funded infrastructure projects including roads, bridges and rail lines. Several in-country sources said 'mega projects equal mega corruption'. See Police, Legal System and Detention and Prison.

2.36 In January 2025, an Anti-Corruption Reform Commission submitted recommendations to the Interim Government for strengthening Bangladesh's anti-corruption framework. These recommendations were under active consideration at the time of writing.

HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

2.37 The Constitution guarantees fundamental rights for citizens, including: equality before the law and the right to protection of the law (Article 27), the rights to life and personal liberty (Article 32) and freedom from discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 28). The freedoms of religion (Article 41), movement (Article 36), assembly (Article 37), association (Article 38), thought, conscience and speech (Article 39) and profession and occupation (Article 40) are all guaranteed.

2.38 Bangladesh has ratified all nine core international treaties relating to human rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified in 1984), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (ratified in 1998), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified in 1998), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified in 2000), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ratified in 2007) and the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ratified in 2024).

2.39 The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was established in 2009. The NHRC can investigate human rights violations by individuals, public servants, government agencies and other state institutions except for police and military. It can request a report from police in response to a complaint. The NHRC can visit prisons and places of detention, conduct mediations and require government agencies to produce documents (with powers of a civil court to order production). At the time of writing, the NHRC had 'B status' from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, meaning it was not fully compliant with the Paris Principles relating to the status of national human rights institutions of pluralism, independence and effectiveness.

SECURITY SITUATION

2.40 The security situation in Bangladesh is volatile and can deteriorate quickly. Security threats include politically motivated violence and clashes between rival groups, especially around elections and times of heightened political tension. There is a risk of violence at political rallies (see Political Opinion and Protesters). Crime including murder, assault, extortion, theft, robbery and sexual assault is common. *Nikkei Asia* reported in March 2025 a deteriorating law and order situation with rising rates of rape and murder since the fall of the Hasina Government.

2.41 Successive governments have faced the challenge of dealing with extremist groups that have planned or executed violence against government and civilian targets. These groups include Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB), an al-Qaeda affiliate and Neo-JMB, an Islamic State-affiliated JMB offshoot. Authorities have proscribed these and other militant groups and arrested hundreds of their members. Some were released or escaped following the Monsoon Revolution. According to local media, more than 2,200 inmates, including militants, escaped from Bangladeshi prisons on and after 5 August 2024, some of whom remained at large as of December 2024. Local media reported in December 2024 as many as 174 prisoners linked to militant groups, including JMB, had been released on bail since 5 August 2024.

2.42 Between 1977 and 1997, an armed insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in southwestern Bangladesh killed approximately 6,000 people. A peace agreement was signed in 1997. This was yet to be fully implemented at the time of writing and conflict continued to occur in the CHT. Clashes have increased since 2022. See Conflict in the CHT.

2.43 Between January 2013 and mid-2016, domestic militants conducted a wave of attacks across Bangladesh. The most notable was the July 2016 Holey Bakery attack in which dozens of hostages were taken in a Dhaka bakery popular with foreigners. Twenty hostages and two police officers were killed. Authorities subsequently launched a crackdown on militants. No attack of the same scale has occurred since.

2.44 Human rights organisations have reported security operations against militant groups have resulted in high numbers of extrajudicial killings. In-country sources said these had largely ceased following 2021 American sanctions against the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), an elite police unit frequently deployed in counter-terrorism operations.

2.45 Countrywide anti-government protests in July and August 2024 were met with force by the Army, police (including the RAB), Border Guard and armed elements of the Awami League's student wing. Following an independent inquiry at the request of the Interim Government, the OHCHR found reasonable grounds to believe the former government, in conjunction with violent elements associated with the Awami League, 'systematically engaged in serious human rights violations', including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, 'to suppress the protests and related expressions of dissent'.

2.46 The OHCHR recommended criminal investigations to determine the extent to which these actions may have amounted to crimes against humanity under international law, as well as crimes under domestic Bangladeshi law. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch documented widespread violations in response to the protests. The OHCHR estimated 1,400 protest-related deaths, most of them government opponents and more than 11,700 arrests. The OHCHR assessed 'a very large portion' of arrests were likely of an arbitrary nature.

2.47 Following Sheikh Hasina's ouster, some reprisal attacks occurred against minority communities widely perceived to have supported the Hasina Government, particularly the Hindu community. Hindu homes and temples were vandalised and set on fire and some Hindus were assaulted and looted of their belongings.

2.48 Local media have reported inter-party violence between supporters of the Awami League and the BNP since the fall of the Hasina Government. In February 2025 and December 2024, at least 60 houses and businesses were vandalised and looted during clashes in Faridpur (southern Bangladesh). In April 2025, more than 50 people were injured in a fight over control of a fish farm in Habiganj (northeastern Bangladesh).

2.49 Separately, there has been a spate of intra-party clashes involving members and supporters of the BNP, as different factions seek to assert their authority ahead of the next election (planned for 2026), establish community-level control and/or fight over properties and businesses previously owned by members of the Awami League. Local media reported at least 14 killings as a result of intra-party violence between 6 August and 22 September 2024. Sporadic intra-party clashes involving the BNP were reported in 2025. The BNP has expelled a number of members for violating party discipline since August 2024.

Human Trafficking

2.50 Thousands of Bangladeshis fall victim to human trafficking each year, both within Bangladesh and overseas. Domestically, men, women and children are trafficked into a variety of industries, including agriculture, brick kilns, shipbreaking, garment factories, fisheries and tea plantations. Women and children are often trafficked into the domestic sex industry.

2.51 Bangladesh is the sixth-largest labour exporting country in the world. Many Bangladeshis work overseas, including in construction and agriculture in the Middle East and as domestic servants and labourers in Southeast Asia. Migrant workers are vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking, especially when they owe debts to recruiters for facilitating their travel and employment (see Victims of Loan Sharks and Usury).

2.52 Bangladeshis are trafficked into forced labour and sex work in India, Pakistan and Gulf countries, as well as into online scam centres in Southeast Asia. Local media reported in February 2025 that 10 Bangladeshis were trafficked to Russia to fight in Russia's war against Ukraine. Rohingya refugees are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, both within Bangladesh and to overseas destinations including India, Malaysia and Nepal. Trafficked persons from Bangladesh often leave through legal means, for example, on a tourist visa or to another regional country before being trafficked.

2.53 Bangladesh is listed as a Tier 2 country in the US Department of State's 2024 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, indicating it does not fully meet minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. Sex and labour trafficking are criminalised under the *Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012*, which prescribes prison sentences of five years to life in prison for offenders. Police have investigated and arrested human traffickers in recent years. According to the US Department of State, efforts to combat trafficking were inadequate and some Bangladeshi officials were complicit in trafficking networks.

3. REFUGEE CONVENTION CLAIMS

RACE/NATIONALITY

3.1 About 98 per cent of Bangladesh's population is Bengali, the remainder belong mostly to other ethnic (including indigenous) groups. Article 23A of the Constitution compels the state to 'take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities.' In practice, smaller ethnic and indigenous groups experience a range of discrimination by the state and individuals.

Biharis (or 'stranded Pakistanis')

3.2 Biharis, sometimes called 'stranded Pakistanis', are non-Bengali, Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated to East Pakistan from India after the partition of British India. They are often physically and linguistically indistinguishable from the majority Bengali population. Most speak both Urdu and Bengali. The term 'Bihari' may refer to the Indian state of Bihar and is sometimes used for other non-Bengalis living in Bangladesh not part of the Bihari community. In-country sources were unable to give accurate estimates for the number of Biharis in Bangladesh. Online estimates indicate a population of between 300,000 and 400,000. Some Biharis have integrated into local communities, although most live in impoverished camps in various parts of the country.

3.3 The Bihari community was strongly associated with the ruling regime during the 1947-71 East Pakistan period and widely perceived to have supported Pakistan during the 1971 war. Following independence, many Biharis faced reprisals. Laws intended to manage properties abandoned during the war were ineffective and resulted in many Biharis being dispossessed. In 2021, then-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said stranded Pakistanis were a 'burden' on the economy. In-country sources said Hasina's Government had ordered the Bureau of Statistics to prepare a list of stranded Pakistanis for deportation to Pakistan.

3.4 In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled the Bihari community satisfied the requirements for Bangladeshi citizenship, upholding a 2003 court ruling in a case brought by 10 Urdu-speaking petitioners. The 2008 ruling compelled the government to issue National Identity Cards (NICs) to Biharis and include them on electoral rolls. In-country sources reported most eligible Biharis had since obtained NICs.

3.5 In-country sources reported many Biharis continued to experience discrimination in education, employment and obtaining documentation. Those living in camps found it hard to obtain passports due to onerous documentation requirements. Having an address in a Bihari camp is reportedly used by authorities as a reason to deny passport applications. Many Biharis have difficulty finding employment, particularly in government, allegedly due to the address on their NICs. According to in-country sources, Biharis were sometimes evicted without compensation to make way for commercial developments.

3.6 DFAT assesses Biharis who live in camps face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of unfair barriers to obtaining documentation and government employment. They face a moderate risk of societal discrimination in relation to employment, education and security of housing.

Indigenous People

3.7 Bangladesh is home to a diverse range of indigenous groups, including the Bawm, Chakma, Garo, Manipuri, Marma, Munda, Oraon, Santal, Khasi, Kuki, Tripura, Mro, Hajong and Rakhain/Rakhine. While people from these groups can be found across the country, about a third live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a hilly area in southeast Bangladesh. Indigenous groups are diverse and can often be distinguished from other Bangladeshis by their appearance, dress, names and language.

Living Conditions and Treatment of Indigenous People

3.8 The poverty rate for indigenous people is significantly higher than the national average. The US Department of State, in its *2023 Human Rights Report on Bangladesh*, noted areas where indigenous people lived often experienced food insecurity, poorer quality healthcare and lack of government assistance, as well as conflict over land rights, ethnicity and politics.

3.9 Indigenous people sometimes move to cities like Dhaka to find work or access services. In-country sources reported this was difficult for people with inadequate personal connections or finances. In cities, indigenous women typically work in garment factories, housekeeping or beauty parlours. Indigenous men often work in security, as drivers or in manufacturing or sales. According to in-country sources, while many indigenous people enjoyed good working conditions, some were subjected to slavery-like conditions, refused permission to leave workplaces or subjected to sexual violence.

3.10 Indigenous people living in cities sometimes experience discrimination such as people shouting insults at them in the street or refusing to share food, drinks, eating utensils or common spaces. In-country sources said Indigenous people were often conflated with Rohingya refugees, despite not resembling them in language, appearance or customs. Indigenous children in mainstream schools are sometimes bullied. Education and public services such as healthcare are generally not available in indigenous languages, creating barriers for indigenous people who are not fluent in Bengali.

3.11 There are quotas for indigenous people in education and government jobs. In-country sources told DFAT these programs were not well-implemented and non-indigenous students sometimes used falsely claimed indigeneity to secure these places. They also said indigenous people outside the CHT occasionally experienced discrimination in renting accommodation or accessing healthcare. Some indigenous people are wealthy and send their children overseas to study.

Conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)

3.12 An armed insurgency occurred in the CHT from 1977 to 1997, triggered by disputes over land and identity following migration by Bengali settlers into areas previously occupied by indigenous groups. Activists have accused security forces of serious human rights violations during this period, including arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killings. Approximately 6,000 people were killed during the insurgency, which also created internal and external displacement (tens of thousands fled across the border to India). The government undertook to ensure indigenous political representation and resolve land disputes as part of the CHT Peace Accord, signed with indigenous representatives in 1997. In-country sources reported many indigenous grievances remained unresolved and continued to fuel conflict.

3.13 Clashes between ethnic armed groups and state security forces, as well as between ethnic armed groups themselves, have increased in the CHT since 2022. In-country sources reported the security forces' response was frequently harsh and indiscriminate. Indigenous people faced harassment at security checkpoints and sometimes experienced arbitrary arrests and raids on their homes. In December 2023, four indigenous leaders were killed and three more abducted in Khagrachhari District by unidentified assailants. Some indigenous groups claim the attacks were carried out by a state-sponsored group known as *Mukhosh Bahini* ('Masked Force').

3.14 In April 2024, fighters belonging to the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) carried out coordinated attacks on a local government building and several state-owned banks. Security forces arrested more than 100 people from the local Bawm community, including women and children, imposed movement restrictions and banned individuals from carrying more than 5kg of rice, purportedly to stop them supplying food to KNF fighters. In-country sources told DFAT this placed great hardship on indigenous communities, especially those living in remote areas who relied on bulk purchases of rice to feed their families.

Land Grabs and Other Disputes in the CHT

3.15 Land grabs of indigenous land by Bengali settlers are a frequent cause of disputes and violence. According to Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), a political organisation of indigenous people, almost 1,000 acres of indigenous land was illegally occupied by outside settlers in 2024. In-country sources reported Bengali settlers sometimes bribed or acted in collusion with local authorities to take control of Indigenous land.

3.16 A Joint Submission on the Human Rights Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh, submitted ahead of Bangladesh's 2023 Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council, claimed a Bengali-owned company, Lama Rubber Industries, used arson, assault and intimidation to seize indigenous land in 2022, allegedly with the support of security forces. Indigenous landowners who believe their land has been stolen can lodge complaints with

the Chittagong Land Dispute Resolution Commission or local authorities. In-country sources said these agencies were rarely effective.

3.17 Other sources of tension between indigenous people and ethnic Bengalis include religious disputes and legal decisions favouring Bengalis over indigenous people. In-country sources told DFAT indigenous women who experienced sexual assault rarely received justice, especially if the perpetrator was Bengali. PCJSS reported 12 cases of sexual violence against indigenous women and girls in 2024. Some arrests were made but those arrested were released shortly thereafter according to PCJSS. In-country sources also described some positive examples of interactions between indigenous people and ethnic Bengalis, including inter-marriage, trade and business links.

3.18 DFAT assesses indigenous people outside the CHT experience a low risk of societal discrimination in the form of slurs and bullying in settings such as schools and workplaces. They face a low risk of official discrimination in the form of being unable to access education and services in their own language. DFAT assesses indigenous people in the CHT face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of movement restrictions, arbitrary arrest and lack of access to justice. They face a moderate risk of societal discrimination in the form of land grabs and violence by Bengali settlers and a low risk of violence by ethnic armed groups.

Rohingya

3.19 The Rohingya are a predominantly Sunni Muslim ethnic group that traditionally live in Rakhine State in northwestern Myanmar. In customs and language, Rohingya resemble ethnic Bengalis from the Chittagong region of southeastern Bangladesh. In 2017, around 700,000 Rohingya fled a violent attack by the Myanmar military in Rakhine State, crossing the border into Bangladesh, where they joined around 300,000 existing refugees who had fled earlier waves of violence in Myanmar. More than 165,000 Rohingya are estimated to have arrived in Bangladesh since November 2023 as a result of civil war in Rakhine State. At the time of writing, UNHCR reports there were at least 1.1 million Rohingya in Bangladesh. Most Rohingya refugees live in 33 camps in Cox's Bazar and on the island of Bhasan Char. See the DFAT Country Information Report on Myanmar.

Living Conditions in Cox's Bazar

3.20 The environment in Cox's Bazar is prone to natural disasters like floods, cyclones and landslides. Conditions are considered to be deteriorating, including because of reduced donor contributions to deliver assistance, essential services and manage the camps. Refugees are not allowed to build permanent shelters. Houses and communal buildings are made from materials such as bamboo and tarpaulins and are easily damaged in extreme weather. Fires are common. The Interim Government has approved the use of more permanent materials for housing, which was being rolled out in targeted areas at the time of writing. In-country sources reported some improvements in the number and quality of roads and paths. They said efforts to curb deforestation, land degradation and fire-related pollution through the provision of liquefied petroleum gas to replace cooking fires had been partially successful.

3.21 UNHCR provides camp residents identification cards confirming their refugee status. All births and marriages are required to be registered with UNHCR. Cardholders are entitled to food and cooking fuel rations. The previous government placed a moratorium on registration of new arrivals in 2022 but large numbers of Rohingya continue to enter Bangladesh as the civil war in Myanmar drives displacement. DFAT understands over 50,000 unregistered Rohingya were living in the camps at the time of writing. UNHCR is conducting a biometric registration exercise, although Bangladeshi authorities have stipulated this does not equate to full UNHCR registration.

3.22 Refugees can access basic healthcare at 'health posts' and primary healthcare facilities in the camps. Tertiary healthcare is available at local *upazila* health complexes or at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital. However, in-country sources said barriers such as movement restrictions, referral delays, security concerns, out-of-pocket costs and a lack of options for people with disability often made healthcare difficult to access. Camps are overcrowded and diseases such as hepatitis, malaria, scabies, dengue and chikungunya spread quickly, particularly during the wet season. Vaccination rates are high (vaccination certificates are required to receive UNHCR registration). Some healthcare services in the camps have ceased operations because of funding shortfalls associated with cuts to US aid announced in February 2025.

3.23 Rohingya are overwhelmingly dependent on humanitarian assistance, including for food supplies. A 2023 UNHCR survey found 40 per cent of refugees suffered chronic malnutrition. Many were anaemic. The World Food

Programme (WFP) provides monthly food rations of USD12 (AUD18.50) to camp residents, although, at the time of writing, the quantum of this assistance beyond November 2025 was uncertain, owing to cuts to US aid funding. Clean water and soap are generally available in the camps but toilet facilities are inadequate. An estimated two-thirds of children practice open defecation, contributing to the spread of diarrhoea and other diseases.

3.24 There are around 400,000 school-aged children in the camps, although only three-quarters attend school. There are 3,400 learning centres across the camps, supported by UNICEF and various NGOs and religious organisations. Most students leave school after Grade five, with most girls leaving before adolescence. Opportunities for secondary education are limited. In-country Rohingya sources cited the lack of access to quality education as one of their greatest concerns. In 2022, UNICEF launched the Myanmar Curriculum in the hope it would prepare Rohingya students to re-enter the Myanmar school system if and when they are repatriated.

3.25 The vast majority of Rohingya cannot legally work, own property, or sell or buy goods or services inside or outside the camps. Within the camps, some run small shops or home-based enterprises. Some join the local informal economy where they are subject to regular solicitation for bribes, rent-seeking and extortion. Others find volunteer work with humanitarian agencies and NGOs providing services to fellow camp residents. Some trade takes place between refugees and local host populations.

3.26 Around 50,000 Rohingya, most of whom arrived before 2017, are recognised as refugees by Bangladeshi authorities and permitted to work and own businesses outside the camps. Overall, opportunities for refugees to work are limited. In-country sources told DFAT a lack of economic opportunities was a cause of despair for many Rohingya and a driver of people smuggling and irregular migration.

3.27 While some in-country sources told DFAT relations between the Rohingya and local Bangladeshis were good, others said anti-Rohingya sentiment was common among surrounding host communities. Violent anti-Rohingya protests occurred in Cox's Bazar in 2019. Some Rohingya go 'missing' from the camps and are assumed to take jobs in the informal sector in Cox's Bazar (or elsewhere in Bangladesh) or to travel by boat to Malaysia or Indonesia.

Violence and Insecurity in Cox's Bazar

3.28 Armed groups and criminal gangs operate within the camps and regularly threaten the safety of residents. According to a 2023 report by the International Crisis Group, a think-tank, at least 11 armed groups are active in the camps, most prominently the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO). While ARSA and the RSO claim to have political and religious aims, they are also criminal gangs, carrying out drug smuggling, targeted killings, rape, abductions, extortion and turf wars. Other armed groups active in the camps include the Arakan Rohingya Army (ARA) and the Rohingya Islamic Mahaz (RIM).

3.29 In-country sources told DFAT there were high levels of violence in the camps with instances of murder, attempted murder, abduction, extortion and rape increasing significantly between December 2022 and mid-2024. According to in-country sources and social media reporting, some armed groups active in the camps signed a ceasefire in November 2024 ('Mission Harmony') and surrendered some firearms to law enforcement. Gang-related exchanges of gunfire and killings had reportedly since decreased. Nevertheless, local media reported four Rohingya were killed in six hours in December 2024 as part of a turf war between ARSA and the RSO. The risk of violence, particularly kidnapping, extortion and forced recruitment from armed groups, remains acute. Fortify Rights, an American NGO, reported at least 65 killings, 446 abductions and 136 cases of extortion in the camps in 2024.

3.30 Rohingya community leaders and activists who speak out against violence or criminal gangs are at risk of assassination. A prominent Rohingya activist, Mohib Ullah, was assassinated by unknown gunmen in October 2021. Mohammad Elias, a *mahji* (Rohingya community leader) was allegedly murdered by ARSA in May 2024. Authorities also blamed ARSA for killing two *mahjis* in the camps in October 2022. ARSA's leader, Ataullah Abu Jununi, was arrested by security officials in Dhaka in March 2025.

3.31 In-country sources told DFAT armed groups frequently kidnapped children and adults and held them for ransom. A typical incident in April 2024 involved three young boys who were kidnapped on their way to a mosque and held until their parents paid a ransom. In-country sources told DFAT some young men were pressured or threatened into joining armed groups to fight in Myanmar, while some chose to join out of desperation or a sense of hopelessness.

3.32 The Armed Police Battalion (APBn, see Police) is responsible for security in the camps but effectively only operates during daylight hours. It withdraws at night, leaving security to unarmed Rohingya 'volunteers'. According to in-country sources, the APBn withdrew from the camps during national unrest in July and August 2024 (see Country Overview), creating a security vacuum for gangs to exploit. The APBn has since returned to the camps.

3.33 In-country sources reported the security situation in the camps had deteriorated since the APBn assumed responsibility from the Bangladesh Army in 2020. Where violence was once confined to the night, it was now relatively common during daylight hours, including gunfights between armed groups, sometimes resulting in injury or death to passersby. In-country sources said armed groups had stolen or vandalised streetlights, putting women at risk of sexual assault and men at risk of beatings and robberies if they moved around at night. Some APBn officers have also been accused of harassing or mistreating Rohingya refugees.

3.34 In-country sources reported overcrowded conditions in the camps led to frequent inter-personal disputes and sometimes violence. Causes include arguments over resources, the behaviour of children, debts and dowry disputes. For petty crimes and minor disputes, camp residents have access to informal resolution mechanisms, including mediation by religious leaders or *mahjis*. A 2019 report by International Rescue, an NGO, found decisions by *mahjis* and imams were sometimes arbitrary or unfair, especially to women and some *mahjis* were subject to corruption, a view shared by in-country sources.

3.35 Serious crimes such as rape or murder are referred to police, the Camp in-Charge (a government representative with certain judicial powers) or the court system. UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) and other protection NGOs provide free legal advice and support to camp residents to access these mechanisms.

3.36 Some Rohingya pay people smugglers to transport them to third countries including India, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. According to a 2023 report in the Lowy Interpreter, it costs between AUD2,800 and AUD5,500 for a family to be smuggled overseas from Cox's Bazar. Rohingya who use people smugglers face many risks, including robbery, rape, arrest and drowning at sea. Some fall prey to human trafficking. The IOM runs education programs to warn Rohingya of the dangers of using people smugglers, although in-country sources said desperate conditions in the camps meant some were willing to accept the risks.

Conditions for Rohingya Women

3.37 Rohingya society is religiously conservative and highly patriarchal. Women have few opportunities to work or participate in community decision-making. Gender-based violence is common, as is child marriage (see Women). Men, including members of armed groups, sometimes threaten women who fail to adhere to strict cultural and religious norms of dress and behaviour. These norms, known as *purdah*, require women to be covered from head to toe and forbid them leaving their homes unless accompanied by a male relative.

3.38 According to Rohingya custom, a bride's family must pay a dowry of cash and/or goods to the family of her groom. Dowry disputes are common and sometimes lead to violence. In-country sources reported families sometimes sought marriages for their daughters overseas, typically Indonesia or Malaysia, in the hope of paying a lower dowry. In these instances, the prospective groom often pays for the bride's journey overseas.

Living Conditions and Security Situation in Bhasan Char

3.39 Beginning in 2020, large numbers of Rohingya were moved to Bhasan Char, an island in the Bay of Bengal built on unstable silt deposits, owned and operated by the Bangladesh Navy. Relocation was officially voluntary, although some Rohingya and human rights groups dispute this. While conditions are better than in Cox's Bazar, with solid material shelter rather than tarpaulin tents, DFAT understands conditions are still poor, with few livelihood opportunities and higher cost of living. Human Rights Watch reported in June 2021 the island had food shortages, unreliable water sources, lacked schools and healthcare, and had 'severe restrictions on movement', including restrictions on leaving.

3.40 Both Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char are vulnerable to natural disasters, especially cyclones and flooding. Human Rights Watch notes complete evacuation of Bhasan Char would be difficult or impossible in the event of a natural disaster, not least because the island lacks an appropriate airport. Hundreds of Rohingya residents have attempted to escape Bhasan Char, some have drowned doing so. Bhasan Char has some violence problems, including

militancy and sexual assault. There are plans to expand settlement on the island but it only has capacity to house a fraction of the total number of Rohingya in Cox's Bazar camps.

3.41 DFAT assesses Rohingya in Bangladesh face a high risk of violence within camps from armed groups and other Rohingya and a low risk of violence from local Bangladeshis and security forces. Rohingya face a high risk of official discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity and legal status in Bangladesh, including in the form of movement restrictions and inability to work legally and own property. Rohingya women face a high risk of gender-based violence. State protection of Rohingya is inadequate.

RELIGION

3.42 According to the 2022 census, 91 per cent of Bangladesh's population is Sunni Muslim, 8 per cent Hindu. The remainder is mostly Christian or Buddhist. Small numbers of animists and other minority religions also exist. Religious minorities are found throughout Bangladesh but are especially common among indigenous people in the CHT.

Freedom of Religious Expression

3.43 Bangladesh was established as a secular state. A constitutional amendment in 1988 made Islam the state religion while continuing to provide for religious equality and freedom 'subject to law, public order, and morality'. Some religious minorities have criticised the establishment of Islam as the state religion on the grounds it discriminates against other religions and encourages an atmosphere of intolerance. In 2024, the Constitutional Court rejected a petition to revoke the 1988 amendment.

3.44 While blasphemy is not explicitly criminalised, the *Penal Code 1860* criminalises statements or acts made with an intent to insult religious sentiments, which can be punished by fines or up to two years in prison. In-country sources said this law was disproportionately used to punish people perceived as criticising Islam but not to protect the religious sentiments of non-Muslims. For example, local media reported in April 2024 a Hindu man was arrested in Shariatpur after sharing the lyrics of a song online deemed to 'hurt the religious sentiments of Muslims'. The law against insulting religion is also interpreted by courts as including perceived insults to the Prophet Mohammad.

3.45 The *Information and Communication Technology Act 2006* criminalises 'obscene material', 'expression(s) likely to cause deterioration of law and order', and 'statements hurting religious sentiments'. These provisions have been used to prosecute individuals for perceived insults to Islam. The now-repealed *Cyber Security Act 2023* and its predecessor, the *Digital Security Act 2018*, criminalised publication or broadcast in electronic format of any information intended to hurt religious values or sentiments. In February 2023, a Hindu teen was sentenced to five years in jail under the former *Digital Security Act 2018* for a social media post police claimed sparked violence and arson attacks by Muslims against a Hindu village in Rangpur district (no one was convicted for the actual attacks). The *Cyber Security Act 2023* was repealed and replaced by the *Cyber Security Ordinance* in May 2025. This removed provisions of the previous law criminalising the electronic publication or broadcast of information that hurt religious values or sentiments. The *Cyber Security Ordinance 2025* prohibits content that incites religious and ethnic violence (see Media and Journalists).

3.46 Apostasy, religious conversion and proselytisation are not crimes in Bangladesh. In-country sources said proselytisation perceived as aggressive, especially by evangelical Christians, was often a source of community tension. The 2023 US Department of State *International Religious Freedom Report for Bangladesh* noted NGO claims Christians who converted from Islam sometimes faced physical violence, harassment and social isolation.

3.47 In-country sources reported indigenous people sometimes chose or felt pressured to convert to Islam, in part due to a perception Muslims received greater social and economic benefits than other religions. DFAT understands this practice is not widespread. A 2017 report by the Kapaeeng Foundation, an NGO, said some indigenous children had been subjected to forced conversion. DFAT is not aware of more recent cases.

3.48 Family law (concerning marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption) contains specific provisions for Muslims, Hindus and Christians, although the same secular courts hear cases for all religious communities. There is a separate civil family law for mixed-faith families or adherents of faiths other than Islam, Hinduism or Christianity and for those who do not follow a religious faith. Family law is a blend of religious personal laws and some secular laws, including the *Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961*, the *Hindu Marriage Act 1955*, the *Christian Marriage Act 1872*, the *Special*

Marriage Act 1872, the *Guardians and Wards Act 1980*, the *Family Courts Ordinance 1985*, the *Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939*, the *Hindu Succession Act 1956* and the *Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956*.

Caste Discrimination

3.49 Caste discrimination is illegal under the Constitution. In-country sources told DFAT caste discrimination was not as widespread in Bangladesh as in other South Asian countries. Nevertheless, low-caste Hindus, also known as Dalits, are disproportionately impoverished, with most employed in menial work. Some experience shunning (e.g. people refusing to sit with them). A 2019 study by Transparency International Bangladesh, an NGO, found Dalits were disproportionately required to pay bribes to access basic services. According to Dalit activist groups, Dalit women are often subjected to sexual harassment and violence. Some low-caste Hindus convert, especially to Christianity, in order to avoid caste discrimination, although discrimination often persists after their conversion.

Ahmadis

3.50 The Ahmadis are members of an Islamic messianic movement formed in British-controlled India in the late 19th century. They take their name from their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, regarded by his followers as the messiah and a prophet. Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims and follow the teachings of the Quran, although many other Muslims consider Ahmadis heretics. The former BNP Government banned Ahmadi publications in 2004. The ban was not enforced and was later lifted.

3.51 Ahmadis are regarded with suspicion by many other Muslims because of their belief in the non-finality of the Prophet Mohammad. This has resulted in societal discrimination and violence, including physical attacks, boycotts and demands for the state to label Ahmadis non-Muslims. According to the OHCHR, Ahmadis were subjected to violent attacks by mobs, including burning of homes and attacks on places of worship, during and after anti-government protests in July and August 2024. This included allegations the OHCHR assessed as credible of the destruction of 117 houses and a mosque in Panchagarh on 5 August 2024. In March 2023, hundreds of Muslims attacked an Ahmadi community in Panchagarh after Ahmadis announced plans to hold a three-day religious convention there. Two people were killed, dozens were injured and hundreds of Ahmadi houses, an Ahmadi mosque and clinic were destroyed.

3.52 DFAT assesses Ahmadis face a moderate risk of societal violence in the form of sporadic attacks and mob violence. Ahmadis face a moderate risk of societal discrimination in the form of hate speech and calls to boycott their businesses. DFAT assesses Ahmadis face a low risk of official discrimination.

Atheists and Secularists

3.53 Atheism is rare and unpopular in Bangladesh. Religion, particularly Islam, is a central part of Bangladeshi culture and identity. In-country sources told DFAT atheists who proclaimed their non-belief in god would be unlikely to find support among their families or communities and could face violence.

3.54 Despite secularism's long history in Bangladesh, in-country sources said it was under growing pressure following the ouster of the Hasina Government and the resurgence of Islamist elements in Bangladeshi society. In March 2025, hundreds of people belonging to Hizb ut-Tahrir, a banned organisation, took to the streets of Dhaka to call for the establishment of an Islamic state ruled by *sharia* (Islamic law).

3.55 In January 2025, a Constitutional Reform Commission recommended the principle of secularism be replaced with 'pluralism' in an amended Constitution, subject to approval via referendum. At the time of writing, secularism remained enshrined in the Constitution. In-country sources reported secularists often found themselves at odds with religious Bangladeshis, especially when criticising the role of religion in society. *Nikkei Asia* reported in March 2025 religious mobs were harassing women for not wearing headscarves in public, calling out people for eating during Ramadan and vandalising restaurants open during daylight fasting hours.

3.56 Atheists and secularists have been the target of attacks by Islamic extremists, especially between 2013 and 2016. Asif Mohiuddin, a self-described 'militant atheist' blogger was stabbed and injured by Islamist extremists in January 2013. Another blogger, Avijit Roy, was killed in 2015 by members of the terrorist group Ansar al-Islam. His attackers were sentenced to death in 2021 by an anti-terrorism tribunal. DFAT is not aware of more recent examples of attacks against atheists or secularists.

3.57 DFAT assesses atheists who publicly proclaim their non-belief in god and/or criticise religion face a moderate risk of violence in the form of targeted assassinations and assaults by Islamic extremists. They face a moderate risk of societal discrimination, especially if they attempt to convince others to adopt their beliefs.

Buddhists

3.58 Buddhists comprise around 1 per cent of the population. Most are indigenous and are often identifiable by their appearance, dress, names and language. They live primarily in the CHT. In-country sources reported Buddhists were often subjected to land grabs, although this was generally related to their indigenous ethnicity and presence in the CHT rather than their religion.

3.59 According to in-country sources Buddhists sometimes experience societal discrimination, although it was unclear whether this was on the basis of their religion or ethnicity. Buddhists are generally able to receive instruction in their faith as part of the school curriculum (although the teachers are not necessarily Buddhist). In-country sources said Buddhists did not generally experience discrimination on the basis of their religion when accessing education, healthcare or other public services.

3.60 Buddhists have been periodically affected by communal violence. Anti-Hindu violence in 2021 affected some Buddhist temples and a Buddhist temple in Cox's Bazar was subject to an arson attack in January 2024. A Buddhist monk was reportedly killed in the CHT in May 2021. Another Buddhist monk was killed in July 2024. The motive was unknown. Violence notably occurred in 2012 when Islamists razed Buddhist homes and temples after a false and erroneous Facebook post implicated a Buddhist in the alleged desecration of a Quran. DFAT is not aware of more recent examples of violence or discrimination against Buddhists.

3.61 DFAT assesses Buddhists face a low risk of societal violence in the form of occasional localised incidents. Buddhists face a low risk of societal discrimination on the basis of their religion, noting it is often difficult to distinguish between religious and racial discrimination, especially for Buddhists in the CHT.

Christians

3.62 Christians make up 0.5 per cent of the population. Many are indigenous and are often identifiable by their appearance, dress, names and language. Many Christians are descendants of 15th century converts who look like other Bangladeshis but have Portuguese surnames. Christians live in communities across the country but are especially common in the CHT, with concentrations in Barishal City, Gournadi in Barishal District, Baniarchar in Gopalganj District and Monipuripara and Chirstianpara in Dhaka, as well as in the cities of Gazipur and Khulna.

3.63 Like other religious minorities, Christians were targeted by Islamic extremists between 2015 and 2016. During this period, an estimated 36 Christian leaders received death threats and militants linked to Islamic State murdered a Christian convert in Bonpara and a Christian pastor in Kurigram. Counter-terrorism operations by state security forces have greatly reduced the capacity of these terrorist groups. The state provides armed security to churches around sensitive dates such as Easter and Christmas.

3.64 DFAT is aware of isolated incidents of discrimination against Christians. Some international Christian NGOs say Christians continue to face violence in Bangladesh. In February 2020, a group of Christian families was attacked in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar and a Christian pastor and his daughter abducted. In July 2021, *PIME Asia News* (a Catholic news website) reported Buddhists had attacked Christian converts in Rangamati attempting to force them to return to Buddhism. In-country sources told DFAT communal violence against Christians was rare in recent years. In-country sources said Christians were often subject to land grabs, although this was generally related to their indigenous ethnicity and presence in the CHT rather than their religion.

3.65 There are reports of discrimination against Christians in housing and employment. In February 2023, *PIME Asia News* reported over 1,000 Christians had been evicted from their homes and two Christian churches demolished in Dholpur by the Dhaka South City Corporation on the grounds the buildings were 'illegal'. In-country sources reported some Christians were singled out for discrimination and mistreatment by Islamist groups and communities following the fall of the Hasina Government. For example, a number of missionary schools were reportedly forced to close and Christian teachers forced to resign under pressure of threats by Islamist groups.

3.66 In-country sources told DFAT Christians were under-represented in the civil service and the military, although Christians did not generally experience discrimination on the basis of their religion when accessing education, healthcare or other public services. Inter-religious marriage and conversion occur and are generally tolerated but sometimes lead to disagreements within families. Some Christians who convert from Hinduism or come from low-caste Hindu backgrounds experience ongoing discrimination, similar to the discrimination experienced by low-caste Hindus.

3.67 DFAT assesses Christians generally face a low risk of societal violence in the form of occasional localised attacks and a low risk of official or societal discrimination in the form of sporadic housing and employment discrimination. These risks increase at times of heightened political and religious tension. Christians from low-caste Hindu backgrounds face a similar risk of societal discrimination as low-caste Hindus. See also Indigenous People.

Hindus

3.68 Hindus are the largest religious minority in Bangladesh, although their numbers have declined since independence. In 1991, Hindus made up 15 per cent of the population. By 2022, this number had dropped to 8 per cent. Most Hindus are ethnically and linguistically Bengali and are not physically distinguishable from the majority Muslim population. Hindus can often be identified by their clothing, including the wearing of red string on their wrists, certain bangles, *bindis* (a dot between the eyebrows known as a *teep* in Bangladesh) and *sindoor* (red colour placed in the hair of a married woman). Hindus are found throughout the country. Many are wealthy and there are perceptions of wealth disparities between Bangladeshi Hindus and Muslims.

3.69 Hindus were targeted by pro-Pakistan forces during the Bangladesh Liberation War and subjected to extrajudicial killings, rape and other human rights abuses. After the war, many Hindus were affected by the *Vested Property Act 1974*, which continued a pre-independence policy of confiscating companies, land and buildings belonging to Indian nationals and people residing in India. A law providing for the return of these properties (the *Vested Property Return Act*) was passed in 2001, although in-country sources told DFAT poor implementation and bureaucratic barriers meant few Hindu properties had been returned.

3.70 Hindus are periodically targeted by communal violence, especially around national elections and in response to anti-Muslim incidents in India. In-country sources said Bangladeshi Hindus almost uniformly supported the Awami League, making them a target for rival supporters of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. The OHCHR reported attacks, looting and acts of vandalism against Hindu homes, businesses, places of worship and funeral sites during and after anti-government protests in July and August 2024. In some cases, Hindus were physically assaulted, including a woman whose throat was slit and a man who was injured with sharp weapons. Attacks were most prevalent in rural areas and areas perceived to be sympathetic to the Awami League. Perpetrators were primarily local supporters of the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and other organised groups. The Interim Government registered 88 cases of communal violence against Hindus between 5 August and 22 October 2024, with 70 people arrested.

3.71 According to Bangladesh's peak body for religious minorities, the Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Unity Council, at least nine Hindus were killed by mobs in the immediate aftermath of the Hasina Government's collapse. The Interim Government, the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and student leaders condemned violence against Hindus. The OHCHR reported local efforts by the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, student groups and social organisations to protect Hindu homes and places of worship after 6 August 2024. In April 2025, a prominent Hindu community leader, Bhabesh Chandra Roy, was abducted and killed. Local media reports suggested the murder may have been related to the non-repayment of a loan (the accused were known loan sharks according to police). In-country sources said they had no evidence attacks against Hindus post-August 2024 were religiously motivated, systematic or coordinated.

3.72 Religious violence has also been sparked by incidents, or rumours of incidents, where Hindus are alleged to have insulted Islam. In December 2024, Muslims in Sunamganj District (northeastern Bangladesh) vandalised Hindu temples, homes and businesses after a Hindu allegedly made derogatory remarks about Islam on Facebook. In October 2021, anti-Hindu violence was sparked by allegations Hindus had disrespected the Quran during celebrations of the Durga Puja festival (the largest festival of the Hindu community in Bangladesh). This violence led to four deaths and more than 680 arrests. Successive governments took steps to prevent similar violence during Durga Puja celebrations in 2023 and 2024.

3.73 Islamist militant groups, including some claiming links with Islamic State, conducted several small-scale localised attacks against minority religious and social groups across Bangladesh between 2013 and 2016. These attacks killed or seriously injured several Hindus. Police were despatched to protect temples and clergy and extensive counter-terrorism operations conducted in response. These operations reduced the capability of militant groups but have not eliminated the risk of further attacks.

3.74 In-country sources reported employment discrimination against Hindus was rare. Hindus hold senior positions in government, the civil service, police and the judiciary. The military is an exception, where in-country sources said Hindus were under-represented, especially at senior levels. According to in-country sources, Hindus generally do not experience discrimination on the basis of their religion when accessing education, healthcare or other public services.

3.75 DFAT assesses Hindus face a low risk of official discrimination, including in the form of barriers to regaining property lost under the *Vested Property Act 1974*. While the incidence of societal discrimination and violence against Hindus varies, DFAT assesses Hindus face a moderate risk of societal discrimination and violence overall based on the capacity for anti-Hindu sentiment to quickly flare and turn violent in times of religious and political tension, as in the immediate aftermath of the Hasina Government's collapse. Low-caste Hindus face a high risk of societal discrimination in the form of employment discrimination and shunning.

POLITICAL OPINION (ACTUAL OR IMPUTED)

3.76 For most of its history, Bangladesh has had a two-party political system dominated by the Awami League and the BNP. The Awami League has traditionally been secular, liberal and rural-based, with a broadly pro-India foreign policy outlook. The BNP has traditionally been more accommodating of political Islam, conservative and urban-based, with an anti-India perspective.

3.77 The relationship between the Awami League and the BNP is characterised by longstanding enmity, described by one in-country source as a 'hate culture'. The rivalry is deeply personal at the highest levels. Awami League leader and former Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, is the daughter of the 'Father of the Nation', Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The BNP's leader, Khaleda Zia, is the widow of the party's founder, former General and President Ziaur Rahman. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman were both assassinated in office. Their respective parties view them as martyrs.

3.78 In government, the Awami League restricted the activities of opposition political parties, particularly the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. Opposition figures were arrested or disappeared, often in conjunction with political demonstrations. Thousands were charged with crimes such as arson or property damage, often spuriously according to in-country sources. Security forces frequently prevented opposition parties holding meetings and demonstrations. They also interfered with the ability of opposition parties to campaign during elections. Information was tightly controlled under the Hasina Government and an atmosphere of surveillance and self-censorship prevailed.

3.79 Since the fall of the Hasina Government, the pattern of political repression in Bangladesh has reversed. Formerly powerful, the Awami League and its allies have been excluded from dialogue on forming a national consensus on state reform. In contrast, members of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, politically disenfranchised and discriminated against under Awami League rule, now operate freely and wield more influence. In February 2025, student leaders of the uprising against the Hasina Government announced the formation of a new political party, the National Citizen Party ('Jatiya Nagarik Party'), to contest the next election (planned for 2026).

3.80 Both during the period of the former Hasina Government and after, mass case files have been used to target opponents. Mass case files often list a small number of alleged perpetrators by name, accusing them of crimes such as arson, followed by a statement that hundreds more 'unnamed persons' are accused of the same crime. In many cases, there is no evidence to support the accusations. OHCHR, in its February 2025 report, said the filing of unsubstantiated charges and arrests based on mass cases, instead of targeted investigations of cases where there was sufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction, constituted a form of 'malpractice' that undermined due process. Human Rights Watch describes the practice as 'abusive', allowing police 'to intimidate and threaten virtually anyone with arrest'.

3.81 In-country sources, local media and international human rights organisations reported a surge in mass case files immediately following the fall of the Hasina Government in August 2024. Most targeted people for actual or

perceived affiliation to the Awami League. According to local media, people from various walks of life have been implicated, including actors, businesspeople, journalists, police officers, bureaucrats and even deceased persons. In April 2025, the Inspector-General of Police advised wrongfully implicated persons to seek police assistance. The Inspector-General acknowledged many cases had been filed with an intent to extort money and instil fear.

3.82 According to in-country sources, mass legal cases had reduced in 2025 and recent crackdowns on Awami League supporters did not appear to utilise mass case files to arrest suspects. In April 2025, the Interim Government indicated it would publish a list of politically motivated cases (filed between 6 January 2009 and 5 August 2024, numbering in the thousands) it would recommend be withdrawn.

Awami League

3.83 The Awami League was established in 1949, co-founded by former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's father, Mujibur Rahman. It most recently held power from 2009 to 2024 (see Country Overview). The Awami League monopolised many opportunities in the civil service, business community and higher education sector during this time, meaning people sometimes felt compelled to join the party or one of its arms to succeed.

3.84 In May 2025, the Interim Government banned the Awami League from all activity under the *Anti-Terrorism Act 2009*, citing national security concerns. The Interim Government said the ban would remain in place until legal cases against the party and its leaders over the deaths of protesters during the 2024 uprising had concluded. The Awami League described the ban as illegitimate. Its student wing (the Bangladesh Chhatra League, BCL) was banned in October 2024, under the *Anti-Terrorism Act 2009*, for its role in violent attacks on protesters during the uprising.

3.85 Mass arrests of Awami League members have occurred since the fall of the Hasina Government including for suspected murder, manslaughter or assault of student protesters, vandalism of BNP offices, embezzlement and other corruption-related offences. In-country sources told DFAT 256 mass cases (see preceding section) were filed against 194,000 people belonging to or affiliated with the Awami Leage between 5 and 30 August 2024, including for murder and corruption.

3.86 In April 2025, around 12,700 people were arrested across Bangladesh as part of a police crackdown on supporters of the Awami League. These arrests followed, and expanded upon, 'Operation Devil Hunt', which saw around 12,500 people (mostly Awami League supporters) arrested between 8 February and 1 March 2025 as part of a campaign to curb unrest and ensure public safety. In February 2025, the Interim Government announced 35 people affiliated with the Awami League had been arrested for potential crimes under international law, with a further 70 people (some of them abroad) under investigation. DFAT understands, as of May 2025, more than 300 cases had been lodged with Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (a domestic court) relating to alleged crimes committed by Awami League members. The court commenced its first hearings in May 2025. According to in-country sources, it would likely be years before all cases were heard.

3.87 The OHCHR recorded widespread revenge attacks against Awami League members and affiliates during and after anti-government protests in July and August 2024. Some had their houses vandalised, looted or burned down and/or were subjected to physical assault. Businesses with Awami League links have also been targeted, with some forcibly seized by BNP supporters. In February 2025, Awami League-affiliated properties, including the historic home of Hasina's father and homes belonging to former Awami League MPs, were targeted following Sheikh Hasina's denunciation of the Interim Government as 'unconstitutional' in an online address from India. DFAT is aware of reports of Awami League party workers being attacked and sometimes killed on the basis of their political affiliation. Local media reports indicate around 50 people have been killed in such circumstances.

3.88 DFAT understands there is no blanket ban on former Awami League MPs travelling abroad. Yet, according to in-country sources, most were unable to do so as the diplomatic passports on which they formerly travelled were cancelled and passport offices reportedly instructed not to issue them ordinary passports. Separately, courts have imposed travel bans on several former ministers and MPs belonging to the Awami League, including for alleged irregularities and corruption while in government.

3.89 According to in-country sources, in most cases civil servants with Awami League links were able to retain their jobs, although some had reportedly been sidelined or relocated. A smaller number have been fired. Many police officers have been forced to leave their jobs due to their association with the Awami League and the violent response

to the 2024 protest movement. Many are reportedly in hiding. In-country sources told DFAT some senior officials and businesspeople with links to the Awami League had used their personal connections to successfully escape sanction following the fall of the Hasina Government.

3.90 DFAT assesses Awami League MPs who were members of the Hasina Government face a high risk of arrest. While, in some cases, these MPs may have legitimate cases to answer for their role in protester deaths in July and August 2024 and/or alleged abuse of office while in government, many face arbitrary detention. If arrested, they are unlikely to receive bail or a fair trial. DFAT is not aware of instances of Awami League figures being subjected to violence or other ill-treatment while in detention. DFAT assesses Awami League MPs who were members of the Hasina Government face a moderate risk of societal discrimination and violence in the form of assault on their person and property by political rivals and protesters. DFAT is not aware of instances of Awami League figures seeking police protection when faced by threats.

3.91 DFAT assesses Awami League district organisers, former MPs, party workers, members and supporters face a high risk of official discrimination in the form of arbitrary detention and the loss of employment. They generally face a low risk of violence, although this varies by location and personal circumstances and some hold legitimate fears for their safety. They can theoretically access state protection, although this may not always be effective, as police have been at reduced capability and effectiveness since the July and August 2024 uprising.

3.92 Civil servants with Awami League links face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of arbitrary dismissal, demotion, sidelining or relocation. The risk of such discrimination is high for police officers. Business owners with Awami League links face a moderate risk of societal discrimination and violence in the form of looting, vandalism and arson attacks against their businesses.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

3.93 The BNP was established in 1978 and has held government on several occasions. From 2014 to 2024, the party had significantly reduced visibility due to active repression efforts by the Hasina Government. The BNP's influence also waned due to its boycott of recent elections it claimed were fixed in the Awami League's favour. Like the Awami League, the BNP maintains various committees at the grassroots level. In-country sources told DFAT the BNP enjoyed broad popular support.

3.94 Former BNP prime minister, Khaleda Zia, was convicted in February 2018 on graft charges and sentenced to five years in prison. In October 2018, she was sentenced to another seven years on a separate corruption charge. The BNP claimed the charges against Zia were politically motivated. Zia was released from house arrest on 6 August 2024, one day after Sheikh Hasina fled Bangladesh. Zia was acquitted of all charges in January 2025. Zia travelled to the United Kingdom for medical treatment in January 2025, returning to Bangladesh in May 2025.

3.95 Under the Hasina Government, false criminal charges and vexatious civil court procedures were routinely used to harass members of the BNP. In-country sources said millions of BNP supporters faced such cases. Many were disappeared. Prior to the 2024 election, thousands of BNP supporters were arrested, accused of acts of vandalism, burning garbage trucks or throwing petrol bombs. These accusations were often not supported by evidence.

3.96 According to in-country sources, BNP political prisoners were freed following the fall of the Hasina Government in August 2024. In April 2025, the Interim Government indicated it would publish a list of politically motivated cases (filed between 6 January 2009 and 5 August 2024, numbering in the thousands) it would recommend be withdrawn. The Acting Chair of the BNP and presumptive prime ministerial candidate, Tarique Rahman (the son of Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia), was acquitted of various charges, including relating to sedition and corruption, since the fall of the Hasina Government. In-country sources said the BNP now operated freely and was influential in the Interim Government. For intra-party BNP violence, see Security Situation.

3.97 While BNP supporters experienced significant official discrimination and sometimes violence during the period in which the Awami League was in power, DFAT assesses BNP leaders and supporters generally do not face official or societal violence or discrimination under the Interim Government.

Jamaat-e-Islami

3.98 Jamaat-e-Islami is an Islamist political party that supported the Pakistani Army during the independence war in 1971. Jamaat-e-Islami was banned from competing in elections in 2014, 2018 and 2024. The Awami League banned the party entirely shortly before the fall of the Hasina Government. Supporters of the Awami League claimed Jamaat-e-Islami espoused extremist ideology and supported Islamic terrorism. The Interim Government lifted the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami in August 2024. At the time of writing, it was expected Jamaat-e-Islami would have its party status reinstated and participate in the next election.

3.99 Under the Hasina Government, Jamaat-e-Islami followers generally kept a low profile and did not actively or publicly campaign, although DFAT understands they were able to recruit new members clandestinely. According to in-country sources, following the fall of the Hasina Government, Jamaat-e-Islami followers were emboldened and, in some cases, directed violence or threats at minorities, including Hindus, Christians and LGBTQIA+ people.

3.100 While they faced official discrimination under Awami League rule, DFAT assesses members of Jamaat-e-Islami are generally not at risk of official or societal discrimination or violence since the fall of the Hasina Government.

Jatiya Party

3.101 The Jatiya Party was established in 1986. In its early years, it was closely aligned to the military. During its history, the Jatiya Party has formed alliances with both the Awami League and the BNP. Under the Hasina Government, the Jatiya Party was the main opposition following the BNP's boycott of the 2024 election.

3.102 While Jatiya Party leaders and MPs maintained a policy of neutrality during the 2024 student protests, they are perceived by their political rivals and some members of the student movement as having collaborated with the Awami League in violently repressing the protests.

3.103 In October 2024, a group of protesters calling themselves the Anti-Fascism Student, Worker and People's Movement vandalised and burned down the Jatiya Party's office in Dhaka. In-country sources told DFAT a large mob assaulted members of the party who were in the office, some of whom required hospitalisation. In May 2025, the Rangpur home of the party's leader, G.M. Quader, was vandalised. Legal cases have been launched against Jatiya MPs and party leaders accusing them of involvement in the killing of students. Several have been arrested. Businesses whose owners have links to the Jatiya Party have been vandalised and burned by student protesters and people linked to rival political parties.

3.104 Like the Awami League, the Jatiya Party has not been invited to participate in dialogue on forming a national consensus on state reform, although in-country sources reported it continued to operate openly, including through publicly advertised engagements.

3.105 DFAT assesses Jatiya Party MPs and senior leaders face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of arbitrary arrest and prosecution and a moderate risk of societal discrimination and violence in the form of threats, assaults, vandalism and arson attacks by protesters and people linked to rival political parties.

Political Auxiliary Organisations

3.106 The Awami League, the BNP and other political parties have large auxiliary organisations. They include 'wings' for students, volunteers, youth and professionals (e.g. doctors, lawyers and labourers). These organisations are sometimes known by other names, such as 'fronts' or 'leagues'. The largest of these are the student wings, of which many former students are still members. Prior to the fall of the Hasina Government, the Awami League's student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), had millions of members. The BNP version, the Chhatra Dal, is also active. The two sides have engaged in violence, including during the 2024 student-led protest movement, when BCL members were accused of assaulting and killing protesters.

3.107 There are strong incentives to join an auxiliary organisation. For student organisations, members have access to better university accommodation, jobs upon graduation or business opportunities. Patronage is an important factor, attending protests or supporting a locally powerful person or politician offers protection. The poor are more vulnerable to these pressures (the rich can get opportunities without such networks), although membership of an auxiliary organisation does not guarantee employment.

3.108 Prior to the fall of the Hasina Government, the BCL maintained tight control over accommodation at many universities. It was impossible to secure a room without the BCL's blessing and BCL membership was usually required. In-country sources said BCL's control of student accommodation had ended after the fall of the Hasina Government with rooms now generally allocated based on need and merit.

3.109 The Interim Government banned the BCL in October 2024, designating it a terrorist organisation and initiating criminal proceedings against hundreds of its members. Cases levelled against BCL members include murder, manslaughter and assault for alleged actions during the July and August 2024 protests. Many of these cases may be based on legitimate allegations BCL members engaged in violence and other illegal conduct.

3.110 In January 2025, the Election System Reform Commission recommended to the Interim Government the prohibition of all political auxiliary organisations. This had not been implemented at the time of writing. Several universities have banned political activities on their grounds since August 2024.

3.111 Auxiliary organisations are involved in significant violence. Those who engage in auxiliary organisations are at a moderate risk of violence due to factional in-fighting.

3.112 DFAT assesses members of the BCL face a high risk of arrest and prosecution under the Interim Government. In many cases these charges may be justified although some BCL members could face arbitrary arrest on the basis of political affiliation alone. DFAT notes many BCL members have moved educational institutions and joined other student political parties since the uprising which may mitigate the risk of arrest and prosecution.

Protesters

3.113 Street protests, strikes and blockades, sometimes resulting in, or from, communal violence, are a common occurrence in Bangladesh. Protests are often organised on social media. The *Digital Security Act 2018* was sometimes used by authorities to review social media communications and impede or punish organisers of protests and journalists covering them. The *Digital Security Act 2018* was repealed and replaced by the *Cyber Security Act 2023* which was also used to target dissent. The *Cyber Security Act 2023*, in turn, was repealed and replaced by a less restrictive *Cyber Security Ordinance* in May 2025 (see Media and Journalists). Allegations of enforced or involuntary disappearances against both online and in-person protesters have been made.

3.114 Student-led protests in July and August 2024, which turned violent, brought down the government of Sheikh Hasina. See Country Overview and Security Situation.

3.115 *Hartals* (sometimes called general strikes) are a common form of protest in Bangladesh where protesters attempt to shut down roads or unrelated businesses to bring attention to their cause. The BNP held several *hartals* against the Hasina Government between October 2023 and January 2024. The Awami League called a *hartal* against the Interim Government in February 2025 but failed to mobilise large numbers. In May 2025, thousands of people, including supporters of the newly formed National Citizen Party and the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, participated in days of protests in Dhaka calling for a ban of the Awami League.

3.116 In-country sources told DFAT protests related to labour disputes, especially in garment factories, were common. Police sometimes responded with force. In October 2024, police fired on protesting garment workers, killing one and injuring 30. Violent protests against unpaid wages and demands for pay increases and bonuses occurred in April and June 2022, with police using tear gas and protesters throwing projectiles. According to a report in *The Guardian*, police charged at a peaceful protest of 700 garment workers protesting against unpaid wages in the wake of COVID-19 shutdowns. Police opened live fire at protesters demonstrating outside a power plant in April 2021, killing five. Enforced disappearances in the context of street protests have been alleged.

3.117 In-country sources said protest activity by the Awami League would highly likely attract authorities' attention. Beyond this, there was no clear pattern of which protests would attract attention. The size of most protests means authorities are unable to target most attendees. The profile of protester matters, with organisers more likely to be singled out.

3.118 For treatment of returnees who have participated in protests or other political activities in Australia, including via social media, see Conditions for Returnees.

Civil Society Organisations

3.119 Article 38 of the Constitution guarantees citizens the right to form associations or unions, provided their objectives are consistent with the Constitution and are not formed for the purpose of destroying religious, social or communal harmony, creating discrimination on any grounds or organising terrorist or militant activities.

3.120 Bangladesh has an active civil society sector conducting activities on a wide range of social, cultural, political and economic issues. All civil society organisations (CSOs), including religious organisations, are required to register with the Ministry of Social Welfare. The NGO Affairs Bureau, which sits within the Chief Adviser's Office, oversees the activities of CSOs in Bangladesh.

3.121 CSOs working on sensitive topics or groups, including religious issues, human rights, indigenous people, LGBTQIA+ issues, Rohingya refugees, corruption and workers' rights, have reported formal and informal government restrictions. This includes repeated audits or delayed approvals by the National Board of Revenue, legal harassment under the *Information and Communication Technology Act 2006* and the former *Digital Security Act 2018* (repealed and replaced by the *Cyber Security Act 2023*, in turn repealed and replaced by the *Cyber Security Ordinance* in 2025), temporary freezing of bank accounts, overt monitoring by intelligence agencies, disruption of planned events and delays in/withholding approvals such as NGO registration. Some very successful CSOs have developed skills working with the government to maintain independence and avoid conflict.

3.122 According to Freedom House, members of CSOs advocating for labour rights and trade unions face dismissal or physical intimidation. Protests against low wages, poor conditions and poor safety standards are particularly common in the garment industry. In-country sources reported those advocating for labour rights had been arbitrarily arrested and tortured during Awami League rule.

3.123 The Interim Government comprises leaders from the CSO sector, including Chief Adviser Yunus. According to in-country sources, CSO engagement had increased under the Interim Government, with CSOs contributing significantly to reform documents and the OHCHR fact-finding inquiry into alleged human rights violations and abuses in the context of the 2024 anti-government protests. In-country sources also reported the Interim Government had streamlined NGO approval and registration and the operating environment for the sector had improved.

Media and Journalists

3.124 Bangladesh has a wide variety of traditional and electronic media. Media outlets tend to align themselves with one of the main political factions. Many private television networks exist alongside a national public broadcaster. Social media, Facebook in particular, has led to a decline in the influence of mainstream media in recent years.

3.125 The now-repealed *Cyber Security Act 2023*, like the *Digital Security Act 2018* before it, allowed law enforcement to search and/or seize journalists' devices and arrest people without warrant for publishing information online that was deemed false, threatening or offensive, disrupted communal harmony and undermined law and order, hurt religious values or sentiments, represented propaganda against the spirit of the Bangladesh Liberation War or caused defamation. According to Amnesty International, these laws were used by the Hasina Government to stifle critical expression and restrict the ability of journalists to report freely. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an international NGO, reported four journalists were imprisoned in 2024 as a result of their work. Five journalists were killed between 2020 and 2024 according to CPJ data.

3.126 The *Cyber Security Act 2023* was repealed and replaced by the *Cyber Security Ordinance* in May 2025. This removes several provisions of the previous law considered suppressive of free speech, including provisions criminalising criticism of the Liberation War, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and national symbols and the publication or dissemination of information that hurt religious values or sentiments or was deemed offensive, false or threatening. The *Cyber Security Ordinance 2025* recognises Internet access as a civic right and prohibits content inciting religious or ethnic violence. It annuls all ongoing trials and past sentences issued under repealed provisions of the former *Cyber Security Act 2023*.

3.127 Bangladesh ranked 149 out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' *2025 World Press Freedom Index* (up 16 places from 2024). In-country sources reported the operating environment for journalists had not necessarily improved since the fall of the Hasina Government. Journalists continued to face pressure, including, increasingly,

from non-state actors. Since August 2024, journalists who reported on religious affairs were increasingly feeling vulnerable and scared for their safety.

3.128 Human Rights Watch reported, as of November 2024, authorities had filed murder charges against at least 140 journalists in relation to their reporting on the Monsoon Revolution. Media organisations have reportedly dismissed or sidelined journalists considered sympathetic to the former Hasina Government. According to Reporters Without Borders, in November 2024 the Information and Broadcasting Ministry cancelled the press accreditations of 59 journalists deemed supporters of the previous government. In October 2024, the Interim Government announced a mechanism for journalists to report harassment against them since July 2024 and seek remedies.

3.129 Journalists attempting to report on the military, judiciary or religious affairs, or whose reporting is critical of the government, are likely to feel pressured to self-censor. DFAT assesses journalists who publish critical views face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of legal sanction, arrest, harassment and physical violence. DFAT applies this assessment to all journalists, both rural and urban regardless of gender.

Social Media

3.130 Social media is monitored in Bangladesh. Content considered defamatory of high-level officials, perceived as blasphemous or offensive to Islam, has the potential to provoke communal tensions or promotes LGBTQIA+ rights is most likely to attract adverse attention from authorities. Posts relating to planned protest activity (e.g. by the Awami League or garment workers) may also attract attention. People with a public profile, including influencers, are much more likely to have their social media targeted than low-level users.

3.131 Law enforcement had broad scope under the former *Cyber Security Act 2023* to search and seize electronic devices and arrest individuals for their online activity. Human rights organisations say this law was misused by the Hasina Government to limit freedom of expression and target dissenting voices. The Interim Government repealed and replaced the *Cyber Security Act 2023* with a less restrictive *Cyber Security Ordinance* in May 2025.

GROUPS OF INTEREST

Women

3.132 Article 28 (2) of the Constitution provides women equal rights to men. Numerous additional constitutional provisions prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sex. There are also substantial legal protections for women, including on personal safety, participation in the workforce and mandatory schooling for girls. Nevertheless, Bangladesh remains a patriarchal and religiously conservative society and women experience discrimination and disadvantage in many areas of life.

3.133 Bangladesh has had two female prime ministers, numerous female Cabinet Ministers and a female Speaker of Parliament. The current Interim Government has several female Advisers (minister-level). Many women occupy positions in the civil service, judiciary, police, military and local government institutions. Overall, women are under-represented in politics. The Constitution reserves 50 seats in parliament for women. Besides this number, only 20 out of 300 MPs in the last parliament were women.

3.134 Around 43 per cent of women participate in the labour force compared to 81 per cent of men. The emergence of the ready-made garment industry has provided a means of economic empowerment for large numbers of lower-income Bangladeshi women but only at the worker, not management, levels.

Religious Personal Laws

3.135 Religious personal laws govern marriage, divorce, maintenance, custody, inheritance and other family matters for Muslims, Hindus and Christians (for specific laws, see Freedom of Religious Expression). These laws often impact women in discriminatory ways. Muslim men can divorce their wives at will (*talaq*) but Muslim women can only divorce with the consent of their husbands. Upon divorce, Muslim men must pay maintenance to their wives for 90 days from the date of divorce. Christian men can divorce their wives for adultery but Christian women must provide additional grounds such as cruelty or abandonment. Divorce is not permitted for Hindus. Polygamy, while rare, is legal for Muslims and Hindus. The law requires men to treat their wives equitably and seek permission from their existing wife before taking additional wives, although these requirements are often ignored. Unless otherwise

specified, Muslim daughters inherit one-half of what their brothers receive. Family courts are slow and inefficient, exacerbating the position of women affected by these laws.

3.136 In April 2025, a Women's Reform Commission established by the Interim Government recommended a single family law for all Bangladeshis, equal parental rights and criminalisation of marital rape. Islamists called for the Commission's disbandment and held a large demonstration to protest its recommendations in Dhaka in May 2025.

Gender-Based Violence

3.137 Gender-based violence is common in Bangladesh. According to a 2024 government survey, seven in 10 Bangladeshi women had experienced one or more forms of intimate-partner violence (physical, sexual, emotional, controlling behaviour or economic violence) in their lifetimes, with over four in 10 women experiencing intimate-partner violence in the previous 12 months. Aside from their husbands, women are also frequently abused by in-laws or members of their own family.

3.138 Women can seek protection from gender-based violence through informal mechanisms, including by appealing to family members or relatives, or seeking the intervention of community elders (*shalish*). In-country sources reported these mechanisms often prioritised reconciliation over the interests and safety of victims. Other barriers to leaving abusive relationships include stigma, the economic dependence of many women on their husbands and societal attitudes towards domestic violence as a personal, rather than criminal, issue.

3.139 Formal protection mechanisms include mediation by local government officials known as *upazila nibahi* officers, village courts and filing criminal charges. The *Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010*, provides for protection orders (similar to Apprehended Violence Orders in Australia), with penalties of six months to two years in prison for breaches. The Act also provides for victims of domestic violence to remain in their homes while barring their abuser from entering and to access jointly held property, although Human Rights Watch said implementation fell 'drastically short'. In-country sources told DFAT police would usually act in cases of 'grievous injury' caused by domestic violence. However, many victims of domestic violence were unaware of their legal rights and police would often refuse to register a case of domestic violence unless a bribe was paid.

3.140 Rape and sexual assault occur frequently. Ain O Salish Kendra, a local NGO, recorded 377 cases of rape between January and November 2024. Of this number, 28 women were murdered following rape and seven suicided. These numbers are probably a drastic underestimate. According to in-country sources, many victims do not report rape because of a lack of access to legal services, social stigma, fear of harassment and the process of proving the rape using medical evidence. Sexual violence within marriage is common. Spousal rape is not criminalised. In-country sources said the legal system was not gender-sensitive and just 3 per cent of rape cases resulted in convictions.

3.141 So-called 'eve teasing', the sexual harassment and abuse of young unmarried women, is common and affects girls as young as 14. Despite its name, such harassment is often severe and, in some cases, leads girls to drop out of school or agree to early marriage to escape the perceived threat. In-country sources told DFAT sexual harassment and sexual assault were common in some universities, as well as in the garment industry, affecting women both in the workplace and on their way to and from work. Acid attacks against women occasionally occur, although strict enforcement of anti-acid attack laws have made them much less common today. Most acid attacks are reportedly related to marital, family, property or money disputes or to a woman's refusal to accept a marriage proposal.

3.142 The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs runs programs to reduce and respond to gender-based violence. These include a 24/7 national hotline and One-Stop Crisis Centres in at least a dozen hospitals throughout the country. These centres offer healthcare, police assistance, DNA testing, social services, legal assistance, counselling and shelter referrals. There are an estimated 36 women's shelters in the country, around half are run by NGOs. The number is reportedly inadequate to meet demand. In-country sources reported the ability of a victim of gender-based violence to relocate to escape an abuser depended on her family networks and financial means, although, in some cases, the garment industry provided opportunities for women to gain financial independence and live in relative safety.

Child Marriage

3.143 Under the *Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017*, the legal age of marriage is 18 years for females and 21 years for males. The law includes a provision for minors to be married with the consent of their parents or guardians where

marriage is considered in the minor's best interests. Penalties of up to two years' imprisonment, a fine of 1 million taka (AUD12,600) or both otherwise apply for any adult found guilty of contracting a child marriage.

3.144 The *Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017* is not well-enforced and studies have found Bangladesh has high rates of child marriage. In-country sources reported rates of child marriage as high as 80 per cent in some districts. According to Girls Not Brides, an NGO, around half of all married women in Bangladesh were married before they turned 18 and around 15 per cent were married before they turned 15. By comparison, only 4 per cent of boys were married before they turn 18.

3.145 Strong social pressure to marry young is driven by poverty, security concerns and societal norms stigmatising women who have not married by the age of 20. Most marriages are arranged and girls often have little say in when and whom they marry. Child brides are much more likely to drop out of school and often find it difficult or impossible to leave abusive relationships, including because of financial dependence.

3.146 DFAT assesses women in Bangladesh face a high risk of societal violence in the form of domestic violence and sexual assault. Young, unmarried women face a high risk of societal discrimination in the form of 'eve teasing' and other forms of sexual harassment. The ability of a woman in Bangladesh to mitigate these risks depends on individual circumstances such as wealth, education, location and family networks. State and informal protection mechanisms exist but are not always effective due to lack of capacity and, in some cases, police not fully applying legal provisions with respect to domestic violence or seeking bribes to do so. DFAT assesses women who experience domestic violence face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of police not always being willing to uphold their rights.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

3.147 LGBTQIA+ identities and behaviours are not widely accepted in Bangladesh. Sex between men is illegal under section 377 of the *Penal Code 1860* and punishable by life in prison. Prosecutions under this law are rare but do occur. Other laws used to target LGBTQIA+ individuals and venues include laws against pornography, drug and alcohol offences and venue licensing restrictions.

Hijra

3.148 A transgender identity known as *hijra* has existed in Bangladesh and other parts of South Asia for hundreds of years. Many *hijra* live in organised communities, overseen by a 'guru' and perform culturally accepted roles such as providing blessings for newborn children and performing at ceremonies. While generally understood in Bangladesh as referring to intersex people or hermaphrodites, most *hijra* are born male. Some undergo castration upon joining the *hijra* community. Not all transgender women in Bangladesh are *hijra* and the *hijra* community does not include transgender men. In-country sources reported the *hijra* community was tight-knit and secretive and while it provided a haven for many, some transgender women were pressured into joining the community and accepting its rules by senior gurus.

3.149 In 2013, Bangladesh officially recognised *hijra* as a third gender and subsequently announced quotas for *hijra* in employment and education. Implementation of these quotas has been controversial. In-country sources reported minimal uptake. According to these sources, gender-diverse applicants were subjected to invasive medical procedures and most *hijra* were rejected on the grounds they were biologically male. It is possible for *hijra* to obtain national ID cards, passports and other documents which list their gender as '*hijra*' or 'other', although activists describe the process as 'complex, time-consuming and labyrinthine'.

3.150 While *hijra* have an accepted role in Bangladeshi society, they remain marginalised. Few mainstream employment options are open to them and besides providing ceremonial services, many obtain income through extortion, begging or sex work. Relatives often reject *hijra* family members and they lack inheritance rights under *sharia* (Islamic law) provisions governing personal status matters (see Religious Personal Laws). *Hijra* are often subjected to violence by the community and law enforcement. In-country sources reported online and in-person attacks and harassment of *hijra* were common.

3.151 Opportunities to receive appropriate medical care are a major challenge for gender diverse people in Bangladesh. In-country sources reported access to gender-affirming medication and surgeries was essentially non-existent. Doctors could only provide limited aftercare treatment for those who had travelled overseas for

surgery. Hormone replacement medication is not available through formal channels. Black market options may exist but are highly risky.

Treatment of LGBTQIA+ People

3.152 Societal attitudes in Bangladesh towards LGBTQIA+ people are very conservative. Very few gay men, lesbian women or people who are bi-sexual publicly disclose their sexual orientation. While *hijra* are more accepted, they are more vulnerable to abuse due to their greater visibility. A 2021 report by the International Republican Institute, an American NGO, found widespread experiences of discrimination, exclusion and violence among LGBTQIA+ people in Bangladesh. Forty-five per cent of respondents said they faced 'discrimination, violence or harassment' on a daily or weekly basis. A majority reported experiencing discrimination in healthcare, education and employment. Half said they kept their sexual orientation and/or gender identity a secret from their family.

3.153 In-country sources reported LGBTQIA+ people were sometimes evicted from the family home by their parents. This was more common for gay men and transgender women than for lesbian women. In other cases, parents pressured LGBTQIA+ children to accept heterosexual marriages or confined them to avoid 'dishonouring' the family. Many LGBTQIA+ people experience bullying in school, leading to high drop-out rates. Very few openly LGBTQIA+ people attend university. Those who do face bullying from fellow students and faculty.

3.154 In-country sources said lesbian women and transgender men were much less visible in Bangladesh than gay men and transgender women, in part due to strict cultural norms around women's sexuality, behaviour and movement (see Women). According to in-country sources, a transgender man would face grave risks to his safety if his transgender identity was revealed.

3.155 The operating environment for LGBTQIA+ activists is extremely challenging and, according to in-country sources, deteriorated since the collapse of the Hasina Government emboldened Islamist elements (see Jamaat-e-Islami). LGBTQIA+ activists routinely experience threats and physical attacks, including by Islamist militants. In April 2016, Islamist militants murdered LGBTQIA+ activists, Xulhaz Munnan and Mahbub Tonoy, in their apartment. Six members of the Islamist group Ansar al-Islam were convicted of the crime and sentenced to death in August 2021. In-country sources said this event continued to have a chilling effect on advocacy and public discussion of LGBTQIA+ issues in Bangladesh.

3.156 In 2023, public controversy erupted over the depiction of a transgender woman in a school textbook. LGBTQIA+ groups were subsequently targeted by online hate speech, harassment and protests. In one incident, around 100 anti-LGBTQIA+ protesters gathered outside the office of an LGBTQIA+ organisation shouting abuse. In-country sources told DFAT police had responded appropriately, although many LGBTQIA+ activists now lived in fear. Some had resigned their positions. The same sources said the textbook controversy had been a significant setback for the LGBTQIA+ community in Bangladesh. For example, many of around 100 transgender women who had been employed under a pilot scheme lost their jobs, which LGBTQIA+ activists attributed to backlash following the controversy. The textbook was subsequently withdrawn.

3.157 DFAT assesses LGBTQIA+ people in Bangladesh face a high risk of societal discrimination, regardless of their specific sexual orientation or gender identity. They face a high risk of official discrimination in the form of criminalisation and discriminatory enforcement of laws. LGBTQIA+ activists face a moderate risk of violence, including sporadic attacks by Islamist militants and a high risk of societal discrimination in the form of harassment and hate speech. *Hijra* and transgender women face a moderate risk of societal and official violence, including sexual assault by police and others and a high risk of employment discrimination.

Victims of Loan Sharks and Usury

3.158 Loan sharking is prevalent, particularly in rural and economically marginalised communities with limited access to formal banking facilities. Reputable microfinance institutions provide loans to the very poor, reducing the reliance on loan sharks. BRAC, a local development NGO, provides a range of customised microfinance products, including small enterprise loans, agricultural loans and loans for women, migrant households and people living in slums. Disreputable microfinance institutions, some of them unauthorised, also operate.

3.159 Loan sharks are unlikely to lend money to people without capacity to repay or some other form of recoverable capital. Disputes over loans are a matter of contract law. Courts are slow in Bangladesh, giving both

debtors and lenders few avenues of redress. In any case, loan sharking occurs largely outside of the law and debtors who fear harm from creditors for an inability to repay may be reluctant to report the matter for fear of retaliation.

3.160 Debtors unable to repay a loan shark may be subjected to oral abuse, threats and public shaming or have assets (e.g. land, livestock, household goods) seized. Loan sharks may employ enforcers to coerce repayment. Physical violence has been reported in some cases. Local media reporting indicated the April 2025 abduction and killing of Bhabesh Chandra Roy, a prominent Hindu community leader, was linked to the non-repayment of a loan from known loan sharks.

3.161 Some people borrow money through family, including extended family. This reduces the likelihood of violence, although this can differ from family to family. In-country sources were not aware of instances of family lenders resorting to violence.

3.162 Lenders consider a person's capacity to migrate overseas and send remittances a form of security, meaning money lending is particularly associated with migration. People borrow money to pay intermediaries (known locally as 'middlemen'), who can be travel agents, people who organise employment or people smugglers. Those intending to migrate, including to Australia, may obtain various small loans from different sources, including extended family and other members of the community.

3.163 Amounts paid to intermediaries can range from the equivalent of several thousand dollars to several tens of thousands of dollars, depending on the intermediary and the destination. If attempts to migrate and send remittances to cover the debt are unsuccessful and the person returns to Bangladesh (for example, a failed asylum seeker), aggressive attempts to recover the money may be made. However, DFAT understands lenders are more likely to loan more money to fund a further attempt to migrate than they are to use violence to recover the debt. From a lender's perspective, violence may not result in money being repaid but another migration attempt might.

3.164 Efforts to curb exploitative financial practices are ongoing. In March 2025, the High Court directed the chair of the Microcredit Regulatory Authority address complaints regarding illegal high-interest lending practices. Bangladesh Bank (the central bank) has previously instructed district-level officials to identify unlicensed lenders operating in their jurisdictions.

3.165 While the very poor are most likely to be targeted by loan sharks, and violence is possible where a debtor cannot repay, DFAT does not have sufficient evidence to conclude this is a typical pattern. Debt-funded migration is common in Bangladesh.

4. COMPLEMENTARY PROTECTION CLAIMS

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE

Extrajudicial Killings

4.1 Extrajudicial killings by law enforcement are reported in Bangladesh. They are particularly associated with the Rapid Action Battalion, or RAB, an elite police unit deployed in counter-terrorism operations. Human rights monitors estimate nearly 2,000 extrajudicial killings between 2009 and 2024 during Sheikh Hasina's rule, including in the context of anti-government protests in July and August 2024. An OHCHR fact-finding inquiry found reasonable grounds to believe state actors and violent elements associated with the Awami League committed 'hundreds' of extrajudicial killings, including of minors, during these protests.

4.2 According to human rights groups, extrajudicial killings often occur in confected conflicts set up by security forces resulting in the death of the victim and plausible deniability for the perpetrator (so called 'encounter killings'). Local media portray such incidents 'crossfire' or 'gunfights'. Another alleged method is taking a suspect to the scene of an alleged crime where they are executed, with police claiming the suspect attacked first and was shot in self-defence.

4.3 Extrajudicial killings continue to be reported since the fall of the Hasina Government. Ain O Salish Kendra, a local NGO, recorded at least 19 extrajudicial killings by law enforcement between 8 August 2024 and 3 March 2025, including five killings in January 2025. It reported some of these killings were the result of torture while in custody. Odhikar, another local NGO, recorded eight extrajudicial killings in September 2024.

4.4 Families of victims of extrajudicial killings generally do not take legal action because of fear for their safety, well-founded or otherwise. Historically, accountability for alleged extrajudicial killings by state agents has been limited.

Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

4.5 International and local human rights organisations report state security forces frequently committed enforced and involuntary disappearances during Sheikh Hasina's rule. Political opponents were especially targeted. The BNP claims enforced disappearances were commonly used against its high-profile members. Journalists, human rights defenders and people participating in street protests (e.g. in relation to pay and conditions in the garment industry) were also targeted. Odhikar, a local NGO, reported at least 708 cases of enforced disappearance between 2009 and June 2024. Police officers, often from the RAB and wearing plain clothes, are accused of conducting most disappearances, usually at night.

4.6 Efforts to prevent, investigate and prosecute enforced disappearances have historically been limited. Families have reported being threatened with violence when attempting to make enquiries about the fate of a disappeared person. The Interim Government has stopped the practice of enforced disappearance. In August 2024, the Interim Government announced a Commission of Inquiry to investigate reports of enforced disappearance between January 2010 and August 2024 and signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Some disappeared persons have since been released. Odhikar recorded no enforced disappearances between August and September 2024, after the Interim Government assumed power.

4.7 The Commission of Inquiry released its preliminary findings in December 2024. It found former Prime Minister Hasina ran a 'calculated system' of enforced disappearances. The Inquiry recorded approximately 1,700 cases of forcible abductions, although estimated cases likely exceeded 3,500. Many of those forcibly abducted remain missing, presumed dead. The Inquiry implicated the RAB, the Detective Branch of the Bangladesh Police, the Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime Branch of the Bangladesh Police and the Directorate-General of Armed Forces Intelligence (DGFI) in enforced disappearances. It recommended the RAB's dissolution.

Deaths in Custody

4.8 Deaths in custody occur as a result of poor conditions, police violence and natural causes. Local NGOs cited in the US Department of State's *2023 Human Rights Report on Bangladesh* reported between 77 and 94 prison inmates died between January and September 2023. This included the June 2023 death of a detainee allegedly

subjected to beatings while in police custody. Odhikar, a local NGO, recorded nine prison deaths between 9 August and end-September 2024. In November and December 2024, four pre-trial inmates associated with the Awami League reportedly died from heart attacks. Their families accused prison authorities of negligence. A committee of inquiry was formed to investigate their deaths. See also Extrajudicial Killings, Police and Prisons.

DEATH PENALTY

4.9 Courts impose the death penalty for various offences, including murder, terrorism, sedition, espionage, treason, rape, kidnapping and drug trafficking. Sexual assault has attracted the death penalty since 2021. According to Amnesty International, there were over 2,000 people on death row in 2024 at least 165 of whom were sentenced in 2024 (down from at least 248 in 2023). After recording five executions in 2023, Amnesty International recorded no executions in 2024 (for the first time since 2018).

CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

Torture

4.10 Torture is prohibited, including under the Constitution, but still occurs. Local and international human rights organisations reported police, including the RAB and intelligence officers, used torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment to extract information, including confessions for use in court proceedings and bribes from suspected militants and political opponents of the Hasina Government.

4.11 Torture is most likely to occur when a suspect is on remand and at a time when a lawyer does not need to be present. According to in-country sources, the US Department of State and Human Rights Watch, common methods of torture included beatings with iron rods and other weapons, electric shocks to the ears and genitals, fingernail removal, waterboarding, hanging from ceilings, shooting to maim, kneecapping, prolonged exposure to loud music or light, mock executions and enforced nudity.

4.12 An OHCHR fact-finding inquiry found reasonable grounds to believe state actors and violent elements associated with the Awami League committed torture and other forms of ill-treatment during anti-government protests in July and August 2024. The OHCHR found the DGFI and the Bangladesh Police, including its Detective Branch, used torture including beatings, electric shocks and threats of execution, to extract information and confessions from persons detained for their participation in the protests.

4.13 Torture continues to be reported since the change in government. Ain O Salish Kendra, a local NGO, reported some extrajudicial killings by law enforcement between 8 August 2024 and 3 March 2025 involved torture. The families of two men who died during a law enforcement operation in Gaibandha (northern Bangladesh) in September 2024 claim they were tortured. Police said they died from illness. Some high-ranking officials from the former Hasina Government have alleged being tortured while in custody. In-country sources said verified reports of torture had declined significantly since the change in government in August 2024.

4.14 Victims of torture may file cases under the *Torture and Custodial (Prevention) Act 2013*. Many cases go unreported, including because of fear of reprisal. Police are required to conduct internal investigations into allegations of torture. In practice, allegations of torture are rarely investigated or prosecuted. According to Human Rights Watch, only one case of torture had been successfully prosecuted under the *Torture and Custodial (Prevention) Act 2013* as of January 2025.

Arbitrary Arrest and Detention and Criminal Procedure

4.15 The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. Arrests need to be made with a warrant, although some exceptions apply (e.g. if the authorities assess the individual was involved in a serious crime and/or constitutes a threat to security and public order). Arrestees should appear before a magistrate within 24 hours of arrest and be provided access to legal counsel, although this does not always occur. Bail is available but may mean little as police often arrest people on bail to return them to custody.

4.16 In-country sources reported arbitrary arrest and detention of government critics, particularly those belonging to the BNP, was widespread under the Hasina Government, including in the context of anti-government protests in July and August 2024. The OHCHR reported 11,702 arrests, 'a very large portion' of which were of an

arbitrary nature and did not follow due process. Most were released by the Interim Government, which has committed to drop police investigations and charges against peaceful critics of the former government.

4.17 In-country sources said many arrests of Awami League supporters since August 2024, including as part of Operation Devil Hunt, were arbitrary. Operation Devil Hunt was discontinued on 1 March 2025. Mass case files continue to be used to charge and arrest persons based on actual or perceived political affiliation, although in-country sources reported their use had declined in 2025 (see Political Opinion).

4.18 See also relevant sections on Media and Journalists, Civil Society Organisations and Protesters.

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

STATE PROTECTION

Police

5.1 Bangladesh Police, the country's primary law enforcement agency, has several branches including the Metropolitan Police, Railway Police, Highway Police, Industrial Police, River Police and Tourist Police.

5.2 Professionalism varies across police. Senior officers are relatively well trained, well paid and occupy important positions in the bureaucracy. Those in lower ranks are poorly paid, trained and equipped. Low incomes encourage corruption. Solicitation of bribes is common. Rules designed to ensure accountability and probity, for example, limits on police arrest or ability to hold suspects, are not always observed (see Arbitrary Arrest and Detention and Criminal Procedure and Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances).

5.3 Bribes are sometimes paid to affect outcomes for police investigations or to cause an investigation to occur, or not occur, in the first place. According to in-country sources, bribe demands or the threat or act of violence may also be used to apply political pressure. Political patronage may affect outcomes with police complaints. A complaint is more likely to be investigated if an influential person intervenes on behalf of the complainant.

5.4 Political and bureaucratic interference is an impediment to police efficiency. Police systems are highly bureaucratic, which can lead to slow or ineffective responses to crime. Whether or not a person who flees to another part of Bangladesh would be found by police depends on the nature of the crime and how motivated police are to find them. It could also be affected by corruption and levels of professionalism.

5.5 Police faced a major crisis of confidence during and after the July and August 2024 protests. Police were implicated in human rights violations against protesters, including by the OHCHR. Attacks on police stations were reported across the country and scores were burned down. Some police personnel were killed and firearms and ammunition looted. Many police officers went into hiding or fled abroad to avoid retribution or criminal prosecution following the change in government. At least 30 were arrested for alleged use of unlawful force against protesters, others were dismissed for their association with the Awami League. In May 2025, eight police officers, including a former Commissioner, were charged with crimes against humanity for the deaths of protesters in July and August 2024, of whom four were being tried in absentia.

5.6 According to in-country sources, police were operating at reduced capacity and effectiveness since August 2024, with implications for their ability to provide state protection and maintain law and order. Local and international media have reported rising crime rates since the fall of the Hasina Government. To improve law and order, in September 2024 the Interim Government granted domestic policing powers to the military. This was extended by 60 days from 14 May 2025.

5.7 In September 2024, the Interim Government announced a Police Reform Commission to promote an impartial and transparent force and rebuild public trust. Handing down its findings in January 2025, the Commission recommended the creation of an independent body with representation from ruling and opposition parties to oversee police, strict use-of-force protocols, use of body cameras and GPS tracking systems, strengthened anti-corruption measures and enhanced police training.

5.8 According to in-country sources, police have a reputation for corruption and violence and are not trusted by most people. Some religious minorities have benefited from a police presence but most in-country sources said they would prefer to avoid contact with police.

Legal system

5.9 Bangladesh's judiciary is based on the British system with a Supreme Court and subordinate courts, including the High Court, district and local courts and tribunals. The Supreme Court includes an Appellate Division and High Court Division. Lower courts are presided over by a hierarchy of magistrates.

5.10 The court system has several systemic challenges. There is a large backlog of cases. Some take over 10 years to resolve. Having to return to court for various hearings or intermediate proceedings can be particularly difficult for the poor, who struggle to take time off work and pay to travel. The same applies to criminal cases where prisoners

are sometimes held on remand for long periods or bailed then rearrested in quick succession. Bribes can affect these outcomes. Whether long-running cases eventually get dismissed differs from case-to-case. A ruling from a higher court is necessary to reverse or quash a decision. Appeals are cost-prohibitive for most Bangladeshis.

5.11 Corruption is widespread and, according to in-country sources, more pronounced in the lower courts. According to some in-country sources, cases can continue if bribes are not paid, albeit at a slower pace. Other in-country sources told DFAT cases could get 'stuck', possibly indefinitely, without bribes. Political bias is alleged, including in relation to bail applications. Alleged interference involves judicial appointments and judges referring to political matters in making decisions. According to in-country sources, the problem is worse in lower than higher levels of courts.

5.12 The poor are unlikely to be able to access the courts due to the high costs involved and the need to pay bribes. Courts are largely paper based. The bureaucracy is slow and bureaucrats demand bribes for moving papers between offices or actioning simple processes. This creates delays and difficulties in verifying documents. It is possible to obtain documents for a price (comprised of both fees and bribes). The poor condition of court infrastructure often leads to poor storage and difficulty accessing records.

5.13 Legal aid is theoretically available via government legal aid officers in every District Court. NGOs also provide legal aid. Due to funding constraints or other practical difficulties, legal aid may not be available to all defendants.

5.14 There are hundreds of 'village courts' throughout Bangladesh. Village courts operate under the *Village Court Act 1976* and play a vital role in providing access to justice for a significant portion of the population. Village courts apply a broad range of traditional rules, often heavily influenced by traditional religious or customary law and are also subject to traditional power structures in communities. Powerful litigants and their families are more likely to get a favourable outcome through this system.

5.15 Cases can proceed in absentia, for example, if the defendant is in Australia making an asylum application. DFAT understands this only occurs in exceptional cases involving serious charges or very large amounts of money. Due to corruption and poor information technology infrastructure, DFAT assesses it is possible a person facing court could flee Bangladesh, although this is unlikely for a person who is facing serious charges or who is of interest for their political activity (see Exit and Entry Procedures).

5.16 The Constitution and *Code of Criminal Procedure 1898* prohibit double jeopardy. DFAT is not aware of cases where Bangladeshi nationals have been tried for crimes overseas and then tried again in Bangladesh on return.

Detention and Prison

5.17 According to the *World Prison Brief* Bangladesh had 53,831 prisoners across 68 facilities in October 2024 (the official prison capacity is 42,887). The prison population in 2023 was 80,000. The US Department of State, in its *2023 Human Rights Report on Bangladesh*, assessed prison conditions as 'harsh and at times life threatening due to severe overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and physical abuse'. Authorities permit independent monitoring of prisons, including by NGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross. There is no formal mechanism for prisoners to submit complaints. Government investigations into allegations of mistreatment are not common.

5.18 Local human rights NGOs have reported corruption and torture as key concerns facing the prison system. Some prison guards reportedly hire prisoners to 'run' prison wards and collect bribes and torture inmates. It is reportedly not uncommon for prisoners to have to pay for food, water, blankets in winter and hospital treatment.

5.19 Not all prisons are the same and the profile of the prisoner should be considered when assessing information about Bangladeshi prisons. While overall prison conditions are very poor, some new 'model' prisons have better facilities and offer opportunities for rehabilitation, education and more regular access to medical care. Former politicians, high profile individuals and, more often than not, Western foreigners and dual nationals (where the other nationality is 'Western') are usually held in these prisons in a 'foreigners wing' separate from the general prison population. Some prisons separate prisoners of opposing political views to reduce violence.

INTERNAL RELOCATION

5.20 Article 36 of the Constitution guarantees citizens the right to move freely throughout Bangladesh, to reside and settle in any place and to leave and re-enter Bangladesh. There is no legal impediment to internal movement within Bangladesh (with the exception of the CHT, see below) and Bangladeshis can and do relocate for a variety of reasons. Major cities, such as Dhaka and Chittagong, offer greater opportunities for employment. DFAT assesses women without access to family or other support networks are likely to face greater difficulties in relocating than men, particularly if they are poor, single or have suffered gender-based violence.

5.21 As noted in indigenous people, the CHT is heavily militarised. Access to large sections of the CHT is restricted and military checkpoints prevent free movement in the CHT by local people. In-country sources reported many indigenous people left the CHT to live in other parts of Bangladesh but noted this could be very difficult due to the costs involved and loss of connection to communities and land.

TREATMENT OF RETURNEES

Exit and Entry Procedures

5.22 The Department of Immigration and Passports conducts immigration checks and maintains a list of convicted criminals and persons wanted by security forces and intelligence agencies (Exit Control List). The Department mostly uses the Exit Control List to determine whether to issue passports but may also use it to prevent people from leaving Bangladesh. The reasons a person might be prevented from leaving are not made public.

5.23 DFAT is aware of people being detained trying to leave Bangladesh or prevented from leaving Bangladesh, including, prior to the collapse of the Hasina Government, BNP leaders and ordinary BNP members. In-country sources said people belonging to the BNP could freely exit and enter Bangladesh post-August 2024. Restrictions may apply to members of the Awami League, particularly people suspected of committing violations during the Hasina Government's rule. Courts have imposed travel bans on some Awami League members. See also Awami League.

5.24 It is an offence to depart Bangladesh other than in accordance with the procedures prescribed by the *Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013*. Bangladeshis require a valid passport and, depending on the destination country, a visa to depart Bangladesh. The *Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013* is designed to protect Bangladeshis from human trafficking rather than to prosecute illegal exit or prosecute failed asylum applications, for example. Its provisions are rarely enforced. It is unlikely any person returning after a failed asylum attempt in Australia would be prosecuted under the *Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013*. DFAT is not aware of this occurring.

5.25 Bangladesh is largely surrounded by India and a number of land border crossings exist. Some parts of the border are fenced, some are open. Borders are patrolled by both Indian and Bangladeshi forces who may rebuff attempts at crossing. There are two main border crossings with Myanmar.

5.26 In theory, Rohingya need exit permits to leave Bangladesh. Some leave without them, including on boats across the Andaman Sea. Rohingya of this profile who later return to Bangladesh may be unable to obtain an exit permit in future (on the basis of having previously left Bangladesh without an exit permit). In-country sources said the Interim Government had unblocked delays in the granting of exit permits.

Conditions for Returnees

5.27 It is possible a person involuntarily returned by a foreign government after travelling on a fraudulent document will be detained and questioned by police. However, these are isolated and high-profile cases and DFAT is not aware of a pattern of holders of fraudulent passports being detained or questioned.

5.28 Bangladesh has a large diaspora and a strong outward migration culture. Hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis exit and enter the country for employment every year. The government does not have the capacity or intent to monitor all of them. Those with a particular political profile may have their entry into Bangladesh noted, although this is unlikely for the vast majority of returning Bangladeshis. Additional checks, including checking mobile phones, are not typically conducted on return. DFAT is not aware of any instances of returnees being stopped and detained at the border for political activities, including online political activities, conducted in Australia.

5.29 BNP members, including members who were, or continued to be, the subject of domestic legal proceedings, have returned to Bangladesh since the change in government in August 2024. To DFAT's knowledge, these individuals did not face adverse attention or consequences on their return.

5.30 According to in-country sources, outward migration was often a long-term process where extended families and communities saved and pawned resources for one member (usually the eldest son) to travel abroad for work and thus entire communities were invested and expecting a return. As a result, there was stigma for failed and returning migrants, who often came back deep in debt and were often suicidal or depressed. This experience is not unform and many returnees make seamless transitions (see also Victims of Loan Sharks and Usury).

5.31 DFAT assesses most returnees, including failed asylum seekers, are unlikely to face adverse attention regardless of whether they have returned voluntarily or involuntarily. Authorities take an interest in high-profile individuals but the vast majority of returning Bangladeshis do not attract such interest.

DOCUMENTATION

5.32 Documents from Bangladesh are difficult to verify. Document verification can involve a resource-intensive and long bureaucratic process. Success is not guaranteed. Some documents can be verified more easily. For example birth, marriage and death certificates can be verified online but this is not necessarily an indication the document is genuine. Even in those cases, verification is often not possible. Verification of Rohingya documents is usually impossible.

5.33 It is not uncommon for documents related to the same person to have different details recorded, for example, a variation in the spelling of a name or a different date of birth. This can be related to fraud but can also be caused by poor record-keeping or clerical errors.

Birth Certificates

5.34 Birth registration is compulsory, although not all births are registered. Birth certificates are required to attend school, vote, register marriages and for government or NGO employment. DFAT understands not all service providers routinely demand birth certificates even when required to do so by law. Since 2001, an online Birth and Death Registration Information System (BDRIS) has recorded births centrally, although people can still apply for birth certificates without supporting documentation.

5.35 There is a high prevalence of document fraud among birth certificates. Issuance does not necessarily follow established patterns and certificates have low reliability. Birth, death and marriage certificates (especially pre-BDRIS) are held in paper-based records in various parts of the country and can be very difficult to verify. Verification may be possible online but is not necessarily reliable.

National Identity Cards (NICs)

5.36 All citizens over the age of 18 years must have a National Identity Card (NIC) issued by the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC). NICs are valid for 15 years and are required for a wide range of transactions, including voting, banking, obtaining a passport and purchasing property.

5.37 To obtain a NIC, applicants must provide their electoral roll serial number, personal particulars (parents' names, date of birth and residential address), thumbprints, photograph and signature. The BEC crosschecks these details against applicants' electoral roll details. Applicants can provide proof of residence using a range of official documents, including drivers' licences and utility bills. NIC holders are not required to update their residential addresses should they move.

5.38 Smart NICs have been issued since 2016. The cards are machine-readable, contain security features and biometric information embedded in a microchip. Many older cards without security features are still in use. People in urban areas are more likely to have a Smart NIC. At the time of writing, older style NICs were still valid.

Other Documents

5.39 Drivers' licences are issued as 'learner', 'amateur' and 'professional'. Licences cannot be relied upon as conclusive evidence of identity. They are commonly fraudulent, either manufactured by a specialist fraudulent manufacturer or as fraudulently obtained genuine documents.

5.40 Licences are difficult and resource-intensive to verify. Education certificates are more reliable because they can often be verified with the institution or on government websites. Police documents are difficult to obtain and verify and police are susceptible to corruption, making credibility uncertain.

Passports

5.41 Adults applying for a passport must have a valid NIC or birth registration certificate with a 17-digit birth registration number. Applicants must provide biometric data (fingerprints and photographs) to a passport office before lodging their application. Applicants can obtain a birth registration number by declaring their date of birth in person or via the BDRIS system.

5.42 The government introduced machine-readable passports and established a passports database in 2010. DFAT understands there is still a high prevalence of document fraud in relation to passport-qualifying documents (rather than the passports themselves). To simplify passport services, a police verification system for the issuance of passports was removed in February 2025.

Rohingya Documents

5.43 Some Rohingya who have lived in Bangladesh since the 1990s were registered on arrival and have several forms of identification, including UNHCR identity cards, birth certificates and cards issued by the WFP. A 2016 voluntary census registered many more Rohingya arrivals and these people received a laminated biometric identity card. In January 2025, the Interim Government approved the collection of biometric information (fingerprints and photos) to identify and deliver assistance to newly arrived Rohingya.

5.44 As with all people living in Bangladesh, Rohingya may be able to access fake passports, which ostensibly demonstrate Bangladeshi citizenship. These passports are also known to be held by Rohingya overseas. These passports are sometimes entirely fraudulent, having been manufactured by people smugglers, rather than being fraudulently obtained genuine documents. Some applicants arrive in Australia on genuinely issued Bangladeshi passports then state the document was fraudulently obtained before claiming to be a stateless Rohingya.

5.45 People smugglers sometimes offer fake passports from other countries, e.g. Pakistan, India or Nepal. These passports allow Rohingya to travel overseas for employment or potentially be smuggled by people smugglers.