

# Civic Freedom Monitor: Bangladesh

Last updated: **November 18, 2025**

## Recent Developments

On November 17, 2025, a panel of three judges of the International Crimes Tribunal, Bangladesh's domestic war crimes court, found former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, guilty of various crimes against humanity and sentenced her to death. The court ruled that Hasina was responsible for inciting hundreds of extrajudicial killings carried out by law enforcement during the deadly crackdown on anti-government protests in 2024. The interim government of Bangladesh has called the death sentence a "historic verdict", while also calling for calm and warning that any attempt to create "anarchy, chaos or disturb public order would be strictly suppressed". Former Prime Minister Hasina has condemned the Dhaka court verdict as "biased and politically motivated".

*While we aim to maintain information that is as current as possible, we realize that situations can rapidly change. If you are aware of any additional information or inaccuracies on this page, please keep us informed; write to ICNL at [ngomonitor@icnl.org](mailto:ngomonitor@icnl.org).*

## Introduction

Bangladesh is endowed with a rich tradition and culture of philanthropy. This civic spirit was reinforced following the country's devastating 1971 war for independence, when a wide array of self-help groups emerged to support relief, rehabilitation, and development. However, the sector has also inherited constraints rooted in colonial-era legal frameworks and decades of authoritarian and military rule, which continue to shape the regulatory and political environment.

Today, civil society in Bangladesh encompasses a broad and diverse array of actors that play an essential role delivering services and advocating for social justice and democratic governance. While the total number of CSOs is unknown, estimates suggest that around 250,000 are registered with various government agencies, although fewer than 50,000 are actively operating.

Bangladesh is a unitary republic governed under a Constitution that guarantees basic rights and freedoms and provides for a Westminster-style parliamentary system. In practice, however, democratic space has been significantly eroded in recent years. Legal and administrative restrictions on association, expression, and assembly—along with increased surveillance, politicized law enforcement, and attacks on dissent—have created a challenging environment for civil society.

## Civic Freedoms at a Glance

<b>Organizational Forms</b>	Societies, trusts, non-profit companies, NGOs, voluntary social welfare agencies, cooperative societies, youth organizations, micro finance institutions, waqf
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<b>Registration Body</b>	Registrar of Joint Stock Companies (RJSC) (societies and non-profit companies) Relevant Sub-Register’s office (trusts) NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOs) Department of Social Services (DSS) within the Ministry of Women and Children (voluntary social welfare organizations) Department of Cooperatives (cooperative societies) Department of Youth Development (youth organizations) Microcredit Regulatory Authority (micro-finance institutions) Office of the Waqf Administrator within the Ministry of Religious Affairs (waqf)
<b>Barriers to Formation</b>	Foreigners, non-citizens, and minors are prohibited from serving as founding members of societies, NGOs, voluntary social welfare agencies, cooperative societies, youth organizations, or micro-finance institutions. Similarly, non-Muslims and minors cannot be committee members of a waqf. A micro-finance institution must already be registered as a society, trust, cooperative society, voluntary social welfare agency, or company.
<b>Barriers to Operations</b>	Mandatory reporting: Societies are required to submit an annual return. NGOs are subject to termination for the non-submission of reports. Youth organizations must submit annual reports & audited accounts. Limitations on permissible purposes: Trusts cannot pursue purposes deemed by a court to be immoral or opposed to public policy. Youth organizations may only pursue youth development. Government interference: Government representatives may attend the internal meetings of NGOs, voluntary social welfare agencies, cooperative societies, and youth organizations.
<b>Barriers to Resources</b>	Organizations seeking to receive or use foreign donations must obtain approval, known as <i>FD Registration</i> , from the NGO Affairs Bureau. For non-profit companies, borrowing from foreign sources may require prior approval of the Bangladesh Bank.
<b>Barriers to Expression</b>	The 2025 Cyber Security Ordinance criminalizes online speech through vague and undefined terms.
<b>Barriers to Assembly</b>	Advance permission of 7 days required. Assembly organizers are liable for any misconduct, violence or damages that occur during the assembly.

## Legal Overview

This section provides a brief overview of Bangladesh’s legal framework for the promotion and protection of civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

## RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	2000

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)	No
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	1998
Optional Protocol to ICESCR (Op-ICESCR)	No
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	1979
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	1984
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women	2000
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1990
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW)	2011
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2007

Key Regional Agreements	Ratification
South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC)	1985
South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)	1994

\* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

## CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Constitution of Bangladesh was adopted by the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh on November 4, 1972. Relevant clauses corresponding to fundamental rights enunciated in the Constitution include:

- **37. Freedom of assembly:** Every citizen shall have the right to assemble and to participate in public meetings and processions peacefully and without arms, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of public order health.
- **38. Freedom of association:** Every citizen shall have the right to form associations or unions, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of morality or public order.
- **39. Freedom of thought and conscience, and of speech:** (i) Freedom of thought and conscience is guaranteed. (ii) Subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence (a) the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression; and freedom of the press, are guaranteed.

## **NATIONAL LAWS, POLICIES, AND REGULATIONS**

Relevant national laws governing civil society in Bangladesh include the following:

- The Societies Registration Act, 1860;
- The Trust Act, 1882;
- The Companies Act, 1913 (amended in 1994);
- The Cooperative Societies Act, 2001;
- The Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies Ordinance, 1961;
- The Youth Organizations Act, 2015;
- The Waqf Ordinance, 1962;
- The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 2016; and
- The Microfinance Regulatory Law, 2006.

A brief description of each law follows below.

### **Societies Registration Act, 1860**

During British rule, CSOs were regulated as “literary, scientific and charitable societies” through the Societies Registration Act. The Act provides for registration with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies under the Ministry of Commerce for the following types of societies:

- charitable societies;
- societies established for the promotion of science, literature or the fine arts;
- societies established for instruction, the diffusion of knowledge and political education;
- societies established for educational and medical services;
- societies established for the foundation or maintenance of libraries or reading rooms for use by members of the public; and
- public museums and galleries of paintings and other works of art, and collections of natural history, mechanical and philosophical inventions.

### **The Trust Act, 1882**

This Act was designed to accommodate private trusts without affecting the already existing Muslim and Hindu laws for religious endowments. A trust (trust deed) is registered by the relevant (geographically) Sub-Register’s office under the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, which is responsible for the registration of property and collecting the registration tax. It is also responsible for the registration of marriage in Bangladesh.

### **The Companies Act, 1913 (amended in 1994)**

This Act provides legal status to non-profit companies. Some CSOs and foundations seek registration

under the Act for the sake of convenience. The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies under the Ministry of Commerce is the registration authority.

Under section 28 of The Companies Act, 1994, a “non-profit association” or club may also be registered.

### **Cooperative Societies Act, 2001**

This Act provides legal status to three kinds of Cooperative Societies, i.e., Primary Cooperative Society, Central Cooperative Society and National Cooperative Society through the Department of Cooperatives (DoC).

### **Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies Ordinance, 1961**

The majority of CSOs in Bangladesh are recognized as voluntary social welfare organizations (SWOs) and are registered under this Act with the Department of Social Services (DSS) as well as with the Department of Women Affairs (DWA).

The Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Registration and Control) Ordinance was promulgated in 1961 “to expedite the registration and control of voluntary social welfare agencies and for matters ancillary thereto.” A “voluntary social welfare agency” is defined as an “organization, association or undertaking established by persons of their own free will for the purpose of rendering welfare services in any one or more of the fields mentioned in the schedule and depending for its resources on public subscriptions, donations or government aid.” The Director of the DSS under the Ministry of Social Welfare is the registration authority.

Any organization that is willing to work for women’s and children’s welfare can register under this Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies Ordinance, 1961. Its organizational structure is also similar to that of the DSS, but it remains under the DWA, which is under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

### **Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 2016**

This law regulates the receipt and expenditure of foreign donations by CSOs. CSOs are required to submit certain information to the government in a prescribed form to obtain approval for undertaking projects with donations received from outside of the country. Prior approval is also required if a CSO wishes to use the services of a volunteer or staff from outside the country.

### **The Youth Organizations (Registration and Management) Act, 2015**

The National Youth Policy 2017 of Bangladesh defines youth as individuals aged 18-35 years and any youth-led CSO, whose activities are related to youth development as per Youth Policy 2017 can get registered with the Department of Youth Development (DYD) under this law.

### **Microfinance Regulatory Law, 2006**

CSOs involved in micro-credit operations are to be registered with the Microfinance Regulatory Authority (MRA) under this law.

## **PENDING REGULATORY INITIATIVES**

We are unaware of any pending legislative/regulatory initiatives affecting NGOs at this time. Please help keep us informed; if you are aware of pending initiatives, write to ICNL at [ngomonitor@icnl.org](mailto:ngomonitor@icnl.org).

## **Legal Analysis**

This section provides an in-depth assessment of Bangladesh’s legal environment for civic freedoms, including the barriers to the exercise of the freedoms of association (formation, operations, resources), expression, and peaceful assembly. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

## ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bangladesh may be either membership or non-membership organizations. Membership organizations include indigenous and community-based organizations (CBOs), such as village clubs, mass organizations, religious organizations, and trade associations. Many of these remain unregistered, while those that do register typically do so under the Co-operative Societies Act. Non-membership organizations are commonly established as trusts or non-profit companies.

CSOs in Bangladesh can broadly be categorized into three types based on their regulatory framework, funding sources, and areas of activity:

- **Voluntary social welfare organizations (VSWOs)** The vast majority of CSOs are recognized as VSWOs. These organizations are generally small, operate at the local level, and rely on local donations and government grants. Their activities are primarily carried out by local volunteers.
- **Development NGOs:** Organizations that receive foreign funding are typically classified as development NGOs and must register with the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB).
- **Microfinance Institutions:** MFIs may also fall into either or both of the above categories.

## PUBLIC BENEFIT STATUS

Under the Income Tax Ordinance of 1984, all CSOs are exempt from corporate income tax. Any income generated through profit-earning activities must be used exclusively for charitable purposes and may not be distributed to any individuals in the form of dividends.

Both corporate and individual donors are eligible for tax deductions on contributions made for 22 designated public benefit purposes, including old age homes, forestation, waste treatment plants, care for the disabled, potable water supply, education for orphans and street children, specialized hospitals for treatment of the extreme poor, and public universities.

Corporate donors may deduct the amount of donations up to 10 percent of their taxable income. Individual donors may deduct up to 20 percent of their taxable income, but the deduction is capped at BDT 100,000 (approximately USD 1,380 as of November 2025).

To claim these deductions, donors must obtain prior approval from the National Board of Revenue (NBR), which operates under the Ministry of Finance. The NBR issues a tax exemption certificate if the donor fulfills all relevant tax and labor law obligations.

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2009 is intended to promote transparency and accountability by granting public access to information held by public, autonomous, and statutory organizations, as well as private organizations. CSOs are also subject to the RTI Act and are required to disclose certain information deemed to be within the public's right to know. In practice, however, only a few CSOs are aware of and fully comply with the Act's requirements.

## BARRIERS TO FORMATION

Numerous legal and administrative barriers hinder the formation of CSOs in Bangladesh.

**Minimum Membership Requirements:** The minimum number of members required to register is inordinately high. To register under the Companies Act as a non-profit company, an organization must have at least 11 members. Under the Societies Registration Act (SRA), the number of general members must be at least three times the number of Executive Committee (EC) members. Since CSOs registered under the SRA must have at least seven EC members, they therefore must have at least 21 founding members. Organizations registered under the Trust Act must have at least five members (Trustees) and

15 general members (three times the number of trustees).

**Restrictions on Member Eligibility:** Membership across all CSO types is restricted to adult Bangladeshi citizens. This excludes non-citizens and minors from founding or belonging to CSOs. In addition, government employees are barred from being office bearers (members of ECs) in CSOs.

**Infrastructure Requirements:** To be eligible for registration, a CSO must possess a furnished office with a verifiable address and signboard, creating an implicit asset requirement that acts as a substantial barrier to registration.

**Registration Fees:** Registration fees vary by legal form and may be prohibitively high. Under the SRA and the Companies Act, registration fees are BDT 2,000 (approximately USD 28 as of November 2025) and BDT 15,000 (approximately USD 207 as of November 2025), respectively. To register a trust with assets of BDT 20,000 (approximately US \$276 as of November 2025) or less, registration fees are BDT 2,540 (approximately USD 35 as of November 2025). These fees increase with higher asset values.

**Additional Registration for Foreign-Funded CSOs:** Organizations seeking foreign funding must register separately with the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB). To register with the NGOAB, organizations must submit an application, bank account details, a letter of intent from the donor, a copy of an annual activity report, and a copy of a financial audit report. The NGOAB is required to decide or seek further clarification within 90 days (60 days for renewals). The registration fee is BDT 10,000 (approximately USD 138 as of November 2025).

Banks will not allow unregistered organizations to open accounts and will not disburse any foreign funds without prior approval from the NGOAB and a letter of intent from the donor.

**Bureaucratic Hurdles and Political Discretion:** The registration process is often subject to bureaucratic inefficiency and political interference:

- Registration requires clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is meant to be completed within 60 days, but often takes longer in practice.
- Registration is sometimes delayed on the pretext of police verification and sometimes denied due to an adverse police report corresponding to “prejudicial activities.”
- Prior clearance from the National Security Intelligence (NSI) is mandatory for registration under the SRA.
- Reports of bribery to registration officials to expedite processing or avoid harassment are widespread.

NGOAB registration is also complicated:

- The NGOAB reserves the right to reject an application if it is not “satisfied” with an organization’s objectives, constitution, or plan of operation.
- CSOs do not have the right to appeal a rejection.
- Registration is only valid for five years. To renew, an application must be submitted six months before expiration.
- The NGOAB retains the authority to cancel registrations during the validity period.

## **BARRIERS TO OPERATIONS**

While the legal framework allows civil society activity, in practice, operational space is often restricted—particularly for organizations engaged in advocacy or governance-related work.

## **Government Perception and Interference**

In general, the bureaucratic stance toward civil society remains passive at best and hostile at worst, especially toward rights-based or governance-focused organizations. The government often sees itself as the primary agent of development and tends to view CSOs as competitors for scarce overseas development assistance (ODA). Bureaucrats have sometimes accused CSOs of “privatizing development,” and organizations critical of government policies may be branded as anti-state and subject to harassment, including blocking of foreign fund disbursement, delays in project approval, and cancellation of registration.

## **Legal Grounds for Suspension or Cancellation**

The government can suspend a CSO’s activities or even cancel its registration if it fails to submit required annual reports to its registration authority. The NGOAB has cancelled the registration of hundreds of CSOs for alleged “unlawful activities”. Further, any CSO accused of a criminal offense may face punitive measures, including deregistration.

The Anti-Terrorism Act makes a broad range of conduct, including “financing terrorist activities,” punishable by death. The vagueness and severity of this provision risk deterring CSO engagement in lawful economic activities.

## **Internal Affairs**

All CSOs—regardless of registration type—must comply with detailed regulations governing their internal structure and operations:

- Except for cooperative societies, all CSOs must establish an Executive Committee (EC) or governing body comprised of between 7 and 11 members, including a Chair, a General Secretary, and a Treasurer. The EC is elected by the membership in accordance with the organization’s articles of association.
- An annual financial audit by a recognized audit firm is mandatory. The NGOAB currently authorizes 71 firms from which CSOs must choose.
- Officials from the registration authority may attend CSOs’ EC and annual general meetings, particularly in cases of internal dispute.
- In case of a dispute, the registration authority can replace the existing EC with a new one of its choosing.
- ECs must operate within pre-approved budgets, and any modification to programs and budgets requires prior approval.
- Under the 1961 Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies Ordinance, the Department of Social Services (DOSS) can suspend a VSWO’s EC without the right to appeal. Notably, the governing body of a VSWO cannot dissolve itself without DOSS approval.

## **Banking and Financial Restrictions**

While CSOs are free to open accounts in any scheduled bank, they can only receive foreign donations in one bank account. Separate project accounts may be opened for internal transactions after foreign donations are received.

## **Reporting Obligations**

CSOs must submit activity reports and audited financial reports for the preceding year, and activity plans (programs) and the budgets for the coming year to their respective registration authority on an annual basis. The government can suspend a CSO's activities or cancel its registration for failure to submit these reports.

CSOs registered with the NGOAB must additionally report on their use of foreign funds to the District Commissioner's (DC) office. In return, the DC issues a No Objection Certificate (NOC), which NGOs need to continue their work. NGOs may struggle to submit these reports due to a lack of staff capacity. In addition, the issuance of NOCs is often subject to delays or non-issuance.

## **Government Harassment**

CSOs—especially those engaged in advocacy or human rights work—are frequently subject to government harassment, including frequent inspections and requests for documents. Legal remedies are inaccessible or ineffective for many organizations due to the cumbersome, expensive, and slow justice system.

## **Involuntary Dissolution**

In case of involuntary dissolution, the government may assume ownership of the organization's remaining assets and may re-constitute the EC to manage the organization.

## **Barriers to International Contact**

CSOs in Bangladesh face no formal restrictions on communication or cooperation with international partners. They are free to participate in conferences and regularly participate in UN and other international forums as important stakeholders.

## **BARRIERS TO RESOURCES**

Accessing international funding remains a significant challenge for CSOs in Bangladesh, largely due to the restrictive framework established by the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 2016 and administered by the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB). All CSOs seeking foreign support must first register with the NGOAB (a process known as FD Registration) and then obtain project-specific approval from NGOAB.

Several recent regulatory changes have intensified the constraints on CSOs' access to foreign resources.

- In 2021, NGOAB issued a regulation allowing it to cancel the registration of CSOs that are inactive for five years and unable to secure foreign funding during that period. Newly registered organizations are given just six months to obtain foreign funding, as stated on their registration certificates. Failure to do so may result in cancellation of their registration.
- A November 2021 circular issued by the Prime Minister's office prohibits CSOs—both domestic and foreign—registered with the NGOAB from providing grants or financial assistance to any organization not also registered with NGOAB. This restriction effectively cuts off a large segment of civil society from accessing donor or intermediary support.
- A December 2021 NGOAB circular, issued upon the direction of the Department of Narcotics Control, mandates that all CSO projects include anti-drug activities, regardless of the organization's mission or project objectives. While the circular does not clearly define "anti-drug activities," it does include examples of acceptable activities, including community awareness campaigns, youth engagement through sports or cultural activities, support for rehabilitation facilities, and sponsorship of youth anti-drug brigades.

- A circular issued by NGOAB in January 2022 requires CSOs to submit a detailed project summary with every project proposal involving foreign funds. The summary must include the project title, duration, geographic area, number of beneficiaries, full and annual budgets (if applicable), and budget breakdowns by district or sub-district. The NGOAB will publish these summaries on its website, ostensibly to promote transparency.
- Another circular issued by NGOAB in January 2022 cites the Right to Information Act to require all domestic and international CSOs to post detailed information on their websites. This includes names of key leadership (chairperson, executive director, country director, and other directors), a contact person for NGOAB, and a list of approved project activities. Organizations are required to comply within 15 days.

## **BARRIERS TO EXPRESSION**

CSOs that engage in advocacy or express criticism of government policies—particularly on sensitive issues such as ethnic discrimination, labor rights, natural resource extraction, environmental degradation, or corruption—are frequently subject to government harassment. This often takes the form of frequent inspections, burdensome documentation requests, or public accusations of partisanship.

The legal framework for regulating expression in Bangladesh has become increasingly punitive over the past decade.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act of 2013 was used to prosecute human rights defenders who expressed criticism of the government. The ICT Act was replaced in 2018 by the Digital Security Act (DSA), which criminalized various types of online speech and was used to imprison individuals on charges of publishing false and offensive information online. In 2023, the Cyber Security Act (CSA) was enacted to replace the DSA. The CSA was in turn repealed by the Cyber Security Ordinance, which was introduced on May 22, 2025.

The Cyber Security Ordinance has been criticized for largely preserving the regulatory and surveillance mechanisms of the CSA and DSA, potentially undermining the freedom of expression and right to privacy. Controversial provisions include the criminalization of content that is "insulting", "harassing", "defamatory", or that amounts to "hurting" religious values and sentiments, without defining these terms or integrating appropriate safeguards into the ordinance.

## **BARRIERS TO ASSEMBLY**

The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees the right to peaceful assembly, but only for citizens. Article 37 of the Constitution states: "Every citizen shall have the right to assemble and to participate in public meetings and processions peacefully and without arms, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of public order or public health."

Despite this constitutional protection, government authorities frequently impose legal and practical barriers to assembly, particularly when protests challenge state policies or involve opposition groups.

### **Advance Permission**

Organizers must secure prior permission from the local police authority to hold any public assembly. For example, a 2013 Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) [circular](#) requires organizers to submit an application to the Police Commissioner seven days in advance. While the office typically responds within five days, permission is often denied for gatherings perceived as critical of the government or any religion. Although denials may theoretically be appealed in the High Court, such challenges are rarely effective.

### **Time, Place, Manner Restrictions**

Authorities frequently impose limitations on the time, place, and manner of assemblies.

The government has also imposed a prohibition on ‘human chain’ protests, a popular form of peaceful demonstration.

## Content Restrictions

The government often restricts assemblies with political objectives. Law enforcement agencies often align with the ruling party and sometimes have been involved in attacking protests involving the opposition.

## Responsibility of Organizers

Organizers are held legally responsible for any misconduct, violence, or damage that occurs during assemblies. Under Section 29 of the [Dhaka Metropolitan Police \(DMP\) Ordinance](#), 1976, violations may lead to fines of BDT 500 or up to three months of imprisonment.

## Enforcement

In practice, government authorities frequently target assemblies protesting state actions. Law enforcement agencies may erect barriers and stop such meetings and processions by attacking participants with batons or firing tear gas shells in the name of “public safety.” In addition, police and ruling party activists often prevent assemblies planned by opposition groups.

In July 2024, authorities violently suppressed widespread student protests calling for reform of a civil service quota system, which reserves over half of public jobs for certain groups, including relatives of independence fighters, who tend to be among the political elite. These protests erupted after the High Court reinstated the quota system, which had been abolished in 2018. The protests escalated when members of the Bangladesh Chatra League—the student wing of the ruling Awami League party—attacked students protesting inside the Dhaka University campus. Government authorities responded to the escalating protests by shutting down the internet and using excessive force, resulting in more than 200 deaths and many more injuries.

In February 2025, UN human rights investigators accused the government, under then-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, of a coordinated and brutal response to the mass opposition in 2024. The investigators alleged that up to 1,400 people had been killed, primarily by state security forces, and that senior officials had directed “an official policy” of violent repression. Hasina, who had been in office for 15 years, ultimately fled to India by helicopter in August 2024 before crowds stormed her residence.

## Additional Resources

This section contains links to external reports and news reports relevant to civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

## GLOBAL INDEX RANKINGS

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best - worst possible)
<a href="#">UN Human Development Index</a>	130 (2023)	1 - 193
<a href="#">World Justice Project Rule of Law Index</a>	127 (2024)	1 - 142
<a href="#">Transparency International</a>	151 (2024)	1 - 180
<a href="#">Fund for Peace Fragile States Index</a>	37 (2024)	179 - 1

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best - worst possible)
<a href="#">Freedom House: Freedom in the World</a>	Status: Partly Free Political Rights Score: 16 Civil Liberties Score: 29 (2025)	Free/Partly Free/Not Free 40 - 0 60 - 0

## REPORTS

UN Universal Periodic Review Reports	<a href="#">Bangladesh UPR page</a>
UN Human Rights Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Bangladesh OHCHR page</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief on his mission to Bangladesh</a> (2016)</li> </ul>
U.S. State Department	<a href="#">2024 Human Rights Report: Bangladesh</a>
Fragile States Index Reports	<a href="#">Fund for Peace Fragile States Index</a>
IMF Country Reports	<a href="#">Bangladesh and the IMF</a>
Odikhar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief on his mission to Bangladesh</a> (2016)</li> </ul>
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law Online Library	<a href="#">Bangladesh</a>

## NEWS

**[Sheikh Hasina sentenced to death after crimes against humanity conviction](#)** (November 2025)  
Sheikh Hasina, the ousted Prime Minister of Bangladesh, has been sentenced to death after being found guilty of crimes against humanity for the violent suppression of student protests that led to the collapse of her government. A panel of three judges from the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), Bangladesh's domestic war crimes court, delivered their verdict, ruling that Hasina was responsible for inciting hundreds of extrajudicial killings carried out by law enforcement. The courtroom, where some victims' families were present, burst into applause as the judges delivered their sentence.

**[Civil society must unite to drive reforms](#)** (September 2025)

Civil society in Bangladesh must rise above fragmented efforts and take collective responsibility to ensure meaningful reforms, said Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). "Exercising a watch function is not just about documenting which reforms should go ahead but also about tracking how they are progressing and mobilising citizens to demand accountability," he said while chairing a citizens' dialogue in Dhaka. Rehman questioned the current reform discourse, pointing out that while the government has referred to dozens of reforms - later narrowed down to 84 - the public has little knowledge about their content or priority.

**[Crackdown on protesters may be crime against humanity](#)** (February 2025)

Former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her government tried to cling on to power using systematic, deadly violence against protesters that could amount to "crimes against humanity", the UN has said. UN human rights investigators accused the deposed government of a brutal response to mass opposition, in which they said up to 1,400 people had been killed, mostly by security forces. Hasina, who had been in office for 15 years, fled by helicopter to India shortly before crowds stormed her residence

last August.

### [\*\*Bangladesh's dawn: From street protests to systemic change\*\*](#) (October 2024)

Despite the grief and sense of loss, in my discussions with civil society, with students, with officials and others, there was palpable hope that this time, through this transition, things will be different. Students conveyed to me they had no choice but to take to the streets as there was no outlet through the state's mechanisms for their concerns to be heard. To restore social cohesion and trust in institutions of the state, it will be crucial to rebuild the civic space that was progressively strangled in recent years. This will require reforming repressive laws, as well as state institutions that have been in the habit of stifling dissent. – Volker Turk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

### [\*\*Internet outages and freedom of expression in Bangladesh\*\*](#) (October 2024)

In 2012, a resolution of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) stated, “the rights that people have offline must also be protected online, especially with regard to freedom of expression.” Later in 2016, the UNHRC condemned all measures that prevent the use of the internet as a violation of human rights. Even though Bangladesh does not acknowledge access to the internet as a human right, hindrance to internet access obviously affects the exercise of the human rights spelled out in Bangladesh's Constitution, resulting in violation of a number of rights.

### [\*\*Bangladesh's Leader Resigns and Flees Country After Protests\*\*](#) (August 2024)

Jubilant crowds thronged the streets of Bangladesh's capital after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled the country. The army chief said in a statement to the nation that the army would oversee the formation of an interim government. Ms. Hasina, 76, had ruled Bangladesh since 2009. She was forced out by weeks of protests that began peacefully and then transformed into deadly clashes with security forces. The student-led protests grew into a broader movement seeking the removal of Ms. Hasina, who was seen as an increasingly authoritarian leader. On the deadliest day of the protests, almost 100 people were reported killed in clashes between security forces and demonstrators across Bangladesh.

### [\*\*Victims of Bangladesh protest violence face dark future\*\*](#) (July 2024)

Hundreds of protesters and bystanders were hit in the eyes by pellets fired by security forces, and might lose vision forever — a lasting marker of the mayhem that engulfed the nation earlier this month. The devastating impact of pellet guns on eyesight hinges on the velocity and distance at which the pellets are fired. The severity of these injuries has prompted international condemnation, with Amnesty International calling for a ban on their use for crowd control in Indian-administered Kashmir a few years ago.

### [\*\*Witness testimony and video and photographic analysis confirm police used unlawful force against protesters\*\*](#) (July 2024)

Bangladeshi authorities used unlawful force against student protesters and failed to ensure their protection during the ongoing 'Bangla-Blockade' quota-reform protest across the country, said Amnesty International. Witness testimonies and video and photographic evidence analyzed and authenticated by Amnesty International and its Crisis Evidence Lab confirm the use of unlawful force by the police against student protesters.

### [\*\*Slowing protests reveal deep-rooted political challenges in Bangladesh\*\*](#) (July 2024)

The streets of Dhaka are less heated and violent than they were two weeks ago following a severe crackdown on dissent, including the imposition of a curfew and a top court ruling that reduced the quota of jobs reserved for descendants of Bangladesh's civil war veterans—the apparent cause of the student protests. Despite this concession to the protesters' demands, Bangladesh's political and social fabric is severely damaged. The recent demonstrations and subsequent lethal crackdown have shocked many Bangladeshis, potentially marking an irreversible turning point.

### [\*\*Student protests over Bangladesh job quota leave at least 100 injured\*\*](#) (July 2024)

Police fired tear gas and charged with batons during violent clashes between protesters rallying against quotas for government jobs and a pro-government student body, leaving at least 100 people wounded. The quota system reserves more than half of well-paid civil service posts, totalling hundreds of thousands of government jobs, for specific groups, including children of fighters in the country's 1971 war of

independence from Pakistan. The quota system also reserves government jobs for women, disabled people and ethnic minority groups. The system was suspended in 2018, which drew similar protests. But last month, the High Court ruled for the 30 percent quota for veterans' descendants to be restored.

### [Student protests against quotas for government posts](#) (July 2024)

Tens of thousands of young people have been on the streets for five days in the capital and across the country. They are demanding reform of the system that favours relatives of independence fighters. At Comilla University, police chased students and opened fire, while in Chittagong they used batons against protesters. Amnesty International expressed concern over reports that at least 20 people, including students, were injured in the police crackdown.

### [UN experts urge government to carry out major human rights reforms](#) (February 2024)

UN experts urged the Government of Bangladesh to carry out major human rights reforms to reverse repressive trends in the country and restore political dialogue and participation. In the lead up to the elections, some 25,000 opposition leaders and supporters were arrested and 56 people killed in election related violence. There were also cases of torture and deliberate denial of healthcare for political prisoners and excessive use of force by law enforcement authorities. There have been no independent investigations into these violations, the experts said.

### [Why Opposition Parties in Bangladesh Are Boycotting Next Month's Elections](#) (January 2024)

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has secured a fourth consecutive term in office, according to the country's electoral commission, maintaining her title as the world's longest serving female head of government in an election boycotted by the main opposition party. Bangladesh, home to 170 million people, is the first country in South Asia this year to head to the polls. But turnout was low, with only 40% of approximately 120 million eligible voters taking part, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal said at a polling briefing early on Sunday. The country had seen political unrest leading to Sunday's general election. Polling booths were set ablaze on the eve of the vote, with four people, including two children, killed in a train fire.

### [Why Opposition Parties in Bangladesh Are Boycotting Next Month's Elections](#) (December 2023)

Bangladesh's largest opposition party has decided to boycott next month's general elections, saying that it cannot participate in a "sham vote." Pro-democracy activists and analysts have expressed concern that there is no possibility the elections will be free and fair.

### [Condemnation of sentence of rights activists Adilur](#) (September 2023)

The United Nations rights bodies, the European Union, and citizen rights groups and human rights activists continued condemning the jail sentence of internationally acclaimed human rights defender Adilur Rahman Khan and his colleague ASM Nasiruddin Elan in a cyber case over their fact-finding report in 2013. The Dhaka Cyber Tribunal jailed Adilur Rahman Khan and ASM Nasiruddin Elan for two years each for their report about the violence and operations during the Hefazat-e-Islam demonstrations on May 5-6, 2013.

### [UN human rights chief urges Bangladesh to halt abuse of digital law](#) (April 2023)

UN human rights chief, Volker Turk, called on the Bangladesh government to immediately suspend the abusive practices of the country's controversial Digital Security Act (DSA). "I am concerned that the Digital Security Act is being used across Bangladesh to arrest, harass and intimidate journalists and human rights defenders, and to muzzle critical voices online," Turk said in a statement issued by the world's top rights defending body from its Geneva office.

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