

Bangladesh's New Government Gets Down to Business

Asia-Pacific Briefing N°187 | 23 April 2026



Table of Contents

Overview

I. After the Uprising	4
A. Interim Government Reforms	4
B. A Mixed Record	6
II. A Return to Elected Government	9
A. A Festival of Voting	9
B. A Clear BNP Majority	12
C. Transfer of Power	14
D. International Reaction	16
III. The Challenges Ahead	18
A. Economic Growth	18
B. Political Reforms	20
C. Public Safety and Justice	22
D. Rights and Reconciliation	24
E. Social Change and Gender Politics	25
F. Foreign Policy	26
IV. Conclusion	28

Principal Findings

What's new? Tens of millions of Bangladeshis voted in a largely peaceful election in February, ending eighteen months of interim rule following an uprising that ousted former premier Sheikh Hasina. The new Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government faces major challenges, including reviving the economy, improving governance and navigating a fraught international environment.

Why does it matter? The election marked a milestone in the country's political history, but the task ahead is daunting. Though the government has a strong mandate, many in Bangladesh remain sceptical about its ability to deliver, partly due to the BNP's track record. Failure to meet public expectations could fuel renewed instability.

What should be done? The BNP should take advantage of the post-election honeymoon to move quickly on economic, governance and security reforms. Dealing with economic disruption linked to the Iran conflict will be a crucial test. The BNP should avoid confrontation with opposition parties over proposed reforms and review cases against Awami League activists.

Overview

On 12 February, Bangladeshis voted in the country's first free and fair election in almost two decades, delivering a clear majority to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The vote was a major test for the outgoing interim government, which had assumed power eighteen months earlier after a popular uprising deposed long-time ruler Sheikh Hasina. Despite concerns that the polls might be marred by violence, they were largely peaceful, and the transfer of power took place five days later. The new government now faces a daunting task amid public expectations that deep reform is on the way. Its most immediate challenge will be alleviating the adverse economic conditions that fuelled the 2024 movement against Hasina's government and managing the toll on households and businesses of conflict in the Middle East. Reviving growth will be crucial, but it will need to come alongside improvements in public safety and the performance of state institutions if the government is to keep majority support. Bangladesh's new leaders must also make a raft of political reforms and navigate a troubled international environment.

For many Bangladeshis, the significance of the election lay not only in its outcome but also in the opportunity to cast a meaningful vote for the first time since 2008. That was the year Hasina's Awami League (AL) swept into power; her government subsequently oversaw three highly questionable polls marked by opposition boycotts, low participation and widespread irregularities. Most voters embraced the opportunity to cast a ballot in 2026, even though the AL – one of the country's two largest parties – was barred from participating. Given Bangladesh's history of political violence, the transparent and fair election was an important step forward for a country still grappling with the legacy of Hasina's iron-fisted rule.

The election also closed the book on the interim government formed after Hasina's ouster in August 2024. Led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, this administration helped stabilise the country at a moment when the economy was faltering and violence threatened to spiral out of control. It delivered to some degree on its three stated priorities: political reform; accountability for atrocities committed against protesters during the 2024 uprising and against opponents earlier in Hasina's tenure; and a credible election followed by a transfer of power. But the administration struggled to achieve some of its goals due to bureaucratic resistance, while also being forced into compromises to preserve the political consensus around reforms ahead of the election.

The election results, meanwhile, suggested that less has changed in Bangladesh since the uprising than might have been expected. The National Citizen Party (NCP), formed by student leaders who spearheaded the movement that toppled Hasina's government, won just six of 300 seats in parliament. Even these victories relied heavily on a controversial seat sharing deal with Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamist party, which recorded its best-ever electoral performance. Meanwhile, the victorious BNP, which is the AL's traditional rival and has a mixed record from its previous periods in power, secured 209 seats.

Signs of a deeper shift in Bangladeshi politics could nevertheless be found in approval of a reform package known as the July Charter, which won majority support in a referendum held alongside the election. Proponents argue that the charter's reforms – particularly those that require constitutional amendments – are essential for

achieving lasting improvements to governance and ensuring that autocracy does not return to Bangladesh. Even so, it remains uncertain which of the charter's provisions the BNP will act upon, as the party has objected to some of the more far-reaching changes included in the final document.

Whatever the case, the government should do all it can to avoid a major confrontation with its political opponents over the July Charter in order to focus on more pressing challenges. Chief among these will be steering the economy through the months ahead. Rising energy prices and trade disruptions linked to the Middle East conflict may very well drain foreign exchange reserves, lower GDP growth and push up inflation. An economy that has yet to fully recover from years of mismanagement under Hasina's government could thus take another hit, making life harder for millions of Bangladeshis. Simultaneously, the BNP will need to pursue additional governance reforms, particularly through efforts to tackle corruption and strengthen the rule of law, including by establishing a better trained and more effective police force.

The BNP government will also have to address the politically sensitive question of the AL's future. Given its pivotal role in Bangladeshi politics since independence, the party's temporary ban is not sustainable in the long term. Considering its close ties to the party, and the fact most of the AL's senior figures are in exile in India, New Delhi should use its influence to encourage the party's leadership to take steps that could pave the way for its eventual return to politics. Rebuilding strained relations with India should be a priority for the BNP government more generally, but as it pursues better ties with its larger neighbour it will need to maintain a balance with other key partners, not least China and the United States. The stakes are high for the BNP. It should move quickly to take advantage of the narrow post-election window for reforms, so as to demonstrate to the Bangladeshi people that it will not simply revert to past practices now that it is back in power.



A polling worker explains the process for voting in both the parliamentary election and the referendum to a voter at a Dhaka polling station on 12 February 2026. CRISIS GROUP / Thomas Kean

I. After the Uprising

Following fifteen years of increasingly autocratic rule, a mass protest movement forced Sheikh Hasina's government from power in August 2024.¹ After Hasina fled to India, the army – which had sealed her fate by refusing to shoot protesters – consulted political parties and student leaders, giving rise to the appointment of Muhammad Yunus as head of an interim administration.²

The Supreme Court deemed this arrangement constitutional via the “doctrine of necessity”, allowing the interim government to stay in power longer than the normal 90-day limit stipulated for caretaker administrations.³ Yunus then announced three priorities: political reforms to prevent a return to autocracy; accountability for atrocities committed by state bodies under Hasina's rule; and a free and fair election followed by a smooth transition of power.⁴ The interim government's agenda over the following eighteen months largely revolved around these three objectives.

A. Interim Government Reforms

Political reform was the interim government's most ambitious aim. One month after taking office, Yunus formed six reform commissions – focused on areas such as the constitution, the electoral system and the judiciary – to push the process forward. These bodies reported back in January 2025, and from their reports a National Consensus Commission created a shortlist of recommendations. Between March and October 2025, the commission held dozens of meetings with over 30 political parties and alliances to forge an agreement on political reforms. Notably absent from the talks was the Awami League, which the interim government temporarily banned in May 2025 (see below).

Most parties signed the resulting July Charter, which featured 84 reform proposals, including 47 requiring constitutional amendments.⁵ As a whole, the charter aims to limit executive power, strengthen accountability in parliament, improve the rule of law and restore credibility to the electoral system.⁶ The talks leading up to the deal were often fraught. The BNP – the country's largest political force in the AL's absence – dissented on key proposals. The NCP, a new party formed by student leaders who had led the anti-Hasina protests, refused to sign the charter entirely due to a

¹ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°336, *Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock*, 4 January 2024; and Pierre Prakash, “Bangladesh on Edge after Crushing Student Protests”, Crisis Group Commentary, 25 July 2024.

² Crisis Group Statement, “*Bangladesh: The Long Road Ahead*”, 7 August 2024.

³ Section 123 of the constitution requires an election within 90 days of parliament being dissolved. See also “Advisory council approves Interim Government Ordinance, 2024 draft”, United News of Bangladesh, 20 September 2024.

⁴ Crisis Group Asia Report N°344, *A New Era in Bangladesh? The First 100 Days of Reform*, 14 November 2024.

⁵ An [unofficial English translation](#) of the July Charter is available at the ConstitutionNet website.

⁶ Key changes include creating an upper house of parliament, allowing MPs to cross the floor, strengthening presidential powers, mandating a new appointment process for Supreme Court justices and clarifying the formation of election-time caretaker governments.

disagreement over how it would be put into effect.⁷ Only the approaching election brought a pause to the arguments over the document.⁸

The second priority was accountability for abuses committed during Hasina's fifteen-year rule, including the brutal crackdown on protests in 2024. In October 2024, the interim government reconstituted the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), established under Hasina in 2009 to prosecute those accused of war crimes during the country's 1971 war of independence from Pakistan.⁹ The ICT set about investigating allegations of serious crimes that Hasina's government allegedly committed during its time in office, with a particular focus on the July-August 2024 turmoil. The ICT reached its first verdict in November 2025, sentencing Hasina and former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan to death (in absentia) for crimes against humanity.¹⁰ A third defendant, the country's former police chief, received a lesser sentence after agreeing to testify for the prosecution. The court also concluded two other cases related to police killings of protesters.¹¹ At least ten other cases were pending as of early March.

The interim government's third priority was organising a credible election and a smooth transition of power. After much debate over when the vote should take place, preparations for the polls began in November 2024, with the formation of a new Election Commission. The commission faced formidable logistical challenges in organising an election in which up to 127 million people could cast a ballot, including as many as 40 million who had never voted before. It also made out-of-constituency voting widely available to the Bangladeshi diaspora for the first time. Just months before the election, moreover, it was tasked with concurrently organising a referendum on the July Charter.¹²

The largest obstacles to a credible election, however, were political in nature. Under pressure from Jamaat-e-Islami, the NCP and other political forces, the interim government in May 2025 banned activities involving the AL until cases against party officials being heard by the ICT had concluded, citing security concerns. The Election Commission then immediately deregistered the party, in effect barring it from the election.¹³ The ban was controversial because it deprived the AL's large base of supporters of the chance to vote for their preferred party.

Yunus also sought to use the election date as a bargaining chip with the BNP, whose members wanted to hold the vote at the earliest possible moment, to secure the party's support for political reforms. He said the election would be held between December 2025 and June 2026, before fixing the date in April 2026. Just weeks later,

⁷ "NCP refuses to sign July Charter, cites lack of legal basis", *The Daily Star*, 16 October 2025.

⁸ Thomas Kean, "[Curtain Falls on Bangladesh's Interim Government as Critical Elections Approach](#)", Crisis Group Commentary, 2 February 2026.

⁹ Crisis Group Report, [A New Era in Bangladesh?](#), op. cit.

¹⁰ Thomas Kean, "[Despite Death Sentence, Sheikh Hasina Casts Long Shadow over Bangladesh](#)", Crisis Group Commentary, 19 November 2025.

¹¹ "Bangladesh: A new prosecutor under pressure", JusticeInfo, 27 February 2026.

¹² Crisis Group interview, Election Commission official, Dhaka, October 2025.

¹³ For further discussion of the AL ban, see Kean, "Curtain Falls on Bangladesh's Interim Government", op. cit., and Crisis Group Asia Report N°353, [After the "Golden Era": Getting Bangladesh-India Ties Back on Track](#), 23 December 2025.

however, Yunus flew to London to meet BNP acting leader Tarique Rahman. The two agreed to hold the election in February 2026 in exchange for the BNP's cooperation on the July Charter, which it eventually signed, like most other parties, in October 2025.



The burned-out office of Prothom Alo in Dhaka's Karwan Bazar. A mob targeted the media outlet's headquarters in December 2025 following the death of political activist Sharif Osman Hadi. CRISIS GROUP / Thomas Kean

B. A Mixed Record

The interim government took charge of a country on the brink, both politically and economically.¹⁴ With his global credentials and the great respect in which he is held by the Bangladeshi public, Yunus's presence at the head of the government was fundamental to restoring order and calming international nerves.¹⁵ The interim government soon convinced most police personnel, who had gone into hiding out of fear of popular reprisals for the violence they had unleashed on protesters, to return to their posts; the army was also called in to support them. Government operations soon resumed and retaliatory violence was largely contained.¹⁶ The government and the central bank, under newly appointed governor Ahsan H. Mansur, stabilised the economy, averting a catastrophe that some viewed as all but certain.¹⁷ Yunus also

¹⁴ At the time of Hasina's ouster, the economy was in serious trouble. Inflation hit 11.66 per cent in July 2024, with food prices rising 14.1 per cent year-on-year. Bangladesh's usable foreign exchange reserves had fallen to around \$20 billion, and the country was in arrears to the tune of billions of dollars that it owed to electricity and energy suppliers. The banking sector was also highly stressed due to high (and under-reported) non-performing loans. For background, see Crisis Group Report, *A New Era in Bangladesh?*, op. cit.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and others familiar with the matter, Dhaka, September 2024.

¹⁶ Crisis Group Report, *A New Era in Bangladesh?*, op. cit.

¹⁷ A prominent businessman told Crisis Group he believed that, if the student-led protests had not toppled Hasina's government, an economic crisis would have brought down her government by the end of 2024. Crisis Group interview, Dhaka, February 2026.

managed to prevent the collapse of the fragile political consensus that he had fostered with the army, students and political parties around the need to carry out reforms before the election – including, at one point, by threatening to resign.¹⁸

But the interim government's public mandate went far beyond averting a crisis; it came into being on the back of high public expectations of deep-seated change. Some demanded that its members stay in office for three or even five years so that they could transform the country.¹⁹ Yunus and his advisers (the equivalent of ministers in the interim government) often fed these aspirations, speaking regularly of the need to establish a “new Bangladesh”. Such hopes for wholesale change were never likely to be fulfilled, however. The administration could not introduce many of the most important proposed reforms directly because of the risk that the next elected government would overturn them. It also had no power base of its own; instead, it was heavily reliant on institutions, such as the bureaucracy, the army and the BNP, that wanted more limited change. The inability of the student-led NCP to turn itself into a major electoral force only strengthened the hand of those trying to maintain as much of the status quo as possible.

As its authority waned and political parties began jockeying for position ahead of the election, the interim government was forced into political compromises to keep the transition on track. Under pressure from student leaders and right-wing forces, it banned the AL and did little to stop opponents of the ousted ruling party from filing large numbers of legal cases against the party's members and supporters, many of which critics described as politically motivated. “For the first few months they managed things well, but by trying to please everyone they became populist”, observed a prominent academic.²⁰

The interim government also allowed a permissive political environment in which far-right groups, including Islamist movements that had been largely forced underground during Hasina's administration, stepped up their activities, leading to an increase in mob violence, including lynchings.²¹ Police were often slow to act or failed to respond to these incidents at all. In many cases, those responsible were not prosecuted, feeding perceptions that impunity was on the rise. Another consequence of the growing power of religious conservatives was that political opportunities for women and minorities did not increase, contrary to hopes that the protest movement would enable greater participation from them.²² Some government insiders counter that they were hamstrung by a police force still compromised by its involvement in Hasina's efforts to suppress the protests. “After the revolution, people expected that the police would not use batons – Yunus himself directed that no weapons be used. But [in Bangladesh] if you want security, you need to empower the police”, an official noted.²³

¹⁸ “Why did Bangladesh's interim advisor Yunus threaten to resign?”, *The Diplomat*, 26 May 2025.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Dhaka, September 2024.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, prominent Bangladeshi academic, Dhaka, February 2026.

²¹ “An Impunity Crisis: The Deadly Surge of Mob Violence in Bangladesh”, International Society for Human Rights, 17 November 2025.

²² “Bangladeshi Women, Girls, Minorities Face Rising Violence”, Human Rights Watch, 14 January 2026.

²³ Crisis Group interview, interim government official, Dhaka, February 2026.

The bureaucracy also stood in the way of carrying out the interim government's plans. From the start, many of the government's cabinet members struggled to manage their portfolios, finding themselves thwarted by obstructive civil servants. "The bureaucracy in this country is so powerful – I had no idea until I started working in the government", a member of the interim administration admitted. "They created a wall to stop reform".²⁴ The poor performance of a few advisers exacerbated the problem, particularly as Yunus refused to replace those who seemingly were not up to the task.

In the end, the interim government prevented Bangladesh from sliding into political instability or economic collapse, but it struggled to push through major changes and was forced to make compromises that undermined its objectives. The July Charter, its landmark policy initiative, was weakened by numerous notes of dissent, particularly from the BNP.²⁵ The Yunus administration managed to make some meaningful changes of its own but was forced to drop others due to resistance from vested interests.²⁶

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, interim government member, Dhaka, February 2026.

²⁵ Kean, "Curtain Falls on Bangladesh's Interim Government", op. cit.

²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Dhaka, February 2026.

II. A Return to Elected Government

The 12 February election was a test of the political consensus constructed between the army, interim government and political parties in the wake of Hasina's downfall. The election went ahead mostly smoothly, with few reports of violence or wrongdoing, marking a stark contrast with most polls in Bangladesh's post-independence history. The BNP secured a large majority, ahead of an alliance of parties led by Jamaat-e-Islami. Five days later, the Yunus administration handed power to the new BNP government, with party leader Tarique Rahman becoming prime minister.



Bangladeshi and international media wait outside a Dhaka polling station as Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader Tarique Rahman votes on 12 February 2026. CRISIS GROUP / Thomas Kean

A. A Festival of Voting

In August 2025, Yunus confirmed that the election would be held the following February, shortly before the start of Ramadan, promising a “free, fair, peaceful and festive” poll. He urged all to go and vote, saying: “We want to make election day feel like Eid. The joy of voting will be shared by all”. But, referring to the AL, the chief adviser also warned that “a certain group is eager to obstruct the election process”.²⁷

On 12 December 2025, just a day after the Election Commission announced the timetable for the poll, a gunman shot activist and independent candidate Sharif Osman Hadi on a busy Dhaka street.²⁸ Police accused individuals linked to the AL, saying the shooter and an accomplice had fled to India, which only added to widespread anti-India sentiment. Transferred to Singapore for treatment, Hadi died

²⁷The [full text](#) of the speech is available at the chief adviser's official Facebook page.

²⁸Hadi had been involved in the student-led uprising and, shortly after Hasina fled, he formed Inqilab Moncho, a self-described “revolutionary cultural platform” that campaigned vigorously for banning the AL.

in hospital six days later. News of his death triggered a wave of violence against Indian diplomatic outposts, as well as media outlets and cultural organisations, which police failed to control.²⁹ These attacks, and the brutal mob killing of a Hindu man accused of blasphemy, sparked corresponding protests in India.³⁰

The unrest, combined with underlying security challenges, intensified concerns about the possibility of violence prior to, during or after the vote. Beyond those seeking to disrupt the election, there were also risks of clashes between rival parties – including with AL supporters, even though the party was not allowed to stand – or intra-party conflict, particularly within the BNP. Despite these concerns, the rest of the pre-election period was largely peaceful, particularly compared to previous campaigns. The return to Bangladesh of BNP acting chair Tarique Rahman on 25 December, just five days before the death of his mother, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, appeared to have a calming effect on much of the country.³¹ India's outreach to the BNP after her death – Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote to Tarique Rahman expressing hope for a “new beginning” in bilateral ties – also helped ease tensions.³² Even so, just days before the vote, an interim government official seemed nervous about the possibility of a major incident. “If this election is a disaster, we'll be seen as a failure”, he worried.³³

Polling day itself went ahead with few reports of violence or malpractice. While the election was highly competitive, there were few clashes between supporters of rival parties; much of the violence that did occur was between BNP factions. Several reasons lie behind the achievement of one of the most peaceful elections in Bangladeshi history. The interim government and army both played important roles, including through close collaboration on security. The visible presence and proactive approach of security agencies helped defuse potential unrest and put voters at ease. Despite AL leaders' insistence that the vote was undemocratic due to the party's absence from the ballot sheet, they seemingly made little effort to disrupt it. Leaders of participating political parties, meanwhile, sought to restrain members. An expert on disinformation said the heated online battle between rival supporters enabled them to let off steam without resorting to physical violence, as had often happened in the past.³⁴ The competence and perceived fairness of the Election Commission was also an important factor.

In Dhaka, the atmosphere was festive. After casting their ballots, many remained behind in polling stations to socialise. “It feels like the Eid festival”, one woman voter told Crisis Group, at a polling station set up with separate booths for men and

²⁹ Crisis Group Report, *After the “Golden Era”*, op. cit.

³⁰ Kean, “Curtain Falls on Bangladesh's Interim Government”, op. cit.

³¹ Following her death, the BNP appointed Tarique Rahman as party chief. See also Thomas Kean, *“Tarique Rahman's Return Raises the Stakes ahead of Bangladesh Poll”*, Crisis Group Analyst's Notebook, 24 December 2025.

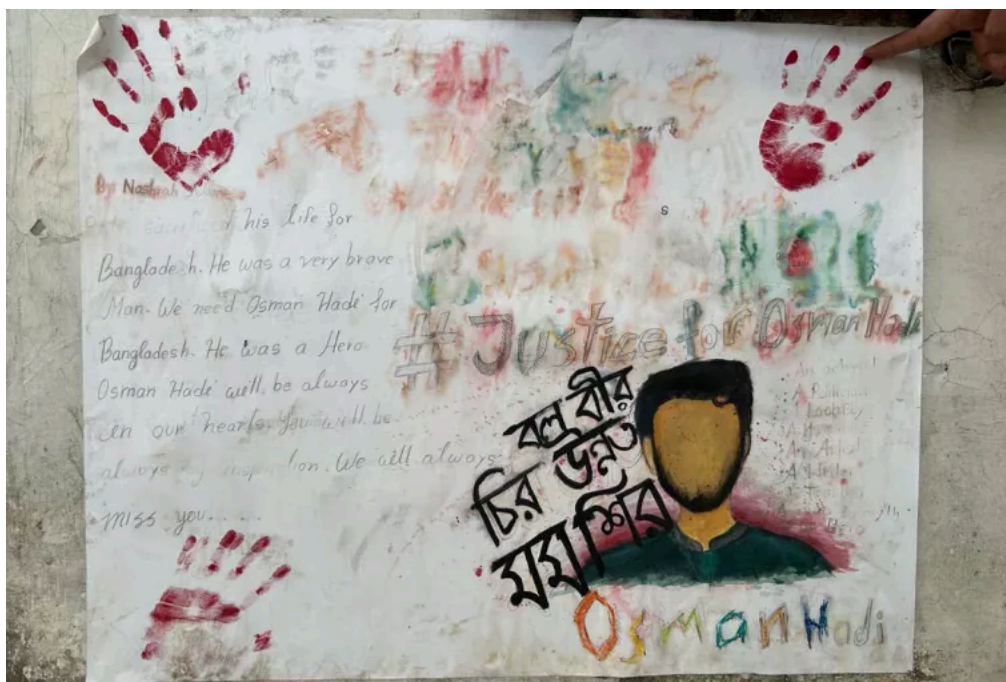
³² The letter was delivered in person by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. “In letter to Tarique Rahman, Modi voices hope for a ‘new beginning’”, *The Daily Star*, 31 December 2025.

³³ Crisis Group interview, interim government official, Dhaka, February 2026.

³⁴ The expert noted that while disinformation and other online activities may have reduced physical violence, they can still cause harm to users. Crisis Group interview, February 2026.

women.³⁵ “People can feel safe, particularly women. ... We are seeing something new. Everyone can come to politics; it’s not just the same old business as usual”, agreed another woman voter.³⁶ “People just want to vote without harassment. Bangladesh has been revived again. This election will set the standard”, a polling station officer added.³⁷ Another official contrasted the 12 February election with the 2014 poll, when turnout at the booth he worked at was barely 5 per cent, due to safety concerns amid a BNP-led bombing campaign to disrupt the vote. “There was such a deep fear. ... This time, we’ve faced no problems”.³⁸

International monitors mostly hailed the election and urged the authorities to press ahead with reforms. The chief observer of the European Union’s 223-strong delegation said the election was “historic” and “genuinely competitive”, “marking a pivotal step toward restoring democratic governance and rule of law.”³⁹ The Asian Network for Free Elections and International Republican Institute, which also sent observers, made similar observations.⁴⁰



A poster pays tribute to Sharif Osman Hadi, a political activist killed in December 2025, on the wall of his burial site, near Dhaka University Central Mosque. CRISIS GROUP / Thomas Kean

³⁵ The Election Commission has long set up separate booths for men and women, a policy designed to increase turnout among women. Crisis Group interview, woman voter, Dhaka, February 2026

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, woman voter, Dhaka, February 2026.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, polling station official, Dhaka, February 2026.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, polling station official, Dhaka, February 2026.

³⁹ “A Credible Electoral Process Propels the Renewal of Democracy”, EU Election Observation Mission Bangladesh 2026, 14 February 2026.

⁴⁰ See “ANFREL IEOM to the 2026 Bangladesh Elections and Referendum Interim Report”, Asian Network for Free Elections, 15 February 2026; and “IRI Preliminary Findings of Bangladesh’s 2026 Elections Mark Important Step Forward for Bangladesh”, International Republican Institute, 14 February 2026.

B. A Clear BNP Majority

The vote pitted the BNP against an alliance of parties led by the country's largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami. The BNP fielded its own candidates for 292 of 300 seats, leaving only a handful to its partners, a group of much smaller parties.⁴¹ Jamaat's eleven-party alliance included several other Islamist forces as well as the student-led NCP and the leftist Liberal Democratic Party. Seats were distributed more evenly, with Jamaat contesting 223 and the NCP 32.

Though the BNP was widely considered the front runner, the election was hotly contested. Over the preceding year, Jamaat had steadily gained support, in part due to frustration among the Bangladeshi public about BNP activists' links to extortion and corruption. Uncertainty about the voting intentions of AL supporters and the unpredictability of the first-past-the-post voting system added to BNP members' nervousness.⁴² Some of the polls conducted shortly before the election showed the parties getting a similar vote share.⁴³ Just days before the vote, senior Jamaat officials appeared confident of winning a majority.⁴⁴ The Islamist party, however, was always facing an uphill battle. It was only directly contesting three quarters of parliament's seats, and its alliance partners were expected to struggle against the BNP in other constituencies. While Jamaat was strong in some parts of the country – particularly the north, west and south west – in others it was much less popular. The party's dominance of social media had also inflated expectations, with online expressions of enthusiasm not necessarily translating into votes.⁴⁵

In the end, the BNP secured 209 seats in the 300-seat national parliament, with its allies winning a further three seats. The opposition alliance won 77, including 68 for Jamaat-e-Islami and six for the NCP. Overall, the BNP and its allies received just over 50 per cent of the vote share, while Jamaat and its alliance partners got over 37 per cent.⁴⁶ As the BNP and Jamaat had mostly boycotted or been barred from elections after 2008, the vast majority of those elected were first-time MPs. Among the newcomers were the leaders of all three major parties: Tarique Rahman of the BNP, Shafiqur Rahman of Jamaat and Nahid Islam of the NCP. Just seven women were elected and four members of minority communities (see Section IV.E).

Despite the BNP's crushing victory, the result was still by far Jamaat's best in an election, eclipsing the eighteen seats and 12 per cent vote share it received in 1991. The party attracted support from both religious conservatives and those looking for change; Jamaat made corruption a focus of its campaign, which helped it among voters bothered by allegations of BNP members' complicity in various schemes.

⁴¹ A change in election rules prompted some members of allied parties to quit and join the BNP so they could use the larger party's paddy sheaf symbol on the ballot. Previously, alliance partners could choose to use either their own party symbol or that of an alliance partner.

⁴² Kean, "Curtain Falls on Bangladesh's Interim Government", op. cit.

⁴³ "Tight race ahead: 4-organisation survey shows BNP-Jamaat contest heating up", *Prothom Alo*, 13 January 2026.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Jamaat-e-Islami official, February 2026.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, prominent political scientist, Dhaka, February 2026.

⁴⁶ "BNP gets 49.97pc, Jamaat 31.76pc votes in national polls: EC", *Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha*, 15 February 2026.

In the end, however, more voters saw the BNP as the safer choice: they were drawn toward a well-established party that had previous governing experience, promising more stability and predictable economic management. As the AL has traditionally been the leading political advocate of secularism in Bangladesh, in the party's absence the BNP picked up support from those worried by the rise of religious conservatives. These considerations outweighed the BNP's track record in government, which has been mixed at best; corruption and misrule during its time in power from 2001 to 2006 left it deeply unpopular.⁴⁷ During the campaign, the party pushed the message that new leader Tarique Rahman, who was not formally a member of that government but was accused of pulling strings behind the scenes, was a changed man as a result of his exile in London.⁴⁸

Doubts about the credibility of the election, particularly considering the ban on the AL, were largely dispelled by the high turnout, which was almost 60 per cent.⁴⁹ While some of the AL's supporters clearly boycotted the poll, many opted to vote. Most seem to have backed the BNP, which despite being the AL's traditional rival is closer to it ideologically and culturally than Jamaat-e-Islami. Some BNP candidates also promised to protect AL supporters if elected, including by having criminal cases against them dropped. "There was both pressure and incentives for AL supporters to vote – both BNP and Jamaat were making offers [to secure the party's votes]. Some [AL supporters] did vote, but it was out of pragmatism, not joy", said an AL activist who declined to cast a ballot.⁵⁰

The losing parties largely accepted the result – an unusual occurrence in Bangladesh.⁵¹ Jamaat-e-Islami announced plans to appeal the results in 32 constituencies but did not attempt to disrupt the handover of power, either through legal processes or major street mobilisation.⁵² While the scale of the BNP's victory helped quell any bid to dispute the outcome, the manner in which political leaders acted after the results was also important. As early as election night, Jamaat's leader, Shafiqur Rahman, said the party would accept the overall tally, though it had complaints about possible irregularities in some places. Once the outcome became clear, BNP leader Tarique Rahman warned party activists not to celebrate the win on the streets, as is traditional in Bangladesh, encouraging them instead to head to the mosque for Friday prayers. He then personally visited the homes of Shafiqur Rahman and NCP leader Islam, an unprecedented step for a prime minister-elect. Yunus also met the BNP, Jamaat and NCP leaders following the vote.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Crisis Group Asia Report N°264, *Mapping Bangladesh's Political Crisis*, 9 February 2015.

⁴⁸ See, for example, "Bangladesh's Tarique Rahman: From exile to winning power", Reuters, 10 February 2026; and "Tarique Rahman promises era of clean politics as Bangladesh holds first election since fall of Hasina", *The Guardian*, 12 February 2026.

⁴⁹ By comparison, turnout was around 55 per cent in 1991, roughly 75 per cent in both June 1996 and 2001, and 85 per cent in 2008. Elections in February 1996, 2014 and 2024 all saw much lower levels of voting due to boycotts by either the BNP or AL, while in 2018 many voters could not participate as the ballots were stuffed the night before.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, AL activist, Dhaka, February 2026.

⁵¹ For background, see Crisis Group Report, *Mapping Bangladesh's Political Crisis*, op. cit.

⁵² "Jamaat-led alliance seeks recount in 32 seats, announces protest rally", *Dhaka Tribune*, 15 February 2026.

These efforts to avoid confrontation and maintain lines of communication, combined with the continued presence of security forces on the streets, also helped ensure that the five-day transition period after the vote was mostly – though not entirely – free of violence. A monitoring group, the Human Rights Support Society, said three people were killed and over 300 wounded in more than 200 clashes among members of the three parties on 13 and 14 February.⁵³ Nonetheless, by Bangladeshi standards, the transition was smooth.⁵⁴

At the polling booths, voters also endorsed a concurrent referendum on the July Charter, with about 68 per cent of valid votes cast in favour.⁵⁵ The interim government had campaigned strongly for a yes vote, as did Jamaat-e-Islami and the NCP. BNP leader Tarique Rahman also backed the yes vote in the final week before the poll, though some local party leaders had earlier opposed it. AL leaders abroad opposed the referendum in social media posts. The government was criticised for the way the referendum question was formulated – a complex, four-part question to which voters were asked to give a single response.⁵⁶ The referendum's outcome, however, reflected widespread public support for political reform, even as many voters seemed uncertain of precisely what the July Charter entailed.⁵⁷

C. Transfer of Power

On 17 February, the chief election commissioner swore in newly elected lawmakers. Promptly nominated by the BNP caucus, party chief Tarique Rahman took the oath as prime minister that afternoon. Tarique Rahman immediately announced his cabinet, comprising 25 ministers and 24 state (junior) ministers; only nine (all ministers) had previously served in government.⁵⁸

The top positions went to senior figures in the party, with General Secretary Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir appointed minister for local government, rural development and cooperatives, and standing committee members Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and Salahuddin Ahmed named finance and planning minister and home minister, respectively. The biggest surprise was the appointment of Khalilur Rahman, who had served as high representative for Rohingya affairs and national security adviser under Yunus, as foreign minister; he was the only member of the interim government to be retained.⁵⁹

⁵³ “Poll-related violence over four months leaves 10 dead, 2,503 injured: HRSS”, *The Business Standard*, 15 February 2026.

⁵⁴ See, for example, “Bangladesh: Attacks on Members of the Hindu Minority”, Amnesty International, 1 December 2001.

⁵⁵ “‘Yes’ campaign wins referendum with 68% of the vote”, *The Business Standard*, 13 February 2026.

⁵⁶ See, for example, David Bergman, “Which charter reforms are you voting for? No one knows”, *Counterpoint*, 9 February 2026.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interviews, voters, Dhaka, February 2026.

⁵⁸ Shortly afterward, the new prime minister also appointed ten advisers to his office: five with the status of minister and five as state ministers. “Bangladesh PM names cabinet after election win”, Agence France-Presse, 17 February 2026.

⁵⁹ Khalilur Rahman had led negotiations with the U.S. on a wide-ranging Reciprocal Trade Agreement signed just three days before the election. “Bangladesh secures reduced 19% US tariff, exemption for some apparel made with US material”, Reuters, 10 February 2026. The [full text](#) of the agreement is available at the U.S. Trade Representative’s website.

At the new government's first cabinet meeting on 18 February, Tarique Rahman set out three focus areas under a 180-day priority plan: controlling the prices of essential goods; improving law and order; and maintaining stable electricity and gas supplies.⁶⁰ Elaborating on the security issue, Home Minister Ahmed later said the new government would no longer tolerate "mob culture", adding that protesters would not be allowed to block roads to press demands. Activists could hold meetings and rallies, and exercise other "lawful democratic rights", and "logical demands will be met through due process". The government would also work to burnish the image of the police, he said.⁶¹ The next day, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hassan Mahmood unveiled a 100-day roadmap for the sector he now oversees, including preparations for a fresh round of bidding for gas exploration.⁶² To offset price rises during Ramadan, the government sold food to one million low-income families at discounted rates.⁶³

The transfer of power did not go entirely according to plan, however. Under a November 2025 implementation order for the July Charter, elected parliamentarians were to serve concurrently as members of a Constitution Reform Council for 180 days in order to enact the charter's constitutional changes, so long as the referendum result was favourable.⁶⁴ But when BNP lawmakers were sworn in to parliament on 17 February, they refused to take a separate oath for the council, arguing that there was no constitutional basis for the reform body.⁶⁵ The BNP has said it will instead make use of its two-thirds majority in parliament to pass ordinary constitutional amendments, while promising to honour the July Charter "exactly as it was signed".⁶⁶ This stance suggests that the party will not approve aspects on which it dissented, such as proportional representation in the new upper house.

Some of the new government's personnel changes have also proven controversial. Chief among these was the decision to remove the Bangladesh Bank governor and replace him with a BNP official who has an accounting rather than economics background; critics warned that his nomination could undermine confidence in the economy.⁶⁷ On 3 March, all three members of the Anti-Corruption Commission resigned, reportedly after being asked to step down; under Yunus, the commission had taken an unusually strong stand against graft.⁶⁸ The changes suggest that the BNP wants party loyalists to head these key institutions.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ "3 priorities set by new government", *Prothom Alo*, 18 February 2026.

⁶¹ "Mob culture won't be tolerated: Salahuddin", *The Daily Star*, 18 February 2026.

⁶² "Govt plans 100-day energy push", *The Daily Star*, 21 February 2026.

⁶³ "Govt to sell low-cost protein food in Ramadan", *Deshkal News*, 19 February 2026.

⁶⁴ "Full text of CA's address on July Charter implementation", Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, 13 November 2025.

⁶⁵ "BNP abstained as no provision of administering oath for Constitution Reform Council: Salahuddin", *The Business Standard*, 17 February 2026.

⁶⁶ "We will implement the July Charter to the letter: Salahuddin Ahmed", *Prothom Alo*, 17 February 2026.

⁶⁷ "Why Bangladesh just fired the man who saved its economy", *Asia Times*, 26 February 2026.

⁶⁸ "ACC chief, his two deputies quit en masse", *The Daily Star*, 4 March 2026.

⁶⁹ The BNP also reshuffled senior posts in the military, security agencies and bureaucracy, without getting criticism. See, for example, "Major reshuffle at top levels of Bangladesh Army", *Prothom Alo*, 23 February 2026; "3 secretaries, including PMO secretary, removed", *Prothom Alo*, 24 February 2026; and "More reshuffle in police, admin, education on the cards", *Prothom Alo*, 25 February 2026.

Notably, the BNP has also moved to reverse some of the interim government's reforms. Constitutional constraints meant that Yunus's administration could enact laws only as presidential ordinances, which lapse if not converted to laws by parliament within 30 days of its first session. After reviewing the 133 ordinances issued under the interim government, the BNP opted to retain 98 unchanged as laws and to retain fifteen in revised form; the remaining twenty were repealed or allowed to lapse.⁷⁰ The BNP was never likely to accept all of them, and it has retained far more than the AL did in 2009 after taking power from a caretaker government.⁷¹ The government has also said it is letting a few key ordinances lapse only so it can have more time to redraft them as parliamentary bills. But this caveat has done little to allay fears that it wants to curb the drive to reform Bangladesh's political and legal powers. The rejection of ordinances related to the Supreme Court, for example, will likely threaten the prospect of greater judicial independence.⁷² A silver lining is the heated debate among MPs over the ordinances, suggesting that parliament may begin to fulfil its remit after decades as little more than a rubber stamp.⁷³

D. International Reaction

Foreign governments were quick to recognise the BNP's victory. Most importantly, India, which has a long history of supporting the AL and whose relations with Yunus's interim government were frosty, signalled that it was open to working with the BNP. On 17 February, the speaker of India's lower house of parliament, Om Birla, attended the swearing-in of the new government and handed Tarique Rahman a second message from Prime Minister Modi. The letter extended Modi's "warmest congratulations" and said he looked forward to working with the BNP leader to "strengthen our multifaceted bilateral relations, enhance regional cooperation and advance our common goals".⁷⁴ He also invited Tarique Rahman to visit him "at a mutually convenient time". Bangladeshi prime ministers typically make their first overseas state visit to India, but such an invitation was not extended to Yunus, who instead went to China.⁷⁵

The U.S. and China also moved quickly to strengthen ties with the new government. On the morning of 13 February, the U.S. ambassador to Bangladesh posted a note commending BNP leader Tarique Rahman on a "historic victory" in the "successful election".⁷⁶ After the swearing-in ceremony, U.S. President Donald Trump sent a message of congratulations in which he urged the new prime minister to stick to a bilateral trade deal Washington had signed with the interim government and complete "routine defence agreements" that would enable the purchase of U.S.

⁷⁰ "Parliament accepts 98 ordinances, drops 20, reviews others", *Dhaka Tribune*, 2 April 2026.

⁷¹ The AL accepted just 54 of 122 ordinances issued by the military-backed caretaker government that ruled Bangladesh in 2007-2008.

⁷² "Repealing Supreme Court ordinances may return courts to political captivity", *The Daily Star*, 6 April 2026.

⁷³ "Record 14 ordinances ratified amid fiery debate", *Daily Sun*, 8 April 2026.

⁷⁴ "Work for each other's security': PM Modi in letter to new Bangladesh PM Tarique Rahman; invites him to India", *Times of India*, 17 February 2026.

⁷⁵ For more, see Crisis Group Report, *After the "Golden Era"*, op. cit.

⁷⁶ "US congratulates Bangladesh on election, hails BNP's victory", *Dhaka Tribune*, 13 February 2026.

military equipment.⁷⁷ On 17 February, Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang said China looked forward to working with the BNP government in boosting “high-quality Belt and Road cooperation” and “elevating the China-Bangladesh Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership to a new level”. The message also noted the two countries “have always respected and treated each other as equals, pursued mutually beneficial cooperation and win-win results” – an oblique criticism of India, which is perceived to have often interfered in Bangladeshi politics.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ “Trump congratulates Tarique, hopes to strengthen US-Bangladesh trade ties”, *The Daily Star*, 19 February 2026. On the trade deal, see footnote 59.

⁷⁸ “Chinese PM: Ready to work with PM Tarique to enhance Dhaka-Beijing cooperation”, *Dhaka Tribune*, 17 February 2026.

III. The Challenges Ahead

The election and handover of power marked a huge step in Bangladesh's attempt to turn the page on a decade and a half of increasingly authoritarian rule. But while the new government has a clear mandate from voters, whether it can translate that into lasting popularity and stability remains uncertain. The BNP will face several major tests in the coming years, including in reviving the economy, improving security, managing political reforms and dealing with the question of the AL's future. If it fails to meet the political and economic aspirations that fuelled the uprising against Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh could face renewed unrest and political upheaval. As an interim government official noted: "After Hasina, people are confident that they can mobilise and take down anyone if they need to – this government has to deliver".⁷⁹

Bangladesh's history of anti-incumbency mobilisation suggests that the BNP will struggle to maintain its current support without decisive action. The U.S.-Israeli airstrikes on Iran, coming less than two weeks after the BNP took office, have only amplified the challenge given Bangladesh's reliance on oil and gas imports from the Middle East.

A. Economic Growth

The government's most important task will be to deliver inclusive economic growth. Though the interim administration initiated some reforms and was largely successful in restoring macro-economic stability, political uncertainty during the transition and high interest rates discouraged the private investment needed to create jobs for the country's large youth population.⁸⁰ GDP growth is still recovering and inflation remains high, at almost 9 per cent. Foreign currency reserves have increased, but the economy remains heavily dependent on garment exports and remittances from overseas workers. Both sources of revenue are vulnerable to global shocks. Pressure to service debt incurred to pay for infrastructure projects initiated under the AL government is also rising. Meanwhile, the banking sector remains under severe strain, with high levels of non-performing loans linked to poor governance and large-scale corruption under Hasina's rule.⁸¹

The political stakes are incredibly high. Economic frustration played a major role in sparking the popular revolt that brought down Hasina, including anger over corruption and mismanagement, rising prices and limited opportunities for young people. The BNP has unveiled an ambitious 180-day plan focused on electricity supply, infrastructure bottlenecks and investment, but it will have only a short window of time in which to demonstrate progress.

External shocks are already complicating this task: the conflict in the Middle East is pushing up energy prices and disrupting trade. With Bangladesh importing most of

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, interim government official, Dhaka, February 2026.

⁸⁰ Over 40 per cent of the population is aged fifteen to 39. See "Population and Housing Census 2022", Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

⁸¹ For overviews of Bangladesh's economic challenges, see "Bangladesh Development Update", World Bank, October 2025; and "IMF Executive Board Concludes 2025 Article IV Consultation with Bangladesh", International Monetary Fund, 30 January 2026.

its commercial fuels from Middle Eastern sources, and the Gulf Arab countries also accounting for almost half of remittance income, a prominent economist has predicted that the war could hit the economy “like an earthquake”.⁸² Already, Bangladesh is suffering from power outages and long lines at fuel stations, while most of its fertiliser plants have been forced to close. The energy crisis is putting downward pressure on the local currency and depleting foreign reserves, with Bangladesh’s fuel import bill expected to rise by as much as 40 per cent in 2026.⁸³ Though the government has increased subsidies to shield consumers, officials concede they may soon have little choice but to roll these back.⁸⁴ Senior government officials concede they are “firefighting every day. ... A battle is going on to salvage the economy”.⁸⁵ In a worst-case scenario, prolonged conflict in the Middle East could reduce GDP by as much as 3 per cent over the next two years.⁸⁶

More broadly, the BNP made ambitious promises during the election campaign, including increased social spending. In particular, the party proposed introducing a “family card” with a monthly stipend for low-income families to get subsidised food, along with initiatives such as midday meal programs at schools and a wider range of health services.⁸⁷ Delivering on these promises will be fiscally and administratively challenging, given the government’s weak revenues.⁸⁸ The full rollout of the family card, which would see 40 million recipient households receive the equivalent of \$20 a month to purchase basic commodities, is expected to cost as much as \$10 billion a year – more than the government now spends on all social protection programs combined.⁸⁹ To avoid fuelling inflation and blowing out government debt, the BNP may need to moderate some of its promises, or follow through on them very gradually, while carefully managing any backlash.

To create the fiscal space needed for full implementation of its social welfare programs, the government will have to increase tax revenues. On average, less than 2 per cent of Bangladeshis pay taxes.⁹⁰ Shifting more permits, approvals and payments online would help capture more tax revenue and improve compliance. In Bangladesh, paying taxes tends to be a complex, time-consuming process, with officials often demanding bribes, not just to evade taxes but also to file them. More broadly,

⁸² Commercial fuels include oil, natural gas and coal, but not biomass sources such as firewood. Imports likely account for around 80 per cent of Bangladesh’s commercial fuel consumption. “Iran war could shake Bangladesh economy ‘like an earthquake’”, *The Daily Star*, 10 March 2026.

⁸³ “Bangladesh faces \$4.8b surge in annual energy import bill”, *The Daily Star*, 25 March 2026.

⁸⁴ “Bangladesh may raise fuel prices in May ‘if necessary’”, *bdnews24.com*, 7 April 2026.

⁸⁵ “War will not only affect the fuel crisis, but impact food prices as well, says finance minister”, *bdnews24.com*, 5 April 2026.

⁸⁶ “Geopolitical Conflict and Economic Spillovers: Simulating the Impact of a Middle East War on Bangladesh”, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling, March 2026.

⁸⁷ “BNP unveils special plans in 8 sectors, including family card, farmer card”, *Prothom Alo*, 21 January 2026.

⁸⁸ Bangladesh’s tax-to-GDP ratio was only 6.7 per cent in the 2025 fiscal year. The World Bank considers 15 per cent the minimum ratio necessary to finance essential development needs. See “How can Bangladesh increase domestic revenues for development?”, End Poverty in South Asia (blog), World Bank, 10 December 2025.

⁸⁹ “Family card pilot to cover 40,000 households”, *The Daily Star*, 8 March 2026.

⁹⁰ See “Why Does Bangladesh Tax So Little?”, International Growth Centre, 3 April 2023.

institutional bottlenecks, vested interests and corruption – which plague existing social welfare programs – will inevitably be major obstacles to carrying out the BNP agenda.

Addressing Bangladesh's economic challenges will depend heavily on the government's ability to make governance reforms and strengthen state institutions (see Section IV.C below). Officials will have to stand up to bureaucrats and business elites, including those associated with the BNP. At the same time, the government will need to balance these long-term goals with short-term stability. If economic conditions deteriorate, political frustration could also quickly re-emerge, undermining the government's broader reform agenda. As a prominent businessperson told Crisis Group, "in the private sector, real wages are falling by the day ... If they [the BNP] can't improve things within two years, people will become very impatient indeed – and the opposition will be looking to take advantage".⁹¹

To buy more time, the government has asked the UN to defer Bangladesh's graduation from least-developed country status for three years, to November 2029.⁹² After graduation to developing country status, it will have only a three-year grace period before losing the export privileges it now enjoys, which are critical to the country's huge garment sector (which accounts for 85 per cent of exports). Delaying graduation is sensible, but it will be crucial that the government use the additional time to improve the country's competitiveness in other sectors – such as light manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and IT services – in order to diversify the economy.⁹³ It will also need to work closely with international partners to continue the economic reforms initiated under the interim government, particularly in the banking sector, where high rates of non-performing loans need to be resolved, including through bank mergers.

B. Political Reforms

Political reforms are likely to be a flashpoint in the months ahead. Though the BNP has endorsed most of the reforms included in the July Charter, implying it will see them through, its lawmakers refused to take an oath for a proposed Constitution Reform Council, as noted above (Section III.C). Even if the party opts to use its two-thirds majority in parliament to pass constitutional amendments, it remains unclear which changes it will adopt. The BNP dissented on nine key points in the charter, including the proposed introduction of proportional representation in the new upper chamber of parliament.⁹⁴ Entirely ignoring these provisions would significantly weaken the checks and balances on executive power the reform document foresaw. It would also likely become a rallying cry for opposition parties.

The BNP will therefore need to strike a careful balance in its approach to the July Charter. Based on the election outcome, it can plausibly argue that the public has

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Bangladeshi businessperson, Dhaka, February 2026.

⁹² "LDC graduation: Government asks UN for three-year deferment", *The Daily Star*, 20 February 2026.

⁹³ "Deferring Bangladesh's LDC graduation and the road ahead", *The Daily Star*, 24 February 2026.

⁹⁴ Others include the role of the upper house, the formation of the caretaker government and the process of appointing heads of key institutions. "Legal and political storm brews over July Charter: Who has the power to issue order, and under what law?", *bdnews24.com*, 1 November 2025.

backed its more cautious reform agenda. But the party should be mindful that strong support for the charter in the referendum reflects broad public demand for institutional change, including on points the BNP refused to sign up to.⁹⁵ If the BNP is perceived as backtracking on its commitments for deep reform, Jamaat-e-Islami and the NCP – both strong supporters of the charter – are likely to mobilise against the government inside and outside parliament, including by bringing their supporters into the streets.⁹⁶ A prolonged dispute over reforms would risk draining political capital that the BNP government will need for other aspects of its political and economic agenda. It would also reinforce widespread perceptions that the party is more interested in maintaining the status quo by limiting the scope of reforms than in delivering genuine change.

Yet constitutional reform is unlikely to determine whether the BNP can keep public support. To do that, it will have to demonstrate real improvements in people's lives, not just by nurturing economic growth, as mentioned above, but also through better local governance and public services. On the latter, the government will need to show it is making progress in enhancing the quality and efficiency of everything from the judicial system to education and health. The increase in the number of children attending madrasahs, for example, is not just due to parental preferences for religious instruction; it is driven in part by the perceived failures of the state education system.⁹⁷

Efforts to tackle corruption will also be crucial. Graft and mismanagement played a pivotal role in fuelling the 2024 protests, and BNP activists' perceived involvement in illicit activity under the interim government was a factor in Jamaat-e-Islami's improved election performance. Party leaders will need to take a strong stance on corruption, particularly when it concerns party members, if they are to prevent public frustration from rising. "The main enemy of the BNP is not Jamaat or the AL – it's the BNP itself", observed a political analyst.⁹⁸

To improve governance, the BNP will also need to assert control of the bureaucracy. Interim government officials described the administration they inherited from the AL as deeply inefficient and resistant to reform, reflecting years of partisan influence, entrenched patronage networks and inertia.⁹⁹ Without meaningful administrative reform, many of the government's economic and governance initiatives could stall. The BNP will need to ensure it has competent and strong-willed ministers who understand or can quickly master the inner workings of government to overcome reticence and push reforms through the civil service.

In several respects, the BNP will be better placed than the interim administration to perform this task. As an elected government with a large majority, it has a stronger mandate than Yunus did, and the party has a power base that can help it surmount

⁹⁵ The referendum question specifically asked whether sections of the charter that the BNP had objected to, such as proportional representation in the upper house, should be implemented. A yes vote therefore implies voters expect the charter to be respected in full regardless of the BNP's objections.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, analysts, Dhaka, February 2026.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, education expert, Dhaka, February 2026.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, political analyst, Dhaka, February 2026.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, interim government officials, February 2026.

political obstacles. Elected MPs also play an important role in carrying through the government's agenda at the local level and resolving local disputes, alleviating pressure on the cabinet.



Bangladeshi soldiers outside a Dhaka polling station on 12 February 2026. CRISIS GROUP / Thomas Kean

C. Public Safety and Justice

A common complaint levelled at the interim government was its perceived inability to restore law and order (see Section II.B). The main challenge was less conventional policing than how to address recurring street agitation and mob violence, which reflected both the highly charged political environment and the weakened legitimacy of law enforcement institutions – particularly the police, which many Bangladeshis perceive as corrupt and loyal to Hasina's AL.¹⁰⁰ The experience of other countries emerging from autocracy suggests that such instability may persist for several years. Unlike its predecessor, moreover, the BNP will not be able to rely on the military to backstop the police. The army chief made it clear from the start that the internal security role it played under the interim government was temporary. He is keen to see troops return to their barracks.¹⁰¹

An elected government should be better placed to tackle mob violence, but it will need to translate its democratic mandate into effective control of the police force. The BNP should use its political authority to give the police clearer direction so that officers are not hesitant to intervene when gatherings get unruly. Rebuilding the police's credibility will be critical; it will require the BNP to both strengthen chains of command and limit political interference. If mob attacks occur, a small number of

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interviews, analysts and interim government officials, Dhaka, February 2026.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, source with knowledge of the matter, Dhaka, February 2026. See also "Army to return to barracks after new govt takes office: Army chief", *The Business Standard*, 15 February 2026.

well-publicised prosecutions could have an important deterrent effect, signalling that perpetrators will face consequences even when violence occurs in large crowds. The government will, however, have to tread carefully. While empowering the police force, it will need to ensure that officers do not simply revert to the brutal tactics deployed under Hasina. Deploying enough police during outbreaks of violence will be important, enabling them to control crowds without resorting to excessive force.

More broadly, the BNP should resist the urge to stack the police force with party members – a hallmark of the AL era, but a temptation that the BNP also succumbed to when in power – and instead begin the long and overdue process of police reform. “Will they politicise or professionalise the police? That’s the key question”, noted an interim government official.¹⁰² Improved policing will also need to be accompanied by continued reforms in the judicial sector, which was also brought under increasing partisan control by Hasina. The interim government made several important changes to restore the judicial sector’s credibility, but it remains a work in progress.¹⁰³

Beyond the challenge of restoring public order, the new government will also need to remain vigilant about the risk of violent extremism, particularly from Islamist groups, which have periodically posed a threat in Bangladesh. Weak law enforcement and the political tumult during the transition period created an environment conducive to extremist mobilisation. While actual violence remains rare, extremist rhetoric continues to circulate online. At the same time, critics have accused the interim government of paying less attention to counter-terrorism, pointing to the release of known militants.¹⁰⁴ Police say an explosion at a madrassa in Dhaka in late December was linked to religious extremism.¹⁰⁵

At the same time, several structural constraints suggest that the risk of a large-scale resurgence remains limited. Transnational influences appear weaker than a decade ago, when Islamic State-inspired militants carried out the deadly Holey Artisan Bakery attack in Dhaka.¹⁰⁶ Political polarisation, which contributed to Islamist militancy under Hasina, has also diminished, and Jamaat-e-Islami’s return to mainstream politics could reduce incentives for violence by providing legal channels for political participation by Islamists. Most importantly, most Bangladeshis tend to be moderate in their views and reject jihadist tenets.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, interim government official, Dhaka, February 2026.

¹⁰³ One of the most important changes that the interim government undertook was to create a Supreme Court Secretariat that is responsible for promoting, transferring and disciplining judges, thus helping protect the judicial system from executive interference. “Separate Supreme Court secretariat: A welcome step, but the hard work begins now”, *The Daily Star*, 11 December 2025.

¹⁰⁴ “The Challenges for Bangladesh’s New Government”, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 4 March 2026.

¹⁰⁵ “Keraniganj madrasah head made bombs overnight before explosion: Police”, *The Business Standard*, 29 December 2025, and

¹⁰⁶ “Dhaka cafe attack ends with 20 hostages among dead”, *The Guardian*, 3 July 2016. See also “The Persistent Challenge of Extremism in Bangladesh”, U.S. Institute of Peace, June 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interviews, sources with knowledge of the issue, Dhaka, February 2026.

D. Rights and Reconciliation

One of the trickiest political questions facing the new government is the future of the Awami League. As noted earlier, the party's activities have been banned pending the conclusion of cases against senior figures at the International Crimes Tribunal. Once those proceedings end, the BNP government will need to decide whether to extend the ban. Perpetuating it could be tempting, given that the AL is clearly the largest opposition party the BNP is confronting – not to mention the deeply entrenched resentment of many party leaders after the way the Hasina government treated them. Given that the AL retains a large support base, however, permanently keeping the party out of politics is unlikely to be feasible. It could also lead to unrest and violence.

Several considerations are likely to guide the government's decision toward lifting the ban. Allowing the AL to re-enter politics with Hasina still at the helm would be difficult considering the level of public anger with her, not to mention her conviction at the ICT (see Section II.A above). For now, she has refused to give up control of the party. Given her status as the daughter of the party's founder, and a long-time prime minister, some activists may also find it difficult to consider alternative leadership. "Many supporters won't see the AL as a party without Sheikh Hasina", an AL activist in hiding told Crisis Group. "It will take time".¹⁰⁸ But a succession would make it easier for the BNP to restore the AL's legal status. The AL's supporters might also accept the idea more readily if her successor was another family member, such as her son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, who lives in the U.S. at present but has long been perceived as a potential heir.

Simply changing leaders will not be enough: the party will also need to make amends. To date, the AL has refused to accept any responsibility for its actions, including the deadly suppression of protests or abuses of power under Hasina's premiership. On the contrary, it has taken a defiant and belligerent rather than conciliatory approach. India, where Hasina has lived since her downfall, retains leverage over her and other party leaders. At a minimum, New Delhi, which has much to gain from having a stable neighbour, should use its influence to ensure that the AL exiles refrain from statements or actions that could destabilise Bangladesh in exchange for allowing them to continue residing in the country.

In the meantime, the BNP government should order a review of cases against AL members and supporters. Many were arrested following Hasina's ouster on spurious charges and remanded in custody for months – over eighteen months, in some cases – while awaiting trial; several have died in prison. Thousands more rank-and-file members have since been detained for staging protests under the interim government or been swept up in police operations. The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs should withdraw cases filed without sufficient evidence and grant bail to those who have no prior record or are unlikely to pose a threat to public security. The BNP must ensure that legitimate demands for judicial prosecution are addressed while preventing the justice system from being used to settle political

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, AL activist, Dhaka, February 2026.

scores. In doing so, it will have to stand firm in the face of pressure from right-wing, mainly Islamist, forces – as well as from within its own ranks – that are determined to prevent the AL from re-emerging.

E. Social Change and Gender Politics

As mentioned, Hasina’s downfall has also created space for more conservative social forces, which in Bangladesh take the shape of religious parties and groups. The shift has been under way for years but became more visible after the interim government lifted restrictions on Islamist groups and political activity more broadly.¹⁰⁹ Observers say it reflects not only greater political freedom but also frustrations with corruption, economic hardship and perceived moral decline. “It’s less due to strengthening religious sentiment than the long decay of democracy in Bangladesh – the failures of the justice system, the economic inequality”, an LGBT activist observed.¹¹⁰

Many minority groups – including religious, ethnic and sexual and gender minorities – now fear that these trends could translate into political pressure for more socially conservative policies. The BNP, which has repositioned itself as the country’s secular champion in the AL’s absence, should be particularly vigilant regarding threats to these groups, such as Hindus or sexual and gender minorities. But it also needs to avoid suppressing Islamist forces, not just because they represent a sizeable part of the electorate, but also because persecuting them would risk boosting their public support. “There’s a storm coming at the societal level”, warned a prominent political analyst. “Sheikh Hasina shows you can’t stop it with an iron fist. [Those seeking to counter conservatism] should reflect on why this is happening and develop better strategies to counter it”.¹¹¹

Though Bangladesh has had women prime ministers for most of the past 35 years, women are still poorly represented in formal politics. They accounted for just 4 per cent of total candidates in the election. Only seven elected women MPs sit in the 300-strong parliament, many of whom are close relatives of former (male) lawmakers, while just three women hold posts in the cabinet.¹¹² Though the 50 seats in parliament reserved for women will address this imbalance to some extent, these positions wield significantly less authority, as they are not tied to constituencies, and the selection process is opaque.¹¹³ Political parties should choose strong, credible candidates for these reserved seats and, within reason, assign them influential roles.

¹⁰⁹ Though Hasina presented herself as secularist, and persecuted some of the country’s Islamist forces, she also courted hard-line groups, such as Hefazat-e-Islam, when politically expedient. See, for example, Roshni Kapur, “Hefazat-e-Islam and the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in Bangladesh”, East Asia Forum, 16 February 2022.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, LGBT activist, Dhaka, February 2026.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, political scientist, Dhaka, February 2026.

¹¹² “Bangladesh’s 2026 election: Where are the women?”, *The Diplomat*, 27 February 2026.

¹¹³ The seats are awarded to parties based on the proportion of seats won in the general election, and the candidates are selected through internal processes after the election. They must be sworn in within 90 days of the results; at the time of writing, that had not yet happened. For more, see “Women’s Reserved Seats in Bangladesh: A Systematic Analysis of Meaningful Representation”, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, June 2016.

The next opportunity to improve women's representation in politics will be local elections, which are expected sometime in 2026 or 2027. Major parties, starting with BNP, should place greater priority on nominating women candidates.

The proportion of women candidates in the February vote was not dissimilar to previous national polls, but it contrasts sharply with the prominent role women activists played in the student protests against Hasina's government.¹¹⁴ Some of these activists helped found the NCP but later quit when the party agreed to a seat sharing deal with Jamaat-e-Islami ahead of the election – a move many secular activists viewed as legitimising Islamist politics. Jamaat was one of around 30 political parties that fielded no women candidate at all; senior officials claim they plan to nominate women in future polls, though they insist that a woman cannot be party leader, citing religious and biological reasons.¹¹⁵

Many secular-minded women are understandably concerned about the possible consequences of Jamaat-e-Islami's rise, but the party also draws considerable support from women. Its women's wing, reported to comprise as many as 500,000 activists, was a visible presence during the election campaign.¹¹⁶ At a Jamaat women's rally in Dhaka, a participant explained to Crisis Group that she supported the party because it would create a "moral environment" to keep women safe.¹¹⁷

F. Foreign Policy

The BNP government has assumed office amid profound regional and global shifts, creating both risks and opportunities. Under Hasina, Bangladesh's foreign policy was closely aligned with that of India. Her ouster prompted a diplomatic rebalancing, and with bilateral relationships undergoing a period of adjustment, India, China and the U.S. are all seeking to deepen ties with the new administration. Under President Trump, Washington has placed greater emphasis on trade and strategic competition with China, including through the Reciprocal Trade Agreement signed in early February.¹¹⁸ China, meanwhile, has continued to cultivate ties across the political spectrum, positioning itself as a key partner for infrastructure financing while emphasising its policy of non-interference in Bangladeshi politics.

In this global environment, the BNP government will need to be careful in how it balances relations with its major partners, which also include the European Union, Japan, Pakistan, Türkiye, Gulf Arab countries and Russia. Given intensifying major-power competition in the Indo-Pacific, it should avoid aligning too closely with any single country or bloc. Instead, diversifying ties would give Dhaka more strategic autonomy and allow it to navigate changing regional politics more effectively. It will

¹¹⁴ "Bangladesh's women have lost before the country has even voted", *Himal Southasian*, 9 February 2026.

¹¹⁵ Asked if a woman could lead Jamaat, Shafiqur Rahman replied that it is "not possible. ... There are some differences between men and women. What Allah made, we cannot change it". See "Bangladesh elections: The resurgence of Jamaat-e-Islami | Sreenivasan Jain and Shafiqur Rahman", *Al Jazeera English*, 29 January 2026.

¹¹⁶ "Jamaat's 'silent army': Half a million women join to reshape electoral landscape", *JagoneWS24*, 21 September 2025.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Jamaat-e-Islami supporter, Dhaka, February 2026.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Dhaka, February 2026.

also help mitigate the domestic backlash that is linked to perceptions of overdependence on specific external partners, as seen in the anti-India sentiment that eroded support for the Hasina government.

That said, the most important task for the new government will be rebuilding ties with India. Hasina forged close relations with New Delhi, addressing its security concerns and bolstering economic integration. After she fell, bilateral relations plummeted to historic lows, largely due to India's hostility toward Yunus and the interim government.¹¹⁹ As mentioned, India's outreach to the BNP has continued since the election, with Modi inviting Tarique Rahman to visit India. Dhaka and New Delhi should seek to build on this long overdue reset. But domestic politics in both countries will constrain efforts to restore ties, particularly with forthcoming state elections in India's border states of Assam and West Bengal, where illegal immigration from Bangladesh promises to be a campaign issue, and the scheduled expiry of the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty in December 2026.¹²⁰

The Rohingya refugee crisis will remain one of Bangladesh's most difficult foreign policy challenges.¹²¹ Continued conflict in Myanmar, particularly in Rakhine State, means the 1.2 million Rohingya refugees now living in camps in Cox's Bazaar are unlikely to return home soon – something Tarique Rahman has all but acknowledged.¹²² With very limited options for third-country resettlement, most will have no choice but to remain in Bangladesh for the foreseeable future. But the current policy – which prohibits employment – leaves refugees heavily dependent on international aid, which has fallen sharply following the demise of USAID.¹²³ Declining funding has already forced the World Food Programme to reduce food assistance to many families.¹²⁴

As Crisis Group has argued before, Dhaka should allow the Rohingya greater opportunities to earn income, while mitigating the impact such a change in policy would have on Bangladeshis. This reform would be in line with the BNP 2023's policy paper on the refugee crisis, which promised to explore the possibility of Rohingya working in sectors with labour shortages.¹²⁵ The government will also need to curb the influence of Rohingya armed groups, which pose security risks both in the camps and along the border.¹²⁶ As the Arakan Army now controls most of Rakhine State, where the refugees came from, Dhaka will also need to resume dialogue with the group; the interim government's efforts made little headway.

¹¹⁹ For a full discussion, see Crisis Group Report, *After the "Golden Era"*, op. cit.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ For background on the Rohingya refugee crisis, see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°335, *Crisis Mounts for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh*, 6 December 2023; and N°303, *A Sustainable Policy for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh*, 27 December 2019.

¹²² "Exclusive: Bangladesh PM front-runner rejects unity government offer, says his party set to win", Reuters, 7 February 2026. On Rakhine State, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°339, *Breaking Away: The Battle for Myanmar's Rakhine State*, 27 August 2024.

¹²³ Chris Newton and Delaney Simon, "U.S. Aid Cuts Make Famine More Likely and Easier to Hide", Crisis Group Commentary, 28 February 2025.

¹²⁴ "WFP cuts Rohingya food rations and opens oil bottles to prevent resale", Rohingya Refugee News, 3 March 2026.

¹²⁵ This paper, "*Rohingya Crisis and Repatriation Strategy*", is available on the BNP website.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group Asia Report N°348, *Bangladesh/Myanmar: The Dangers of a Rohingya Insurgency*, 18 June 2025.

IV. Conclusion

Bangladesh's 12 February election and handover of power mark an important step forward for the country after eighteen months of interim rule. The lack of electoral violence, the humility of the BNP leader and losing parties' acceptance of the outcome reflect the new and higher expectations that Bangladeshis have of their political leaders following the toppling of Hasina. There is now an opportunity to strengthen this step toward peaceful, democratic competition and make sure it is not a one-off occurrence.

The new administration faces a daunting set of challenges, however. How the BNP handles these competing pressures will shape Bangladesh's trajectory in the years ahead. If it can revive the economy, the government will open space to pursue the rest of its ambitious agenda, including improving public services and strengthening the rule of law. If it fails to create the jobs needed to meet the aspirations of young Bangladeshis or struggles to ensure clean governance, however, the country could find itself confronting another bout of instability and political upheaval.

Dhaka/Brussels, 23 April 2026



Preventing War. Shaping Peace.

www.crisisgroup.org

Crisis Group has offices in Bogota, Brussels, Dakar, Istanbul, London, Nairobi, New York and Washington, DC and has a presence in more than 25 different locations in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the Americas.

Please visit our website for information on our [Board of Trustees](#) and [Supporters](#).