

Research Briefing

23 January 2025

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Bangladesh: The fall of the Hasina Government and recent political developments



Summary


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Summary

On 5 August 2024, Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, [fled the country](#). She had been in the post since 2009 and had won the [most recent parliamentary elections](#) in January 2024, though these were boycotted by the opposition parties. An [interim government](#) led by economist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus is now running the country.

While Hasina and her Awami League party had overseen [economic growth and development](#), there had been [discontent at the alleged high levels of corruption](#) and concerns that supporters of the party benefited the most from the increased prosperity.

Concerns had also been raised about Hasina's government [growing increasingly autocratic](#), with reported stifling of dissent leaving [little space for opposition political parties to operate](#). In the run up to the January 2024 elections, there was a [mass arrest of leaders and supporters](#) of the main opposition party, the Bangladesh National Party.

The principal reason for the fall of the government was mass student-led protests that started in July 2024 against [a quota system for public sector jobs](#). Bangladesh's Supreme Court had reinstated the system scrapped in 2018, which gave 30% of jobs to the descendants of those who fought for Bangladesh in its 1971 War of Independence. The protestors demanded that most jobs be awarded on merit. [Dozens of protestors were reportedly killed and hundreds injured](#) as the government responded to the demonstrations.

The new interim government is facing a number of challenges, including with its economy, and in December 2024 it [asked for further funding from the International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF) on top of the current financial package it is receiving from the IMF.

Tensions have been rising between Bangladesh and India. Sheikh Hasina fled to India after the fall of her government, and Bangladesh's [courts have issued an arrest warrant for her actions during the quota protests](#), and the interim government [has formally requested her extradition back to Bangladesh](#). Attacks against Bangladesh's minority Hindu population, and the [arrest of a Hindu religious leader Chinmoy Krishna Das](#), have sparked anger in India, and led to an [attack on Bangladesh's diplomatic mission in the Indian city of Agartala](#) by a group of protestors in December 2024.

Bangladesh's parliament [was dissolved in August](#) when the interim government was appointed. Dates have not been set yet for new elections, with Muhammad Yunus saying his [government must implement reforms before they can take place](#).

This briefing looks at the roots of the political crisis in Bangladesh's political history, the quota protests, and the challenges facing the new interim government, as well as the UK Government's response to these events.

1 Bangladesh's political system and history

1.1 Overview of political system, parties and Bangladesh's independence

Political system¹

Executive power in Bangladesh is held by the Prime Minister, who heads the Council of Ministers (Cabinet). 90% of the Council of Ministers must be members of Parliament (the Jatiya Sangsad, or House of the Nation).

The role of the Bangladesh President is largely ceremonial. Presidents are elected by the Parliament for a five-year term.

The President appoints the Prime Minister and, on the latter's recommendation, other ministers. However, the constitution states "The President shall appoint as Prime Minister the member of Parliament who appears to him to command the support of the majority of the members of Parliament".² Under the current constitution, this has always been the leader of the largest party in the Parliament.

The Parliament is unicameral and serves a five-year term. It comprises 350 members: 300 of whom are elected by universal suffrage and an additional 50 seats are reserved for women which are distributed among the parties in proportion to the number of seats they won.

History of Bangladesh and democracy³

Splits between Bangladesh's two main political parties, the Awami League (AL), and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), go back to the country's formation in 1971.

Colonial India, after becoming independent from the UK in 1947, was partitioned into two new states, India and Pakistan. Pakistan was at that time

¹ Largely taken from Europa World, [Bangladesh: Profile: Constitution and Government](#), accessed 30 November 2023.

² Bangladesh Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, [The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#), Clause 56, accessed 30 November 2023.

³ This section is taken primarily from two sources, Europa World, [Bangladesh: Recent History](#), Professor Pranab Kumar Panday, accessed 30 November 2023; and Anam Zakaria "[Remembering the war of 1971 in East Pakistan](#)", Al Jazeera, 16 Dec 2019.

formed of two constituent parts: West Pakistan (modern-day Pakistan) and East Pakistan (modern-day Bangladesh).

While both parts were predominantly Muslim, West Pakistan and East Pakistan had linguistic and cultural differences, and Bengalis in East Pakistan started fighting for greater rights soon after the country's founding. An Al Jazeera article about events at the time lists some of their grievances:

The refusal to accept Bengali as a state language of Pakistan in the early years after Partition, economic disparity between the two parts, the hegemony of the West Pakistani ruling elite over Pakistan, martial laws, and a demeaning attitude towards Bengali culture and the Bengali population soured relations between the two parts.⁴

In the 1960s, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Sheikh Mujib), then head of East Pakistan's largest political party, the AL, and father of the recently deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, began campaigning for greater autonomy for East Pakistan. After being imprisoned between 1966 and 1969, Sheikh Mujib led the AL to a landslide victory in 1970. The AL became the largest party in the East and also gained a majority of seats across both parts of Pakistan.

However, Pakistan's then President, General Yahya Khan, would not accept the appointment of Sheikh Mujib as Prime Minister, and negotiations on a possible compromise broke down. The convening of the new National Assembly was postponed indefinitely in March 1971, leading to violent protests in East Pakistan. The AL decided that the province should unilaterally break away from Pakistan, and on 26 March Sheikh Mujib proclaimed the independence of the People's Republic of Bangladesh ('Bengal Nation').

Major General Ziaur Rahman (General Zia), a senior member of the armed forces in East Pakistan, also broadcast a message in support of independence and Sheikh Mujib, calling himself Provisional Commander-in-Chief of the Bangladesh Liberation Army. General Zia's widow, Khaleda Zia, went on to lead the BNP.

Civil war broke out after the declaration of independence by Mujib. President Yahya Khan outlawed the AL and arrested its leaders. By April 1971, the Pakistan Army dominated the eastern province. In August, Sheikh Mujib was secretly put on trial in West Pakistan. However, resistance continued from the Liberation Army of East Bengal (the Mukhti Bahini), which launched a major offensive in November. As a result of the conflict, an estimated 9.5 million refugees crossed into India. On 4 December, India declared war on Pakistan and intervened in support of the Mukhti Bahini. Pakistan surrendered on 16 December, and Bangladesh became independent. Pakistan became then solely made up of its former western wing.

During the War of Independence, members of the East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami, the precursor of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI), now the most prominent Islamist party in Bangladesh were said to have "provided full

⁴ Anam Zakaria, "[Remembering the war of 1971 in East Pakistan](#)", Al Jazeera, 16 Dec 2019.

support to the Pakistani Army in their efforts against the freedom fighters of Bangladesh/East-Pakistan” during the 1971 war.⁵

The West Pakistani Government created the ‘East-Pakistan Central Peace Committee’, which was a vital part of their military operations against the Bengali nationalists. Ghulam Azam, then leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, was one of the founding members and senior leaders of the committee.

The committee, alongside the West Pakistan military forces, is accused of having “actively participated in committing war crimes” against civilians and fighters on the pro-independence side.⁶

In 2010, the Awami League-led government set up an International Crimes Tribunal to investigate abuses committed during the 1971 War of Independence (see the next section for more).⁷

1.2

Political history since restoration of democracy in 1991⁸

Overview

Bangladesh was ruled by a military dictatorship between 1982 and 1991. Democracy was restored in 1991 in large part because of the joint actions of Khaleda Zia, leader of the BNP, and Sheikh Hasina, leader of the AL, who together organised a mass uprising against the military regime.⁹

However, once the military dictatorship was removed, the two political leaders became rivals, and for two decades Bangladesh experienced turbulent alternation between the AL and the BNP. The army, which has always played a political role and is traditionally hostile to the AL, periodically acted as a “circuit breaker” by seizing power.¹⁰

⁵ European Foundation for South Asian Studies, [Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh: Past, Present and Future](#), March 2017.

⁶ As above. See also Observer Research Foundation, Mohammed Sinan Siyech, [Understanding the Bangladesh Jamaat e-Islami's return](#), 15 July 2023.

⁷ “[Bangladesh indicts Jamaat-e-Islami four on war crimes](#)”, BBC News, 26 July 2010; and “[Bangladesh war crimes trial: Key accused](#)”, BBC News, 4 September 2016.

⁸ This section, unless otherwise referenced is taken from, Europa World, [Bangladesh: Recent History](#), Professor Pranab Kumar Panday, accessed 10 September 2024; and Taj Hashmi, [Fifty Years of Bangladesh, 1971-2021: Crises of Culture, Development, Governance, and Identity](#) [online], 2022, Chapter 6: “Dynastic Democracy” Under the “Battling Begums,” 1991-2021.

⁹ The army or military officers had intervened in Bangladeshi politics on several occasions before this. Due to his role in the War of Independence Sheikh Mujib became Prime Minister and then President of Bangladesh, but was killed during an army coup in 1975, alongside several members of his family. After further coups, General Zia later took power in Bangladesh, becoming President in 1977. He founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. He was then assassinated by a group of army officers in 1981.

¹⁰ “[Violence rolls on in cutthroat world of Bangladeshi politics](#)”, The Border Mail, 2 August 2013.

From 2014 until the 2024 protests, the AL became the dominant party. It has been accused of eroding democratic norms to keep itself in power during this period.¹¹

Brief political history, 1991 to 2018

Below are the results of the elections held since the restoration of democracy in 1991, along with other significant political events:

- **February 1991:** The BNP became the largest party, winning 140 of the 300 directly elected seats. It formed a government with the Islamist Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) party, which won 35. The AL was the largest opposition party with 88 seats. Khaleda Zia, leader of the BNP, became Prime Minister for the first time.
- **February 1996:** The BNP won 278 of the 300 seats, but the election was boycotted by the major opposition parties including the AL and BJI, who demanded that the election be overseen by a neutral caretaker government. After mass strikes and protests, the BNP-dominated Parliament changed the constitution to bring in the caretaker system, and fresh elections were held in June 1996.
- **June 1996:** The AL became the largest party, winning 146 of the 300 directly elected seats. Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister for the first time. The BNP won 116 seats. Hasina's government becomes the first to complete its full five-year parliamentary term.
- **October 2001:** The Zia-led BNP returned to power, winning 193 seats to the AL's 62. The BNP formed a coalition government with the BJI, which won 17 seats.
- **2006 to 2008:** Elections were postponed between 2006 and 2008. The caretaker government that took control in October 2006 at the end of the Zia government's five-year term postponed elections due to widespread violence. The military intervened in January 2007 to support the government, and effectively took control.¹² The caretaker government started an anti-corruption drive. During this period, Sheikh Hasina was charged with murder and Khaleda Zia was put under virtual house arrest while she was investigated on charges of corruption.¹³
- **December 2008:** A general election was finally held after a two-year hiatus. The AL and their electoral coalition won a landslide victory, winning 230 seats to the BNP's 30.
- **2010:** The Awami League-led government set up an International Crimes Tribunal to investigate abuses committed during the 1971 War of

¹¹ "[Bangladesh: What's next after PM Sheikh Hasina's reelection?](#)", DW, 8 January 2024.

¹² United States Institute for Peace, [On the Issues: Bangladesh](#), 27 April 2007.

¹³ See Congressional Research Service, [Bangladesh: Political Turmoil and Transition](#), 30 May 2008; and "[Hasina charged in murder case](#)", Al Jazeera, 11 April 2007.

Independence. Several senior BJI leaders were arrested and investigated as part of the tribunal. Five were executed between 2013 and 2015 after being found guilty of war crimes.¹⁴

- **June 2011:** Sheikh Hasina's government changed the constitution, removing the caretaker government system. It highlighted that elections weren't held for two years under the previous caretaker government, and denied claims by the opposition that it was trying to rig the next election. The Supreme Court had found the law unconstitutional the month before.¹⁵
- **January 2014:** AL won another landslide victory, gaining 234 seats. However, most of the opposition parties, including the BNP, boycotted the elections, and demanded that the caretaker government system be reinstated. The BNP also claimed that Zia was under virtual house arrest, with police surrounding her home and not allowing her to receive visitors. In the previous year, several senior BNP leaders had been arrested.¹⁶ In August 2013, Bangladesh's High Court ruled that the BJI's registration as a political party was illegal, and determined that it could not put forward candidates at elections.¹⁷
- **February 2018:** Khaleda Zia was jailed for five years after being found guilty of corruption.¹⁸
- **December 2018:** AL won a third straight victory, gaining 257 seats. The BNP and other opposition parties did contest the vote, but they won just eight seats in total, seven of them for the BNP. The opposition called the results "farcical" and claimed there was evidence of ballot-stuffing and other serious irregularities.¹⁹

1.3

January 2024 elections

In January 2024, Bangladesh held parliamentary elections. Incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League (AL) party won a fourth

¹⁴ "[Bangladesh indicts Jamaat-e-Islami four on war crimes](#)", BBC News, 26 July 2010; and "[Bangladesh war crimes trial: Key accused](#)", BBC News, 4 September 2016.

¹⁵ "[Bangladesh ends caretaker government arrangement](#)", BBC News, 30 June 2011.

¹⁶ "[Bangladesh faces shutdown as part of protest over opposition arrests](#)", The Guardian, 22 April 2013.

¹⁷ "[Bangladesh court declares Jamaat illegal](#)", Al Jazeera, 1 August 2013.

¹⁸ "[Bangladesh ex-PM Khaleda Zia jailed amid clashes](#)", BBC News, 8 February 2018.

¹⁹ See "[Bangladesh PM Hasina wins thumping victory in elections opposition reject as 'farcical'](#)", The Guardian, 31 December 2018; and "[Bangladesh election: PM Sheikh Hasina wins landslide in disputed vote](#)", BBC News, 31 December 2018.

consecutive term in office (and her fifth in total). The AL and its allies won a total of 225 of the 300 parliamentary seats.²⁰

The German news site DW reported that “Hasina's control over parliament is even higher ... as many smaller opposition groups and independent candidates are allied with the ruling party”.²¹

The main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), boycotted the elections, and the BBC said that there were “mass arrests of BNP leaders and supporters” in the run-up to polling day.²²

The boycott was reflected in the turnout figures. Official figures suggested a turnout of 40%, though the BBC reported that “critics say even those numbers may be inflated”.²³ The previous election in 2018 had a voter turnout of more than 80%.

A Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office spokesperson released a statement after the results, which said democratic standards had not been “consistently met” during the election, and noted the lack of participation by some political parties:

The United Kingdom notes the results of the 12th Parliamentary Elections in Bangladesh, which took place on 7 January 2024.

Democratic elections depend on credible, open, and fair competition. Respect for human rights, rule of law and due process are essential elements of the democratic process. These standards were not consistently met during the election period. We are concerned at the significant number of arrests of opposition party members before polling day.

We condemn the acts of intimidation and violence that took place prior to and during the campaign period. Such conduct has no place in political life.

Not all political parties took part in the elections. The Bangladeshi people did not therefore have the fullest range of voting options.

The United Kingdom and Bangladesh share a deep and historic friendship. Creating the conditions for a sustainable political settlement and vibrant civil society will enable long-term growth. We encourage all political parties to address their differences and find a common way forward in the interests of the people of Bangladesh. We will continue to support this process.²⁴

²⁰ “[Bangladesh election: PM Sheikh Hasina wins fourth term in controversial vote](#)”, BBC News, 8 January 2024.

²¹ “[Bangladesh: What's next after PM Sheikh Hasina's reelection?](#)”, DW 8 January 2024.

²² “[Bangladesh election: PM Sheikh Hasina wins fourth term in controversial vote](#)”, BBC News, 8 January 2024.

²³ As above.

²⁴ FCDO, [Bangladesh January 2024 election: FCDO statement](#), 8 January 2024.

The United States Institute for Peace, in a March 2024 analysis of the elections, said they had “cemented the country’s transition to a ‘dominant-party’ political system”.²⁵

A report by DW, agreed. It quoted Jasmin Lorch, a senior researcher at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), who labelled it an “autocratic election”. She went on to say:

There was no real opposition party in the electoral race, and the Awami League government controlled the electoral process entirely.

Overall, this was an autocratic election, which was aimed at cementing the power of the ruling party and creating a democratic façade for what is, in fact, an autocratic political regime.²⁶

²⁵ USIP, [A Perilous Moment for Bangladesh’s Democracy](#), 4 March 2024.

²⁶ [“Bangladesh: What’s next after PM Sheikh Hasina’s reelection?”](#), DW 8 January 2024.

2 Quota protests and the fall of the Hasina government

2.1 Student protests against the quota system

The quota system

On 1 July 2024, groups of students began protesting against a quota system for government jobs. Under the system, more than 50% of jobs were reserved for “underrepresented” groups, for example 10% for women, 5% for minority ethnic groups and 10% for those from poorer areas of the country.²⁷ The most unpopular part of the quota system, however, was the 30% of jobs reserved for the children and grandchildren of ‘freedom fighters’: those “who took part in the 1971 Liberation War with Pakistan, which led to the creation of independent Bangladesh”.²⁸

Sheikh Hasina’s government scrapped the quota system in 2018 after mass protests, also led by students.²⁹ The Economist magazine reported at the time that the protestors were angry not just about the quotas but “the system of favouritism and patronage built by the ruling party”.³⁰ It went on to add “the bureaucracy has issued some 250,000 documents certifying the bearer as a freedom fighter. Many recipients obtained them through bribery. Others use forgeries”.³¹

Reinstatement of quota system sparks protests

On 5 June 2024, Bangladesh’s Supreme Court reversed the 2018 decision by the government to scrap the quota system.³² The decision was reaffirmed by the court in early July. At the same time, teachers from universities were also protesting about being enrolled into a new national pension scheme, further escalating tensions on campuses.³³

²⁷ “[What’s behind Bangladesh’s violent quota protests?](#)”, Al Jazeera, 16 July 2024.

²⁸ International Crisis Group, ‘[Bangladesh on Edge after Crushing Quota Protests](#)’, 25 July 2024.

²⁹ “[History of the quota system in Bangladesh](#)”, The Daily Star, 10 July 2024.

³⁰ “[Protests in Bangladesh put an end to a corrupt quota system](#)”, The Economist, 21 April 2018.

³¹ As above.

³² Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, ‘[HC judgment for reinstating FF quota in govt service upheld for now](#)’, 4 July 2024.

³³ See “[Pension scheme: University teachers to continue strike as demands not met](#)”, Dhaka Tribune, 14 July 2014; and “[Bangladeshi University Students Protest Quota System Reforms](#)”, The Diplomat, 10 July 2024

On 1 July, students from several public universities blocked major roads, demanding the removal of the quota system. Their placards and slogans were reported to include: “Let the weapon of 2018 roar again”, “Quota or Merit”, “Students’ action, direct action”, and “No more tears for the meritorious”.³⁴ The Asia-focused Diplomat magazine said that “a significant number of students remain unemployed after graduation”.³⁵

Wider discontent fuels protests

Also examining the origins of the protests, the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted that they came at a time when “Bangladesh’s economy is struggling, largely due to mismanagement and corruption, leading to fewer job opportunities for young people in the private sector”. The ICG also said that there was “growing frustration at the government’s authoritarianism, which enabled it to secure a fourth consecutive term in a stage-managed election in January”.³⁶

An analysis by BBC News found that under Sheikh Hasina’s time in government, Bangladesh has been “transformed” with “new roads, bridges, factories and even a metro rail”, and that “per capita income tripled in the last decade as more than 25 million people were lifted out of poverty over 20 years”.³⁷

However, it also reported that there were “allegations of rampant corruption”, and many “felt that the growth was mostly helping those close to the Prime Minister’s Awami League”.³⁸ The article noted in particular that “social media in Bangladesh in recent months was dominated by discussions about corruption allegations against some of Ms Hasina’s former top officials – including a former army chief, ex-police chief, senior tax officers and state recruitment officials”.³⁹

Dr Samina Luthfa, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Dhaka, told the BBC that “the anger against the government and the ruling party have been accumulating for a long time”, and “people are showing their anger now. People resort to protest if they don’t have any recourse left”.⁴⁰

Bangladesh Government response

An analysis by the Diplomat reported that Sheikh Hasina’s “tone changed” during the 2024 protests. The magazine said this was noticeably different to her response to the 2018 protests, when she acknowledged the motivating grievances. It said in 2024 she dismissed the anti-quota movement as unjustified, especially after the Supreme Court verdict, saying “Students are

³⁴ [“Bangladeshi University Students Protest Quota System Reforms”](#), The Diplomat, 10 July 2024.

³⁵ As above.

³⁶ International Crisis Group, [‘Bangladesh on Edge after Crushing Quota Protests’](#), 25 July 2024.

³⁷ [“What sparked the protests that toppled Bangladesh’s PM?”](#), BBC News, 20 July 2024.

³⁸ [“What sparked the protests that toppled Bangladesh’s PM?”](#), BBC News, 20 July 2024.

³⁹ [“What sparked the protests that toppled Bangladesh’s PM?”](#), BBC News, 20 July 2024.

⁴⁰ As above.

wasting their time unnecessarily in the name of the movement. After the verdict of the court, there is no justification for the anti-quota movement”.⁴¹

The ICG also said that the government blamed opposition parties, particularly the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami, for organising the protests and the violence that had occurred, but that it “provided little evidence to support its claim”. It added:

Although the BNP offered public support to the students and some of its followers joined them on the streets, the party was not directly involved in organising the marches while few, if any, of those killed appear to have been from the BNP, Jamaat or other opposition parties.⁴²

Protests turn violent

Hasina’s government began to escalate its response as the protests grew bigger and more violent. On 19 July, the government imposed a nationwide curfew and cut off internet access nationwide.⁴³

The government also called in the army to support the police, and violence increased against protesters. By 25 July, the ICG reported that “at least 200 people have been killed and thousands wounded throughout Bangladesh since 16 July”.⁴⁴

The UK Government’s Minister for the Indo-Pacific, Catherine West, put out a statement on 22 July expressing the government’s deep concern at the violence, calling for calm, and for internet services to be restored:

The UK is deeply concerned by the violence we have seen in Bangladesh in recent days, with reports of hundreds killed and thousands injured. The loss of life is unacceptable. Peaceful protestors must not be subject to violence.

The rights to protest, to peacefully assemble and to express different political views are rights which the UK holds dear and must be protected.

Access to the internet and communications services must be restored quickly so people in Bangladesh can be reconnected with their families and friends in the UK and across the globe.

We urge an end to the violence and loss of life and call on all sides to find ways to restore calm across Bangladesh, including by establishing a pathway for constructive political dialogue in the interests of the people of Bangladesh.

Our thoughts are with everyone affected. The people-to-people connections between our two countries are strong, with a strong Bangladeshi community in the UK contributing enormously.⁴⁵

⁴¹ “[Bangladeshi University Students Protest Quota System Reforms](#)”, The Diplomat, 10 July 2024

⁴² International Crisis Group, ‘[Bangladesh on Edge after Crushing Quota Protests](#)’, 25 July 2024.

⁴³ [Bangladesh imposes curfew as protests continue](#), BBC News, 19 July 2024.

⁴⁴ International Crisis Group, ‘[Bangladesh on Edge after Crushing Quota Protests](#)’, 25 July 2024.

⁴⁵ Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, [Situation in Bangladesh: FCDO Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State’s statement](#), 22 July 2024.

Hasina's government launched its own appeal against the Supreme Court judgment, and in a swift decision on 21 July, the court largely reversed its previous ruling, stating that just 5% of jobs could be reserved for the relatives of veterans.⁴⁶

However, the decision came too late to stop the protest movement.

2.2 Fall of the Hasina Government

On 5 August, as tens of thousands of protestors took to the streets, and the government reportedly instigated another mass shutdown of mobile internet services, it was reported that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had left her residence in the capital Dhaka "for a safer place".⁴⁷ Shortly after this, news outlets reported that she had left the country for India.

Protestors subsequently stormed her residence, and both a statue and museum dedicated to her father, independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, were reported to have been attacked. Widespread looting in Dhaka was also reported.⁴⁸

Later that day, General Waker-Uz-Zaman, head of Bangladesh's army, said in a televised address that Sheikh Hasina had resigned, and after discussions with "all political parties", it had been decided that an interim government would be formed.⁴⁹

President Mohammed Shahabuddin announced that he had chaired a meeting of army chiefs and political representatives, and that as well as forming an interim government, new elections would be called and the national curfew lifted. The President also ordered the release of jailed former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, and all those detained during the protests.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ "[Bangladesh court scraps job quotas after deadly unrest](#)", BBC News, 21 July 2024.

⁴⁷ "[Live reporting: Bangladesh parliament dissolved after PM Sheikh Hasina's shock exit](#)", BBC News, 5 August 2024.

⁴⁸ "[Live reporting: Bangladesh parliament dissolved after PM Sheikh Hasina's shock exit](#)", BBC News, 5 August 2024.

⁴⁹ "[Who is the Bangladesh army chief who announced Sheikh Hasina's resignation?](#)", Reuters, 5 August 2024.

⁵⁰ "[Live reporting: Bangladesh parliament dissolved after PM Sheikh Hasina's shock exit](#)", BBC News, 5 August 2024.

3 New caretaker government and challenges ahead

3.1 Caretaker government led by Muhammad Yunus takes charge

Parliament dissolved and interim government formed

On 6 August, the President dissolved Bangladesh's Parliament, one of the student protestors' key demands.⁵¹

On 7 August, a spokesperson for the President announced that the new interim government would be led by the Nobel-Prize winning economist Muhammad Yunus (see box below). Yunus is being called Chief Advisor rather than Prime Minister. Student leaders of the protestors were reported to have requested that Yunus take up the role.⁵²

In a statement, Yunus congratulated the "brave students who took the lead" in the protests and described the resignation of Hasina on Monday as "our second Victory Day", after Bangladesh's Independence Day in 1971.⁵³

However, he also called upon people to remain calm and refrain from violence:

Let us make the best use of our new victory. Let us not let this slip away because of our mistakes. I fervently appeal to everybody to stay calm. Please refrain from all kinds of violence. I appeal to all students, members of all political parties and non-political people to stay calm. This is our beautiful country with lots of exciting possibilities.

[...] Violence is our enemy. Please don't create more enemies. Be calm and get ready to build the country.⁵⁴

On 8 August, Yunus announced an interim Cabinet, which included two leaders of the Students Against Discrimination organisation that led the recent protests. According to the DW news organisation, the Cabinet

⁵¹ "[Bangladesh Parliament dissolved, president's office says](#)", Reuters, 6 August 2024.

⁵² "[Bangladesh: Student protestors call for Nobel laureate to advise government as they prepare to meet military](#)", Sky News, 6 August 2024.

⁵³ "[Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus urges peace as he is sworn in as Bangladesh leader](#)", The Guardian, 7 August 2024.

⁵⁴ "[Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus urges peace as he is sworn in as Bangladesh leader](#)", The Guardian, 7 August 2024.

members were “given the title of advisors, not ministers” and were “selected in consultation with student leaders, the military, and civil society representatives”.⁵⁵ DW reported further details about the new members of the interim body:

Prominent rights activist Adilur Rahman Khan, who was sentenced to two years in jail during Hasina's rule, will take the helm of the Ministry of Industries.

Other members of the new cabinet included a former head of Bangladesh's central bank, a former foreign secretary, an environmental lawyer and a retired brigadier general. The cabinet also includes one member from Bangladesh's minority Hindu community as well as one indigenous person hailing from the Chittagong Hill Tracts.⁵⁶

No Awami League members were asked to join the Cabinet.⁵⁷

UK Government response to caretaker government

The UK Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, said in a statement on 8 August that the UK “welcomes the appointment of the interim government in Bangladesh, led by Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus” and that the interim government “has the UK's support as it works to restore peace and order, for the sake of the Bangladeshi people” and further “urge[d] all actors to prevent further violence and loss of life”.⁵⁸

Answering a parliamentary question, Catherine West said that the British High Commissioner in Dhaka met with Muhammad Yunus and the interim government's adviser for foreign affairs in August, and that the UK High Commission “continues to engage with the Interim Government in Bangladesh on key priorities”.⁵⁹

New government actions

On 27 August, the interim government announced it had formed a five-member commission led by a retired judge to investigate cases of enforced disappearances between 2009 and 2024, when Sheikh Hasina was leading the government. Odhikar, a prominent Bangladeshi human rights organisation, estimates that out of over 700 people who were forcibly disappeared under Hasina's rule, nearly 100 people remain missing.⁶⁰

On 28 August, the interim government announced that it had lifted a ban on the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party that had been imposed by Hasina's government using anti-terrorist legislation on 1 August.⁶¹ The party was

⁵⁵ “[Bangladesh's Yunus names student leaders in interim cabinet](#)”, DW, 9 August 2024.

⁵⁶ “[Bangladesh's Yunus names student leaders in interim cabinet](#)”, DW, 9 August 2024.

⁵⁷ “[Bangladesh's Yunus names student leaders in interim cabinet](#)”, DW, 9 August 2024.

⁵⁸ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Bangladesh interim government appointed: Foreign Secretary's statement](#), 9 August 2024,

⁵⁹ [Bangladesh: Foreign Relations \[WIN 3199\]](#), 5 September 2024.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch, [Bangladesh: Government Sets up Disappearances Inquiry](#), 29 August 2024.

⁶¹ “[Bangladesh's interim government lifts ban on Jamaat-e-Islami party](#)”, Al Jazeera, 28 August 2024.

barred from contesting elections in 2013, and so excluded from polls in 2014, 2018 and January 2024. Jamaat-e-Islami said it would file a petition at the Supreme Court to seek to restore its registration with the Bangladesh Election Commission, so it can take part in elections again.⁶²

1 Muhammad Yunus⁶³

Muhammad Yunus is an economist who won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2006. He won the prize alongside Grameen Bank, a community development bank which he founded. Grameen Bank provides microcredit (small loans to impoverished people who usually can't access finance), without the need for collateral.

Yunus was born in 1940 in Chittagong (then part of British India), the third of 14 children, "five of whom died young".⁶⁴

After teaching economics at Chittagong University from 1961 to 1965, Yunus won a Fulbright scholarship. He studied and taught at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, USA, from 1965 to 1972, earning a PhD in economics in 1969. He returned to Chittagong University as head of the economics department in 1972.

In 1974, when a famine struck Bangladesh, Yunus began to look at ways to help farmers, focusing on access to credit. He then began his programme of "micro" loans aimed at providing a "credit system designed to meet the needs of people experiencing poverty in Bangladesh".⁶⁵ This later became the Grameen Bank. By 2003, Grameen was working with 36,000 villages in Bangladesh.⁶⁶

In 2007, after winning the Nobel Prize, Yunus entered politics, founding a political party, Nagorik Shakti (Citizen Power). However, he abandoned the project a few months later, citing a lack of support.

The Financial Times reported that, while popular abroad, "Hasina's government had pursued a legal vendetta against him [Yunus] and his operations, slandering him as a 'bloodsucker' of the poor". In January 2024,

⁶² "[Bangladesh's interim government lifts ban on Jamaat-e-Islami party](#)", Al Jazeera, 28 August 2024.

⁶³ This Box is drawn from Britannica, [Biographies: Economists: Muhammad Yunus](#), Updated 4 September 2024; "[Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate charged with restoring peace in Bangladesh](#)", Financial Times, 9 August 2024; and "[Who is Muhammad Yunus, the new leader of Bangladesh's interim government?](#)", The Guardian, 7 August 2024.

⁶⁴ "[Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate charged with restoring peace in Bangladesh](#)", Financial Times, 9 August 2024.

⁶⁵ Britannica, [Biographies: Economists: Muhammad Yunus](#), Updated 4 September 2024.

⁶⁶ "[Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate charged with restoring peace in Bangladesh](#)", Financial Times, 9 August 2024.

he was sentenced to six months in prison “in what his supporters called a trumped-up case — one that has been dropped after Hasina’s overthrow”.⁶⁷

3.2 Protests, continued unrest and ‘vigilante justice’

A month after the fall of the Hasina government, the Associated Press (AP) reported that “unrest persists” in Bangladesh, mentioning strikes by garment workers demanding better wages that “have forced about 100 factories to shut down”. It said that “tensions are simmering, with lingering but widespread anger against Hasina and her Awami League”.⁶⁸

The AP reports that the former Prime Minister is now facing “murder charges in more than 100 cases”, and there are many more cases “registered against those associated with Hasina, her party or her government — from former ministers and judges to journalists”. It also reports that these individuals have “been attacked, stopped from leaving the country and even jailed. Rights groups have also condemned these lump charges”.⁶⁹

Zillur Rahman, executive director of a Dhaka-based think tank, described many of these cases as legally weak and politically driven. He told the AP that this form of “vigilante justice” has sparked fears that “the system that Hasina perpetuated is still alive, just the victims have changed”.⁷⁰

Calls for Sheikh Hasina to be extradited from India to face trial for her alleged crimes, began soon after she fled the country. Writing in an article for the Conversation website on 5 September, Raisul Islam Sourav said that “at least 94 criminal cases have been lodged against Hasina and her cabinet members, followers and aides”.⁷¹ Sourav added that “Courts do have the authority to hold a trial in Hasina’s absence. But this is unlikely to be fruitful as there will be questions regarding fairness, due process and the motive behind the trial”. He went on to say that “Bangladesh can, in theory, request the return of Hasina from India. New Delhi and Dhaka signed an extradition treaty in 2013, which was subsequently amended in 2016 to simplify the process”.⁷² But he noted this would not be a simple process, as

⁶⁷ “[Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate charged with restoring peace in Bangladesh](#)”, Financial Times, 9 August 2024.

⁶⁸ “[Students in Bangladesh forced out the country’s leader a month ago. Where do things stand now?](#)”, Associated Press, 5 September 2024.

⁶⁹ As above.

⁷⁰ As above.

⁷¹ “[Could Bangladesh’s former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, be extradited to the country to stand trial?](#)”, The Conversation, 5 September 2024.

⁷² As above.

the “treaty itself also contains several provisions that could enable India to refuse an appeal for Hasina’s extradition”.⁷³

Justice for those killed in July and August 2024 unrest

Al Jazeera reported in September 2024, that the interim government faced “growing pressure to ensure accountability and justice for the people killed [during the quota protests]”.

A [preliminary report from the United Nations](#), released at the end of August 2024, said more than 600 people may have been killed during the unrest in July and August. Al Jazeera said that “those killed were largely student protesters and bystanders but also journalists and members of the security forces. The report attributes most killings and injuries to the security forces and the Chhatra League”. The Chhatra League is the youth wing of the Awami League.⁷⁴

The interim head of Bangladesh’s health ministry was reported in August 2024 to have said that over 1000 people had been killed during the violence.⁷⁵

In January 2025, the International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP), a human rights group, said it had analysed video footage of two incidents in Dhaka on 5 August, during the protests against Hasina’s Government, that it said showed Bangladeshi police killing or injuring at least 20 unarmed protesters, which had previously been undocumented.⁷⁶

In response to the Guardian’s reporting of the ITJP’s evidence, the inspector general of the Bangladeshi police, Baharul Alam, told the newspaper:

We have been conducting a thorough investigation into the role of police officers killing demonstrators in the July and August upsurge. At least 30 officers have already been arrested. We are cooperating with others who have evidence, including, for example, the international judicial organisation that has produced this short documentary.⁷⁷

Arrest warrants issued for Sheikh Hasina

In October 2024, a Bangladesh court issued an arrest warrant for Sheikh Hasina, after Bangladesh’s International Criminal Tribunal (ICT), accused her

⁷³ [“Could Bangladesh’s former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, be extradited to the country to stand trial?”](#), The Conversation, 5 September 2024.

⁷⁴ [‘Why was my child killed?’ Parents grieve a month after Bangladesh clashes](#) Al Jazeera, 1 September 2024.

⁷⁵ [“More than 1,000 killed in Bangladesh violence since July, health ministry chief says”](#), Reuters, 29 August 2024.

⁷⁶ [“Videos reveal new incidents of deadly brutality by Bangladesh police”](#), The Guardian, 14 January 2025.

⁷⁷ As above.

of alleged "crimes against humanity" during the demonstrations that led to her leaving the country.⁷⁸

The ICT was created in 2010 by Sheikh Hasina's government to investigate atrocities during Bangladesh's 1971 War of Independence. Human Rights Watch stated that the interim government had put down amendments to the law establishing the ICT to increase transparency "by allowing the presence of international observers and for broadcasting trial proceedings" and "important requirements for victim and witness protection". However, the human rights organisation said "additional amendments are necessary to ensure that trials are fair and carried out in accordance with international standards and the rights enshrined in the Bangladesh Constitution". It also called for the interim government to adopt a moratorium on the death penalty and "take steps to abolish capital punishment in line with international human rights law".⁷⁹

BBC News reported that the court issued arrest warrants for 44 other individuals "including former government ministers who also fled the country".⁸⁰

On 6 January a second arrest warrant for Sheikh Hasina was issued by a Bangladesh court, at the request of the ICT, this time in connection with enforced disappearances during her time in government. Warrants were issued for 11 others in connection to the same offences, including her military adviser, military personnel, and other law enforcement officials.⁸¹

3.3

Violence against Hindus and strained relations with India

Violence against Hindus

There has been continued violence directed towards Bangladesh's Hindu population, which according to the Guardian newspaper numbers around 13 million and makes up around 8% of the total population. A large proportion of Bangladesh's Hindu population has traditionally supported the Awami League, Sheikh Hasina's party.⁸²

Al Jazeera reported on 11 August 2024 that there have been "numerous reports of attacks against Hindu households, temples and businesses". It quoted the new interim Cabinet as saying: "the attacks on religious minorities in some places have been noted with grave concern". The cabinet also said it

⁷⁸ "[Bangladesh issues arrest warrant for ex-leader Hasina](#)", BBC News, 17 October 2024.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch, [Bangladesh: Arrest Warrant for Sheikh Hasina](#), 22 October 2024.

⁸⁰ "[Bangladesh issues arrest warrant for ex-leader Hasina](#)", BBC News, 17 October 2024.

⁸¹ "[Bangladesh issues second arrest warrant against Sheikh Hasina](#)", Times of India, 6 January 2025.

⁸² "[Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus urges peace as he is sworn in as Bangladesh leader](#)", The Guardian, 7 August 2024.

would “immediately sit with the representative bodies and other concerned groups to find ways to resolve such heinous attacks”.⁸³

Reports of further violence have continued. On 1 November 2024, the Voice of America (VOA) news organisation stated that the “influential Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council has said that there have been more than 2,000 attacks on Hindus since August 4 [2024]”.⁸⁴ There have been protests from Hindus in Bangladesh in response to these incidents, with VOA reporting that on 1 November “30,000 Hindus demonstrated [...] in the southeastern city of Chattogram”.⁸⁵

On 11 December the New Indian Express news site reported that Muhammad Yunus’ press secretary, Shafiqul Alam, had confirmed “88 cases of communal violence targeting minorities, primarily Hindus, since the departure of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August”, and that “70 individuals have been arrested in connection with the attacks”. Mr Alam said the “number of cases and arrests is likely to increase as new incidents of violence have been reported in Sunamganj, Gazipur, and other areas”. He also added that “authorities believe that not all attacks were faith-based”, with some victims having been targeted “due to political affiliations or personal disputes”.⁸⁶

While there have been recorded incidents of attacks on the Hindu community in Bangladesh, on 18 August a report by the BBC’s Global Disinformation and Verify teams stated that some videos claiming to be depicting attacks on that community were false.⁸⁷

Arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das

At the end of November 2024, Chinmoy Krishna Das, a Hindu monk and spokesperson of a Bangladesh-based Hindu organisation, was arrested on sedition charges. These charges related to accusations of “disrespecting Bangladesh’s national flag during a rally in the southern city of Chittagong in October”, according to BBC News.⁸⁸

The arrest of Mr Das sparked violence, with the BBC reporting that “hundreds of his supporters surrounded the van that was taking him back to prison”, and that “security forces used batons and tear gas to disperse the crowd”. A Muslim lawyer, Saiful Islam Alif, was killed in the clash, according to Bangladeshi officials.⁸⁹

⁸³ [“New Bangladesh government says working to ‘resolve’ attacks on minorities~”](#), Al Jazeera, 11 August 2024.

⁸⁴ [“Hindus seek protection from attacks in Muslim-majority Bangladesh”](#), VOA, 1 November 2024.

⁸⁵ [“Hindus seek protection from attacks in Muslim-majority Bangladesh”](#), VOA, 1 November 2024.

⁸⁶ [“Bangladesh acknowledges attacks on minorities; says 88 cases filed, 70 arrested so far”](#), The New Indian Express, 11 December 2024.

⁸⁷ [“The far-right videos distorting the truth of Bangladesh minority attacks”](#), BBC News, 18 August 2024.

⁸⁸ [“India and Bangladesh spar over Hindu monk's arrest”](#), BBC News, 27 November 2024.

⁸⁹ [“India and Bangladesh spar over Hindu monk's arrest”](#), BBC News, 27 November 2024.

Following the incident, former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her first public address since leaving office, accused Muhammad Yunus of failing to protect Hindus and other minorities, and of committing “genocide”. She said “Today, I am being accused of genocide. In reality, Yunus has been involved in genocide in a meticulously designed manner. The masterminds, the student coordinators and Yunus, are behind this genocide”.⁹⁰

India-Bangladesh tensions

Attacks on the Hindu minority in Bangladesh and the arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das have added to the tensions between India and Bangladesh, that started to rise when it emerged that Sheikh Hasina had fled to India.

On 2 December 2024 a group of protestors in the Indian city of Agartala forced their way into Bangladesh’s diplomatic mission located there, pulling down the Bangladeshi flag and damaging the premises.⁹¹

The Indian government called the attack “deeply regrettable”, with the foreign ministry saying in a statement that “Diplomatic and consular properties should not be targeted under any circumstances”. It also pledged to increase security around Bangladesh’s other diplomatic buildings in India.

Bangladesh’s foreign ministry described the attack as “heinous” and called on India to undertake a thorough investigation and “to prevent any further acts of violence against the diplomatic missions of Bangladesh”.⁹²

In September 2024, the Diplomat reported that Bangladesh’s border force, the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), had “taken a newly strong stance” on incidents along Bangladesh’s border with India. This stance reportedly included confronting Indian smugglers and preventing India’s border force from erecting fences and cutting off a dam on Bangladesh’s side of the border.⁹³

Border tensions between the two countries are not new, however. The Diplomat states that the border area between India and Bangladesh “is fraught with tension – and violence”. They quote Ain o Salish Kendra, a human rights organisation in Bangladesh, as saying “between 2013 and 2023 a total of 332 individuals were reported killed by the BSF [India’s Border Security Force] near the Bangladesh-India border, an average of 30 per year”.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ [“Hasina slams Muhammad Yunus for persecution of minorities in Bangladesh”](#), National Herald, 4 December 2024.

⁹¹ [“Protesters barge into Bangladesh mission in Agartala, pull down flag”](#), The Hindu, 3 December 2024.

⁹² [“India-Bangladesh tensions soar amid protests”](#), BBC News, 4 December 2024.

⁹³ [“Bangladesh’s New Border Stance Signals a Shift in Its Approach to India”](#), The Diplomat, 4 September 2024.

⁹⁴ [“The Deadly Border Between Bangladesh and India”](#), The Diplomat, 23 February 2024.

On 12 January 2025, Bangladesh’s Foreign Secretary, Jashim Uddin, summoned India’s High Commissioner Pranay Verma, to express his government’s “deep concerns” over activities at the two countries’ border.⁹⁵ It was reported that Bangladesh was particularly concerned that India has been erecting fences in five locations along the border, and that it hadn’t been consulted before this occurred.⁹⁶

On 23 December 2024, Bangladesh formally requested India to extradite Sheikh Hasina, via a diplomatic correspondence called a note verbale. The official spokesperson of India’s ministry of external affairs stated in response to questions about the request: “We confirm that we have received a note verbale from the Bangladesh high commission today in connection with an extradition request. At this time, we have no comment to offer on this matter”.⁹⁷

2 Further reading

For more on tensions between India and Bangladesh see the following:

- [“India-Bangladesh relations sour as tensions rise over attacks on Hindu minority”](#), The Guardian, 5 December 2024.
- [“India and Bangladesh spar over Hindu monk’s arrest”](#), BBC News, 27 November 2024.
- [“Why are tensions flaring between India and Bangladesh?”](#), DW, 5 December 2024
- [“Bangladesh’s New Border Stance Signals a Shift in Its Approach to India”](#), The Diplomat, 4 September 2024

3.4

Economy

Overview of challenges

The health of Bangladesh’s economy is another challenge for the caretaker government. BBC News reported in September 2024 that Bangladesh’s garment industry, worth \$55bn (£42bn) a year and integral to its economy,

⁹⁵ [“Bangladesh summons Indian High Commissioner over border tensions”](#), The Hindu, 12 January 2025.

⁹⁶ As above.

⁹⁷ [“Bangladesh formally asks India to extradite former PM Sheikh Hasina”](#), The Guardian, 23 December 2024.

was affected by the protests that brought down Hasina's government, with four factories being set alight and the internet shutdowns affecting their operations.⁹⁸ As outlined above, strikes by workers in the industry are now also bringing further pressures.

Dr Ahsan Mansur, Bangladesh's new central bank governor, told the BBC that "excessive spending on showpiece infrastructure projects had drained the government's coffers". He claimed that "rampant cronyism weakened its banks, as powerful businessmen with links to former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League party failed to repay loans".⁹⁹

Dr Mansur said fixing these issues "would take years and the country would need more financial support, including another IMF bailout". He added "we are in a difficult spot and we want to remain fully compliant in terms of servicing our foreign obligations, every penny of it. But we need some additional cushion for now".¹⁰⁰

On 8 September 2024, BBC Monitoring reported that the interim government had asked China to extend the repayment period for its loans to 30 years. It quoted a report from the Business Standard financial newspaper that, as of June, "China holds over \$55bn in stocks in Bangladesh".¹⁰¹

IMF support

In December 2024, the IMF approved the release of funds from Bangladesh's existing financial support programme agreed in January 2023, but also Bangladesh's request for a new \$750 million loan from the Fund.¹⁰²

The IMF was reported to have called for Bangladesh to implement reforms in return for the funding, including separating the roles of tax administration and tax policy in the government and greater exchange rate flexibility.¹⁰³ The international lender also suggested Bangladesh undertake other tax reforms, curb subsidy spending and arrears in its electricity and fertiliser sectors, as well as address vulnerabilities in its banking sector.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ "[Fast fashion drove Bangladesh - now its troubled economy needs more](#)", BBC News, 4 September 2024.

⁹⁹ "[Fast fashion drove Bangladesh - now its troubled economy needs more](#)", BBC News, 4 September 2024.

¹⁰⁰ "[Fast fashion drove Bangladesh - now its troubled economy needs more](#)", BBC News, 4 September 2024.

¹⁰¹ BBC Monitoring, [Bangladesh media highlights 9 Sep 24](#), 9 September 2024.

¹⁰² See "[IMF pushes for more reforms to unlock additional \\$750m](#)", The Daily Star, 20 December 2024; and IMF, [IMF Reaches Staff-Level Agreement on the Third Review of Bangladesh's Extended Credit Facility, Extended Fund Facility, and Resilience and Sustainability Facility Arrangements](#), 18 December 2024.

¹⁰³ "[IMF pushes for more reforms to unlock additional \\$750m](#)", The Daily Star, 20 December 2024.

¹⁰⁴ [IMF Reaches Staff-Level Agreement on the Third Review of Bangladesh's Extended Credit Facility, Extended Fund Facility, and Resilience and Sustainability Facility Arrangements](#), 18 December 2024.

China agrees to debt relief

In January 2025, during a visit by Bangladesh's chief foreign advisor, Touhid Hossain to China, his counterpart Wang Yi reportedly agreed to Bangladesh's request to extend the repayment period of China's loans to Bangladesh from 20 to 30 years. Mr Wang also said he would consider Mr Hossain's request to reduce the interest rate on the loans from 2-3 percent to 1 percent.¹⁰⁵

3.5

Reforming political institutions and timing of new elections

Reforms

On 26 August 2024, Muhammad Yunus gave a speech on the tasks facing the interim government. He said that reforms were necessary before elections could be held:

After completion of required reforms in administration, judiciary, election commission and electoral system, law and order and information flow systems -- a free, fair and inclusive election will be held to give the student-people mass protests a successful consequence.¹⁰⁶

He did not, however, give any indication of when the interim government might step down, saying "everyone is interested to know when our government will leave", and that: "the answer lies with you when you will give us the farewell. None of us (council of advisers) are the ones to rule the country. We are happy with our professions. We took charge, responding to the students' call during a national crisis".

Timings of elections

On the timing of elections, the interim leader said during the August speech this was a "political decision and people will decide how long this interim govern[ment] will remain in power" He added "you have to be patient. It is difficult to overcome mountain-like challenges overnight".¹⁰⁷

In November 2024 during a televised address to mark 100 days of the interim government's time in office, Mr Yunus stated "I promise that we will hold the much-anticipated election once the necessary and essential reforms are complete". He said that an election commission would be formed "within a

¹⁰⁵ "[Foreign adviser's China tour: 10 extra years for repaying Chinese loans](#)", Daily Star, 22 January 2025.

¹⁰⁶ "[Muhammad Yunus says 'free and fair' polls to be held after 'vital' reforms in Bangladesh](#)", Hindustan Times, 26 August 2024.

¹⁰⁷ "[Muhammad Yunus says 'free and fair' polls to be held after 'vital' reforms in Bangladesh](#)", Hindustan Times, 26 August 2024.

few days”, adding “I request your patience until then. We aim to build an electoral system that will endure for decades. For this, we need some time”.¹⁰⁸

At the end of October 2024, a spokesperson for Mr Yunus stated that “no timeline has yet been worked out” for fresh elections, but pressed on what would be a realistic timeline for holding them responded that “six months would be very little time for making the preparations” and “two years would be stretching it”, and further that “certainly” they would be held in less than two years.¹⁰⁹

A [report published by the International Crisis Group](#) in mid-November looking at the first 100 days of the interim government said it faced a “monumental task”. It suggested that “if the interim administration falters in making reforms, the outcome is likely to be an early election with little progress; in the worst-case scenario, the military could assume power”. It proposed that the interim government “should look to score a few quick wins to keep its social support base strong as it builds consensus around key reforms and prepares the country for credible elections”, adding “International actors should back Yunus’s administration and bolster the Bangladeshi economy to help inaugurate a new era in national politics”.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ [“Bangladesh’s Yunus seeks time, says election roadmap after reforms”](#), Al Jazeera, 17 November 2024.

¹⁰⁹ [“Bangladesh election could be ‘little over a year away’, hints Yunus govt”](#), Times of India, 29 October 2024.

¹¹⁰ International Crisis Group, [A New Era in Bangladesh? The First Hundred Days of Reform](#), 14 November 2024.

4 Further reading and recent UK Government statements on Bangladesh

4.1 UK Government statements

Recent attacks on the Hindu community in Bangladesh

There have been [a high volume of parliamentary questions on Bangladesh](#) over the last few months of 2024, many focused on the issue of religious persecution.

The government's response to recent events in Bangladesh was set out during an urgent question debate on 2 December 2024, [Bangladesh: Attacks on Hindu Community](#).

Responding for the government Catherine West, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Indo-Pacific, set out that she had visited Bangladesh in November and met with Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain.

During her meeting with Mr Yunus, they “discussed the full range of bilateral issues, including the importance of protecting religious minorities in Bangladesh”.¹¹¹ Ms West added that when discussing the Hindu community in Bangladesh specifically, she had been:

[G]iven assurances by the interim Government in Bangladesh that support was available for minority communities in Bangladesh in the lead up to Durga Puja—a national festival. We were pleased to see the establishment of a special policing unit, which was active in protecting mandaps—the Hindu worship sites.¹¹²

Ms West went on to say that the government “will continue to monitor the situation, including making representations from this House, and will engage with the interim Government in Bangladesh on the importance of freedom of religion or belief specifically as it affects the Hindu community”.¹¹³

The minister also set out that government supports freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression in Bangladesh “through both our political advocacy and development programme funding, providing up to £27 million from March 2023 to February 2028 under the Bangladesh collaborative,

¹¹¹ [HC Deb \[Bangladesh: Attacks on Hindu Community\]](#), Vol 758, 2 December 2024, c33.

¹¹² [HC Deb \[Bangladesh: Attacks on Hindu Community\]](#), Vol 758, 2 December 2024, c33.

¹¹³ [HC Deb \[Bangladesh: Attacks on Hindu Community\]](#), Vol 758, 2 December 2024, c33.

accountable and peaceful politics programme for protecting civic and political space”.¹¹⁴

In response to a question about attacks on Hindus, Ms West said that “Our high commission, based in Dhaka, is in detailed discussions with the interim Government of Bangladesh on how to verify and record the number of incidents or attacks against communities, and indeed small businesses”.¹¹⁵

On the arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das, Ms West responded that the “Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office desk is closely monitoring those developments”.¹¹⁶

Asked about her engagement with the UK’s Hindu and Bangladeshi communities on the issues in Bangladesh, the minister responded:

Let me respond on how I have been learning in my role. I was delighted to go to the London borough of Brent to visit the Neasden temple and learn about Diwali; I had an exceptional visit with the British Asian Trust and learned so much. That was a prelude to Diwali. After going to Bangladesh, I went to India. I am on a wonderful journey—I am falling in love.¹¹⁷

Sheikh Hasina

Responding to a parliamentary question on what assessment the Foreign Secretary had made of “the potential implications for his policies of the recent arrest warrant issued against former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina”, and whether he has had “discussions with his Indian counterpart on the former Prime Minister’s continued presence in India, in the context of the bilateral extradition treaty between Bangladesh and India”, Catherine West responded:

We note the arrest warrant issued by Bangladesh; discussions between the Interim Government and India about this are a bilateral matter between them. Any investigation is a matter for the relevant authorities in Bangladesh. The UK and international partners continue to push for progress towards accountability and justice including supporting an impartial and independent fact-finding mission by the United Nations. In August, I spoke to my Indian counterpart and discussed the need for de-escalation of violence in Bangladesh.¹¹⁸

UK asylum policy

Asked in a parliamentary question in October 2024 about the deportation of Bangladeshis who were unsuccessful in applying for asylum in the UK, Home Office Minister Dame Angela Eagle responded that “the Home Office remains

¹¹⁴ [HC Deb \[Bangladesh: Attacks on Hindu Community\]](#), Vol 758, 2 December 2024, c33.

¹¹⁵ [HC Deb \[Bangladesh: Attacks on Hindu Community\]](#), Vol 758, 2 December 2024, c34.

¹¹⁶ [HC Deb \[Bangladesh: Attacks on Hindu Community\]](#), Vol 758, 2 December 2024, c34.

¹¹⁷ [HC Deb \[Bangladesh: Attacks on Hindu Community\]](#), Vol 758, 2 December 2024, c38.

¹¹⁸ [PQ10483 \[Sheikh Hasina\]](#), 28 October 2024.

satisfied that Bangladesh is currently safe for returns of those with no legal basis to stay in the UK”.¹¹⁹

4.2 Further reading

For more on the challenges facing Bangladesh see:

- [“Can Hasina’s Awami League Make a Comeback in Bangladesh’s Next Election?”](#), The Diplomat, 15 January 2025.
- [“Revolution and Rivalry: Can Bangladesh Escape Its Illiberal Past?”](#), 8 January 2025.
- International Crisis Group, [A New Era in Bangladesh? The First Hundred Days of Reform](#), 14 November 2024
- [“Could Bangladesh’s former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, be extradited to the country to stand trial?”](#), The Conversation, 5 September 2024.
- [“Students in Bangladesh forced out the country’s leader a month ago. Where do things stand now?”](#), Associated Press, 5 September 2024.
- [“Fast fashion drove Bangladesh - now its troubled economy needs more”](#), BBC News, 4 September 2024.
- [“‘Why was my child killed?’ Parents grieve a month after Bangladesh clashes”](#), Al Jazeera, 1 September 2024.

¹¹⁹ [PQ10164 \[Deportation: Bangladesh\]](#), 29 October 2024.

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