



# BANGLADESH

## COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION (COI) REPORT

COI Service

Date 23 December 2011

**SECURING OUR BORDER CONTROLLING MIGRATION**

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*Please note: Information which has been updated since the last edition of this document is indicated by the use of yellow highlighting. A version of the report without highlighting is available from the UK Border Agency website at <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/policyandlaw/guidance/coi/>*

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## Preface

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- i This Country of Origin Information (COI) Report has been produced by the COI Service, United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA), for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. The Report provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The main body of the report includes information available up to 31 October 2011. The 'Latest News' section contains further brief information on events and reports accessed from 1 November 2011. The report was issued on 23 December 2011.
- ii The Report is compiled wholly from material produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources and does not contain any UKBA opinion or policy. All information in the Report is attributed, throughout the text, to the original source material, which is made available to those working in the asylum/human rights determination process.
- iii The Report aims to provide a compilation of extracts from the source material identified, focusing on the main issues raised in asylum and human rights applications. In some sections where the topics covered arise infrequently in asylum/human rights claims only web links are provided. It is not intended to be a detailed or comprehensive survey. For a more detailed account, the relevant source documents should be examined directly.
- iv The structure and format of the COI Report reflects the way it is used by UKBA decision makers and appeals presenting officers, who require quick electronic access to information on specific issues and use the contents page to go directly to the subject required. Key issues are usually covered in some depth within a dedicated section, but may also be referred to briefly in several other sections. Some repetition is therefore inherent in the structure of the Report.
- v The information included in this COI Report is limited to that which can be identified from source documents. While every effort is made to cover all relevant aspects of a particular topic, it is not always possible to obtain the information concerned. For this reason, it is important to note that information included in the Report should not be taken to imply anything beyond what is actually stated. For example, if it is stated that a particular law has been passed, this should not be taken to imply that it has been effectively implemented unless stated. Similarly, the absence of information does not necessarily mean that, for example, a particular event or action did not occur.
- vi As noted above, the Report is a compilation of extracts produced by a number of reliable information sources. In compiling the Report, no attempt has been made to resolve discrepancies between information provided in different source documents though COI Service will bring the discrepancies together and aim to provide a range of sources, where available, to ensure that a balanced picture is presented. For example, different source documents often contain different versions of names and spellings of individuals, places and political parties, etc. Reports do not aim to bring consistency of spelling, but to reflect faithfully the spellings used in the original source documents. Similarly, figures given in different source documents sometimes vary and these are simply quoted as per the original text. The term 'sic' has been used in this document only to denote incorrect spellings or typographical errors in quoted text; its use is not intended to imply any comment on the content of the material.

- vii The Report is based substantially upon source documents issued during the previous two years. However, some older source documents may have been included because they contain relevant information not available in more recent documents. All sources contain information considered relevant at the time this Report was issued.
- viii This Report and the accompanying source material are public documents. All COI Reports are published on the UKBA website and the great majority of the source material for the Report is readily available in the public domain. Where the source documents identified are available in electronic form, the relevant web link has been included, together with the date that the link was accessed. Copies of less accessible source documents, such as those provided by government offices or subscription services, are available from the COI Service upon request.
- ix Reports are published regularly on the top 20 asylum intake countries. Reports on countries outside the top 20 countries may also be published if there is a particular operational need. UKBA officials also have constant access to an information request service for specific enquiries.
- x In producing this Report, COI Service has sought to provide an accurate, up to date, balanced and impartial compilation of extracts of the available source material. Any comments regarding this Report or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to COI Service as below.

#### **Country of Origin Information Service**

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**Website:** <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/policyandlaw/guidance/coi/>

#### **INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION**

- xi The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency to make recommendations to him about the content of the UKBA's COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on UKBA's COI Reports and other COI material. Information about the IAGCI's work can be found on the independent Chief Inspector's website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>
- xii In the course of its work, the IAGCI reviews the content of selected UKBA COI documents and makes recommendations specific to those documents and of a more general nature. A list of the Reports and other documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI or the Advisory Panel on Country Information (the independent organisation which monitored UKBA's COI material from September 2003 to October 2008) is available at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>
- xiii Please note: it is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any UKBA material or procedures. Some of the material examined by the Group relates to countries designated or proposed for designation to the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Group's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the

decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself. The IAGCI can be contacted at:

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**Website:** <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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## Latest News

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### EVENTS IN BANGLADESH FROM 1 NOVEMBER 2011 TO 23 DECEMBER 2011

*The Latest News provides a non-exhaustive selection of significant events since 1 October 2011. Further information may also be available from the list of useful sources below.*

*The Home Office is not responsible for the content of external websites.*

15 December Human rights groups in Bangladesh have demanded a severe punishment for the husband of a young woman who allegedly cut off most of her right hand. Police say Rafiqul Islam, 30, attacked her because she pursued higher education without his permission.

#### BBC News

Bangladesh man 'admits' cutting off wife's fingers, 15 December 2011

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16201961>

Date accessed 16 December 2011

7 December Money sent home by expatriate Bangladeshis fell by 13.55 percent to \$915.45 million in November compared with the previous month, the central bank said on Wednesday. About 7.4 million Bangladeshis are working across the world.

#### Reuters.com

Bangladesh Nov remittances fall 13.5 pct

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/12/07/bangladesh-remittance-idINL3E7N74MI20111207?rpc=401&feedType=RSS&feedName=domesticNews&rpc=401>

Date accessed 8 December 2011

2 December Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's three-year administration yesterday received a boost when Berlin-based Transparency International (TI) found Bangladesh had made some progress in reducing corruption this year scoring 2.7 points in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which is 0.3 points higher than last year.

#### Gulf Times

Dhaka does better on corruption, 2 December 2011

[http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu\\_no=2&item\\_no=473454&version=1&template\\_id=44&parent\\_id=24](http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=473454&version=1&template_id=44&parent_id=24)

Date accessed 3 December 2011

26 November The Dhaka government has repealed a British Empire-era law from 1898 which confined lepers to state-run asylums in the belief that the disease was highly contagious (a reasonable assumption at the time since there was no cure). Officials now assert that 'The 1898 Lepers Act' violates human rights.

**International Business Times**

Bangladesh Repeals Discriminatory Law against People Affected by Leprosy, 26 November 2011

<http://uk.ibtimes.com/articles/256436/20111126/bangladesh-lepers-leprosy-disease-stigma-law-therapy.htm>

Date accessed 28 November 2011

19 November India and Bangladesh today moved close to finalising a draft extradition treaty. The extradition treaty, when signed, is expected to lead to India's handing over of Riasaldar Mosleuddin who killed Bangladesh's independence architect Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, father of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in August 1975. The meeting also discussed expediting the implementation of the pact on demarcation of land boundary and exchange of 162 adversely-held enclaves.

**Daily News and Analysis**

Bangladesh move closer to finalizing extradition treaty, 19 November 2011

[http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report\\_bangladesh-move-closer-to-finalizing-extradition-treaty\\_1614835](http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_bangladesh-move-closer-to-finalizing-extradition-treaty_1614835)

Date accessed 21 November 2011

15 November Bangladeshi prosecutors have filed war crimes charges against a second opposition leader, accusing him of genocide and murder during the country's 1971 liberation struggle, an official said Tuesday. Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, a senior lawmaker with the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, has also been accused of looting and facilitating rape, prosecutor Syed Haider Ali said.

**AFP**

Bangladesh MP charged with war crimes, 15 November 2011

<http://news.yahoo.com/bangladesh-mp-charged-war-crimes-072253200.html>

Date accessed 16 November 2011

11 November International media rights groups are voicing concern about the months-long detention of a Bangladeshi editor whose outlets reported on government corruption. Media groups say journalists in Bangladesh are routinely threatened, assaulted or killed for writing about corruption.

**Arab News**

Rights groups denounce Bangladesh editor's arrest, 11 November 2011

<http://arabnews.com/world/article532267.ece>

Date accessed 11 November 2011

**USEFUL NEWS SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

A list of news sources with Weblinks is provided below, which may be useful if additional up to date information is required to supplement that provided in this report. The full list of sources used in this report can be found in [Annex E – References to source material](#).

AlertNet (Thomson Reuters) <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/index.htm?news=all>

BBC News [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/default.stm)

Cable News Network (CNN) <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/?fbid=i0gUtrVnUAY>

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) <http://www.irinnews.org/>

ReliefWeb <http://www.reliefweb.int/taxonomy/term/31>

South Asia Terrorism Portal

<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/timeline/index.html>

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Reports on Bangladesh published or accessed between 1 November and 23 December 2011  
***The Home Office is not responsible for the content of external websites.***

**Freedom House** [www.freedomhouse.org/](http://www.freedomhouse.org/)

Countries at the Crossroads 2011 – Bangladesh, 10 November 2011

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ecba653c.html>

Date accessed 1 December 2011

**International Federation for Human Rights** [www.fidh.org](http://www.fidh.org)

Steadfast in Protest - Annual Report 2011 – Bangladesh, 25 October 2011

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4ea7b3eed.pdf>

Date accessed 1 December 2011

**Odhikar** <http://www.odhikar.org/>

Odhikar, Human Rights Monitoring Report, November 1-30, 2011

<http://www.odhikar.org/documents/2011/English/Human%20Rights%20Monitoring%20Report%20November.pdf>

Date accessed 1 December 2011

**Reporters Without Borders** [www.rsf.org/](http://www.rsf.org/)

World Report – Bangladesh, October 2011

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4d59461ec.html>

Date accessed 1 December 2011

**Transparency International** <http://www.transparency.org/>

Corruption Perceptions Index 2010, 1 December 2011.

<http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/>

Date accessed 1 December 2011

**United States Department of Labor** [www.dol.gov/](http://www.dol.gov/)

2010 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, Bangladesh, 3 October 2011

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4e8c3972d.pdf>

Date accessed 1 December 2011

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## Background Information

### 1. GEOGRAPHY

- 1.01 The People's Republic of Bangladesh is located in south Asia and is bordered almost entirely by India, except for a small frontier in the southeast with Burma (The Union of Myanmar) and a coastline along the Bay of Bengal in the south. The capital is Dhaka. (CIA World Factbook, updated 27 November 2009) [62] The country covers an area of approximately 144,000 sq. km. (56,000 sq. miles). (Europa, Country Statistics, accessed 14 December 2009) [1b]
- 1.02 From the administrative point of view, Bangladesh is divided, into 6 Divisions, 64 Districts, 6 City Corporations, 308 Municipalities, 481 Upazillas, 599 Thanas and 4498 Unions. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, accessed 14 December 2009). [77a] A particular name might refer to more than one geographical entity; for example, the City of Chittagong is situated in the District of Chittagong, which is in Chittagong Division. The 'Chittagong Hill Tracts' (CHT) area, referred to later in this report, comprises three of the districts within Chittagong Division. (Bangladesh Guide Map 2003) [25]
- 1.03 The *Bangladesh 2011 Population & Housing Census: Preliminary* published in July 2011 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), gave the total population of Bangladesh as 142,319 thousands. [43a] (p3) The US Bureau of the Census estimated that the population of Bangladesh would reach 158,570,535 (July 2011 est.). (CIA World Factbook, updated September 2011) [62] The metropolitan area of Dhaka, in 2001, had a population of 9.7 million; the populations of the other principal cities (as 'statistical metropolitan areas') were as follows in 2001: Chittagong 3.3 million, Khulna 1.2 million, and Rajshahi 0.7 million. (BBS, Census by metropolitan area) [43d] Apart from territories comprising less than 1,200 sq. km in area, Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the world. (Europa, Statistics, accessed 14 December 2009) [1b] The 2001 census, as summarised in *Bangladesh Census Results at a Glance* by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, classified 89.6 per cent of the population as Muslim, 9.3 per cent as Hindu, 0.6 per cent as Buddhist and 0.5 per cent as Christian or 'other'. [43b] (p5)
- 1.04 About 95 per cent of the population speak Bengali, the state language, while the remainder mostly use tribal dialects. (Europa, Statistics, accessed 14 December 2009) [1b] Sylheti, which is spoken primarily in Sylhet Division in the north-east of the country, is commonly defined as a dialect of Bengali/Bangla, although it is quite different to standard Bengali in its sound system, the way in which its words are formed and in its vocabulary. (Hampshire County Council, accessed 21 April 2009) [110] There are approximately three million indigenous (Adivasi) people in Bangladesh, many of whom have their own language or dialect. 11 out of the 45 ethnic groups are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where they are collectively known as the Jumma peoples. There are also about 300,000 Urdu-speakers in the country, collectively known as 'Biharis' (see [Section 20](#)). (FCO, 6 November 2007) [11k]
- 1.05 In a paper *Challenging Language in the Diaspora*, dated 2008, Dr Benjamin Zeitlyn, a Research Fellow at the University of Sussex, stated that:
- "In Bangladesh Sylheti is one of several different but related speech varieties and is thus considered a dialect of Bangla. In the UK by contrast, Sylheti is the ordinary means of communication for a large group of people relatively uninfluenced by 'standard' or 'shuddho' Bangla and could thus be seen as a distinct language. One test Chalmers

refers to of assessing the relationship of two languages is whether they are mutually intelligible; Sylheti and standard Bangla, according to academics that Chalmers cites, are nearly mutually unintelligible.

“The reality is more complicated, most Sylheti speakers can understand a great deal of Bangla and vice versa. They are very closely related and speakers of Sylheti and Bangla in Bangladesh are exposed to each other and learn to communicate. No one in Bangladesh speaks standard Bangla exactly as it is written and taught. Standard Bangla is the language of the majority of literature, education, film, media and official communication in Bangladesh. Almost everyone in Bangladesh can get by in standard Bangla even if they speak a very different dialect or language at home.” [34] (p2)

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**Public holidays**

1.06 Below are listed Public Holidays for the January 2011 – December 2011 period taken from the Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology (BUET) website.

Occasion	Date
*Akheri Chahar Shomba	2 February
Shree Panchami (Sharaswati Puja)	8 February
*Eid-e-Miladun-Nobi (sm)	16 February
Shaheed Dibash and International Mother Language Day	21 February
Birth Date of Father of the Nation and *Fateha -e- Eajdaham	17 March
Independence & National Day	26 March
Naba Barsha	14 April
May Day	1 May
*Buddha Purnima (Baishakhi Purnima)	17 May
*Shab-e-Meraj	30 June
*Shab-e-Barat	18 July
National Mourning Day	15 August
Janmastami	22 August
Zumatul Bida	26 August
*Shab-e-Quadar	28 August
Eid-ul-Fitr	30, 31 August, and 01 September
Durgapuja (Bijaya Dashami)	05, 06 & 07 October
*Eid-ul-Azha	06, 07 & 08 November
*Muharram (Ashura)	06 December
Shaheed Intellectuals Day	14 December (only classes shall remain closed)
Victory Day	16 December
Christmas Day	25 December

\*(star) marked holidays depend upon the appearance of the Moon. The scheduled holidays of Akheri Chahar Shomba on 02 February, Shree Panchami (Sharaswati Puja) on 08 February, Fateha -e- Eajdaham on 17 March, Shab-e-Meraj on 30 June and Durgapuja (Bijaya Dashami) on 05 & 07 October are applied for Bangladesh University

of Engineering & Technology (BUET) only. Other holidays are public holidays & government holidays as per executive order. [118] (Last Updated: July 11, 2011)

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## Maps of Bangladesh

1.07 On the following pages are maps showing the main cities and towns, and the Divisions of Bangladesh.



(United Nations Cartographic Section: Map no. 3711 ref.2, dated January 2004; edited by COI Service to show Sylhet Division.) [8j]



Bangladesh - [Political Map of Bangladesh](#) [94a]

## Other Maps of Bangladesh

The Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection – [Bangladesh](#) provides a good selection of maps including the geo-political relationship with both India and Pakistan. [86a]

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## 2. ECONOMY

2.01 The World Bank in a report *Bangladesh Economic Update*, April 2011 stated that:

- “The outlook for FY2011 has changed since the last macroeconomic update in October 2010.1 While GDP growth is still projected to be around 6.2 percent in FY11, inflationary pressures have strengthened and the external position has weakened.



- Rising energy and food subsidies are placing a strain on the budget, but higher-than-anticipated revenues and lower-than-budgeted Annual Development Program expenditures leave sufficient fiscal space for the government to react to these pressures.
- Progress on reforms is mixed, with advances made on Value Added Tax reforms, efforts to tighten liquidity and setting up a framework for public-private partnership projects. Developments on telecommunication policy, the Anticorruption Commission, and policy responses to stock market volatility are a cause for concern.
- The growth outlook for FY12 remains good but there are risks that need to be contained. Short-term risks include rising food and fuel prices, deteriorating remittances, an increased reserve drawdown, a growing quasi-fiscal deficit, stock market volatility and its potential impact on the banking sector. Long-term risks include the inability to sufficiently alleviate power shortages, raise public investment, and remove bottlenecks for private investment.” [113b]

2.02 As noted in the CIA World Factbook, updated September 2011:

“The economy has grown 5-6 per cent per year since 1996 despite political instability, poor infrastructure, corruption, insufficient power supplies, and slow implementation of economic reforms. Bangladesh remains a poor, overpopulated, and inefficiently-governed nation. Although more than half of GDP is generated through the service sector, 45 per cent of Bangladeshis are employed in the agriculture sector, with rice as the single-most-important product. Bangladesh's growth was resilient during the 2008-09 global financial crisis and recession. Garment exports, totalling \$12.3 billion in FY09 and remittances from overseas Bangladeshis, totaling \$11 billion in FY10, accounted for almost 25 per cent of GDP.” [62a]

2.03 The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), in its Bangladesh Country Report for September 2011:

“... expect Bangladesh to remain on a strong economic growth trajectory in 2011/12-2014/15, when we forecast real GDP to grow by an average of 6.6 per cent a year. Growth will continue to be underpinned by the steady expansion of private consumption and investment. The main determinants of private consumption growth will be the performance of the agricultural sector and remittances from the country's diaspora and from Bangladeshis working abroad. Although the agricultural sector will account for less than 20 per cent of GDP at factor cost, it will continue to be the country's largest employer and the main source of income for around one-half of the working population. The agricultural sector is expected to expand at an average annual rate of 4.1 per cent in the forecast period, compared with 4.3 per cent a year in 2005/06-2009/10. Workers' remittances are forecast to increase steadily in the next five years, but the pace of growth in the early part of the period will be tempered by weak employment prospects in the Middle East (the most popular destination for Bangladeshi workers). We expect private consumption to grow by an average of 5.9 per cent a year in the forecast period. Gross fixed investment will increase by 8 per cent annually on average in 2011/12-2014/15. This component of GDP is dominated by the private sector, which accounts for 80 per cent of fixed investment. Private investment is expected to benefit from improving business sentiment. It is also likely to be boosted by government efforts to

attract greater flows of foreign direct investment from India, China and Russia, as well as from members of the Bangladeshi diaspora in OECD countries.

“GDP growth analysed on a factor-cost basis will continue to be driven by services and industry. Services will continue to account for around 50 per cent of GDP, while industry will contribute around 30 per cent. Output growth in the industrial sector is expected to average 7.7 per cent a year in 2011-15. The manufacture of textiles and clothing will remain the largest contributor to growth in industrial output. Textile exporters will continue to benefit from a recent change in EU import rules over the forecast period. Since January 2011 clothes and other finished goods made in Bangladesh (and other least-developed countries) have been entitled to duty-free access to the EU if imported components of the final product do not exceed 70 per cent previously, duty-free access was granted only to goods with a maximum imported content of 30 per cent. The change has given Bangladesh a significant advantage over its main competitors, namely China, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka, as their goods are liable for duty in the EU owing to the fact that these countries are no longer classified as least developed. The services sector is expected to grow at a similar pace to industry as the government continues to focus on developing the country's outsourcing capabilities, including call centres. [40x] (Outlook for 2011-15: Economic growth) In the same report it was forecast that the economy (measured in terms of real gross domestic product) would expand by 7.9 per cent in 2011/12 and 8.4 per cent in 2012/13, down slightly from an actual growth rate of 8.8 per cent in 2010/11. [40x] (Highlights)

- 2.04 Bangladesh's per capita GDP (on a purchasing power parity basis) was estimated to be US \$1,700 in July 2010, compared with \$7,600 for China, \$2,500 for Pakistan, \$1,400 for Burma and \$34,800 for the United Kingdom. (CIA World Factbook, September 2011) [62a]
- 2.05 Agriculture (including fishing) employed more than half of the labour force and contributed 19 per cent of GDP in 2006/2007. Bangladesh is now virtually self sufficient in food. However, unpredictable weather, including flooding and droughts regularly undermine production plans and targets, disrupting the economy and necessitating food imports. Bangladesh is the world's largest exporter of jute; other agricultural exports include frozen foods, fish, leather and hides, and tea. By 2006/2007, ready-made garments accounted for over 75 per cent of the country's total export earnings. (EIU Country Profile for 2008) [40n] (p18-26)
- 2.06 The EIU Country Report of December 2009 stated:
- “Remittances from the estimated 6m Bangladeshis working overseas grew by 21.2 per cent year on year to US\$3.6bn in the first four months of 2009/10—a slightly slower rate of increase than in the year-earlier period, when remittances surged by 36.5 per cent. Inflows of workers' remittances were particularly strong in October, when they leapt by 41 per cent year on year, to US\$911m. The sharp increase was remarkable given the current weakness of overseas labour markets, but is probably a reflection of the growing popularity of remitting money via official channels and the fact that a proportion of the total amount remitted comes from Bangladeshi communities based abroad permanently. According to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training, the number of Bangladeshis finding employment abroad in the first 11 months of 2009 stood at 441,590, only around one-half of the total in the year-earlier period.” [40c] The EIU Country Report of September 2011 stated that:

“Inflows of workers' remittances will remain an important feature of the current account, as they will continue to make up the bulk of current transfers.” [40x] (External sector)

See [Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011: Bangladesh](#), November 2010 [113c]

- 2.07 The unit of currency in Bangladesh is the ‘Taka’ (BDT), which is divided into 100 poisha/paisa. (Europa) [1b] The rate of exchange on 30 September 2011 was £1 sterling = 120.241 Bangladesh taka. ([xe.com](#)) [22]

See the World Bank: [Bangladesh at a glance](#) [113a] for further details of the economy.

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### 3. HISTORY

The section provides a brief history of Bangladesh since independence from the UK in 1947 when it was known as East Pakistan. More detailed information on Bangladesh's recent history can be found on The Federal Research Program of the Library of Congress: [A Country Study: Bangladesh](#) [9a]

#### PRE-INDEPENDENCE: 1947 – 1971

- 3.01 The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in its *Armed Conflict Database* (ACD), undated, accessed on 17 December 2009, reported:

“British rule over India came to an end in 1947, and a predominantly Muslim state comprising East and West Pakistan was established on either side of the country. As a result, the newly created country existed in two geographically separate territories. East Pakistan was the smaller of the two, and friction with the politically dominant West Pakistan was soon evident. East Pakistanis felt exploited by the West Pakistan-dominated central government. The sense of estrangement was compounded by linguistic and ethnic differences between the two. Sentiments for Bengali independence found focus with the creation of the Awami League (AL) in 1949, and the party began to agitate for greater autonomy. An early indication of the coming friction came in 1950 and when the East rejected an attempt by the West to establish Urdu as the national language.

“Tensions came to a head in 1971. One year earlier, a cyclone had devastated East Pakistan and claimed some 500,000 lives. The weak response by the central government in West Pakistan was heavily criticised. Later in 1970, the AL won an election victory in East Pakistan, gaining it a majority in parliament and propelling its leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (also known as Mujib) to prominence. Authorities in West Pakistan refused to recognise the results, and rioting took place on the streets of Dhaka. President Yahya Khan's strategy was to arrest Mujib, and to launch a military invasion of East Pakistan on 25 March 1971. The resulting war exacted an immense toll from Bangladeshi's, and casualty estimates range from hundreds of thousands up to three million. Some ten million refugees fled into India to escape the massacres alleged to have been perpetrated by West Pakistani forces.

“India's role in the conflict would prove decisive. Since 1947, India had felt extreme discomfort at the prospect of being flanked by both an East and West Pakistan. For this reason and because of the massive influx of refugees with which it was suddenly forced

to cope, India chose in December 1971 to intervene on behalf of East Pakistan. On 16 December West Pakistani forces announced their surrender. Their defeat paved the way for the return from incarceration of Mujib, who became prime minister of the newly founded independent state of Bangladesh, which was to be governed by parliamentary democracy with a constitution. In March the following year, Bangladesh and India signed a treaty of friendship.” [116b]

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## POST-INDEPENDENCE: 1972 – APRIL 2010

### GOVERNMENT OF SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN, 1972-75

3.02 The US State Department, *Background Note: Bangladesh*, updated May 2010, stated that on 16 December 1971: “... Bangladesh - meaning ‘Bengal country’ - was born; the new country became a parliamentary democracy under a 1972 constitution. The first government... was formed in Dhaka with Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury as President, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (‘Mujib’)...Prime Minister.” The Note continued:

“Mujib came to office with immense personal popularity but had difficulty transforming this popular support into the political strength needed to function as head of government. The new constitution, which came into force in December 1972, created a strong executive prime minister, a largely ceremonial presidency, an independent judiciary, and a unicameral legislature on a modified Westminster model. The 1972 constitution adopted as state policy the Awami League's (AL) four basic principles of nationalism, secularism, socialism, and democracy.

“The first parliamentary elections held under the 1972 constitution were in March 1973, with the Awami League winning a massive majority. No other political party in Bangladesh's early years was able to duplicate or challenge the League's broad-based appeal, membership, or organizational strength. Relying heavily on experienced civil servants and members of the Awami League, the new Bangladesh Government focused on relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction of the economy and society. Economic conditions remained precarious, however. In December 1974, Mujib decided that continuing economic deterioration and mounting civil disorder required strong measures. After proclaiming a state of emergency, Mujib used his parliamentary majority to win a constitutional amendment limiting the powers of the legislative and judicial branches, establishing an executive presidency, and instituting a one-party system, the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL), which all members of Parliament (and senior civil and military officials) were obliged to join.

“Despite some improvement in the economic situation during the first half of 1975, implementation of promised political reforms was slow, and criticism of government policies became increasingly centered on Mujib. In August 1975, Mujib, and most of his family, were assassinated by mid-level army officers. His daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, were out of the country. A new government, headed by former Mujib associate Khandakar Moshtaque, was formed.” [2e]

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### GOVERNMENT OF ZIAUR RAHMAN, 1975-81

20 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

3.03 The US State Department, *Background Note: Bangladesh*, updated May 2010, stated that:

“Successive military coups resulted in the emergence of Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ziaur Rahman (‘Zia’) as strongman. He pledged the army's support to the civilian government headed by President Chief Justice Sayem. Acting at Zia's behest, Sayem dissolved Parliament, promising fresh elections in 1977, and instituted martial law.

“Acting behind the scenes of the Martial Law Administration (MLA), Zia sought to invigorate government policy and administration. While continuing the ban on political parties, he sought to revitalize the demoralized bureaucracy, to begin new economic development programs, and to emphasize family planning. In November 1976, Zia became Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) and assumed the presidency upon Sayem's retirement 5 months later, promising national elections in 1978.

“As President, Zia announced a 19-point program of economic reform and began dismantling the MLA. Keeping his promise to hold elections, Zia won a 5-year term in June 1978 elections, with 76 per cent of the vote. In November 1978, his government removed the remaining restrictions on political party activities in time for parliamentary elections in February 1979. These elections, which were contested by more than 30 parties, marked the culmination of Zia's transformation of Bangladesh's Government from the MLA to a democratically elected, constitutional one. The AL and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), founded by Zia, emerged as the two major parties.

“In May 1981, Zia was assassinated in Chittagong by dissident elements of the military. The attempted coup never spread beyond that city, and the major conspirators were either taken into custody or killed. In accordance with the constitution, Vice President Justice Abdus Sattar was sworn in as acting president. He declared a new national emergency and called for election of a new president within 6 months--an election Sattar won as the BNP's candidate. President Sattar sought to follow the policies of his predecessor and retained essentially the same cabinet, but the army stepped in once again.” [2e]

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### **GOVERNMENT OF HUSSAIN MOHAMMED ERSHAD, 1982-90**

3.04 The US State Department, *Background Note: Bangladesh*, updated May 2010, stated that:

“Army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. H.M. Ershad assumed power in a bloodless coup in March 1982. Like his predecessors, Ershad suspended the constitution and--citing pervasive corruption, ineffectual government, and economic mismanagement--declared martial law. The following year, Ershad assumed the presidency, retaining his positions as army chief and CMLA. During most of 1984, Ershad sought the opposition parties' participation in local elections under martial law. The opposition's refusal to participate, however, forced Ershad to abandon these plans. Ershad sought public support for his regime in a national referendum on his leadership in March 1985. He won overwhelmingly, although turnout was small. Two months later, Ershad held elections for local council chairmen. Pro-government candidates won a majority of the posts, setting in motion the President's ambitious decentralization program. Political life was further liberalized in early 1986, and additional political rights, including the right to hold

large public rallies, were restored. At the same time, the Jatiya (National) Party, designed as Ershad's political vehicle for the transition from martial law, was established.

“Despite a boycott by the BNP, led by President Zia's widow, Begum Khaleda Zia, parliamentary elections were held on schedule in May 1986. The Jatiya Party won a modest majority of the 300 elected seats in the National Assembly. The participation of the Awami League--led by the late President Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina Wajed - lent the elections some credibility, despite widespread charges of voting irregularities.

“Ershad resigned as Army Chief of Staff and retired from military service in preparation for the presidential elections, scheduled for October. Protesting that martial law was still in effect, both the BNP and the AL refused to put up opposing candidates. Ershad easily outdistanced the remaining candidates, taking 84 per cent of the vote. Although Ershad's government claimed a turnout of more than 50 per cent, opposition leaders, and much of the foreign press, estimated a far lower per centage and alleged voting irregularities.

“Ershad continued his stated commitment to lift martial law. In November 1986, his government mustered the necessary two-thirds majority in the National Assembly to amend the constitution and confirm the previous actions of the martial law regime. The President then lifted martial law, and the opposition parties took their elected seats in the National Assembly.

“In July 1987, however, after the government hastily pushed through a controversial legislative bill to include military representation on local administrative councils, the opposition walked out of Parliament. Passage of the bill helped spark an opposition movement that quickly gathered momentum, uniting Bangladesh's opposition parties for the first time. The government began to arrest scores of opposition activists under the country's Special Powers Act of 1974. Despite these arrests, opposition parties continued to organize protest marches and nationwide strikes. After declaring a state of emergency, Ershad dissolved Parliament and scheduled fresh elections for March 1988.

“All major opposition parties refused government overtures to participate in these polls, maintaining that the government was incapable of holding free and fair elections. Despite the opposition boycott, the government proceeded. The ruling Jatiya Party won 251 of the 300 seats. The Parliament, while still regarded by the opposition as an illegitimate body, held its sessions as scheduled, and passed a large number of bills, including, in June 1988, a controversial constitutional amendment making Islam Bangladesh's state religion and provision for setting up High Court benches in major cities outside of Dhaka. While Islam remains the state religion, the provision for decentralizing the High Court division has been struck down by the Supreme Court.

“By 1989, the domestic political situation in the country seemed to have quieted. The local council elections were generally considered by international observers to have been less violent and more free and fair than previous elections. However, opposition to Ershad's rule began to regain momentum, escalating by the end of 1990 in frequent general strikes, increased campus protests, public rallies, and a general disintegration of law and order.

“On December 6, 1990, Ershad offered his resignation. On February 27, 1991, after 2 months of widespread civil unrest, an interim government headed by Acting President

Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed oversaw what most observers believed to be the nation's most free and fair elections to that date.” [2e]

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## GOVERNMENT OF KHALEDA ZIA, 1991-96

3.05 The US State Department, *Background Note: Bangladesh*, updated May 2010, stated that:

“The center-right BNP won a plurality of seats and formed a government with support from the Islamic fundamentalist party Jamaat-I-Islami, with Khaleda Zia, widow of Ziaur Rahman, obtaining the post of prime minister. Only four parties had more than 10 members elected to the 1991 Parliament: The BNP, led by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia; the AL, led by Sheikh Hasina; the Jamaat-I-Islami (JI), led by Ghulam Azam; and the Jatiya Party (JP), led by acting chairman Mizanur Rahman Choudhury while its founder, former President Ershad, served out a prison sentence on corruption charges. The electorate approved still more changes to the constitution, formally re-creating a parliamentary system and returning governing power to the office of the prime minister, as in Bangladesh's original 1972 constitution. In October 1991, members of Parliament elected a new head of state, President Abdur Rahman Biswas.

“In March 1994, controversy over a parliamentary by-election, which the opposition claimed the government had rigged, led to an indefinite boycott of Parliament by the entire opposition. The opposition also began a program of repeated general strikes to press its demand that Khaleda Zia's government resign and a caretaker government supervise a general election. Efforts to mediate the dispute, under the auspices of the Commonwealth Secretariat, failed. After another attempt at a negotiated settlement failed narrowly in late December 1994, the opposition resigned en masse from Parliament. The opposition then continued a campaign of marches, demonstrations, and strikes in an effort to force the government to resign. The opposition, including the Awami League's Sheikh Hasina, pledged to boycott national elections scheduled for February 15, 1996.

“In February, Khaleda Zia was re-elected by a landslide in voting boycotted and denounced as unfair by the three main opposition parties. In March 1996, following escalating political turmoil, the sitting Parliament enacted a constitutional amendment to allow a neutral caretaker government to assume power and conduct new parliamentary elections; former Chief Justice Mohammed Habibur Rahman was named Chief Adviser (a position equivalent to prime minister) in the interim government. New parliamentary elections were held in June 1996 and the Awami League won plurality and formed the government with support from the Jatiya Party led by deposed president Ershad; party leader Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister.” [2e]

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## GOVERNMENT OF SHEIKH HASINA, 1996-2001

3.06 The US State Department, *Background Note: Bangladesh*, updated May 2010, stated that:

“Sheikh Hasina formed what she called a ‘Government of National Consensus’ in June 1996, which included one minister from the Jatiya Party and another from the Jatiyo Samajtantric Dal, a very small leftist party. The Jatiya Party never entered into a formal coalition arrangement, and party president H.M. Ershad withdrew his support from the government in September 1997. Only three parties had more than 10 members elected to the 1996 Parliament: The Awami League, BNP, and Jatiya Party. Jatiya Party president, Ershad, was released from prison on bail in January 1997.

“International and domestic election observers found the June 1996 election free and fair, and ultimately, the BNP party decided to join the new Parliament. The BNP soon charged that police and Awami League activists were engaged in large-scale harassment and jailing of opposition activists. At the end of 1996, the BNP staged a parliamentary walkout over this and other grievances but returned in January 1997 under a four-point agreement with the ruling party. The BNP asserted that this agreement was never implemented and later staged another walkout in August 1997. The BNP returned to Parliament under another agreement in March 1998.

“In June 1999, the BNP and other opposition parties again began to abstain from attending Parliament. Opposition parties staged an increasing number of nationwide general strikes, rising from 6 days of general strikes in 1997 to 27 days in 1999. A four-party opposition alliance formed at the beginning of 1999 announced that it would boycott parliamentary by-elections and local government elections unless the government took steps demanded by the opposition to ensure electoral fairness. The government did not take these steps, and the opposition subsequently boycotted all elections, including municipal council elections in February 1999, several parliamentary by elections, and the Chittagong city corporation elections in January 2000.

“In July 2001, the Awami League government stepped down to allow a caretaker government to preside over parliamentary elections. Political violence that had increased during the Awami League government’s tenure continued to increase through the summer in the run up to the election. In August, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina agreed during a visit of former President Jimmy Carter to respect the results of the election, join Parliament win or lose, forswear the use of hartals (violently enforced strikes) as political tools, and if successful in forming a government allow for a more meaningful role for the opposition in Parliament. The caretaker government was successful in containing the violence, which allowed a parliamentary general election to be successfully held on October 1, 2001.” [2e]

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## GOVERNMENT OF KHALEDA ZIA, 2001-2006

3.07 The US State Department, *Background Note: Bangladesh*, updated May 2010, stated that:

“The four-party alliance led by the BNP won over a two-thirds majority in Parliament. Begum Khaleda Zia was sworn in on October 10, 2001, as Prime Minister for the third time (first in 1991, second after the February 15, 1996 elections).

“Despite her August 2001 pledge and all election monitoring groups declaring the election free and fair, Sheikh Hasina condemned the election, rejected the results, and boycotted Parliament. In 2002, however, she led her party legislators back to

24 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.



Parliament, but the Awami League again walked out in June 2003 to protest derogatory remarks about Hasina by a State Minister and the allegedly partisan role of the Parliamentary Speaker. In June 2004, the AL returned to Parliament without having any of their demands met. They then attended Parliament irregularly before announcing a boycott of the entire June 2005 budget session.” [2e]

3.08 The Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), in a report stated that:

“On August 21, 2004, a little before 5.30 in the evening, there was a grenade attack on the Awami League leader, Sheikh Hasina Wajed. This occurred soon after she concluded her speech in a public rally close to the Awami League headquarters in Dhaka, ... 11 of the 13 grenades hurled at the rally exploded instantly followed by indiscriminate firing fortunately missing the target ... The impact left 18 dead and hundreds wounded. Committed in broad daylight, the terror attack - the work of ‘experts’ - was meticulously planned and executed.

“The recent grenade attack on Sheikh Hasina has provided the Opposition ammunition to reiterate the demand for the present alliance to quit. Despite a month-long programme that ended recently, the Opposition forces were unable to muster adequate strength to bring about the dismissal of the BNP alliance government.” [120a]

3.09 The US State Department *Background Note: Bangladesh*,(USSD Background Note 2010) updated May 2010 continued:

“On August 17, 2005, near-synchronized blasts of improvised explosive devices in 63 out of 64 administrative districts targeted mainly government buildings and killed two persons. An extremist Islamist group named Jama'atul Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB) claimed responsibility for the blasts, which aimed to press home JMB's demand for a replacement of the secular legal system with Islamic sharia courts. Subsequent attacks on the courts in several districts killed 28 people, including judges, lawyers, and police personnel guarding the courts. A government campaign against the Islamic extremists led to the arrest of hundreds of senior and mid-level JMB leaders. Six top JMB leaders were tried and sentenced to death for their role in the murder of two judges; another leader was tried and sentenced to death in absentia in the same case.

“In February 2006, the AL returned to Parliament, demanded early elections, and requested significant changes in the electoral and caretaker government systems to stop alleged moves by the ruling coalition to rig the next election. The AL blamed the BNP for several high-profile attacks on opposition leaders and asserted the BNP was bent on eliminating Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League as a viable force. The BNP and its allies accused the AL of maligning Bangladesh at home and abroad out of jealousy over the government's performance on development and economic issues. Dialogue between the Secretaries General of the main ruling and opposition parties failed to sort out the electoral reform issues.” [2e]

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## CARETAKER GOVERNMENT AND STATE OF EMERGENCY, OCTOBER 2006-JANUARY 2009

3.10 The USSD Background note stated:

“The 13th Amendment to the constitution required the president to offer the position of the Chief Adviser to the immediate past Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Justice

K.M. Hasan, once the previous parliamentary session expired on October 28, 2006. The AL opposed Justice Hasan, alleging that he belonged to the ruling BNP in the past and that the BNP government in 2004 amended the constitution to extend the retirement age for the Supreme Court judges to ensure Justice Hasan became the Chief Adviser to help BNP win the elections. Justice Hasan declined the position, and after two days of violent protests, President Iajuddin Ahmed also assumed the role of Chief Adviser to the caretaker government.

“On January 3, 2007, the Awami League announced it would boycott the January 22 parliamentary elections. The Awami League planned a series of country-wide general strikes and transportation blockades.

“On January 11, 2007, President Iajuddin Ahmed declared a state of emergency, resigned as Chief Adviser, and indefinitely postponed parliamentary elections. On January 12, 2007, former Bangladesh Bank governor Fakhruddin Ahmed was sworn in as the new Chief Adviser, and ten new advisers (ministers) were appointed. Under emergency provisions, the government suspended certain fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution and detained a large number of politicians and others on suspicion of involvement in corruption and other crimes. In January 2008, a reshuffle of the caretaker government took place, which included the appointment of special assistants to help oversee the functioning of the administration.

“On July 16, 2007 the government arrested Awami League president and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on charges of extortion during her tenure as Prime Minister. Hasina was released on parole in June 2008 and allowed to travel to the United States for medical treatment. The cases against her continue. On September 3, 2007, the government arrested BNP chairperson and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on charges of corruption. Sheikh Hasina returned from abroad and Khaleda Zia was released from prison to lead their respective parties in the parliamentary election campaign in the fall of 2008.”

“Municipal elections were held in 13 city corporations and municipalities on August 4, 2008. These elections were judged free and fair by international and domestic observers. The Election Commission registered over 80 million voters in preparation for parliamentary elections, which were held December 29, 2008. The Awami League swept to a landslide victory in what domestic and international observers declared a free, fair and credible election. The caretaker government ended on January 6, 2009 when Awami League President Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister.” [2e]

- 3.11 It was announced on 17 December 2008 that the President had signed an order terminating the state of emergency completely. (BBC News) [20eh]

See International Crisis Group, [Restoring Democracy in Bangladesh](#), 28 April 2008 [128b] for further background

See Section 4: [Recent developments](#), Section 6: [Political system](#) and Section 8: [Security forces](#)

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## RESTORING DEMOCRACY IN BANGLADESH

## GENERAL ELECTION OF 29 DECEMBER 2008

- 3.12 The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported in a press release dated 25 December 2008:

“As Bangladesh gears up for its first parliamentary elections in seven years, a nationwide independent audit of the country’s new digital voter list has concluded that all names on the roll are legitimate voters and nearly all eligible voters are on the list. This first ever computerized photo voter list in Bangladesh contains pictures of more than 80 million voters and took 11 months to compile ... The independent audit of the computer voter list, conducted by Washington-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), consisted of two nationwide surveys sampling nearly 17,000 individuals of voting age across the country. It concluded that the list was compiled with a ‘high degree of accuracy’. It verified that no ‘ghost voters’ were found on the 2008 photo voters list.” [108b]

See also Section 6: [Political system – Supervision of elections](#)

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## Political parties which contested the General Election

- 3.13 The Election Commission required political parties to register by 20 October 2008 in order to take part in the general election. Over 100 parties applied for registration, but only 39 of those met the criteria laid down in the Representation of the People Ordinance 2008 and its amendments; 38 of these 39 parties actually fielded candidates. In addition, 148 individuals stood as independents. (*The Daily Star*, 1 January 2009) [38d0] (RP2008 Ordinance) [16d]
- 3.14 Both the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) maintained alliances with a number of other parties to contest the 2008 election: The AL-led 14-party Mohajot, or ‘grand alliance’, and the BNP-led ‘four party alliance’ (see Results below). (BBC News, 12 December 2008) [20en]

See International Crisis Group, [Bangladesh: Elections and Beyond](#), 11 Dec 2008 [128A] for further background

## Results of the General Election

- 3.15 The results (marked ‘unofficial’), published on the website of the Bangladesh Election Commission (accessed 13 January 2009), were as follows:

	Number of seats	
Awami League-led ‘grand alliance’:		
Awami League	230	
Jatiya Party – Ershad	27	
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)	3	
Liberal Democratic Party	1	
Workers Party	2	263
BNP-led ‘four-party alliance’:		
Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP)	30*	
Jamaat-e-Islami	2	

Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP)	1	33
Independent candidates		4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>

\*includes the result in Noakhali-1, declared 12 January 2009 [16c]

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## Reaction to the results

3.16 The magnitude of the Awami League win came as a surprise to most commentators. One reason for the outcome, it was suggested, was that the AL – formerly seen as a traditionalist party – presented a pragmatic and forward-looking set of policies, which appealed to younger and first-time voters, whereas the BNP and its allies reportedly conducted a more negative campaign. (Economist Intelligence Unit, 30 December 2008) [40v]

3.17 BBC News reported on 30 December 2008 that BNP leader Khaleda Zia had said she rejected the results, telling reporters:

“We have confirmed reports of rigging and other irregularities in many polling stations across the country...We are collecting details of more irregularities and will give them to the media and appropriate authorities over the next few days.” [20em] Nevertheless, BNP officials confirmed on 7 January 2009 that their MPs would be attending the first session of the new parliament “for the sake of democracy, the country’s interest and to continue the democratic process”. (BBC News, 12 January 2009) [20ek]

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## International observer reports

3.18 According to a BBC News article of 30 December 2008, the general election was monitored by some 200,000 observers, including 2,500 from abroad. [20ei]

3.19 The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) noted in a press release of 11 January 2009:

“Bangladesh’s 9th parliamentary election is being hailed as the country’s most transparent, credible, and peaceful election ever.

“The High-Level Panel established by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon for the elections consisting of senior UN officials and election experts said that the Election Commission had conducted the polls with credibility and fairness, pointing to the very high voter turnout and the large participation by minorities. Over 200,000 national and 500 international election observers deployed on Election Day returned similar verdicts: the election was peaceful, transparent, and credible, setting a high democratic standard.” [108c]

3.20 The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), which deployed 70 observers around the country, reported that the election was conducted credibly and it did not believe

isolated breaches of the electoral laws affected the overall polling process. (United News of Bangladesh, 31 December 2008) [39bf] The Commonwealth Observer Group told a press conference that they did not find any evidence to justify the BNP's claims of serious irregularities. (UNB, 31 December 2008) [39bg] Similarly, the European Union Election Observation Mission did not find evidence of 'election manipulation' as alleged by the BNP; they reported that the general election was free, fair and transparent and was held in a peaceful atmosphere, with high turnout. (*The Daily Star*, 1 January 2009) [38dw]

See [Commonwealth Secretariat, 2008 Bangladesh Elections - Interim Statement](#) [129a] and ANFREL, [Bangladesh: Ninth National Parliament Election 2008](#) [130a] for further background

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## Post-election violence

- 3.21 The Dhaka-based human rights NGO, Odhikar, stated that – according to press reports – 62 people were killed and over 4,000 were injured in violence between supporters of various political parties during the first three months of 2009. [46s] Most were killed in clashes between supporters/activists of the Awami League, BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami and their affiliated student organisations, and between members of two opposing factions of Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student association of the AL. In most instances, the violence involved students and it took place at several different universities and colleges throughout the country. (Odhikar) [46s] For example, clashes between AL and BNP student wings in early January at Jahangir Nagar University, located 30 km from the centre of Dhaka, spread and led to the temporary closures of a number of other higher-education institutions. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, “The violence [at Jahangir Nagar University] was sparked by an attempt by some students to ‘establish control’ over certain dormitories.” (EIU, February 2009) [40r]

(Note: ODHIKAR - The principal objectives of the organisation are to raise the awareness of human rights and its various abuses, on the one hand and to create a vibrant democratic system through election monitoring on the other. The organisation also performs policy advocacy to address the current human rights situation.) [46] (About Us)

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## SHEIKH HASINA, 2009 TO MAY 2010

- 3.22 Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina was sworn in as Prime Minister on 6 January 2009. (BBC News, 6 January 2009) [20ej] In selecting members of her cabinet, she overlooked many in the party's 'old guard' in favour of generally younger, 'bolder' appointments – which included four women and three members of ethnic minorities – in an attempt to build what *The Daily Star* described as “a bold, new and gender sensitive face of Bangladesh's government”. No members of the new cabinet had faced corruption charges. (*The Daily Star*, 7 and 12 January 2009) [38dr] [38ds]

- 3.23 The USSD Background note, updated May 2010 stated that:

“...The BNP-led opposition attended the opening of the Parliament session, but has since mounted several boycotts in protest of perceived slights by the ruling party. Both sides struggle to break free from their shared history of confrontational politics, and key

institutions necessary for strengthening democracy remain weak. As the new government was settling into office, it was rocked by a mutiny by border guards on February 25-26, 2009 in which more than 50 army officers were murdered.

“Prime Minister Hasina has sought to increase Bangladesh’s presence on the world stage. As leader of one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, Hasina has been a vocal advocate for mitigation and adaptation by both developed and developing countries, aligning with the Copenhagen Accord in January 2010. In a sharp change from previous administrations, her government has actively confronted violent extremist groups to deny space to terrorist networks and activities within its borders. The simultaneous elections of the Awami League and the Congress Party in India set the stage for renewed bilateral talks between the countries, an atmosphere which has been improved by counterterrorism cooperation. In January 2010, Hasina travelled to New Delhi to meet with Indian Prime Minister Singh, where they signed three agreements on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, transfer of sentenced persons, and countering terrorism, organized crime, and illegal drug trafficking; and two memoranda of understanding on energy sharing and cultural exchange programs.” [2e]

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## LOCAL ELECTIONS

- 3.24 Elections for the upazila parishads (sub-district councils) were held on 22 January 2009. The Economist Intelligence Unit reported:

“Preliminary results released on January 24th showed that Awami League-backed candidates had won 306 of the 475 upazila leadership positions contested; the authorities suspended voting in several upazilas, owing to disturbances or electoral irregularities. BNP-backed candidates won 79 seats, followed by an Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, with 20, the Jatiya Party, also with 20, and candidates of other parties with 44. Unlike the national election, the local polls were marred by violence and allegations of vote-rigging and voter intimidation; at least three people were killed and 150 injured in post-poll violence ... The Election Commission has said that there were instances in which the AL, which now governs at national level, misused its power to interfere with the electoral process. The BNP rejected the upazila poll results, saying that the elections had been ‘grossly rigged’ ... [T]he new national government has already indicated that it will modify the legislation to give parliamentarians greater influence at local level than envisaged by the previous administration.” (EIU Country Report, February 2009) [40r]

- 3.25 Md. Zillur Rahman, a 79 year old Awami League leader, was sworn in as President of Bangladesh on 12 February 2009 having been elected (unopposed) by parliament. He resigned his seat as an MP. The former President, Iajuddin Ahmed, whose five-year term expired in September 2007, had remained in office until after the election of a new parliament. The presidency of Bangladesh is a largely ceremonial post. (*The Daily Star*, 12 February 2009) [38e]
- 3.26 It was reported on 25 March 2009 that a large arms cache and bomb-making equipment had been found at an Islamic school, or madrassa, in the southern district of Bhola; the school was reportedly run by ‘Green Crescent’, a UK based charity. (BBC News) [20e]

- 3.27 Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia was, on 20 April 2009, served with a notice to vacate her residence in the Dhaka cantonment (military compound) within 15 days. She had lived there since her husband, former President Ziaur Rahman, was assassinated in 1981. The government claimed that Mrs Zia was allocated a house in the Gulshan district of Dhaka following her husband's death, and that it was illegal for her to hold a lease on that house as well as the residence in the Dhaka cantonment. Mrs Zia's supporters viewed the notice as an act of political vindictiveness and resolved to challenge it in court. (EIU, May 2009) [40s] *The Daily Star* reported on 28 May that the High Court had stayed (for three months) a third notice of eviction and had issued a rule upon the government to explain why the notice should not be declared illegal. [38en] *The Daily Star* further reported that the order staying the governments' third notice was extended by a further four months as the government had not responded to the illegality question. [38en]

### BANGLADESH RIFLES (BDR) MUTINY

- 3.28 On 25 February 2009 a mutiny took place at a Bangladesh Rifles (border guards) barracks in the Pilkhana area of Dhaka, apparently following a dispute over pay and conditions; the mutineers surrendered the following day, after tanks surrounded the barracks. (BBC News, 27 February 2009) [20eo] By 2 March, the bodies of 57 murdered army officers and 17 other people had been found at the barracks. (Army officers are seconded to command posts in the Bangladesh Rifles.) Nearly 700 guardsmen (jawans) had, by then, been detained and were liable to charges ranging from sedition to murder. Police were still searching for several hundred other guardsmen and 'accomplices' who had absconded since 25 February. (BBC News, 2 March 2009) [20ep]

See Open Democracy: [Bangladesh: revolt and fallout](#), 31 March 2009 [133a] for further background including the possibility that the mutiny was sparked by BDR frustration at their remuneration package (which is much inferior to that enjoyed by the army) as well as their exclusion from lucrative United Nations postings that army personnel are routinely offered.

- 3.29 Investigators said on 10 March that they had so far found evidence of about 450 guardsmen being involved in the mutiny. (*The Daily Star*, 10 March 2009) [38ec] BBC News reported on 11 March that a team from Scotland Yard had arrived in Bangladesh to help with the investigation. BBC News commented that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had "won praise" from many Bangladeshis for her handling of the situation and in "averting a coup". She had apparently held a meeting with about 2,000 army officers soon after the event, many of whom expressed anger that the government had not sent in troops immediately news of the mutiny had been received. [20eq] *The Daily Star* reported on 21 April that 1,079 guardsmen and 20 other people had so far been arrested for suspected involvement in the mutiny. Investigators were making use of video footage and 'information from various sources' to identify suspects. The government reportedly would be consulting legal experts to decide under what law the accused would be tried. [38ed]
- 3.30 In a news release dated 25 March 2009, Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted that six of those in custody, including five border guards and an Islamic imam, had died. While press reports quoted the authorities as saying that the men either committed suicide or had died of heart attacks, relatives of one of the men publicly alleged that he was tortured to death. [10m] An Amnesty International (AI) release of 27 March, referring to four of the deaths, stated: "There are credible reports suggesting that these detainees

may have died as a result of torture.” The AI report said it was not clear whether they were in the custody of the police or the army when they died. [7v] HRW claimed to have received “credible information that several other border guard members in custody have been brought to hospital with signs of torture”. HRW urged the government to ensure that all suspects had access to lawyers and were tried in a judicial process that met international fair trial standards. HRW contended it would be inappropriate to hold the trials in military courts, as the Bangladesh Rifles are under the authority of the Home Ministry and not the Defence Ministry. [10j]

- 3.31 *The Daily Star* reported on 15 May 2009 that a military committee appointed to investigate the reasons behind the mutiny had returned largely inconclusive findings. The committee recognised that the guardsmen had several grievances and that these had been made known prior to the mutiny, but there were apparently also suggestions that ‘external parties’ may have exploited the soldiers’ grievances to instigate the mutiny, possibly for political reasons. The committee pointed out that its terms of reference did not permit it to record statements from civilians, and it therefore recommended that a more powerful enquiry board be formed to continue the investigation. The committee also suggested that the guardsmen be tried under army rules. *The Daily Star* recorded that a further 750 guardsmen had been arrested on sedition charges since 10 May. [38ek]
- 3.32 The trial of the first group of some 3,500 members of the BDR who are accused of taking part in the mutiny in February 2009 started on 24 November 2009. Observers noted that for the government, the trial was important for several reasons. Firstly, it wanted to bring to justice the perpetrators of the mutiny. Secondly, the government needed to maintain good relations with the still influential army, which relinquished political power in December 2008 after a two-year state of emergency. Finally, the government wanted to be seen as being able to deliver justice. (EIU Country Report, December 2009) [40c] (p9)
- 3.33 The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), in its Bangladesh Country Report dated December 2009, stated that:
- “During its term of office the greatest challenge for the government will be to retain the support of the security forces, and in particular the army and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR, a paramilitary force). A mutiny staged by members of the BDR in February, which resulted in the deaths of around 70 army officers and civilians, threatened to destabilise relations between the two security forces. In addition, the army's insistence on using the Army Act (which stipulates the death penalty for mutineers) to prosecute the perpetrators of the mutiny also threatened to strain relations between it and the government. The government shrewdly left to the Supreme Court the decision on whether the perpetrators of the mutiny should be prosecuted under the act; the court decided in September that they should not. By seeking the opinion of the Supreme Court on the issue, the government has managed to escape accusations of bias from either the BDR or the army. It has also managed to avoid the political embarrassment of mass executions.” [40c] (p4)
- 3.34 The same EIU report also noted that up to 48 detainees accused of taking part in the mutiny have died in custody since March [2009] and that the remaining detainees were being prosecuted under a controversial Speedy Tribunal Law that limits the duration of the trial. [40c] (p10)



## WAR CRIMES COMMITTED IN 1971

- 3.35 Amnesty International, (AI) in a report *UN provides welcome support to Bangladesh war crimes investigations dated 7 April 2009* noted that:

“The government of Bangladesh has sought and received UN assistance in its efforts to investigate and prosecute crimes against humanity and other serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in 1971. ... Amnesty International welcomed the news, having called on the Caretaker Government and political parties in January 2008 to address impunity for violations carried out in 1971 in the context of the independence war.” [7w]

- 3.36 Human Rights Watch, (HRW) in a letter [8 July 2009] to the Bangladeshi government stated that:

“Bangladesh should make significant improvements to its 1973 law on war crimes so that its planned trials for atrocities and crimes committed in the 1971 war of independence from Pakistan will bring meaningful justice to victims ... Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch stated that ‘This is a highly politically charged subject in Bangladesh, which makes it even more important to have a judicial process that can withstand all challenges, ... Otherwise some may argue the trials are political and that the aim is revenge rather than justice.’” [10p]

## TRIAL OF MURDERERS OF ‘BANGABANDHU’ SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

- 3.37 A report from Reuters.com dated 27 January 2010 stated that: “... Mujibur, or Mujib as he was popularly known, was Bangladesh's first president. He was killed with most of his family in a 1975 army revolt that ended the South Asian country's first spell of democracy and set the stage for decades of military rule. ... The government installed after the revolt issued an ordinance in November 1975 granting immunity to the killers.” [93a]

- 3.38 The same report stated that:

“Mujib's daughter Sheikh Hasina was elected prime minister in 1996 and vowed to put her father's killers on trial. Her government revoked the indemnity ordinance in 1996 and cleared the way for a trial of the assassins and coup leaders, beginning with a police complaint identifying 20 accused. In 1998 a Dhaka judge handed down death sentences on 15 of the 20 accused, of whom only four were in custody. They appealed in the High Court against the verdict, the first of a series of appeals. Between repeated appeals and governments less interested in the case than Hasina, who was out of power from 2001 until early 2009, those convicted remained in prison.” [93a]

- 3.39 The report continued:

“After lengthy hearings, the Supreme Court in November 2009 upheld the sentences on the five as well as six others still at large and believed to be outside the country. Another whose death sentence was upheld died abroad. Yet more appeals reached the end of the judicial process with the Supreme Court decision this month.

“Under Bangladeshi law the death sentences must be carried out within three or four weeks of that decision, unless the president grants clemency. President Zillur Rahman rejected clemency appeals by the convicted men. ... On 27 January 2010 the five convicted killers of independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were executed at a Dhaka prison.” [93a] also [93b]

- 3.40 Regarding the six ‘absconders’ a report on NEWKERALA.COM, dated 29 January 2010 stated that: “Efforts were on to bring back to Bangladesh six fugitive killers of the country’s founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a minister said. ... The six absconding people are Lt Col (dismissed) Khandaker Abdur Rashid, Lt Col (relieved) Shariful Haque Dalim, Lt Col (retd) Nur Chowdhury, Lt Col (retd) A.M. Rashed Chowdhury, Capt Abdul Mazed and Risalder Moslehuddin.” [119a]

See also section 3: [History – Sheikh Mujibur Rahman](#). For a time line of events see The Daily Star article, [\[The\] Long Road to Justice](#). [38eo]

Further historical information can be found at: World History at KMLA - [History of Bangladesh](#). [122a]

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## 4. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: MAY 2010 TO DECEMBER 2010

### WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL

- 4.01 The EIU, in the Country Report of May 2010 stated that:

“Following the government’s recent decision to establish a war crimes tribunal to investigate atrocities committed during the 1971 war of independence from Pakistan, there have been no signs that it might start soon. Optimistic observers believe that if the work of the tribunal were to commence this year, it could conclude its proceedings before the end of the AL’s current term of office in 2014. Establishing proof of war crimes perpetrated four decades ago is a time consuming process. The tribunal, which was set up in late March, is starting from scratch. At least initially, it is reviewing evidence collated by others, some of which is highly contentious. The War Crimes Fact Finding Committee (WCFFC), a Dhaka-based non-governmental organisation, is widely regarded as the only independent body in Bangladesh to have collated reliable evidence relating to the atrocities carried out in 1971. In April it published a list of 500 people whom it claims committed crimes against humanity, mass killings and other war crimes. The head of the WCFFC, M A Hasan, has said that, based on the list, ‘at least 20 notorious criminals’ could be detained. But under the International War Crimes Tribunal Act 1973, the tribunal judges can issue an arrest warrant only once a person has been charged with an offence. The tribunal is some way away from filing charges, as a report of the findings of its investigations has yet to be compiled.” [40w]

- 4.02 The HRW *World Report 2011*, Bangladesh, covering events in 2010, released on 24 January 2011, observed that:

“In 2009 the parliament passed amendments to the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act of 1973 in order to bring to trial those responsible for human rights crimes in the war of 1971, but the law still falls short of international standards. Five members of Jamaat-e-Islami, a religious right-wing political group alleged to have collaborated with Pakistani

34 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

forces, were in 2010 charged with war crimes, including genocide, and at this writing are awaiting trial before a special war crimes tribunal established in March to investigate crimes committed during Bangladesh's battle for independence four decades ago." [10q]

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## NATURAL CATASTROPHES

- 4.03 Cyclone 'Sidr', even though it occurred in 2007 it is still often referred to. *The Times* of London stated that: "The eye of Cyclone Sidr ... hit land in an impoverished coastal area near Bangladesh's border with India. ... the head of the Bangladeshi meteorological department, said the storm matched one in 1991 that triggered a tidal wave that killed an estimated 138,000 people. Bangladesh's worst cyclone disaster was in 1970, when some half a million people died." [131a]
- 4.04 Cyclone Aila struck on 25 May 2009 and caused devastation in the country's southern coastal districts. UNB reported on 29 May that the official death toll stood at 155; at least 7,000 people had been injured and over 500,000 homes were destroyed or partially damaged. [39b]

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## 5. CONSTITUTION

- 5.01 Europa World Online, undated, accessed on 14 December 2009, stated that a new Constitution for the People's Republic of Bangladesh came into effect on 16 December 1972. Following the military coup of 24 March 1982, the Constitution was suspended and the country placed under martial law. On 10 November 1986, martial law was repealed and the Constitution reinstated. [1a] (Constitution and Government) The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Country Profile 2007 noted that amendments to the Constitution require a two thirds majority of parliament. [40] (p8)
- 5.02 Europa noted that the 1972 Constitution based its fundamental principles on nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism. The Constitution aimed to establish a society free from exploitation in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms, justice and equality were to be secured by all citizens. All citizens are equal before the law and have a right to its protection. Arbitrary arrest or detention, discrimination based on race, age, sex, birth, caste or religion, and also forced labour are all prohibited under the Constitution. Subject to the law, public order and morality, every citizen has a right to freedom of movement, of assembly and of association. The Constitution also aims to guarantee freedom of conscience, speech, press and religious worship. [1a] Europa recorded that the Constitution was amended in 1977 to increase the influence of Islam in its text; the word 'secularism' was also deleted from the preamble. A further amendment in 1988 established Islam as the state religion. [1a] (Constitution and Government)
- 5.03 A United Nations Development Programme report of September 2002, entitled Human Security in Bangladesh, commented: "The Constitution states that all existing laws that are inconsistent with fundamental rights shall be declared void, and the State is forbidden to make any law inconsistent with fundamental rights ... However, the enjoyment of any right is subject to 'reasonable' restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the State, public order, public health, morality or decency." The UNDP report

pointed out that “reasonable” is a relative term, and what is reasonable in one given set of circumstances may be unreasonable in another. [8b] (p15)

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## 6. POLITICAL SYSTEM

- 6.01 As recorded in the US State Department *2010 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, Bangladesh*, released on 8 April 2011, (USSD 2010):

“The constitution provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

“The Representation of the People's Order (Amendment) Ordinance 2008 significantly changed the electoral law that had been in place since 1972, in an attempt to address corruption in politics. The major political parties considered some of the new provisions in the bill, such as the abolition of students' and women's wings and foreign chapters, to be undemocratic, but they accepted the changes with some reluctance and revised their party constitutions. Under the amended ordinance, candidates must reveal information about their education, wealth, and criminal records when they file to run for parliament. Most political parties submitted statements to the election commission outlining expenditures and sources of funds by the September deadline.” [2v] (Section 3) The Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) is a unicameral legislature; members are directly elected for a five-year term on the basis of universal adult franchise from single territorial constituencies i.e. a member of parliament for each constituency is elected by simple majority, on a ‘first-past-the-post’ basis. Persons aged eighteen and over are entitled to vote. (Europa) [1a]

- 6.02 Europa World Online, undated, noted that the President is the constitutional Head of State and is elected by Parliament (Jatiya Sangsad) for a period of five years. Executive power is held by the Prime Minister, who heads the Council of Ministers. [1a] (Constitution and Government)

- 6.03 The Freedom House report of September 2009, *Freedom in the World 2009: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, covering events in 2008, commented:

“Bangladesh’s military-backed caretaker government oversaw a raft of electoral reforms in 2008, laying the groundwork for national elections that were finally held on December 29 [2008]. However, the government had less success in implementing an anticorruption drive and reducing the power and popularity of the two main political parties. Emergency regulations, including restrictions on a range of civil liberties and political activity, remained in place until just prior to the campaign period. The elections, which were widely deemed free and fair, returned the opposition Awami League to power in a sweeping victory. Despite the significant openings in the political environment, human rights abuses including extrajudicial executions remained a concern.” [65a] (p1)

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**CARETAKER GOVERNMENT**

- 6.04 The Economist Intelligence Unit's Bangladesh Country Profile 2007 (EIU Country Profile 2007) noted that, under the 13th amendment to the Constitution passed in March 1996, a non-party Caretaker Government takes office for a period of up to three months preceding a general election. This administration assumes office within 15 days of the dissolution of parliament and must hold the general election within 90 days of the dissolution; it is led by a Chief Advisor – who holds the status of a prime minister – and who runs the Government with not more than ten other Advisors appointed by the President on the advice of the Chief Advisor. [40j] (p9-10) Article 58c (7) of the Constitution provides that the Advisors must not be members of any political party or of any organisation affiliated to a political party. [4] The Caretaker Government is responsible for giving the Election Commission “all possible aid and assistance that may be required for holding the general election of Members of Parliament peacefully, fairly and impartially”. (EIU Country Profile 2006) [40a] (p9)
- 6.05 Clause 58c(3) of the Constitution states that “The President shall appoint as Chief Advisor the person who among the retired Chief Justices of Bangladesh retired last and who is qualified to be appointed as an Advisor under this article...” The Constitution goes on to detail, in 58c(4) and (5), a sequence by which other senior retired judges would become eligible, should the most recently retired Chief Justice be unavailable for the post. Article 58c(6) also says: “Notwithstanding anything contained in this Chapter, if the provisions of clauses (3), (4) and (5) cannot be given effect to, the President shall assume the functions of the Chief Adviser of the Non-Party Caretaker Government in addition to his own functions under this Constitution.” [4]
- 6.06 Maneeza Hossain, of the Hudson Institute, wrote in June 2007: “Although similar governments have appeared elsewhere, for Bangladesh it is a new model. I describe it as ‘semi-constitutional’ because it stretches the notion of a caretaker cabinet into a time-frame for which the Constitution is silent.” [95a] (p2) A caretaker government will be appointed in December 2013 to supervise the next election, which must then be held within 90 days. (EIU Country Report 2009) [40c] (p23)

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

- 6.07 The EIU Country Profile 2007 noted:

“Bangladesh is divided into 64 districts, each with its own district council. Beneath the districts are 460 sub-districts and 4,488 union councils [union parishad], which are currently the lowest tier of government in Bangladesh. In late 2003 the Government formed 40,392 village governments (gram sarkar) as a fourth layer of government. Gram sarkars are non-elected bodies at the grassroots level, and were introduced by a former president, General Zia, in late 1970s. When he was president, General Ershad introduced upazila (local councils) in the mid-1980s, as an elected local government body. The village governments are aimed at local development by local people. Although the constitution provides for elected bodies at all tiers of local government, only the third tier – union councils and municipalities (mostly sub-district and district administrative centres) – is elected; all others are administratively controlled. Bangladesh has six administrative divisions – Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Barisal, Rajshahi and Sylhet – and four major municipal corporations – Dhaka, Chittagong,

Rajshahi and Khulna. The mayors of the municipal corporations are directly elected and wield considerable political power.” [40j] (p9)

- 6.08 On 2 August 2005, United News of Bangladesh and BBC News reported that the High Court had declared Gram Sarkar – village governments composed of nominated members – illegal and unconstitutional, on the basis that they violated the basic principles of democracy based on elections, as provided for in the Constitution. [20bf] [39x] *The Daily Star* reported on 21 April 2008 that the Government had approved the Gram Sarkar (Rescission) Ordinance 2008, abolishing Gram Sarkar village governments. [38di]

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## SUPERVISION OF ELECTIONS

- 6.09 Europa noted that the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC), a constitutional body, supervises parliamentary and presidential elections. The Commission also delimits constituencies and prepares electoral rolls. It consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and other commissioners, as appointed by the President. The Election Commission is independent in the exercise of its functions. [1b]

See also Section 3: [History- General Election of 29 December 2008.](#) See also Section 15: [Political affiliation](#)

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## Human Rights

### 7. INTRODUCTION

- 7.01 Human Rights Watch's (HRW) *World Report 2010, Bangladesh*, covering events in 2009, released on 20 January 2010, observed:

"Bangladesh returned to democratic rule in 2009. Constitutionally guaranteed rights, suspended during most of 2007 and 2008, were in place and the elected government under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made strong commitments to address a number of serious human rights problems. Yet extrajudicial executions, custodial torture, and impunity for members of the security forces continue. Following a bloody rebellion within the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), thousands of guards were arrested, many tortured, and some killed in detention." [10n]

- 7.02 However, the HRW *World Report 2011, Bangladesh*, covering events in 2010, released on 24 January 2011, observed:

"The elected government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed made strong commitments to address serious human rights problems in 2010, but those promises were not realized, as extrajudicial executions and torture continued, as well as impunity for members of the security forces. The government mounted sustained attacks on the right to freedom of expression of the media and political opposition. Labor union activists protesting for higher wages were systematically targeted and, in some cases, arrested and jailed on trumped-up charges." [10q]

- 7.03 The US State Department *2010 Human Rights Report: Bangladesh*, (USSD 2010), covering events in 2010, released on 8 April 2011, stated in its introductory section:

"... International and domestic observers considered the 2008 elections to be free and fair, with isolated irregularities and sporadic violence. There were instances in which elements of the security forces acted independently of civilian control.

"Security forces committed extrajudicial killings and were responsible for custodial deaths, torture, and arbitrary arrest and detention. The failure to investigate fully extrajudicial killings by security forces, including several deaths in custody of alleged criminals detained by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), remained a matter of serious concern. Some members of the security forces acted with impunity. Prison conditions at times were life-threatening, lengthy pretrial detention continued to be a problem, and authorities infringed on citizens' privacy rights. An increasingly politicized judiciary exacerbated problems in an already overwhelmed judicial system and constrained access to justice for members of opposition parties. The government limited freedom of speech and of the press, self-censorship continued, and security forces harassed journalists. The government curbed freedom of assembly, and politically motivated violence remained a problem. Official corruption and related impunity continued. Discrimination against women, and violence against women and children remained serious problems, as did discrimination against persons with disabilities and against persons based on their sexual orientation. Trafficking in persons remained a serious problem. Violence against religious and ethnic minorities still occurred, although many government and civil society leaders stated that these acts often had political or economic motivations and could not be attributed only to religious belief or affiliation. Limits on worker rights and child labor remained problems." [2v] (Introduction0

7.04 Bangladesh is party to most of the principal United Nations international human rights treaties. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights website (accessed in June 2009) noted that these included:

- the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), date of accession 5 January 1999;
  - the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), date of accession 6 December 2000;
  - the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), date of accession 11 July 1979;
  - the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), date of accession 6 December 1984;
  - the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW-OP), date of ratification 22 December 2000;
  - the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), date of accession 4 November 1998;
  - the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), date of ratification 2 September 1990; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-AC), date of ratification 12 February 2002; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC-OP-SC), date of ratification 18 January 2002;
  - the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (MWC), signatory only 7 October 1998.
- [8a]

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## 8. SECURITY FORCES

8.01 The internal security establishment consists primarily of the police and four auxiliary (paramilitary) forces: the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), the Ansars and the Village Defence Party, all of which are organised nationally under the control of the Ministry of Home Affairs. (MOHA), (Bangladesh Ministry of Home Affairs, accessed 11 January 2010) [33]

See also Section 9: [Military service](#) regarding external security.

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### POLICE AND PARAMILITARY FORCES

8.02 The US State Department *2010 Human Rights Report: Bangladesh* (USSD 2010), released on 8 April 2011, observed “[The] Police are organized nationally under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) and have a mandate to maintain internal security and law and order. Under recent governments, police were generally ineffective and reluctant to investigate persons affiliated with the ruling party. The government took steps to improve police professionalism, discipline, training, and responsiveness, and reduce corruption. [2v] (Section 1d)



- 8.03 The Bangladesh Police are made up of 123,000 personnel serving under police divisions across the country ... (Bangladesh Police website, May 2009) [98b] According to the website of the Rapid Action Battalion (accessed June 2009), Bangladesh has one police officer per 1,200 population, compared with ratios of 1:728 for India and 1:625 for Pakistan. [70] (Note: 'Cobra' and 'Cheetah', sometimes referred to as 'Kobra' and 'Chita', are units within the Bangladesh Police. [38aa])
- 8.04 The following information on the various auxiliary paramilitary forces was obtained from the websites of the Rapid Action Battalion [70], the Bangladesh Rifles [72] and the non-governmental website, Bangladesh Military Forces [71] (all accessed 11 January 2010), Jane's Information Group [83a] (accessed 28 April 2010): **Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)**: The Rapid Action Battalion was established in March 2004 as a special anti-crime strike force capable of dealing with armed criminal organisations. It ... consists of personnel drawn mainly from the police and the armed forces. [70] [71] [83a] There are 12 RAB battalions, stationed in the main urban centres of the country, with a total strength of roughly 9,000 personnel. RAB troops have received training from the Special Forces and are equipped with modern equipment. (Human Rights Watch (HRW), 18 May 2009) [10] (Section III) [70] The Freedom House report, *Countries at the Crossroads 2007*, commented, "Although the battalion has enjoyed widespread public support, partly because of its apparent success in cracking down on hitherto untouchable gangsters, thugs, and criminals, it has been accused of torturing innocent people and killing alleged criminals in what it calls crossfire." [65a] The NGO Odhikar reported that, during 2008, 65 people were killed by the RAB in "crossfire/encounter/gunfight/shootout". [46r] It was noted in the USSD 2008 report: "The RAB received human rights training through the UN Development Program; the UK government; and a local NGO, BSEHR. Although the RAB continued to commit serious human rights violations [in 2008], the number of incidents involving the RAB dropped from the previous year." [2b] (Section 1d)

See [Torture](#), [Extrajudicial Killings](#) and [Accountability and impunity](#), below.

## Police Reform Programme

- 8.05 A Police Reform Programme (PRP), designed to assist the Bangladesh Police to improve performance and professionalism, to ensure equitable access to justice and to be more responsive to the needs of vulnerable people, commenced in 2005 and then progressed more rapidly under the Caretaker Government. A comprehensive public attitude baseline survey was carried out in 2006 and submitted in January 2007 (see ['Avenues of complaint'](#), below). [97c] [97a] By April 2008, 11 model thanas (police stations), designed under the Programme, had so far opened in different regions of the country; officers were receiving training on human rights, on gender awareness and on accountability. [97c] [97a]
- 8.06 Under the Police Reform Programme, a draft ordinance (Bangladesh Police Ordinance 2007) was prepared to replace the Police Act of 1861; it aimed to redefine the roles and responsibilities of police. It also recommended pay increases and improved allowances for police personnel, and provided for specialised training of officers. (*New Age*, 10 June 2007) [96d] (PTI, 10 May 2007) [56b] The draft ordinance proposed the establishment of a Police Complaints Commission, as well as a Summary Court for quick adjudication of cases against police personnel accused of abuse of power or other irregularities. (*Daily Star*, 20 June 2007) [38cw] An article in *The Daily Star* of 26 August 2008 noted that Police Ordinance 2007 had not yet been implemented, but had been referred to stakeholders for comment. [38cx] It was reported on 16 February 2009 that the

government had not yet selected the draft Ordinance for ratification by Parliament. (*The Daily Star*) [38dm]

8.07 In February 2009 the country's first Victim Support Centre was established in Dhaka by the Bangladesh Police. It is staffed by 17 trained female police officers and is supported by a network of health care professionals, social workers, lawyers and NGO personnel. The UN Development Programme's Country Director, Stefan Priesner, commented at the Centre's inauguration that it reflected "the significant shift that has taken place in the police mindset in recent years". (Minsitry of Home Affairs, Police Reform Programme press release, 17 February 2009) [97c]

8.08 The International Crisis Group, in *Bangladesh: Getting Police Reform on Track*, 11 December 2009 reported that:

"After decades of misuse and neglect, Bangladesh's police are a source of instability and fear rather than a key component of a democratic society. Human rights abuses are endemic and almost all Bangladeshis who interact with the police complain of corruption. With an elected government in place again, there are now opportunities to reform this dysfunctional force. But there are also significant obstacles. If the government fails to move beyond the current modest reform process, the democratic transition could falter should deteriorating security give the military another chance to intervene, using, as it has in the past, the pretext of upholding law and order to justify derailing democracy. Deep structural reforms – including a new police law – and major additional resources are necessary to create an effective and accountable service." [128c] (Executive summary)

**Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Parties (VDP):** These voluntary forces are combined under the Ministry of Home Affairs's Ansar and VDP Directorate. The forces have the stated mission of ensuring safety and security in rural Bangladesh, assisting in disaster management, contributing to socio-economic development, and work under operational control of the army during an emergency or war. They are divided into three basic components: Ansar Bahini, Battalion Ansar, and VDP. Ansar Bahini is said to have a company of 100 men and a female platoon of 32 members in every sub district, as well as 32 members in each 'union' of the country. Battalion Ansar is made up of 35 male battalions and one female battalion. The total strength of VDP is about 5.6 million people, of which 50 per cent are women. There is a VDP presence in most villages of the country; there is also an urban version of VDP called the Town Defence Party. (Bangladesh Military Forces Group, accessed 11 June 2010) [71] (HRW, 19 May 2009, accessed 8 February 2010) [10] (Section III)

**Bangladesh Rifles (BDR):** The primary role of this paramilitary force is border control, including anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking activities. (Bangladesh Military Forces Group, accessed 11 June 2010) [71] The BDR has also been called upon to assist the police in various "internal" operations, such as recovering illegal firearms and guarding election polling stations. (Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), accessed 11 January 2010) [72] The BDR is reported to have 67,000 personnel, is under the authority of the Home Ministry and is mainly commanded by officers seconded from the army. (HRW, 19 May 2009, accessed 8 February 2010) [10] (Section III)

See Section 3: [Bangladesh Rifles \(BDR\) mutiny](#)

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## ARMED FORCES

- 8.09 The armed forces total 135,000 members: 120,000 in the army, 8,500 in the navy and 6,500 in the air force (Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessment, Armed Forces, updated 14 December 2009) [83g] The USSD *Background Note, Bangladesh*, updated 24 May 2010, stated :

"The Bangladesh Army, Navy, and Air Force are composed of volunteer military members. In addition to traditional defense roles, the military is frequently called on to provide support to civil authorities for disaster relief and internal security. During the period of emergency rule from January 2007 to December 2008, the military played a central role in the formulation and execution of key government strategies, including the anti-corruption campaign and voter registration." [2e]

- 8.10 The army is also a major contributor to UN peacekeeping missions around the world. A BBC report dated 18 January 2006 stated that:

"For Bangladeshis, the peacekeepers – who are on duty in 12 countries across three continents – are a source of pride. "It is giving a good exposure to our country," said Flight Lieutenant Abu Saleh Mohammad Mannafi, a helicopter pilot with Bangladesh's air force. "We're earning a good name and fame for the army, air force and navy as well as contributing to our economy. So it is doing a world of good for our country." ... In return Bangladesh's army is well paid by the United Nations." [20eu]

See [Bangladesh Army, UN Mission](#) website. [134a]

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## OTHER GOVERNMENT FORCES

### Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI)

- 8.11 The DGFI is Bangladesh's principal military intelligence agency and operates subdivisions serving all branches of the armed forces. Established in 1977, it reports directly to the prime minister and maintains offices in all of the country's districts and sub-districts. (HRW, 18 May 2009) [10I] (Section III) According to the Human Rights Watch report of 18 May 2009, the DGFI

"... is widely regarded as a driving force behind the military-backed regime that took power on January 11, 2007, and exercised a central role in its anti-corruption campaign. It intimidated, arrested, and arbitrarily detained dozens of businesspersons, senior party officials, journalists, and academics and placed them in illegal detention facilities inside the military cantonment in Dhaka. Many were physically and mentally tortured, often threatened...to make forced confessions or implicate others in crimes ... During much of the state of emergency, DGFI exercised control over media outlets." [10I] (Section III)

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## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY THE SECURITY FORCES

## Arbitrary arrest and detention

See also Section 12: [Arrest and Detention – Legal Rights](#) and Section 15: [Opposition Groups and Political Activists](#)

- 8.12 According to the USSD 2009 report, “The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, the law permits authorities to arrest and detain persons suspected of criminal activity without an order from a magistrate or a warrant.” [2v] [Section 1d]
- 8.13 A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report published in January 2008, stated: “The government has not published accurate statistics on detainees, access to official places of detention has been restricted, and the security forces have used unofficial sites, such as the headquarters of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI, or military intelligence) in Dhaka, making it impossible to know exactly how many people were arrested or how many are still being held.” The HRW report stated that most arrests under the state of emergency had taken place without warrants. [10h] (p3)
- 8.14 An intensive wave of arrests took place between 28 May and 12 June 2008, when between 18,000 and 25,000 people (based on media estimates) were arrested by police and ‘joint forces’ in what the government described as a drive against ‘miscreants, criminals and those wanted by the law’. Those arrested included political leaders and activists (of both major political parties) at district, sub-district and municipal level. It is not known how many were subsequently released. (*New Age*, 9 June 2008) [96f] (Odhikar, 12 June 2008) [46q]

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## Torture

- 8.15 The USSD 2010 report stated:
- “Although the constitution prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment, security forces including the RAB, military, and police frequently employed severe physical and psychological abuse during arrests and interrogations. According to figures provided by human rights organizations, the use of such techniques dropped in 2008 but increased during the year. Abuse consisted of threats, beatings, and the use of electric shock. According to human rights organizations, security forces tortured at least 68 persons. The government rarely charged, convicted, or punished those responsible, and a climate of impunity allowed such abuses by the RAB, police, and military to continue.” [2v] (Section 1c)
- 8.16 The human rights NGO, Odhikar, stated that:
- “Torture has a pervasive presence in Bangladesh. In 2010, as per Odhikar’s documentation, 67 persons were reportedly tortured by different law enforcement agencies. Among them 22 persons were allegedly tortured to death. Law enforcement agencies regularly practice torture on suspects and accused persons in order to extract confessional statements. Torture is prohibited by Article 35(5) of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, which states that: “No person shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment or treatment.” However, the practice of torture has not been made a criminal offence and there is no definition of it in any law. However, despite this, section 331 of the Penal Code gives some relief stating

44 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

that it is a criminal offence if someone causes grievous hurt for the purpose of extorting a confession or any information which may lead to the detection of an offence or cause the restoration of property.” (Odhikar *Human Rights Report 2010*) [46x] (p35)

8.17 A HRW report, *Ignoring Executions and Torture...*, published on 18 May 2009, stated that: “Although there are no reliable statistics on the extent to which state agents engage in acts of torture...nongovernmental organizations and journalists in Bangladesh have over the years documented and reported thousands of cases.” [10i] (Section II)

8.18 According to the HRW *World Report 2010* (covering events of 2009), dated 20 January 2010:

“Torture continues to be used by law enforcement officials to force confessions in criminal investigations and to extort money. The bodies of those who are killed by RAB and the police regularly have physical marks and injuries indicating that they were subjected to torture.

“Several persons taken into custody following the BDR rebellion in February 2009 died under suspicious circumstances. Many detainees were subjected to physical torture, including beatings and electric shocks. Relatives of Mobarak Hossain, one of the BDR members who died after being detained, allege that he was tortured to death. Sources at the Dhaka Medical College morgue told the media and human rights workers that Hossain's wrists, arms, knees, and shoulders were swollen and badly bruised. In May the government announced that a commission had been established to investigate the deaths of BDR members in custody. The findings of the commission, which was to have submitted its report within 15 days, have not been made public at this writing.

“On October 22, F.M. Masum, a journalist at the *New Age* newspaper, was detained by RAB officers and tortured. Masum has written several reports about the paramilitary unit for *New Age*, including on its involvement in extrajudicial killings.

“Laws that facilitate torture by removing or undermining fundamental safeguards against arbitrary arrests and detention remain in effect, including the Special Powers Act and the newly adopted Anti-Terrorism Act.” [10n]

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## Odhikar Torture Prevention Project

8.19 Odhikar, a Dhaka-based human rights NGO, stated in their *Human Rights Report 2009*, issued 1 January 2010 that:

“The Government abruptly brought an end to the torture prevention project being implemented by Odhikar, where Odhikar was to provide training to human rights defenders and carry out mass-awareness raising programmes. The NGO Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office, approved the programme and gave permission to launch the project titled ‘Human Rights Defenders Training and Advocacy Programme in Bangladesh’ on April 28, 2009. After the permission was granted, Odhikar provided training to Human Rights Defenders as to how human rights could be upheld; how human rights violations could be prevented; how one could assist the tortured persons; along with providing training as to how public awareness could be raised against torture and to enact a domestic law criminalising torture as an offensive crime and carry out

advocacy programmes to inspire the Government to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

“... Odhikar then received a letter dated August 17, 2009, from the NGO Affairs Bureau ordering it to shut down its torture prevention programmes. The letter reached Odhikar on August 31, 2009. The letter, which was signed and stamped by the NGO Affairs Bureau authority, stated that the project had been cancelled because of objections expressed by the Ministry of Home Affairs. No prior notification or valid reason to shut the programme was given by the government.

“Odhikar filed a Writ Petition (No. 6550) challenging the cancellation of its project by the Government. On October 11, 2009, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh issued a rule against the Government and at the same time stayed the impugned order of the NGO Affairs Bureau ... “ [46w] (p29)

See para: [8.21](#)

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## Extra-judicial killings

8.20 According to the USSD 2010 report:

“Members of the security forces committed numerous extrajudicial killings. The police, BDR, military, and the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) occasionally used unwarranted lethal force.

“The government did not release statistics for total killings by all security personnel. The government also did not take comprehensive measures to investigate cases, despite public statements by high-ranking officials that the government would show ‘zero tolerance’ and would fully investigate all extrajudicial killings by security forces. The number of killings by police and combined security forces also increased. According to the media and local human rights organizations, no case resulted in criminal punishment, and in the few instances in which the government brought charges, those found guilty generally received administrative punishment. Some members of the security forces acted with impunity. [2v] (Section 1a)

8.21 The NGO Odhikar stated in a report of 31 May 2009 that 29 people had been “extra-judicially killed” by the police and security forces since the Awami League government came to office on 6 January 2009. In an address to the Human Rights Council on 3 February, the Foreign Minister said the Government would show “zero tolerance” towards extrajudicial killings, torture and custodial deaths. [46t]

8.22 Odhikar, noted in their *Bangladesh: Six Month’s Human Rights Monitoring Report, January 01 –June 30* [2011], published 1 July 2011 that:

“On average, every 4 days, 1 person is killed extra-judicially. According to information gathered by Odhikar, between January and June 2011, 49 people were killed extra-judicially. ... Among the 49 extra-judicial killings, 37 persons were killed in ‘crossfire/encounters/gun fights’. ... 24 were allegedly killed by RAB, 8 by police, 3 by RAB Police and 2 by RAB-Coast Guard. ... 9 were allegedly tortured to death by police and one by jail authorities. ..., one was allegedly beaten to death by police. One person

was shot dead by police.” [46y] (p4) The NGO, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), in their 2010 Annual Report, stated that, according to their records, Extra judicial killings in ‘cross fire’ or ‘encounter’ continue to be a source of insecurity and fear for citizens. News reports tabulated by ASK’s Documentation Unit show that in 2010, different law enforcing agencies admitted to 133 deaths in “crossfire” and 74 deaths occurred in jail custody. Incidents of torture in custody and suicide were also reported. [109c] (p4)

(Note: Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) is a national legal aid and human rights organization, established in 1986. Initially focused on providing free legal services to the disenfranchised in Dhaka City, its aims and activities have developed over twenty years to encompass investigation, advocacy, media campaigning, documentation, training and action research in addition to its core activities of legal services (including legal aid, mediation and public interest litigation). [109] (About Us)

8.23 According to the HRW report *Ignoring Executions and Torture...*, published on 18 May 2009:

“The longstanding problem of killings in custody assumed endemic proportions after the creation of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), a paramilitary law enforcement agency, in 2004. RAB started the trend of so called ‘crossfire killings’-apparent extrajudicial killings that officials purport were legitimate or accidental killings where the victims (people RAB called ‘wanted criminals’ or ‘top terrors’) died when they resisted arrest or when they were caught in the crossfire during an armed clash between RAB and a criminal group. But the police also adopted these methods soon after. Since June 2004, well over 1,000 people have been killed by the police, RAB, and other security forces. It is widely believed that the vast majority of these killings in reality are thinly disguised executions, often preceded by torture.” [10l] (Section II)

8.24 According to the HRW *World Report 2010*:

“On several occasions during 2009 the government promised that it would end the grave problem of extrajudicial executions by members of the security forces. Yet the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)-an elite paramilitary law enforcement agency-and the police continued to kill people in what the authorities refer to as “crossfire” killings, “encounters,” and “shootouts” but in fact constitute thinly disguised extrajudicial executions. ... The killings increased significantly during the second half of the year, suggesting a lack of commitment to confront the security forces once the government settled into office. Alleged members of outlawed left-wing political parties are particularly targeted. In echoes of previous governments’ statements that had been heavily criticized by the Awami League while in opposition, the government claimed that law enforcement agencies were only exercising their right to self defense.” [10n]

8.25 The HRW *World Report 2011*, updating the situation, stated that:

“Soon after elections in December 2008, officials in the Awami League-led government promised to institute a zero-tolerance policy and bring the perpetrators of extrajudicial killings to justice. Yet little change has taken place, and in 2010 the home minister and other officials denied any wrongdoing by law enforcement agencies, including the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), the elite anti-crime, anti-terror force whose officers regularly kill with impunity. The RAB acknowledges that its officers have killed at least 622 people since the force was established in 2004. But in press statements, the RAB has claimed that the victims were shot and killed in “crossfire” after their accomplices opened fire on the force. The home minister has also supported the claim that RAB officers who have killed were acting in self-defense. In a worrying development, the police appear to have increasingly adopted the RAB’s extrajudicial methods, and several hundred killings have

been attributed to the police force in recent years. Investigations by human rights organizations regularly find that victims were executed while in RAB custody. The bodies of the dead often bear marks of torture, and many survivors of RAB custody have repeatedly alleged ill-treatment and torture. The chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission recommended in December 2009 that all allegations of RAB killings be investigated by an independent commission of inquiry. At this writing the government has taken no action on this, and not a single member of the RAB has been criminally prosecuted for involvement in torture or killings.” [10q]

See Section 8: [Torture](#), See also [Accountability and impunity](#) below

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## Corruption in the law enforcement agencies

- 8.26 A study carried out by Transparency International (TI) in 2006-2007 found that 64.5 per cent of those respondents who had dealings with the law enforcement agencies claimed to have used bribery. [42g] (pp34-36)

See also [Avenues of complaint](#) and Section 18: [Corruption](#)

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## AVENUES OF COMPLAINT

- 8.27 According to a HRW report of December 2006: “Citizens who wish to file a complaint with the police face many hurdles. First is the fear of reprisal, sometimes based on direct threats not to file a complaint. When families of victims are brave enough to come forward, the police frequently refuse to accept the case. Under Bangladeshi law, the government must provide sanction for courts to consider any offence by a public servant on official duty, including members of the police and other security forces.” [10c] (Section II) The HRW report of 18 May 2009 noted that, in certain cases where the police had refused to accept a complaint, individuals had turned directly to the judiciary – which had the power to conduct its own investigations into those cases. [10j] (Section III)
- 8.28 The public attitude baseline survey conducted on behalf of the UNDP in 2006 found:
- “Only a meagre per cent of the respondents at household (4-7 per cent) mentioned that they reported any incidence of crime to the police during the last 12 months and of them about three fourths (71-74 per cent) were dissatisfied with the response received from the police... About half (49-55 per cent) of the respondents were dissatisfied with the ease of reporting and accuracy of reporting crimes to the police. The following were identified as problems in reporting crimes to the police (placed in order of priorities): police seeks incentives/bribes (money); they remain busy and do not give time or listen; non availability of forms (printed) and papers (carbon paper); concerned police staff not available; police influence or discourage complainant from lodging complaints; forms are complex, not understandable; and police create unnecessary complications and delays ... The overwhelming majority of the respondents (82-83 per cent) mentioned that people [most frequently] report to police when the crime committed is a life-threatening one. [Other] crimes which [frequently] induce people to report to police...are physical torture (63 per cent); property related crimes (57-63 per cent); and [honour-



related] issues/defamation (29-53 per cent). Crimes [which victims usually do not report to police] include violence against women. Sex related crimes have also been identified by three fourths of the female respondents (77 per cent)...as crimes inhibiting reporting to police. Other crimes which discourage victims from reporting to police are crimes committed by [influential people] or police themselves and unnecessary harassments.” [‘Common or minor crimes’ were also usually not reported]. [97a] (p111) (p51)

8.29 The report added:

“The [female respondents] hardly or never reported crimes to the police unless police was incidentally present at the place of occurrence. Males...most frequently, or frequently, reported crimes by visiting the police station personally or sending somebody to police station or through telephone or sending letters or bringing the police to the place of occurrence. Most frequently, or frequently, cited reasons for not reporting crimes to the police...include: worried or afraid to face police; problems or fear of expenditure; fear of harassment by the police; fear of harassment by the criminals; fear of losing honor; no confidence in police/ police not effective; community people/ward commissioner solved the problem; neutral investigation and equal protection of law not expected; and directly filed case in the court.” [97a] (p111)

8.30 Police officers interviewed for this survey estimated that, on average, it required 23 to 26 hours to reach the scene of a crime after receiving information. [97a] (p52) Most household respondents said that the police were over-worked and did not have sufficient time off. However, a majority also perceived that police officers spent time doing errands for higher officials or on protocol functions or VIP protection or collecting incentives/bribes, or could not perform their duties properly. [97a] (p64-65)

8.31 The British High Commission in Dhaka, in a letter dated 1 October 2004, described how citizens could proceed if the police refused/declined to investigate a particular complaint or file a criminal case: “Lawyers working for the respected Human Rights NGO, Odhikar, have advised that in such a case an individual can petition a magistrate. If the magistrate agrees with his [or her] claim, the magistrate can then direct the police to accept the case. [The British High Commission has also] heard the same from another Human Rights NGO, the Human Rights Congress for Bangladeshi Minorities.” [11h]

## Accountability and impunity

8.32 The HRW *World Report 2011*, Bangladesh, released on 24 January 2011, noted:

“In 2010, members of the security forces regularly escaped accountability for killings, acts of torture, and illegal detentions. Several legal provisions effectively shield members of the security forces and other public officials from prosecution by requiring government approval for criminal actions to be initiated. Military and police regularly employ torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment against detainees, despite constitutional guarantees against torture and Bangladesh’s ratification of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The government failed to investigate the causes of numerous deaths in custody, and there was little action to hold accountable those responsible for the deaths of alleged mutineers from the Bangladesh Rifles border force.” [10q]

8.33 According to the USSD 2010 report, “The government took steps to improve police professionalism, discipline, training, and responsiveness, and reduce corruption. Plaintiffs rarely accused police in criminal cases due to lengthy trial procedures and

fears of retribution. Reluctance to bring charges against police perpetuated a climate of impunity. [2v] (Section 1d)

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## 9. MILITARY SERVICE

- 9.01 Conscription has never existed in Bangladesh, although the 1952 Bangladesh Army Act does provide for a possible introduction of compulsory military service. (War Resisters International: Bangladesh entry, last updated March 1998, accessed Dec 2009) [13] A State Party report, dated 14 July 2005, to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) observed: "There is no provision for compulsory recruitment into the armed forces of Bangladesh." [52b]
- 9.02 According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers *Global Report 2008* (accessed 15 June 2009) the minimum age for voluntary recruitment in the army is 16, and 17 years for the navy and air force. The minimum age for recruitment into the armed paramilitary and auxiliary forces, including the Bangladesh Rifles and the Ansar, is 18 years. [35] (Bangladesh narrative) The UN CRC report of July 2005 clarified that, because recruits into the armed forces initially underwent a period of basic training, there was no scope for any person to be employed for actual service or combat duty before attaining the age of 18. [52b]

See paragraph [24.42](#) regarding the difficulties in maintaining a reliable Birth registration system.

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## 10. ABUSES BY NON-GOVERNMENT ARMED GROUPS

- 10.01 Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessment, Bangladesh, Executive Summary, posted In September 2011, stated:

"Islam has become an increasingly defining feature of Bangladeshi politics in recent years. One consequence of the rise of Islamic politics in Bangladesh has been a deterioration in the security environment. The former BNP-led government (2001-2006), which included the Bangladesh Islamic Conference (Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh: JIB) and the Coalition of Islamic Unity (Islami Oikya Jote: IOJ), came under pressure for its tacit support of radical Islamist groups such as the Jamaat ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), which was responsible for 459 near-simultaneous improvised explosive devices that detonated on 17 August 2005, killing two people and injuring more than 100 others. The judiciary was also targeted that year with attacks on courthouses in Gazipur and Chittagong, likely because they are symbols of secularity. The BNP belatedly began to crack down on the JMB. Although this created tensions with the JIB, the government succeeded in capturing and executing the leading operatives of the terrorist attacks. In May 2007, three near-simultaneous bomb explosions struck three railway stations in three cities. The attacks were attributed to a new organisation called Zadid Al-Qaeda, which may be a regrouping of certain JMB activists. The government stated in April 2009 that there were 122 organisations involved in terrorist activity in the country, the result of increased factionalisation among militants. There have been no major attacks

on the same scale as the 2005 blasts, and counter-terrorist operations have been surprisingly successful in arresting key members of the JMB and reducing its capabilities. The current AL government has sought to crack down on the spread of Islamism by strengthening the counter-terrorism apparatus internally and increasing international co-operation. Attempts by the Supreme Court to ban religious-based parties and return the constitution to its avowedly secular roots were, however, overturned by the 15th constitutional amendment in June 2011, which maintained Islam as the state religion. Nonetheless, the removal of the phrase "absolute faith and trust in Allah" from the preamble of the constitution was enough to spark rioting by Islamist organisations." [83e]

- 10.02 The Institute for Conflict Management's South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) reported in their *Bangladesh Assessment 2010* (covering events of 2009):

"Bangladesh has experienced an abrupt political stabilization in 2009, even as subversive activities by Islamist extremist groups have been substantially curbed by the Government. No terrorist attack has so far been recorded in 2009 by the Islamist militants, though radical groups continue to maintain a varying presence across the country. Bangladeshi authorities, however, continue to vigorously target alleged Left Wing Extremists, though there is little corresponding evidence of a proportionately violent Left Wing movement in the country." [59g]

- 10.03 SATP, in its *Bangladesh Assessment 2011* (covering events of 2010) reported that:

"The processes of de-radicalization initiated by the Sheikh Hasina Government after it came to power on January 6, 2009, have been further and considerably consolidated through 2010, with Dhaka successfully reining in the Islamist extremist constituency in the country, even as it continued to ruthlessly target an incipient radical Left Wing movement. ... The gains of 2010 have been dramatic, but a note of caution remains to be sounded. The residual capacities of the Jel and JMB are significant, even as HuJI-B continues to maintain close links with a number of ambitious Pakistani groups adamant upon spreading their base in the country. Moreover, the corrosive nature of violent and disruptive street mobilization by political parties in Bangladesh has the potential to destroy the tentative stability that has been secured after decades of rising disorder. Bangladesh has made very steady, indeed, dramatic gains, in two short years, but is still at risk of sliding back if the Government wavers even slightly. [59h]

- 10.04 The *Armed Conflict Database* of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, undated, accessed 10 February 2010, stated:

"Militants were responsible for a few small-scale incidents, including violent demonstrations on university campuses and just one fatality during 2009. Eighty-six died in incidents not linked to militancy, 74 of them during the mutiny by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) border guards. However, despite this lull in the conflict, intelligence sources reported that Islamist organisations continued to operate and recruit throughout Bangladesh. There were arrests and continuous security operations throughout the year, including a hunt for Islamist militants' bomb stores." [116a]

- 10.05 The South Asia Terrorism Portal's Data Sheets, updated to 31 December 2009 reported that there were no fatalities associated with Islamist terrorism in 2008 or 2009. During the same period, 86 left-wing militants – mostly members of Purba Bangla Communist Party factions and the New Biplobi Communist Party – and six civilians were killed, primarily in encounters with the security forces. [59f]

- 10.06 The Institute for Conflict Management, in their Bangladesh Assessment 2010 reported that: “According to a November 7, 2009, report 13 Left Wing Extremist (LWE) groups are active in the country: Purba Banglar Communist Party, PBCP (Janajuddha), PBCP (M-L Red Flag), PBCP (M-L Communist War), Biplabi Communist Party, New Biplabi Communist Party, Gono Bahini, Gono Mukti Fouz, Banglar Communist Party, Socialist Party, Biplabi Anuragi, Chhinnamul Communist Party and Sarbahara People's March.” [59g]

See also Section 4: [Recent Developments](#) and [Annex B](#)

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## 11. JUDICIARY

- 11.01 Article 35(3) of the Constitution states “Every person accused of a criminal offence shall have the right to a speedy and public trial by an independent and impartial court or tribunal established by law.” Article 27 provides: “All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of law.” [4]
- 11.02 According to the US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010* (USSD 2010 report), released 8 April 2011:

“The law provides for an independent judiciary, but in practice a longstanding temporary provision of the constitution placed the executive in charge of the lower courts, judicial appointments, and compensation for judicial officials. Legislation from 2007 separating the judiciary from the executive remained in effect throughout the year [2010].

“Despite ostensible separation of the judiciary from the executive, the political authority made judicial appointments to the higher courts and allegedly influenced many judicial decisions on politically sensitive cases, including decisions regarding bail and detention for political opponents of the government. On April 11 [2010], the AL government appointed 17 additional judges to the High Court Division of the Supreme Court triggering protests from the pro-opposition Supreme Court Bar Association leaders. The opposition argued that two of the appointees had criminal records that included murder charges and ransacking of court premises. Outgoing Chief Justice Fazlul Karim refused to administer oaths to the judges, which drew criticism from government leaders. ...[2v] (Section 1e)

- 11.03 Freedom House’s (FH) report, *Freedom of the World 2011*, covering events in 2010, released in May 2011 observed, “The court system is prone to corruption and severely backlogged; pretrial detention is lengthy, and many defendants lack counsel. The indigent have little access to justice through the courts. In August 2009, the government launched an initiative to form small courts in 500 rural administrative councils that could settle disputes outside of traditional court settings, reducing pressure on the legal system.” [65e]

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## ORGANISATION

- 11.04 As noted in the USSD 2009 report:

52 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

“The court system has two levels: the lower courts and the Supreme Court. Both hear civil and criminal cases. After the separation of the judiciary from the executive, the government appointed judicial magistrates to replace the executive magistrates who had presided over the lower courts. Although executive magistrates still exist, their powers are restricted, and they are only appointed in specific circumstances; for example, executive magistrates were appointed to administer the mobile court system to look at issues of food adulteration and quality. The Supreme Court has two parts, the high court and the appellate divisions. The High Court Division hears some original cases mostly dealing with constitutional issues, and reviews cases from the lower courts. The Appellate Division hears appeals of judgments, decrees, orders, or sentences of the High Court. Rulings of the Appellate Division are binding on all other courts.” [2t] (Section 1e)

11.05 Decisions of the Appellate Court are binding on all other courts, including the High Court. The judges of both divisions of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President, according to the terms of the Constitution. [Bangladesh Constitution, accessed 15 March 2010] [4]

11.06 The Civil Justice system in Bangladesh is based on the British model (USSD Background Note, August 2008) [2e] and continues to operate under the 1908 Civil Procedure Code. Certain amendments have been incorporated to try to speed up the process and avoid long and unnecessary delays. (*The Daily Star*, 16 July 2005) [38ag]

11.07 As noted in the USSD 2010 report:

“Administrative and judicial remedies are available for alleged wrongs. The government did not interfere with civil judicial procedures. Corruption and outside influence were problems in the civil judicial system. Alternative dispute resolution for civil cases allows citizens to present their cases for mediation. According to government sources, wider use of mediation in civil cases quickened the administration of justice, but there was no assessment of its fairness or impartiality.” [2v] (Section 1e)

11.08 The Law Commission was formed in 1976; its functions include recommending the repeal or amendment of existing laws which are obsolete or inconsistent with fundamental rights; recommending the enactment of new laws; and recommending reforms to modernise the judicial system. The Commission is headed by a retired Chief Justice of Supreme Court. (Law Commission of Bangladesh (website) accessed 15 March 2010) [84]

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## Special Tribunals

11.09 The USSD *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2006*, released March 2007, recorded that, under the provisions of the Public Safety Act, the Law and Order Disruption Crimes Speedy Trial Act (see below), and the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act (see Section 23: [Women](#)), special tribunals hear cases and issue verdicts. Cases under these laws must be investigated and tried within specific time limits, although the law is unclear regarding the disposition of a case if it is not finished within an allotted time period. [2I] (Section 1e)

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## The Truth Commission

11.10 As noted by the NGO, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) in their Annual Report 2008:

“The ‘Truth and Accountability Commission’ was set up on 3 August [2008], pursuant to the Right to Voluntary Disclosure Ordinance 2008, which allows citizens to avoid imprisonment by making voluntary disclosures regarding any unearned income and depositing the same with the Commission. The tenure of the Commission was set to end on 2 January 2009. Up to November, some 389 people, mainly government officials and medium-level businessmen, applied for voluntary disclosure; 259 of them admitted to possessing assets beyond their known source of income amounting to some Taka 27.79 crores (277.9 million Taka) and deposited Taka 14.46 crores (144.6 million Taka) with the public exchequer. However, the High Court, on 13 November, declared the Ordinance, the formation of the Commission, and all its functions illegal and unconstitutional, in a public interest litigation. The Court observed that the Commission was unconstitutional as it had by allowing offenders to be exonerated without trial in the courts, effectively by-passed the judiciary. The writ petitioners argued that the provisions of the Ordinance which allowed the conduct of private hearing by the Commission, the reliance on self incriminating evidence and the confiscation of private property were in violation of fair trial protections under Article 35 of the Constitution. The Appellate Division, on 16 November [2008], stayed the High Court order for one month, allowing the Commission to function in the mean time. However, the Commission had completed all its hearings before the High Court order, and functioned only administratively following this order.” [109a] (Chapter 6)

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## Informal systems of justice: village courts and Shalish

11.11 The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2002 report noted that about two-thirds of all disputes did not enter the formal court process; instead they were either settled at a local level by local leaders or a village court, or they remained unsettled. Shalish (or Grameen Shalish) local mediation councils provide a traditional alternative to dispute resolution and comprise local community leaders who either individually or in groups provide a forum for arbitration and dispute resolution. A study of Shalish in two districts in 1996 indicated that the majority of disputes dealt with related to family law, maintenance, second marriage, dowry and land ownership. According to the UNDP 2002 report, the option of conciliation through mediation was particularly favoured by women and the poor. [8b] (p91-100) Shalish cannot lawfully try criminal cases; all criminal proceedings must be regulated by the Code of Criminal Procedure or by specific acts passed by parliament. (UNB, 20 March 2009) [39b] Village courts deal with both civil and criminal matters; they have the power to summon witnesses and can impose a fine on contempt charges. The officials of village courts are usually chairmen and members of ‘union parishads’ (the local government authorities, of which there are 4,448 in Bangladesh) and are generally powerful members of the local community. Village courts can, however, be open to outside influences. The main sources of influence were said to be local political leaders, community leaders, wealthy people and other influential individuals in the village. Village courts generally functioned in co operation with the local police. [8b] (p91-100)

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## INDEPENDENCE

- 11.12 Article 94(4) of the Constitution states “Subject to the provisions of this Constitution the Chief Justice and the other Judges shall be independent in the exercise of their judicial functions.” Article 96 provides that a judge cannot be removed from office for reasons other than those set out in the Constitution. [4]
- 11.13 The NGO Odhikar commented in its Human Rights Report 2008 of 15 January 2009 that the separation of the Judiciary from the Executive could be regarded as one of the major successes of the Caretaker Government. The report, however, stated that the Government still exercised some control over the recruitment of judges, which was done by the Public Service Commission through the Ministry of Law. [46r] (p26)
- 11.14 The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) reported in *The State of Human Rights in Bangladesh 2009*, undated, that:
- “Bangladesh's government has made public announcements that the judiciary would be separated from the executive and will function independently, including to the international community in pledges made as part of the country's re-election bid for membership in the UN Human Rights Council. However, the same government also amended the Code of Criminal Procedure in 2009 to allow 'executive magistrates' to arbitrarily take over trials of any cases they deem fit, greatly undermining any notion of independence of the judiciary, in particular concerning cases of human rights violations allegedly committed by the State.” [66b] (p63)
- 11.15 The AHRC reported in *The State of Human Rights in Bangladesh 2010*, undated, that:
- “The judiciary does not enjoy independence as far as the administration of justice is concerned in terms of logistics, manpower, integrity and the adjudication of the cases. Besides, there is a serious lack of judicial competence and commitment to upholding the rule of law among many judicial officers.” [66d] (p40)

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## FAIR TRIAL

- 11.16 As noted on the website of the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC (accessed on 8 October 2006), “The Government has constituted Legal Aid Committees, headed by District Judges in 61 districts, to provide legal assistance to the poor and destitute litigants. These district level committees have been working under the National Legal Aid Committee.” [85a]

See also paragraph [11.03](#).

- 11.17 The USSD 2010 report stated:

“The law provides accused persons with the right to be represented by counsel, to review accusatory material, to call or question witnesses, and to appeal verdicts. Cases are decided by judges rather than juries, and trials are public. In practice a public defender is rarely provided to defendants. Defendants are presumed innocent, have the right to appeal, the right to be present and to see the government's evidence.” The report added, “Corruption and a substantial backlog of cases hindered the court system, and trials were typically marked by extended continuances, effectively preventing many

from obtaining a fair trial due to witness tampering, victim intimidation, and missing evidence. Human rights observers contended magistrates, attorneys, and court officials demanded bribes from defendants in many cases filed during the year.” [2v] (Section 1e)

- 11.18 The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) reported in *The State of Human Rights in Bangladesh 2009*, undated, that:

“The criminal justice system of Bangladesh is incapable of holding a fair trial and providing justice to the country’s citizens. In order to establish the rule of law, the country immediately requires equal access to be provided to citizens to effective complaint mechanisms without any fear or manipulation. Criminal investigations should be efficient, impartial and independent from the regular police. The prosecution needs to be independent and permanent instead of the current practice of politicised recruitments followed by dismissals depending on which political party is in power. Judges occupying the judiciary’s various branches need to exhibit competence and judicial skills and be supported with adequate resources.” [66b] (p65)

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## CORRUPTION IN THE JUDICIARY

- 11.19 The Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC), in its publication of February 2010, [\*Politics – Corruption Nexus in Bangladesh, An Empirical Study of the Impacts on Judicial Governance\*](#) stated that:

“No matter what form of corruption takes place in the judiciary of Bangladesh, political factors play a huge part in terms of the origin, development and practices of corruption. Government must take a holistic approach to the problems and undertake a thorough reformation of the existing systems without any further delay. The Subordinate Judiciary of Bangladesh has yet to develop as an effective institution under the status quo, and this is so even after its de jure separation from the executive branch of the State machinery. It is one of the most neglected institutions of the State having only minimum facilities. In upholding the rule of law, in maintaining law and order, in protecting fundamental human rights and in building up a strong check and balance system amongst the State organs, the judiciary should be rescued directly and with all due speed, from its status of vulnerability.” [76a] (p111)

See also Section 12: [Arrest and detention - Bail](#)

- 11.20 The ALRC publication highlighted several areas of concern, which included:

1. Local touts and persons with vested interests can exploit the man/woman on the street by using their ignorance of the judicial process, as an opportunity for their own personal gain;
2. Innocent persons are victimized by political leaders or activists through false cases and especially in counter cases;
3. People use every means to avoid lodging their cases in a police station because of the possibility of endless police harassment;



4. Police do not record genuine cases because of political considerations or because their demands for money were refused. [76a]

11.21 The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) reported in *The State of Human Rights in Bangladesh 2009*, undated, that:

“Different forms of corruption can be found at most stages of criminal investigations. The police play a key role in corruption in investigative and trial cases. It is difficult to lodge a complaint in a criminal case in a police station. It is also difficult to file a complaint case before the cognizance magistrate courts. ... Bribes for court staff are an inevitable expectation for services rendered at all stages from the filing to the disposal of a criminal case. ... Accused persons under arrest are not consistently presented before the nearest magistrate within twenty-four hours. The most corrupt area of judicial matters involves bail, where the majority of stakeholders are either directly or indirectly involved. Strict legal formalities in recording confessions are not properly followed by the magistrates.” [66b] (p31)

See also Section 18: [Corruption](#)

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## 12. ARREST AND DETENTION – LEGAL RIGHTS

See also Section 8: [Arbitrary Arrest and detention](#) and Section 15: [Opposition Groups and Political Activists](#)

12.01 As stated in the US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010* (USSD 2010 report), released on 8 April 2011: “The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, the law permits authorities to arrest and detain persons suspected of criminal activity without an order from a magistrate or a warrant.” [2v] (Section 1d) USSD 2009 has also noted that, in December 2008 the president promulgated the Emergency Power (Repeal) Ordinance to revoke the state of emergency that had been declared in 2007. Under the state of emergency, the government promulgated the Emergency Power Rules (EPR), which gave the government authority to detain citizens without filing formal charges or specific complaints. In repealing the state of emergency, the ordinance specified that, although cases brought under the EPR would continue to have validity, pending cases would be conducted under the traditional rules and laws. [2t] (Section 1d)

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### PREVENTIVE DETENTION AND ITS LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

12.02 The USSD 2010 report noted:

“The law provides for arrest without the use of warrants in certain cases. The criminal procedure code and the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance authorize detention of persons on suspicion of criminal activity without an order from a magistrate or a warrant, and the government regularly used such provisions. The number of preventive and arbitrary arrests declined from the previous year. Since taking office, the AL government has not carried out any mass arrests. ASK, a domestic human rights organization, and

media outlets estimated that authorities made more than 2,000 routine arrests daily. The majority of those arrested were released within one or two days, often on payment of a bribe.” [2v] (Section 1d)

- 12.03 Human Rights Watch (HRW) commented in their report of 18 May 2009, “Laws giving the authorities the power to deprive a person of his or her liberty in order to prevent potential future criminal acts have been in place on the subcontinent since British colonial rule. As no crime has been committed, these laws are by their very nature in conflict with the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty, as well as to not be arbitrarily detained.” [10I] (Section V)

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### The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC): Section 54

- 12.04 Section 54 of CrPC authorises any police officer to arrest “without an order from a magistrate or without a warrant.... any person ....concerned in any cognisable offence or against whom a reasonable complaint has been made or credible information has been received or a reasonable suspicion exists of his having been so concerned”. Section 54 of the CrPC lays down certain procedures to be observed once an arrest has been made. This includes that the accused must be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours, and that a magistrate must give prior permission if police want to hold a prisoner for longer. However, it is reported that despite these safeguards, Section 54 effectively allows the police to arrest anyone at any time for almost any reason, and is one of the most easily abused provisions in the Bangladesh legal system. (Canadian IRB, September 1998) [3f] (p4)

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### The Special Powers Act (SPA)

- 12.05 The Special Powers Act (SPA) of 1974 gives the Government powers to detain any person for an initial period of up to 30 days, without a formal charge or specific complaint, in order to prevent him or her performing a ‘prejudicial act’. A prejudicial act is broadly defined as “any act... likely to prejudice... the sovereignty and defence of the country, national security, public order or the economic or financial interests of the state”. (Canadian IRB, 1998) [3f] (p5)
- 12.06 The USSD 2010 report provided the following details:

“Under the existing Special Powers Act, the government or a district magistrate may order a person detained for 30 days to prevent the commission of an act that could threaten national security; however, authorities held detainees for longer periods. The magistrate must inform the detainee of the grounds of detention, and an advisory board is required to examine the detainee's case after four months.

“Detainees had the right to appeal. Many detainees taken into custody during the caretaker government's anticorruption drive were held under this act, and during the period the government sought and received numerous detention extensions from advisory boards, consisting of two judges and a government official. Use of the provisions of the Special Powers Act declined during the year.” [2v] (Section 1d)

12.07 The HRW report of 18 May 2009 noted that the advisory board, required to review the detainee's case after 120 days, and thereafter every six months, is made up of two persons qualified to be high court judges, and 'one senior officer in the service of the Republic'. The proceedings before the board are confidential. [10I] (Section V)

12.08 The HRW report of 18 May 2009 commented:

"From 1974 to March 1995, according to court records, of the 10,372 habeas corpus writs that were moved before the High Court Division of the Supreme Court to challenge detentions, only in less than 9 per cent did the court find the detention to be valid-an indication of the extent to which the Act has historically been misused. However, the executive seems to have taken little or no notice of the Supreme Court's repeated criticism of the law and its implementation. It has even ignored release orders, forcing the court to initiate contempt of court proceedings." [10I] (Section V)

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## PRE-TRIAL DETENTION

12.09 The USSD 2010 report recorded:

"The government generally permitted lawyers to meet with their clients only after formal charges were filed in the courts, which in some cases occurred several weeks or months after the initial arrest. Arbitrary arrests were common, and the government held persons in detention without specific charges, often to collect information about other suspects.

"Arbitrary and lengthy pretrial detention continued to be a problem. There were an estimated two million pending civil and criminal cases. A 2008 estimate from the International Center for Prison Studies found nearly 70 percent of prison inmates were in pretrial detention." [2v] (Section 1d)

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## BAIL

12.10 The USSD 2010 report confirmed that "there was a functioning bail system in the regular courts. For example, the courts granted bail to almost all of the officials and former officials accused of corruption under the caretaker government; however, the system sometimes moved slower in cases that carried political implications. Additionally the attorney general ordered that his office have the final decision on bail cases in violation of the code of criminal procedure." [2v] (Section 1d)

12.11 The ALRC, in its publication of February 2010, *Politics – Corruption Nexus in Bangladesh, An Empirical Study of The Impacts On Judicial Governance* stated that:

"The most corrupt and highly controversial area of the judicial system in Bangladesh is the matter of bail for an accused person. Bail shall be granted as a right, and the court cannot refuse bail if it is requested by any arrested person or an accused person who has surrendered himself. Unfortunately, as a group, lawyers have the tendency to demand huge sums of money from their clients who are arrested in cases where bail is allowed. They paint a negative picture of the court's attitude towards the alleged

offence. In some instances they take money in the name of the responsible judge or magistrate. To lend credibility to their dealings they make lengthy and unnecessary submissions before the court in front of their clients.

“The question of bail arises as soon as a person is arrested by the police or detained in custody or a warrant of arrest is issued against an accused person by the court. In most cases, the accused or their relatives try to obtain bail at any cost, even when bail is [un]available. This is the area where local touts, political leaders, lawyers and judicial officers take the opportunity to amass huge sums of money.” [76a] (p39)

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### 13. PRISON CONDITIONS

13.01 The International Centre for Prison Studies (ICPS) London, recorded in their Prison Brief (accessed 7 May 2011) that, according to the national prison administration, the total prison population stood at approximately 69,650 on 31 December 2010, while the country’s 67 prisons had an official capacity of only 29,240 on 31 December 2010. ICPS noted that pre-trial detainees/remand prisoners then comprised 69 per cent of the prison population. [78a] *The Daily Star* had reported on 26 July 2008 that the prison population was then 87,011. In Dhaka Central Jail, which was accommodating around 9,000 to 10,000 inmates in July 2008 but had a capacity to house only 2,600, prisoners were sleeping in shifts and had to wait in long queues to use the bathrooms and toilets. [38cu] The Bangladesh Prisons Directorate reported that the total prison population on 28 February 2009 was 75,521, while the nominal capacity of all prisons was 27,368. [112a]

13.02 The NGO Odhikar noted in its *Human Rights Report 2010*, dated 1 January 2011 that:

“The prisons of Bangladesh are afflicted with various problems, including gross overcrowding, poor nutrition, lack of vocational and educational facilities, lack of proper and appropriate medical care, etc. Nothing much has been done to improve the situation of the inmates since the prisons was built a century ago. One of the main problems is the condition of the prison buildings. To date, there are several prisons in the country which were built during the British Raj. The cells are small and cramped, sanitation poor and ventilation inadequate. Many of the buildings are dilapidated and throughout the years, accommodating prisoners beyond cell capacity; supply of low quality food; lack of adequate medical facilities; crime inside the prison; the spread of various kinds of disease; harassment of inmates; inadequate/insufficient budget allocation etc. have all added to the slow degradation of the prison system in Bangladesh.” [46x] (p39)

The report continued:

“There are 67 prisons in Bangladesh, 12 Central Jails (including one for women only) and 55 District Jails in the country. As of 29 December 2010, there are 69,052 inmates in the prisons, where the actual capacity is 29,240. Among them, 17000 are convicted prisoners and 50,576 are under trial inmates.” [46x] (p39)

13.03 Women prisoners comprised 3.7 per cent of the prison population in September 2008. (ICPS, 1 September 2008) [78a] In 2007, the government opened a new prison for women in Gazipur. (USSD 2008) [2b] (Section 1c) On 3 October 2006, Parliament had passed a law allowing release on parole of women prisoners in certain categories and

60 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

their eventual freedom from imprisonment on fulfilment of certain conditions. (USSD 2006) [2i] (Section 5) According to the US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010*, (USSD 2010) released on 8 April 2011, “Although the law prohibits women in “safe custody” (usually victims of rape, trafficking, and domestic violence) from being housed with criminals, in practice officials did not always provide separate facilities in these situations.” [2v] (Section 1c)

#### 13.04 The USSD 2010 report noted that:

“Prison system conditions remained life threatening at times due to overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and lack of proper sanitation. Human rights observers stated that these conditions contributed to custodial deaths. Unlike in the previous year, there were no accounts of security forces holding detainees in temporary or military detention facilities. According to Odhikar, 46 persons died in prison and 109 persons died in the custody of police and other security forces during the year.

“According to the government, the existing prison population at year's end was 69,650, or more than over 200 percent of the official prison capacity of 29,240. Of the entire prison population, approximately one-third of the detainees had been convicted. The rest were either awaiting trial or detained for investigation. Due to the severe backlog of cases, individuals awaiting trial often spent more time in jail than if they had been convicted and served a maximum sentence. In most cases, prisoners slept in shifts because of the overcrowding and did not have adequate bathroom facilities. During the year the government ordered the release of 1,000 prisoners to help ease overcrowding. Some human rights groups expressed concern over the methods used to determine which prisoners qualified for the release. Conditions in prisons varied widely often within the same prison complex as some prisoners were subject to high temperatures, poor ventilation, and overcrowding while others were placed in “divisional” custody, which featured better conditions such as increased family visitation and access to household staff. Political and personal connections often influenced the conditions that a prisoner would be placed in. All prisoners have the right to water access and medical care; however, throughout the year, human rights organizations and the media stated that many prisoners did not enjoy these rights.” [2v] (Section 1c)

#### 13.05 It was stated in the USSD 2010 report: “In general the government did not permit prison visits by independent human rights monitors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross. Government-appointed committees of prominent private citizens in each prison locality monitored prisons monthly but did not release their findings. District judges occasionally visited prisons, but rarely disclosed their findings.” [2v] (Section 1c)

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## 14. DEATH PENALTY

#### 14.01 The Amnesty International (AI) *Annual Report of 2010* (covering events of 2009) released on 26 May 2010, noted that Bangladesh retains the death penalty. According to this report, at least 64 people were sentenced to death in 2009; at least three executions were actually carried out. [7a] The Amnesty International (AI) *Annual Report of 2011* (covering events of 2010) released on 13 May 2011, stated that, “Five men found guilty of killing the country’s founding leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in 1975 were executed in January. Their hasty execution – less than 24 hours after their final conviction – was unprecedented. Contrary to usual practice, the President dismissed

clemency petitions by three of them before the court's final verdict. Four other men were executed in three different jails on 15 September." [7x]

- 14.02 Hands Off Cain, an Italian NGO which campaigns for an end to the death penalty worldwide, stated in their Bangladesh country report accessed on 11 June 2010):

"The number of death sentences passed in Bangladesh increased significantly with the introduction of [Speedy Trial Tribunals established under the Disruption of Law and Order Offences Act of 2002]. According to official sources in the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, the nine Speedy Trial Tribunals of the country dealt with 650 cases between October 2002, when they were set up, up to June 30, 2005. The tribunals passed death sentences on 311 people. On the other hand, Sessions Judges' courts of the country sentenced 123 people with death punishment from 2001 until June 30, 2005. A total of 221 people were sentenced to death by different courts of the country until 2001 since independence. On the other hand, 80 people were given death sentence in 2002, 162 in 2003, 112 in 2004 and 80 in 2005 (up to June 30), the sources said... The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, on June 30, 2005, said there were 655 prisoners condemned to death in prisons scattered across the country. The government had only 53 cells for condemned prisoners with each cell originally made to accommodate only one convict. Bangladesh resumed executions in 2001, after a de facto three-year suspension. Two men were hanged between February and March and another in November. One execution was recorded in 2002 and two people were put to death in 2003. At least 13 people were sent to gallows in 2004 and at least five in 2005; four people were executed in 2006 and six in 2007. On December 18, 2008 Bangladesh voted against the Resolution on a Moratorium on the Use of the Death Penalty at the UN General Assembly." [73a]

- 14.03 Bangladesh applies the death penalty for such crimes as murder, sedition and drug-trafficking. In March 1998 the Bangladesh Cabinet approved the death penalty for crimes against women and children, including trafficking and rape. Skyjacking and sabotage became capital offences in 1997. (Hands Off Cain) [73a] In 2002 the death penalty was introduced for acid attacks. (State party report to CEDAW, dated 3 January 2003) [47a] (p20) In March 2008 the Caretaker Government approved an anti-terrorism ordinance containing a provision for the death sentence as the maximum penalty for those convicted of terrorism. As of 14 February 2010 there had been five executions, there were 25 death sentences issued and 1020 people were on death row. (Hands Off Cain) [73a]

- 14.04 Amnesty International noted in a statement of 28 September 2006 "Prisoners sentenced to death in Bangladesh have an automatic appeal hearing before the High Court. They can also lodge additional appeals with the High Court. They can then appeal to the Supreme Court, and after that they have the right to appeal to the President for mercy. Executions are carried out after all these appeals have been exhausted." [7p]

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## 15. POLITICAL AFFILIATION

See also Section 16: [Freedom of Speech and the Media](#) and Section 6: [Political System](#)

### FREEDOM OF POLITICAL EXPRESSION

- 62 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

15.01 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights* 2010, released on 8 April March 2011, (USSD 2010) recorded that:

“Although public criticism of the government was common, newspapers depended on government advertisements for a significant percentage of their revenue. As a result, self-censorship by newspapers practiced (sic) was common.

“There were hundreds of daily and weekly independent publications. Although there were improvements over the previous year, newspapers critical of the government still experienced government pressure. Journalists perceived to be critical of the government and those aligned with the opposition alleged harassment from unspecified wings of the security forces and members of the ruling party.” [2v] (Section 2a)

15.02 Reporters without Borders reported on 7 June 2010 that, “The Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission told Internet Service Providers on 5 June to restore access to Facebook following the social-networking website’s agreement to withdraw cartoons of Mohammed as well as cartoons of certain Bangladeshi politicians that were considered offensive.” [135a]

See Section 16: [Freedom of Speech and Media](#)

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## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

15.03 As noted in the USSD 2010 report:

“The constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights in practice; however, at times the government limited freedom of assembly. ... The government generally permitted rallies to take place but on occasion used the criminal procedure code to prevent opposition political groups from holding meetings and demonstrations. The code authorizes the administration to ban assembly of more than four persons; according to ASK, the administration used this provision at least 93 times during the year. At times police or ruling party activists used force to disperse demonstrations.” [2v] (Section 2b)

15.04 The USSD 2010 report added “The law provides for the right of every citizen to form associations, subject to ‘reasonable restrictions’ in the interest of morality or public order, and the government generally respected this right. Individuals were free to join private groups.” [2v] (Section 2b)

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## OPPOSITION GROUPS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

### Political violence

15.05 Violence involving members of student organisations affiliated to the main political parties has occurred frequently in Bangladesh. This has not been coordinated on a nationwide basis, but has typically involved small groups of students/youths in a specific university or college or area who are vying for control of ‘local turf’. In most instances over the past few years, clashes have been between activists of the Awami League-

affiliated student organisation 'Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)' on the one side, and the BNP's 'Jatiyabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD)' and/or Jamaat-e-Islami's 'Islami Chhatra Shibir' (ICS) on the opposing side. (South Asia Terrorism Portal, accessed June 2009) [59d]

- 15.06 Freedom House, in their 2010 report *Freedom in the World – Bangladesh*, published May 2010' observed that: "The level of political violence remained relatively high in 2009; local rights group Odhikar registered 251 deaths and more than 15,000 injured as a result of inter- or intraparty clashes during the year, with a spike surrounding the January 2009 local government polls." [65d] [46w] (p9)

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## Charges against, and restrictions on, the main party leaders

- 15.07 On 28 May 2008 both the Awami League and the BNP declared that they would not take part in discussions with the Caretaker Government, ahead of the next general election, until their leaders had been released from detention. (BBC News, 28 May 2008) [20dv] It was reported on 9 June 2008 that the special court had ruled that Sheikh Hasina would not have to remain present in court while her lawyers defended her four cases; she could thus be released from detention while her trial was still in progress. The court would return her passports. (BBC News) [20ea] (UNB) [39av] She was released on bail and allowed to travel abroad under an 'executive order' on the grounds of urgent medical treatment. [109a] (Chapter 6) Sheikh Hasina flew to the US on 12 June 2008. (BBC News, 12 June 2008) [20eb]
- 15.08 BBC News reported on 9 June 2008 that the Government had responded to Sheikh Hasina's release by immediately offering Khaleda Zia, who was still in custody, the opportunity to travel abroad to seek treatment for her arthritis and knee problems. [20ec] Ms Zia rejected the conditional offer and instead pleaded for the release from remand of her two sons, Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko, whom she said were both in poor health and in need of treatment. (BBC News, 9 June 2008) [20ec] (UNB, 20 June 2008) [39au] Koko was released on two months' parole on July 17 2008 to facilitate his treatment abroad. [38dg] Khaleda Zia's elder son, Tarique Rahman – who had 13 cases pending against him involving extortion, tax evasion and other alleged offences – was released on bail on 3 September and granted permission to seek medical treatment abroad. (UNB, 12 September 2008) [39ba] On 11 September 2008, Khaleda Zia was released on bail from her makeshift prison in the Parliament complex. She had been detained since 3 September 2007. (UNB) [39bb]

## Student political groups and violence

- 15.09 The International Crisis Group (ICG) report *Restoring Democracy in Bangladesh* dated 28 April 2008 reported that:

"On 20 August 2007 an altercation at a football match on the Dhaka University (DU) campus between a soldier and a student sparked a university-wide protest against the military, which rapidly spread to other towns. Initially the student protesters had two demands: a formal apology from the army for beating up several DU students and its immediate withdraw from the campus. However, as news broke that hundreds of students were flooding into local hospitals with injuries from tear gas, rubber bullets and batons used by the military and paramilitary forces to put down the protests, the



students and professors added an immediate retraction of the state of emergency to their demands. [See [para 3.10](#)] There were also reports of students throwing stones at the army.” [128b] (p26)

15.10 The IGC report continued:

“Political activism on campuses is strong in Bangladesh, a legacy of its independence movement going back to the 1950s. Much political change has had its roots in universities, including the downfall of the previous military government. “The only place for the army is the cantonment, not Bangababan [the president’s office]. If they try to stay too long or interfere too much, of course the students will let them know”, a DU student said. [128b] (p26)

15.11 An article *Student Politics in Bangladesh* dated 11 August 2008 reported that:

“In Bangladesh, there are four major national political parties, namely Bangladesh Awami League (BAL (sic)), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Bangladesh Jatio Party (BJP) and Jamayati Islami Bangladeshi (JIB). Each of them has an affiliated political organization for students. For example, Bangladesh Chartro (sic) [L]eague (BCL) is an affiliated or associated student organization of BAL. The above-mentioned three types are not exclusive. [138a]

15.12 The Foreign Policy Association in *The Pitfalls of Student Politics in Bangladesh*, 10 February 2010 stated that:

“The student affiliates of the major political parties have always had a major hand in the decades long perverse politicking in Bangladesh. Time and again mutually non-deterrent and devastating clashes have shut down the major cities in Bangladesh. Student leaders of these political groups often find lucrative contracts in the private sector; alternatively they become MP’s and cabinet secretaries. It pays, then, to be in these party affiliated student groups and because it pays to posture in Parliament, student groups bandy about threatening other groups and often street and university posturing falls down in cries and flames.

“There are three such major student groups. The Bangladesh Chhatra Daal (sic) or the Bangladesh Student League is ingratiating affiliated with the Awami League, the BNP is conjoined with activists from the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra League while the Jamaat-e-Islami is rearing the Islami Chhatra Shibir.” [137a]

15.13 The Foreign Policy Association article discussed student activity on Rajshahi University (RU) campus and stated that:

“A quick run down of the contemporary events and recent history shows how brutal these student run groups can be. And, they often are as brutal as they can be. ... To maintain its supremacy on the campus, Shibir keeps pressuring the university people by issuing threats directly and indirectly, sources said. Around 60 incidents of clashes among the student wings of different political parties have taken place on RU campus since 1971, which left 28 people killed and over 2,100 injured sources in the RU administration said. The university remained closed for over 600 days because of the clashes.

“Shibir has been involved in most of the clashes since 1980s after it started its activities on the campus in 1980. Towards the end of the ’80s, left -leaning student wings

including Chhatra Moitree became weak organisationally, which helped Shibir establish its supremacy. In the latest incident on Tuesday [9 February 2010], Shibir men hacked to death Faruk Hossain, an activist of Bangladesh Chhatra League, in Shah Mokhdum Hall. Around 100 people were injured in the overnight clashes between the activists of BCL and Shibir following the death. Sources said Shibir killed Faruk as a revenge for the killing of RU unit Shibir general secretary Sharifuzzaman Nomani on March 13 last year.” [137a]

See the South Asia Analysis Group paper [Islami Chhatra Shibir of Bangladesh - A Threat to Democracy](#) dated 27 June 2007 [139a] for a brief overview of student political involvement.

See The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) project report, [Religion, Politics, and the Modern University in Pakistan and Bangladesh](#), April 2009 [136a] for information on the relationship between religion and politics in Pakistani and Bangladeshi universities.

See also Section 12: [Arrest and Detention – Legal Rights](#)

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## 16. FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND MEDIA

16.01 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights 2010*, released on 8 April 2011 (USSD 2010) stated that:

“The constitution provides for freedom of speech and press, but the government occasionally did not respect these rights in practice. In addition to one official government-owned news service, there were two private news services.

“Unlike in the previous year, the military's Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR) office and the DGFI did not directly restrict newspaper ownership or content. However, in May the information minister met with the owners of private television channels and suggested that they refrain from broadcasting content critical of the government. Shortly thereafter, the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) used a technicality in the communications law to shut down a private television station, Channel One, with close ties to the BNP. Channel One remained closed at year's end.

“The popular Bengali-language current affairs talk show, Point of Order, was removed from the air during the year. The host previously alleged that she received telephone calls from individuals identifying themselves as DGFI officials who warned her against promoting "antigovernment and antistate propaganda." She also stated that sponsors of her program were encouraged to stop their support of her show. Before the cancellation of the show, she stated, it was practicing significant self-censorship in an attempt to remain on the air.

“The government owned one radio and one television station. The parliament passed a law mandating that the public television station, BTV, remain the country's only terrestrial broadcast channel. An estimated 60 per cent of the population did not have access to private satellite channels.

“There were 10 private satellite television stations and three private radio stations in operation. There were two foreign-based and licensed satellite television stations that maintained domestic news operations. Cable operators generally functioned without government interference, however, Diganta Television, a private operator, received a letter from the Ministry of Information warning it to edit content critical of the government or face a shutdown. As of year's end, Diganta continued to operate. The government required all private stations to broadcast, without charge, selected government news programs and speeches by the prime minister.” [2v] (Section 2a)

- 16.02 The Freedom House report, *Freedom in the World 2010*, Bangladesh, covering events in 2009, released in May 2010, stated:

“Bangladesh’s media environment opened up considerably in 2009. In late 2008 the CG had lifted the Emergency Powers Rules (EPR), which limited coverage of sensitive topics, allowed censorship of print and broadcast outlets, criminalized ‘provocative’ criticism of the government, and imposed penalties—including up to five years in prison and hefty fines—for violations. Media were allowed to freely cover the December 2008 elections, and despite occasional cases of censorship, the print media were generally given more leeway when covering sensitive topics than broadcasters, particularly the private television channels that provide 24-hour news coverage. Mohammad Atiqullah Khan Masud, editor of the national daily Janakantha, was released in January 2009 after being held for 22 months under the EPR. Separately, a journalist and writer who was first arrested in 2003, Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury, still faced sedition, treason, and blasphemy charges; his trial began in June 2008 and was ongoing during 2009, but he was allowed to travel abroad while the proceedings continued. A new Right to Information Act took effect in July 2009. According to the press freedom group Article 19, the measure would apply to all information held by public bodies, simplify the fees required to access information, override existing secrecy legislation, and grant greater independence to the Information Commission charged with overseeing and promoting the law.” [65d]

- 16.03 The BBC News *Bangladesh profile*, updated 11 January 2010, noted:

“The main broadcasters - Radio Bangladesh and Bangladesh Television (BTV) - are state-owned and government-friendly. There is little coverage of the political opposition, except in the run-up to general elections when a caretaker government takes control.

“TV is the most-popular medium, especially in cities. BTV is the sole terrestrial TV channel. Popular satellite and cable channels include ATN, Channel i, NTV, RTV, Channel One, BanglaVision and Boishakhi.

“Foreign, especially Indian, TV stations have large audiences in Dhaka and other cities.

“State-run radio covers almost the entire country. BBC World Service programmes in English and Bengali are broadcast on 100 MHz FM in Dhaka.

“Newspapers are diverse, outspoken and privately-owned. English-language titles appeal mainly to an educated urban readership.

“The constitution guarantees press freedom, but journalists are prone to harassment from the police and political activists. The government exercises some influence through the placement of official advertising.

“Media rights organisation Reporters Without Borders has accused the army of targeting journalists, who it says face arrest, maltreatment and censorship.

“There were 500,000 internet users in Bangladesh by March 2008 - 0.3 per cent of the population (ITU figure).” [20am]

16.04 The USSD 2010 report noted:

“Unlike in previous years, the government did not subject foreign publications and films to stringent reviews and censorship. A government-managed film censor board reviewed local and foreign films and had the authority to censor or ban films on the grounds of state security, law and order, religious sentiment, obscenity, foreign relations, defamation, or plagiarism, but this was less strict than in the past. In practice video rental libraries and DVD shops stocked a wide variety of films, and government efforts to enforce censorship on rentals were sporadic and ineffective.

“Unlike in the previous year, the government only rarely exercised censorship in cases of immodest or obscene photographs, perceived misrepresentation or defamation of Islam, or objectionable comments regarding national leaders” [2v] (Section 2a)

16.05 The NGO Odhikar reported on 1 April 2009:

“The government has recently imposed a rigid censorship on the browsing of some websites, including youtube.com, for Bangladeshi nationals. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission prohibited the visiting of some of [sic] websites on the pretext of protecting ‘national security’. However, the government did not officially specify what kind of content and information should be forbidden in the name of ‘national security’.” [46s]

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## JOURNALISTS

16.06 The Freedom House 2010 report noted:

“Journalists continue to be threatened and attacked with impunity by organized crime groups, party activists, and Islamist groups, although the level of harassment has declined and no journalists have been killed for the past four years, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. In February, journalist Farid Alam fled the country after receiving death threats from the JMB in connection with his new book on militant Islam. Several cases of arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention, and custodial torture of journalists were documented during 2009, including that of *New Age* reporter F.M. Masum, who was tortured by a member of a government paramilitary unit in October. Journalists have also reported receiving threatening telephone calls from intelligence agencies seeking to prevent negative coverage, and many practice self-censorship when reporting on sensitive topics.” [65d]

16.07 Odhikar’s *Human Rights Report 2009* stated that during 2009, at least 84 journalists were reportedly injured, 1 journalist was arrested, 45 were assaulted and 73 were threatened; 23 legal cases were filed against journalists. [46w] (p27) Odhikar’s *Human Rights Report 2010* stated that “Over the twelve months in 2010, it has been reported

that a total of 14 journalists were killed, 118 injured, 49 threatened, 43 assaulted and 17 attacked. “[46x] (p49)

- 16.08 The Committee to Protect Journalists recorded in their special report, *Getting Away with Murder 2010*, dated 20 April 2010:

“Bangladesh has been in a holding pattern. While no journalist murders have been reported since 2005, no convictions have been won in any of the seven unsolved killings perpetrated in the first half of the decade, when journalists faced heavy reprisals for their coverage of corruption, organized crime, and extremist groups. The most recent murder claimed the life of newspaper reporter Gautam Das, who was found strangled in his office in November 2005. Police arrested several suspects in the case, but to date none have been convicted.” [51a]

- 16.09 The USSD 2010 report noted:

“Attacks on journalists continued to be a problem. There was an increase in individuals affiliated with the government or ruling party harassing, arresting, or assaulting journalists. According to Odhikar and media watchdog groups, at least four journalists were killed, 118 were injured, two were arrested, 43 were assaulted, 49 were threatened, and 12 had cases filed against them during the year. According to some journalists and human rights NGOs, journalists engaged in self-censorship due to fear of retribution from the government” [2v] (Section 2a)

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## 17. HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND ACTIVISTS

Read in conjunction with sections on [Political affiliation](#) and [Freedom of speech and media](#).

- 17.01 The United Nations Common Country Assessment for 2004 had observed:

“The growth of civil society and in particular nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) has been one of the great success stories in Bangladesh. Though the country has a long tradition of social activism throughout its history – the language movement being one example – the emergence of the NGO sector has been a relatively new phenomenon that began in the late 1970s. Today, NGOs are a significant provider of social services, in particular health and education, to the rural poor. Specialized microfinance institutions (MFIs) such as the Grameen Bank, pioneered the micro-credit model that has been replicated all around the world and MFIs have had considerable success in helping to provide alternative income-generating opportunities for poor women in Bangladesh. The emergence of NGOs has also played a significant role in the improvement of human development indicators and compensated, in part, for weak market and state institutions. Within the context of a rights-based approach, it should be noted that local NGOs have also played a significant role in terms of helping poor and marginalized groups to make claims for the fulfilment of their rights to education and health and secure and sustainable livelihoods. Today there are well over a thousand NGOs registered with the Government. From village cooperatives and women’s groups on the one hand to large internationally recognized institutions with staff running into the thousands, civil society in Bangladesh has thrived since the restoration of democracy.” [8d] (p69)

17.02 The report added:

“Legitimate questions have been raised on the accountability and representation of (foreign funded) NGOs and there have been several attempts to limit the work of NGOs to basic service provision. In a couple of notable cases, prominent NGOs have come under fire from within and outside the sector for allegedly crossing the line into direct partisan activities. Legislation is under consideration for tightening the regulatory environment for NGOs including issues relating to registration and taxation.” [8d] (p70)

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## NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (NHRC)

17.03 On 9 December 2007 the Council of Advisors approved an ordinance for the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), ‘for the protection, development and institutionalization of human rights in the country’. (UNB, 9 December 2007) [39ak] As noted in *The Daily Star* of 13 December, various previous governments had described the setting up of a national human rights ‘watchdog’ as a priority, but the approval of this ordinance represented the first definite action towards establishing such an institution. [38cq]

17.04 According to *The Daily Star*:

“The functions of the commission will include investigating any allegation of human rights violation received from any individual or quarter, or the commission itself can initiate investigation into any incident of rights violation. The commission would be empowered to investigate particular human rights violation allegations brought forward by citizens or discovered through their own monitoring. If a human rights violation has been proved, the NHRC can either settle the matter or pass it on to the court or relevant authorities.” [38cq]

17.05 At a meeting on 26 February 2008, representatives of various human rights NGOs expressed concern that the Ordinance would not ensure the independence, transparency, accountability and effectiveness of the Human Rights Commission. (*The Daily Star*, 27 February 2008) [38cr]

17.06 The National Human Rights Ordinance 2007 came into effect on 1 September 2009. On 20 November 2008, the President appointed a former judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Amirul Kabir Chowdhury, as Chairman of the NHRC and Professor Niru Kumar Chakma and Ms Munira Khan as members, for a three-year period. (*The Daily Star*, 20 November 2008) [38em] On 7 June 2009, the Foreign Minister confirmed that a Human Rights Commission bill had been placed before parliament for ratification. (*The Daily Star*, 8 June 2009) [38eg] The National Human Rights Commission Bill was duly passed on July 9, 2009. (Odhikar Human Rights Report 2009, published 1 January 2010) [46w] (p13)

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## TREATMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS

17.07 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights 2010*, released on 8 April 2011 (USSD 2010) stated:

70 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

“A wide variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated independently and without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Although human rights groups were often sharply critical of the government, they also practiced self censorship. The government required all NGOs, including religious organizations, to register with the Ministry of Social Welfare. Local and international NGOs, including Odhikar, Medecines Sans Frontières (MSF), Action Contre la Faim (ACF), and the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS), reported that the government sought to impede their work, either by canceling projects or subjecting them to restrictive operating requirements.

“In July 2009 parliament passed the National Human Rights Commission Act, reconstituting the country's seven-member Human Rights Commission. The new commissioner, Mizanur Rahman, pledged to address all human rights violations, with emphasis on extrajudicial killings; however, the commission was not fully functional by year's end.” [2v] (Section 5)

- 17.08 Human Rights Watch's *World Report 2010, Bangladesh*, covering events in 2009, released in January 2010 noted:

“The NGO Affairs Bureau, which approves projects and funding of NGOs, created obstacles for some organizations trying to obtain permission to receive foreign donor funding. In August 2009 the Bureau cancelled an ongoing anti-torture project implemented by Odhikar on the grounds that the Ministry of Home Affairs objected to it.

“Staff members of several human rights organizations were subjected to harassment by members of the security forces. Advocate Shahanur Islam Saikot of the Bangladesh Institute of Human Rights, who filed several cases against members of the army, RAB, and police for torture, received several death threats from individuals identifying themselves as belonging to these agencies” [10n]

- 17.09 In its *Freedom in the World 2009 Country report*, dated September 2009, Freedom House (FH) reported that:

“Numerous world-class nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in Bangladesh and meet basic needs in fields such as education, health care, and microcredit. However, those perceived to have a political bias or to be overly critical of the government, particularly on human rights issues, are subject to intense official scrutiny and occasional harassment. Amnesty International has noted that at least eight human rights defenders have been assassinated since 2000, and that many have been injured or threatened by criminal gangs or party factions. Others have faced arbitrary arrest and torture by the authorities.” [65d] (p7)

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## 18. CORRUPTION

- 18.01 In its 2010 *Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)*, released on 1 December 2010, Transparency International (TI) ranked Bangladesh 134th in the world corruption ranking, out of 178 countries, giving it a CPI score of 2.4. (CPI score relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen to exist among public officials and politicians by business people and country analysts. [42i]

**ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION (ACC)**

18.02 The Government formally constituted an Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) on 21 November 2004. The ACC absorbed most of the 950 staff of the dissolved Bureau of Anti-Corruption and was headed by a retired High Court judge. (EIU, January 2005) [40b] (p15) In March 2007 the ACC sought a number of additional facilities from the Government, such as for its staff to be increased to about 1,200, a panel of high-profile lawyers to handle cases in trial courts and the legal power to attach the properties of graft suspects. (*The Daily Star*, 22 March 2007) [38bh] The ACC was, by then, being assisted in its investigations by the National Co-ordination Committee on Combating Corruption and Crime. (*The Daily Star*, 19 April 2007) [38bi]

18.03 In February 2007 the Caretaker Government replaced the three members of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC); former army chief, Lieutenant-General Hasan Mashud Chowdhury, was appointed as the new Chairman (Aljazeera, 22 February 2007) [91a]

18.04 According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) *World report 2008*:

"The [Emergency Powers] Ordinance...empowers Anti-Corruption Commission officials, with retroactive effect, to arrest suspects without warrants, confiscate property without court orders, and detain suspects for thirty days without a warrant. Many suspects have been held for 30 days while evidence of their alleged offences is collected. The special tribunals set up for these cases often fail to meet international fair trial standards because of limits on access to counsel, flawed evidentiary requirements, and lack of judicial independence." [10i]

18.05 HRW, in a news release dated 31 March 2010, reported that:

"The Bangladeshi government should reject amendments that would restrict the ability of the Anti-Corruption Commission to take independent action against corrupt government officials, including those in the governing party....

[that] "A cabinet committee established in 2009 to review Bangladesh's anti-corruption legislation has proposed amendments requiring the Anti-Corruption Commission, which was established by law in 2004, to obtain permission from the government before taking legal action against government officials and members of parliament suspected of corruption.

"Public sector corruption is a grave problem in Bangladesh, corroding faith in government and undermining the rule of law and efforts at reforming institutions like the police and army," ... "Creating laws that shield government officials from prosecution would send a clear message that the government is not serious in fighting corruption." [10o]

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**HIGH-PROFILE ARRESTS ON CORRUPTION AND OTHER CHARGES**

18.06 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights 2010*, released on 8 April 2011 (USSD 2010) noted:



“The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

“Gholam Rahman, the former chair of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission, was appointed as the new chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in May 2009. As in prior years, the ACC focused its efforts during the year on developing cases involving public persons who failed to disclose income. In previous years, the ACC filed more than 1,000 cases related to the endemic corruption that marked previous governments. As the ACC has lost much of its influence, most of these cases have been withdrawn. ...

“According to a World Bank Country Assistance Strategy, the government is trying to undercut the authority of the ACC and is severely hampering the prosecution of corruption throughout the country. The reports states that the current government has filed far fewer corruption cases than the caretaker government, and a government commission has recommended that the ACC drop thousands of corruption cases, mostly involving AL members. The report acknowledged that the government has stated a commitment to countering corruption through preventive measures.

“According to Transparency International Bangladesh, the government has approved an amendment that would significantly cripple the ACC. One provision of the amendment would require the ACC to obtain governmental approval before bringing proceedings against an individual. The proposed amendment was approved by the cabinet but was not brought to a vote in parliament by year's end.

“A review committee headed by the state minister for law, justice, and parliamentary affairs recommended the withdrawal of politically motivated cases that the government and ACC filed prior to 2009. The committee recommended the withdrawal of approximately 1,817 cases, filed mostly against AL leaders, including all the cases filed against Sheikh Hasina. Other cases recommended for withdrawal included one case against BNP leader Khaleda Zia's son, Tarique Rahman; one against BNP leader and former law minister Moudud Ahmed; and one against Jatiya Party secretary general Ruhul Amin Howlader. Ahmed refused the government's offer to withdraw all cases against him and demanded the withdrawal of all politically motivated cases against BNP leaders, including Khaleda Zia and her sons.

“The release of many corruption suspects continued to draw comment from some members of civil society, who stated that the government was not serious about fighting corruption. Government leaders argued that the government and the ACC would continue to pursue corruption cases despite the release of some suspects on bail.” [2v] (Section 4)

#### 18.07 The USSD 2010 continued:

“The government took steps to address widespread police corruption. The inspector general of police continued to implement a new strategy, partially funded by international donors, for training police, addressing corruption, and creating a more responsive police force.

“The judiciary was subject to political pressure from the government. In several cases, the appellate division overturned decisions granting bail to high-level corruption suspects who were leaders of opposition parties. Corruption remained a serious

problem within the judiciary. Corruption was a factor in lengthy delays of trials, which were subject to witness tampering and intimidation of victims. Human rights observers contended that magistrates, attorneys, and court officials demanded bribes from defendants in many cases filed during the year.

“There were allegations that candidates could purchase nominations from party leaders with campaign contributions or personal gifts.” [2v] (Section 4)

- 18.08 The USSD 2010 reported that, “In March 2009 parliament passed the Right to Information Act, in line with a lapsed 2008 ordinance promulgated by the caretaker government. This law effectively annulled the Official Secrets Act, which had denied the public access to government information.” [2v] (Section 4)

See Section 8: Police and Auxiliary Paramilitary Forces: [Accountability and impunity](#)  
Section 11: [Corruption in the Judiciary](#) and Section 32: [Forged and fraudulently obtained documents](#)

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## 19. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

### RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

- 19.01 The US State Department’s *July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report* (2010 Religious Freedom Report) published 13 September 2011, covering a six-month period from July 1, 2010 through December 31, observed:

“According to the 2001 census, Sunni Muslims constitute 90 per cent of the population and Hindus 9 per cent. The rest of the population is mainly Christian, (mostly Roman Catholic), and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist. Ethnic and religious minority communities often overlap and are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and northern regions. Buddhists are predominantly found among the indigenous (non-Bengali) populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Bengali and ethnic minority Christians live in communities across the country, including Barisal City, Gournadi in Barisal District, Baniarchar in Gopalganj, Monipuripara in Dhaka, Christianpara in Mohakhal, Nagori in Gazipur, and Khulna City. There also are small populations of Shi’a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha’is, animists, and Ahmadis. Estimates of their numbers varied from a few thousand to 100,000 adherents per group. There is no indigenous Jewish community and no significant immigrant Jewish population. Religion is an important part of community and cultural identity for citizens, including those who did not participate actively in prayers or services” [2w] (Section i)

- 19.02 The 2010 Religious Freedom Report stated:

“The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. While the constitution establishes Islam as the state religion, in 2010 a Supreme Court decision reversed a 1975 amendment and reaffirmed secularism as a Constitutional principle. However, the matter was still under debate at the highest levels of the government as of the end of the reporting period. The constitution provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate all religions, subject to law, public order, and morality. It also states that every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain, and

74 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

manage its own religious institutions. Although the government publicly supported freedom of religion, attacks on religious and ethnic minorities continued to be a problem during the reporting period since religious minorities are often at the bottom of the social hierarchy and, therefore, have the least political recourse ... Religion exerted a significant influence on politics, and the government was sensitive to the religious sentiments of most citizens. The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice.” [2w] (introduction)

- 19.03 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010* (USSD 2010 report), released on 13 September 2011 noted:

“Under the penal code, any person who has a "deliberate" or "malicious" intention of hurting religious sentiments is liable to face imprisonment. In addition the Code of Criminal Procedure states, "the government may confiscate all copies of a newspaper if it publishes anything that creates enmity and hatred among the citizens or denigrates religious beliefs." While there are no laws specifically against blasphemy, religious political parties have pledged to enact such laws should they gain power. The government has not publicly commented on enacting blasphemy laws, but it briefly blocked access to the popular social networking site, Facebook, in 2010 due in part to a depiction of the Prophet Muhammad. Access was restored within one week, but the government continued to block pages of Facebook it deemed offensive.

“The government publicly supported freedom of religion; however, attacks and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities continued during the reporting period. In general, government institutions and the courts protected religious freedom.” [2w] (Section ii)

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## FAMILY LAW

- 19.04 As noted in the USSD 2010 report:

“Sharia (Islamic law) played an influential role in civil matters pertaining to the Muslim community; however, there is no formal implementation of Sharia, and it is not imposed on non-Muslims. For instance, alternative dispute resolution was available to individuals for settling family arguments and other civil matters not related to land ownership. With the consent of both parties, arbitrators relied on principles found in Sharia for settling disputes. In addition, Muslim family law was loosely based on Sharia.” [2w] (Section ii)

- 19.05 The 2010 Religious Freedom Report stated:

“Family laws concerning marriage, divorce, and adoption differed slightly depending on the religious beliefs of the persons involved. Each religious group has its own family laws. For example, Muslim men may marry as many as four wives; however, a Muslim man must get his first wife's signed permission before marrying an additional woman. Society strongly discouraged polygamy, and it was rarely practiced. In contrast, a Christian man may marry only one woman. Under Hindu law unlimited polygamy was permitted; although there was no provision for divorce and legal separation. Hindu widows could legally remarry. The family law on the religion of the two parties concerned governed marriage rituals and proceedings; however, marriages also were registered with the state. There were no legal restrictions on marriage between members of different religious groups.” [2w] (Section ii)

19.06 The 2010 Religious Freedom Report further stated:

“Under the Muslim family ordinance, females inherited less than males, and wives had fewer divorce rights than husbands. Laws provided some protection for women against arbitrary divorce and polygamy without the consent of the first wife, but the protections generally apply only to registered marriages. Due to ignorance of the law in rural areas, couples occasionally did not register their marriages. Under the law a Muslim husband was required to pay his former wife alimony for three months, but this requirement was not always enforced. There was little societal pressure to enforce it and case backlogs made it difficult, if not impossible, to get redress through the courts.” [2w] (Section ii)

See Section 24 on [Children: Education](#)

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## THE STATE AND RELIGION

19.07 The 2010 Religious Freedom Report related:

“The government operated training academies for imams (Islamic clergy) and proclaimed Islamic festival days but generally did not dictate sermon content or select or pay clergy. However, the government had the authority to appoint or remove imams and exercised a degree of indirect influence over sermon content in government mosques, including the national mosque, Baitul Mukarram. The government monitored the content of religious education in madrassahs, and announced its intention to make changes to the curriculum, including modernizing and mainstreaming the content of religious education.” [2w] (Section ii)

The report continued:

“Religious studies were part of the curriculum in government schools. Children attended classes in which their own religious beliefs were taught. In the past, parents complained about the quality of education, claiming teachers employed by the Government, especially those leading classes on minority religions were not members of that religion nor qualified to teach it. Schools with few students from religious minority groups often made arrangements with local churches or temples to hold religious studies classes outside school hours, although ensuring transportation to these sites was often a problem. Anecdotal evidence suggested that there were tens of thousands of madrassahs in the country. A research organization put the number at nearly 33,000, and some journalists estimate that the number was far higher. However, a World Bank study estimated that only 2 percent of students in primary and secondary school attended madrassahs not regulated by the government. According to the same study, another 13 percent of elementary school students and 18 percent of secondary school students attended Alia Madrassahs, which taught a government-approved curriculum. The rest of the students either attended secular government schools or NGO-run schools or did not go to school. There were no known government-run Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist schools, although private religious schools existed throughout the country.” [2w] (Section ii)

19.08 As stated in the 2010 Religious Freedom Report, “The Government took steps to promote interfaith understanding. Through additional security deployments and public statements, the Government promoted the peaceful celebration of Christian, Hindu and

secular Bengali festivals, including Durga Puja, Christmas, and Easter and Pohela Boisakh (Bengali New Year).” [2w] (Section ii)

- 19.09 The 2010 Religious Freedom Report commented: “Since 2001 the Government routinely has posted law enforcement personnel at religious festivals and events that may be targets for extremists.” [2w] (Section II) And continued:

“There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period. Clashes between religious groups occasionally occurred. Violence directed against religious minority communities continued to result in the loss of lives and property, but the true motives--whether religious animosity, criminal intent, personal disputes, or property disputes--were often unclear. Religious minorities were vulnerable due to their relatively limited influence with political elites. Like many citizens, they usually were reluctant to seek recourse from a criminal justice system they perceived as corrupt and ineffective. Police frequently were ineffective in upholding law and order and sometimes were slow to assist religious minorities. This promoted a greater atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence against minorities. However, persons who practiced different religious beliefs often joined each other's festivals and celebrations such as weddings. Shi'a Muslims practiced their religious beliefs without interference from Sunnis.” [2s] (Section III)

- 19.10 The 2010 Religious Freedom Report related:

“The Ministry of Religious Affairs administered three funds for religious and cultural activities: the Islamic Foundation, the Hindu Welfare Trust, and the Buddhist Welfare Trust. The Christian community consistently rejected government involvement in its religious affairs. The Hindu Religious Welfare Trust received a total of \$735,294 (50 million taka) from the Government for the fiscal year ending June 2010; much of it was dedicated to temple-based literacy and religious programs. Of that money, 10 million taka (\$147,059) was specifically allocated for religious worship and festivals. In addition the trust money aided in repairing temples, improving cremation pyres, and helping destitute Hindu families afford medical treatment.

“The Buddhist Welfare Trust, founded in the 1980s, received three million taka (\$44,118) from the government in the fiscal year ending June 2010. Approximately one million taka (\$15,000) of that was for the celebration of Buddhist festivals and two million taka (\$29,000) was for the restoration of Buddhist temples or other facilities. The trust used funds to repair monasteries, organize training programs for Buddhist monks, and celebrate the Buddhist festival Purnima. There was no public criticism of how the money was apportioned or distributed. [2w] (Section II)

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## FATWA

- 19.11 As was stated in the 2010 Religious Freedom Report,

“In 2001 the High Court ruled all legal rulings based on Sharia, known as fatwas, to be illegal. After a lengthy judicial review, the Appellate Division of the High Court upheld the ban as part of a broader ruling against all forms of extrajudicial punishment. Although Islamic tradition dictates that only muftis (religious scholars) who have expertise in Islamic law are authorized to declare a fatwa, village religious leaders at

times made declarations in individual cases. Sometimes this resulted in extrajudicial punishments, often against women, for perceived moral transgressions.” [2w] (Section II)

See Section 23: [Women - Vigilantism](#)

- 19.12 According to a BBC News article of 13 February 2001, punishments could vary from public naming and shaming to physical mutilation. [20g] The 2009 Religious Freedom Report stated that:

“Human rights groups and press reports indicated that vigilantism against women accused of moral transgressions occurred in rural areas, often under a fatwa, and included punishments such as whipping. During 2008 and until the end of the reporting period, religious leaders issued 37 fatwas, demanding punishments that ranged from lashings and other physical assaults to shunning by family and community members, according to the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, a human rights organization focused on women's rights.” [2s] (Section III)

- 19.13 Barrister M.A. Muid Khan, in an article dated 20 March 2009, noted that if a punishment meted out as a result of a fatwa causes hurt or grievous bodily harm, it contravenes the Penal Code and possibly also the Suppression on Women and Children (Special Provision) Act, both of which carry lengthy terms of imprisonment. However, no persons who had issued fatwas (fatwabazs) had so far been convicted under these provisions. (UNB) [39b]

See Section 23: [Women - Vigilantism](#)

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## HINDUS

- 19.14 The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 2006 report entitled ‘Bangladesh: Minorities increasingly at risk of displacement’ noted that the Hindu population comprised approximately 10.5 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh in 1991, compared with about 25 per cent in 1947. It is estimated that 5.3 million Hindus left Bangladesh between 1964 and 1991. [45b] (p21) The Census showed that Hindus, in 2001, comprised only 9.34 per cent of the population. [43b]

- 19.15 The 2010 Religious Freedom Report noted:

“Many Hindus have been unable to recover landholdings lost because of discrimination under the defunct Vested Property Act. Although an Awami League Government repealed the Act in 2001, the new Government did not take any concrete action to reverse the property seizures that occurred under the act. The Vested Property Act was an East Pakistan-era law that allowed the Government to expropriate ‘enemy’ (in practice Hindu) lands. Under the law, the Government seized approximately 2.6 million acres of land, affecting almost all Hindus in the country. According to a study conducted by a Dhaka University professor, nearly 200,000 Hindu families lost approximately 40,667 acres of land since 2001, despite the annulment of the Act the same year.

“In April 2001 Parliament passed the Vested Property Return Act, stipulating that land remaining under government control that was seized under the Vested Property Act be returned to its original owners, provided that the original owners or their heirs remained

resident citizens. The law required the Government to prepare a list of vested property holdings by October 2001. Claimants were to file claims within 90 days of the publication date. In 2002 Parliament passed an amendment to the Vested Property Return Act that allowed the Government unlimited time to return the vested properties and gave control of the properties, including the right to lease them, to local government employees. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not prepared a list of such properties.” [2w] (Section II)

19.16 The NGO Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) reported that the Caretaker Government had formed a Vested Property Return Tribunal and an Appeal Tribunal in October 2008, but commented that it was not clear under what mandate or guiding principles the Tribunal would be operating. (*ASK Annual Report 2008*) [109a] (Chapter 15)

19.17 According to the 2008 Annual Report of the NGO Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK):

“As noted in previous years’ reports, incidents of harassment against the Hindu minority community continued at a low level, almost as a persistent ‘background noise’ in the country’s overall human rights situation. There were arguments, often by those who wished to deny specific religious discrimination that such incidents of harassment, looting, rape, etc., occur against all impoverished communities in Bangladesh. Religious minorities continue to be most vulnerable ... Temples appeared to be a vulnerable target, with several major cases reported by the press this year [2008] ... An attack on Kotiadi monastery, Kishoreganj, which resulted in the rape of one monastery occupant and death of the elderly priest Abinash Chandra Goshai; destruction of idols of two hundred year old temple at Gouranadi arson at Badarganj temple, Rangpur; and destruction of idols at Aghoiljhara, Barisal district ... Thus whether the motivation was looting or communal attack, or a combination of both, the lack of punishment for one incident appears to create an enabling environment for more attacks in same location. Even more worrying are incidents that happen with support of local authorities, as in Bagerhat, where attempts to build a structure on temple land resulted in hundreds of Hindu community members surrounding the offices of municipal authorities demanding the temple area be left intact for Kirtan, Kobi Gaan and other religious events. In many cases of attacks against minority community, the local police appeared reluctant to take the cases seriously. In cases where there is sustained reporting, it is often revealed that land grabbing is a primary motive behind the violence... The footprint of the Vested Property Act can be seen both in the targeting of Hindu land as more vulnerable to legal maneuvers (sic), as well as the frequent exhortations to ‘move to India’.” [109a] (Chapter 15)

19.18 The 2010 Religious Freedom Report observed:

“Attacks against the Hindu community continued, although the number of attacks dropped significantly from the previous year. Most of the land seizures took place in the districts of Natore, Pirojpur, Chittagong, Narsingdi, Bagerhat, Bariasl, Manikganj, Tangail, Satkhira, Pabna, Manikganj, and Munshiganj. In July, *The Daily Star*, a daily English-language newspaper, reported that “land-grabbers” had encroached on the properties of all three Hindu cremation grounds in the Dhaka metropolitan area. Cases related to the situation were pending at the end of the reporting period.

“On August 12, the Bangla-language daily, *Amar Desh*, reported that criminals broke into a Hindu temple in the Sutrapur area of Old Dhaka and broke several idols before evicting fifteen Hindu families who lived on the premises. Another paper, the daily *Ittefaq*, reported that over one hundred minority families living in Sutrapur had been

forcibly evicted by land grabbers during the year. Both papers alleged that local Awami League leaders were involved in the evictions.” [2w] (Section iii)

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## BUDDHISTS

- 19.19 The 1991 Census showed that there were then 623,000 Buddhists in Bangladesh, of whom 575,000 were living in the Division of Chittagong. [43b] According to an estimate quoted by BuddhaNet, the Australian-based website of the Buddha Dharma Education Association, there were about one million Buddhists in Bangladesh by 2004, living mainly in the area of the city of Chittagong, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Comilla, Noakhali, Cox's Bazar and in Barisal. The Buddhists of Bangladesh belong to four groups of nations who have been gradually mixed together; the groups are the Austic, the Tibeto-Burman, the Dravilians and the Aryans. According to historians the Tibeto-Burman consists of three tribes – the Pyu, the Kanyan and the Thet (Chakma). The Chakma tribes primarily reside in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Kanyan tribe is known as the Rakhine (Arakanese) group who still live in the South-Eastern part of Chittagong district. The plain Buddhists of Bangladesh, known as the Burua-Buddhist, are the ancient peoples of Bangladesh who have lived there for five thousand years, according to Arakanese chronology. [92a]
- 19.20 As stated in a report of the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) dated 16 August 2005, the majority of the Jumma people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts practise Buddhism. [3v]
- 19.21 Reports from the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) indicate that there have, on occasion, been religiously motivated attacks against the Buddhist community. For example, a gang reportedly set fire to the Paschim Nanupur Anandodham Bouddha Bihar in Chittagong district on 29 December 2008. [57a]
- 19.22 The Asian Centre For Human Rights (ACHR) in a report *Bangladesh: IPs Massacred For Land Grab* dated 23 February 2010 stated that:

“On 19-20 February 2010, the Bangladesh army personnel and the illegal Bengali settlers under the overall command of Lt Col. Wasim, Commander of the Baghahat zone Army Camp, launched major communal attacks against the indigenous Jumma peoples in 14 Jumma villages in Baghahat area of Sajek Union under Rangamati district in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) of Bangladesh. In these pre-planned attacks that began on the night of 19 February 2010, the illegal plain settlers backed by the Bangladesh army burnt down at least 200 to 300 houses.” [66c]

For further information on the treatment of Buddhists See Section 20: [The Indigenous Jumma Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.](#)

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## THE AHMADIYYA COMMUNITY (ALTERNATIVELY AHMADIS OR KADIYANIS OR QADIANIS)

- 19.23 Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) commented in their Annual Report 2008:



“Continuing tensions prevail regarding the security of the country's Ahmadiya community ... while there have been occasional forays by bigotted (sic) groups, as in Khulna against the Moazzem Hossain family, there have been no attacks on Ahmadiya mosques. The Ahmadiya faith's centennial celebrations were carried out without hindrance, with a cross-section of political and civil society leadership in attendance. However, while there were no major incidents, we should note the organizing of a seminar by Amra Dhakabashi at Deen Hall, where discussants demanded that Ahmadiyas ('Qadiyanis' to their opponents) be declared non-Muslim. This group, essentially involved in street violence earlier, is now pushing hate speech demands through law-based arguments. When looking at recent court case demanding ban of construction of a statue in Narayanganj, one can see possible futures where hate groups push their agenda through the courts rather than street demonstrations, allowing them to take on an apparent mantle of respectability.” [109a] (Chapter 15)

19.24 The US Committee on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2010, covering events from May 2009 to April 2010, released in May 2010, observed that:

“Bangladesh’s small Ahmadi community of about 100,000 has been the target of a campaign to designate the Ahmadis as ‘non-Muslim’ heretics. In January 2004, the then-government, led by the BNP in coalition with Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and a smaller Islamist party, banned the publication and distribution of Ahmadi religious literature. Police seized Ahmadi publications on a few occasions before the courts in December 2004 stayed the ban. Since then, the ban has not been enforced, although it has never been officially rescinded. In some instances, local anti-Ahmadi agitation has been accompanied by mob violence in which Ahmadi homes have been destroyed and Ahmadis are held against their will and pressured to recant. However, violence against Ahmadis has diminished in recent years due to improved and more vigorous police protection. Bangladeshi Ahmadis were able to hold their annual national convention in March 2010, in the eastern city of Brahmanbaria, although they received death threats from anti-Ahmadi groups. They also were subject to written restrictions from the police (including regarding religious content), who entered the Ahmadi mosque to order the cutting off the mosque’s internal sound system.” [115b] (p327)

19.25 The USSD 2008 report also noted that “Government protection of Ahmadiyyas continued to improve, although social discrimination continued” and the ban on publishing Ahmadiyya literature remained stayed by the High Court, effectively allowing the continued publication of such material. [2b] (section 2c)

19.26 The 2010 Religious Freedom report stated that:

“There were approximately 100,000 Ahmadis concentrated in Dhaka and several other locales. Throughout the year, attacks directed at the Ahmadi community in Tangail resulted in personal injuries and significant property damage. The attacks happened in three waves in June, August, and October. The attacks consisted of small groups entering Ahmadi neighborhoods with weapons, beating Ahmadis they encountered and vandalizing several houses before leaving. The authorities made no arrests, but a few local figures issued statements about the need to live in harmony. Although mainstream Muslims rejected some Ahmadiyya teachings, most of them supported the Ahmadis' right to practice without fear of persecution.” [2w] (Section iii)

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## CHRISTIANS

- 19.27 A report from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, dated 9 August 2006, has quoted from various other sources as follows:

“There are an estimated 350,000 to 500,000 Christians living in Bangladesh, the majority of whom are Catholic. The [2005 Religious Freedom Report] indicates that Bengali Christians are spread across Bangladesh, and that some indigenous (non-Bengali) groups are also Christian...Reported incidents against religious minorities, including Christians, have included killings, sexual assaults, extortion, intimidation, forced eviction, and attacks on places of worship... According to Open Doors (OD), an evangelical Christian organization that provides religious materials, training and support to Christians around the world, Christians, and particularly Muslims who convert to Christianity, are not safe in Bangladesh. According to the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, a US-based NGO, Muslim converts to Christianity generally do not openly practice their religion. Sources consulted indicate that Muslims who convert to Christianity could face rejection by their families and society and physical ‘danger’. A May 2005 U.S. Newswire article reports that Christian Freedom International (CFI), a US based human rights organization, found evidence of ‘persecution’ of Muslims who had converted to Christianity during a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh. Cited in the same article, the president of CFI indicated that Muslim women who convert to Christianity may be subject to beatings, abduction, rape, forced marriage and forced reconversion to Islam. Specific reports of Muslim women who converted to Christianity being subject to such treatment could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate [IRB]...The government has, however, taken measures to provide security at places of worship of religious minorities around the country. During Christmas celebrations in 2005, the government reportedly tightened security at churches across the country following a series of Islamic militant bombings earlier that year.” [3f]

- 19.28 The 2008 Religious Freedom Report recorded certain incidents of harassment and violence in which the victims were Christian:

“Reports of harassment and violence against the Christian community were recorded during the reporting period. According to Christian Life Bangladesh (CLB), members of a Muslim fundamentalist group attacked two Christian men at Rangunia in Chittagong on April 12, 2008, as they were showing a film to build social awareness about arsenic pollution, child marriage, and other social ills ... Members of a banned insurgent group called Shanti Bahini in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) attacked Chengko Marma, a member of CLB’s community awareness team in Khagrachhari Hill District on September 6, 2007. According to CLB, the Buddhist-dominated Shanti Bahini targeted the Christian man because of his religious beliefs. In another incident, the CLB reported the daughter of a Christian evangelist who converted some local Hindus was raped by Muslim men in Mymensingh in April 2008 ... In the northern district of Nilphamari, police on July 26, 2007, arrested Sanjoy Roy, a church pastor, after a mob pressured the police to take action against him for converting 25 Muslims to Christianity, CLB stated. Roy was released after 2 days in custody and most of the converts returned to Islam” [2p] (Section III)

- 19.29 The 2009 Religious Freedom Report recorded “According to the BHBCOP and Prothom Alo, on January 28, 2009, in Tangail, a gang of unidentified attackers killed Basanti Mangsa, a Christian headmistress of Gaira Missionary Primary School, as she was

returning home from a meeting. Two teachers were also injured in what was apparently a well-planned attack. The motive was unclear and the case remained unsolved.” [2s] (Section III)

- 19.30 The 2010 Religious Freedom report stated that, “Reports of harassment and violence against the Christian community were recorded during the reporting period. On March 20, according to the Daily Star, a clash over a land dispute involving a Christian church in the Mithapukur upazila resulted in injuries to 20 of the involved parties. The church purchased some adjacent land that was previously used as a school playground. Local MPs worked to defuse the tension and managed to avert further violence.” [2w] (Section iii)

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## 20. ETHNIC GROUPS

- 20.01 Bangladesh is ethnically “... highly homogeneous, with more than 98 per cent of the population being Bengali. Members of ethnic minority communities, mostly tribal peoples in the north and in the east, are often non-Muslim.” (USCIRF Report 2010) [115b] (p326) An article in the *Bangladesh News* dated 27 March 2008 stated that: “For centuries, Bangladesh has been the dwelling place of different ethnic groups. In fact, 35 smaller groups of indigenous people covering about two per cent of the total population have been living in different pockets of the hilly zones and some areas of the plain lands of the country. Their historical background, economic activities, social structure, religious beliefs and festivals make them distinctive.” [6b]

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### THE INDIGENOUS JUMMA PEOPLES OF THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

- 20.02 The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) covers about 10 per cent of the total land area of Bangladesh; it includes the districts of Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban within the Division of Chittagong. (The Mappa Ltd: Bangladesh Guide Map 2003) [25] With regard the CHT, Amnesty International (AI), in a report of 1 March 2004, stated:

“The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is a hilly, forested area in south-eastern Bangladesh which for many hundreds of years has been home to people from 13 indigenous tribes [collectively known as the Jumma people]. These tribal people differ significantly from the rest of the population of Bangladesh in terms of their appearance, language, religion and social organisation.

“Pressure for land to cultivate and encouragement from successive governments have led to the migration of large numbers of non-tribal Bengali people to the CHT. Tribal people have viewed the movement of Bengali settlers to the CHT as a threat to their way of life and their customs and traditions.

“Armed rebellion in the Chittagong Hill Tracts began in mid-1970s. A peace accord signed in 1997 ended the armed conflict, but human rights violations against the tribal people which began during the armed conflict have continued on a smaller scale.” [7m]

- 20.03 As recorded in an Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) report of 23 April 2008, hundreds of illegal plain settlers attacked seven indigenous Jumma villages in the

Chittagong Hill Tracts on 20 April 2008.... Hundreds of people had been displaced as indigenous Jummas took shelter into the deep forest fearing further attack. [53d]

- 20.04 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010* (USSD 2010 report), released on 8 April 2011, stated as follows:

“There was some progress in the implementation of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord. The government reconstituted the CHT Land Commission, which announced its decision to conduct a land survey beginning in October 2009; however, indigenous rights groups have criticized this decision since they believe Bengali settlers will be able to obtain false documents detailing ownership of traditionally indigenous lands. The National Committee for Implementation of the CHT Peace Accord also was reconstituted, ... on December 27, the National Committee for the Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accords, suspended the activities of the land commission pending further review, ... Law and order problems and alleged human rights violations continued, as did dissatisfaction with the implementation of the peace accord.” [2v] (Section 6)

See the UN Economic and Social Council report, [Study on the status of implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997](#), dated 18 February 2011, submitted by the Special Rapporteur, for an implementation update. [8h]

See also Section 28: [Internally Displaced People](#)

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## BIHARIS

### Background

- 20.05 Biharis are sometimes referred to as ‘stranded Pakistanis’, or as the Urdu speaking community of Bangladesh). At the time of the partition of India in 1947, many Urdu-speaking Muslims from the East Indian states – predominantly Bihar but also from Assam and Orissa – chose to migrate to East Pakistan. An additional number of Indian and Pakistani Urdu-speakers subsequently relocated to Bangladesh; these separate groups of Urdu-speakers became known, collectively, as ‘Biharis’. (FCO, 6 November 2007) [11k]
- 20.06 A paper from Interdisciplinary.net, *Conceiving Collectivity: The Urdu-speaking ‘Bihari’ Minority and the Absence of ‘Home’*, 2009 reported that:

“The ‘Urdu-speaking community’ in Bangladesh could be considered a ‘linguistic diaspora’. The descendants of over one million Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from India to East Bengal (then East Pakistan) following the country’s creation in 1947 ... they are distinguished from the Bengali speaking majority largely through language. Many had fled violence in North Indian states such as Bihar (as well as Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and others), and the label ‘Bihari’ has been used in reference to the descendents of these migrants in the region ever since. Controversially sharing certain linguistic and cultural similarities with the ruling (West Pakistani) Punjabi elite these migrants gained increasing influence in the new state ... . They “came to be known as conduits of the West Pakistani ‘colonialists’, who were not to be trusted” ... . Cultural, linguistic and political tensions culminated in the Liberation War of 1971. Following the country’s Liberation, the entire Urdu-speaking community were branded enemy collaborators and

84 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

socially ostracised. Thousands were arrested or executed, while others, having been dispossessed by the state and fearful for their lives, were forced to flee ... . A once strong sense of Diasporic unity' was now constructed in different terms. 'The community' had been displaced for a second time, but now 'within' the land that had become their 'home'. They were once again 'othered' but not as a result of their own actions (emigration) as much as the events that took place around them." [140a]

- 20.07 In 2008-2009 there were estimated to be about 250,000 to 300,000 Biharis living in Bangladesh.(UNB, 18 May 2008) [39ar] (*The Daily Star*, 19 May 2008) [38de] (*The Daily Star*, 26 January 2009) [38ej] Of those, approximately 160,000 were living in 116 camps situated throughout the country; the remainder were living outside of the camps. (Oxford University: Refugee Studies Centre, April 2009) [114a] (*The Daily Star*, 30 December 2008) [38ej]

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## Biharis recognised as citizens

See The Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) policy brief [Accessing Rights as Citizens: The Camp-based Urdu Speaking Community in Bangladesh](#), 2007 [141a] which identifies some of the barriers to 'effective' citizenship.

- 20.08 The US State Department *Human Rights Report 2010*, Bangladesh, released on 8 April 2011, (USSD 2010) observed that:

"In 2008 the High Court ruled that Biharis living in the country, once considered stateless, were citizens. Approximately 160,000 to 200,000 non-Bengali Bihari Muslims who immigrated to the former East Pakistan during the 1947 partition, a large number of whom supported Pakistan during the 1971 war, continued to live in camps throughout the country. According to Refugees International, many of these persons lived in unsanitary conditions with little access to education and medical resources. Some Biharis declined citizenship in 1972, and a minority awaited repatriation to Pakistan, where the government was reluctant to accept them. Many in the Bihari community were born after 1972, and the vast majority of this population has been assimilated into the mainstream Bengali-speaking environment, although social barriers to upward mobility remained. Approximately 90 percent of all adult Biharis, or 184,000 persons, were registered as voters following voter registration drives prior to the 2008 elections." [2v] (Section 2d)

- 20.09 While it is correct that "The government of Bangladesh later offered the community the choice of repatriation to Pakistan. In December 1973, the International Committee of the Red Cross completed registration of 539,669 persons who wished to return to Pakistan." *The Daily Star*, 26 May 2008 stated that there was no mention of citizenship. [38df]

- 20.10 The NGO Refugees International (RI) commented in a report dated 23 May 2008, "This measure will allow about half of the 200-500,000 stateless Biharis, hosted by Bangladesh for 36 years, to find a remedy to their lack of an effective nationality." [74b]

Note: The numbers of Bihari refugees in Bangladesh vary between sources; in paragraph 20.07 there was estimated to be about 250,000 to 300,000 Biharis living in Bangladesh in 2008 while paragraph 20.08 numbers 160,000 to 200,000. Paragraph 20.10 numbers 200-500,000.

- 20.11 An article published in April 2009 by the Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre noted:

“In August 2008, the Election Commission began a drive to register the Urdu speaking communities in the settlements around Bangladesh. This was an important first step towards integrating these minority communities into Bangladeshi society ... Now all camp residents [born after 1971 or who were under 18 years old at the time of independence] are Bangladeshi citizens and all of them have [entitlement to] National ID cards.” [104a]

- 20.12 *The Daily Star* confirmed that Biharis had voted in significant numbers in the general election of 29 December 2008. [38e] However, *The Daily Star* reported on 26 January 2009:

“Despite obtaining country's citizenship, the Urdu-speaking Bihari are still being deprived of getting Bangladeshi passports as copy of the High Court (HC) verdict is yet to reach the Home Ministry even after eight months of the ruling ... After obtaining the citizenship, many Biharis have applied for getting passport. Though they have submitted the applications after following proper system, the passport offices have rejected the applications depriving their citizen rights, many Bihari alleged ... Secretary for Home Affairs Md Abdul Karim told *The Daily Star* that the ministry is bound to follow the HC ruling but its copy yet to be received. ‘Without knowing the verdict clearly, we can't do anything for issuing passport to Biharis,’ he said. The passport officials are still unaware of new government policy regarding issuing passport to Biharis. Abdur Rab Hawlader, director general of Department of Immigration and Passport said, ‘We didn't receive any instruction from the authorities on issuing passports to the Biharis’. [sic] ... “Kafil Uddin Bhuiyan, deputy director of Regional Passport Office, Dhaka said, ‘We provide passport on the basis of police verification...’ But the residents at different Bihari camps said, they are still being addressed as ‘Stranded Pakistani’ in police verification, which is the main barrier to get the passport. In some cases, passport officers say, without holding a permanent address, one will not [be] eligible for getting a passport ... Meanwhile, concealing original identity, many Biharis had got passports before obtaining Bangladeshi citizenship. But they are also facing the same problem while trying to renew the passport.” [sic] [38e]

- 20.13 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in a [\*Note on the nationality status of the Urdu-speaking community in Bangladesh\*](#) [67g] dated December 2009 stated that:

“In light of the May 2008 Supreme Court decision and subsequent implementing measures taken by the Government of Bangladesh, the Urdu speaking community can no longer be viewed as stateless, as they are considered to be nationals of Bangladesh.

“Despite the fact that pockets of Bangladeshi society resent the role that some Urdu speakers played in the 1971 Liberation War, many members of Urdu speaking communities, including those in the open camps, are living alongside the Bengali community and speak Bengali. Urdu speakers living in extreme poverty are sometimes unable to access basic services, either because of the unavailability of such services in their area, or because they are unable to meet the necessary legal or administrative requirements applicable to all Bangladeshi nationals (for example, they may lack a valid address, which is required to acquire a passport); this is not, however, a problem unique to Urdu speakers in Bangladesh. Although there may be instances where officials,

particularly at the local level, would seek further guidance from their ministries on the effect and application of the 2008 Sadaqat Khan judgment before resolving a matter involving Urdu speakers, difficulties in accessing services do not denote a refusal to recognize Urdu speakers as nationals of Bangladesh.” [8i] (p5)

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## Living conditions in the camps

- 20.14 The Refugees International report of 23 May 2008 noted that conditions in the camps were poor: “Living conditions are miserable primarily due to high population density, aging accommodations, poor sanitation and hygiene, lack of education and health care facilities, and limited access to livelihoods...” [74b]
- 20.15 The USCR World Refugee Survey 2007, published in June 2007, observed that ‘half of the Biharis’ lived outside of the camps and were integrated into the local community. [37g] (p32) While the USSD 2008 report stated that many of the Biharis born after 1971 have “assimilated into the mainstream Bengali speaking environment.” [2b] (Section 2d)

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## 21. LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PERSONS

In considering the position of lesbians and bisexual women see also the section on [Women](#) below

### LEGAL RIGHTS

- 21.01 An alternative report submitted by the Citizens' Initiatives to CEDAW-Bangladesh dated December 2010 stated that:

“As a signatory to CEDAW, the Bangladeshi state has an international obligation to protect the rights of sexual and gender minorities; more specifically to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on sex (which can be, and is widely, interpreted to include sexual orientation and gender diversity). .... The Constitution of Bangladesh also guarantees the right to be free from discrimination based on sex, as well as caste, religion and race.” [147b] (p56)

**The Citizens’ Initiatives on UNCEDAW, Bangladesh (CiC-BD) is a citizens’ platform comprised of 38 women’s and human rights organizations. The platform came together in October 2007. [147b]**

- 21.02 The same report continued:

“Same sex sexualities and non-normative gender identities are not recognized under the current legal framework of the country. International and constitutional guarantees of freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sex are directly contravened by Section 377 of the Bangladesh Penal Code which provides for the punishment through imprisonment and fines of any sexual activity deemed “against the order of nature” by the courts. Introduced by colonial authorities in British India, this provision of the Penal Code of 1860 effectively criminalizes all acts other than procreative sex within heterosexual marriage.

“In practice, Section 377 can be used by post colonial states such as Bangladesh to criminalize consensual same sex activity. The law does not distinguish between consensual and forced sex. In some instances, it is also used to prosecute cases of child sexual abuse since existing rape laws do not recognize male to male rape. That is, rape is understood to be a heterosexual phenomenon, both culturally and legally.

“At the Fourth Round of the Universal Periodic Review in February 2009, the Sexual Rights Initiatives (SRI) presented a report on the socio-political rights of sexual and gender minorities, including gays, lesbians, hijras, kothis and inter-sex persons in Bangladesh. The report was historic in nature since this was the first time that the subject of sexual and gender minorities in Bangladesh had been presented at such a high level international forum. During the discussion, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister denied the existence of homosexuality in the country. The GOB also rejected recommendations in the SRI report to decriminalize consensual same sex activity by repealing Section 377.” [147b](p56)

21.03 The ‘alternative CEDAW report of December 2010 stated that:

“The social and cultural invisibility of same sex practices in Bangladesh is accompanied by the dearth of scholarship on the topic. New research shows that sexually marginalized populations, especially those belonging to the hijra or transgender/transsexual community, are systematically persecuted by state agents through another provision, that of Section 54 which allows for arrest without warrant in case of “suspicious” behavior. The police are notorious for gross infringements of the rights of sexual minorities, especially hijras, kothis or “effeminate” males and MSM (males who have sex with males) through invoking Section 54. Harassment, physical and sexual abuse and extortion, as well as arbitrary arrest and detention, are standard forms of violence these groups face for not conforming to heterosexual norms. Moreover, many HIV/AIDS awareness programs have been threatened or closed down because of intimidation and violence by law enforcing authorities. Sexual and gender minorities have minimal access to medical services and treatment of any kind, because of social stigma and the discrimination by medical service providers. Loss of traditional forms of livelihood and overt discrimination in employment opportunities has pushed hijras primarily into sex work for survival. Hijra and MSM sex-workers are routinely subjected to rape as well as intimidation in exchange for police “protection.” Notably, only one case has actually been filed under Section 377 in independent Bangladesh although there is some anecdotal evidence that the law is used to intimidate sexual and gender minorities. According to the UPR report, most Hijra and Kothi identified persons cited bullying as one of the preeminent reasons for dropout from state sponsored primary schools. Many are reported to have turned suicidal and experienced acute psychological trauma. There is now an emerging self-identified gay and lesbian culture in Bangladesh, although little is documented on the kinds of rights violations to which such groups are subjected. Research indicates that “effeminate” boys face serious bullying and intimidation in educational and other social settings. Self-identified gay teenagers are often forced into psychiatric and medical regimes in order to be “cured.” [147b](p57)

21.04 The US State Department *2010 Human Rights Report: Bangladesh*, (USSD 2010), released on 8 April 2011, observed:

“Homosexual acts remained illegal, but in practice the law was rarely enforced. There were a few informal support networks for gay men, but organizations to assist lesbians



were rare. Informal organizations reported that they were unable to organize, do outreach, petition for changes to the law, or set up permanent establishments because of the possibility of police raids. One gay rights organization stated that gay men and lesbians also often faced extreme family pressure to marry opposite sex partners.

“Attacks on lesbians and gay men occurred on occasion, but those offenses were difficult to document because victims desired confidentiality. Strong social stigma based on sexual orientation was common and repressed open discussion about the subject. Local human rights groups did not monitor the problem, and there were few studies on homosexuality in the country.

“Although overt discrimination against lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals was fairly rare--partly because few individuals openly identified their orientation--there was significant societal discrimination. Openly gay individuals, particularly those from less affluent backgrounds, found that their families and local communities ostracized them. Some sought refuge in the transgender or "hijra" community.” [2v] (Section 6)

- 21.05 Aidsdatahub’s (a website that co-ordinates data on HIV/AIDS in the region to assist Governments in their response to the problem) country profile of Bangladesh, updated on 2 April 2010, noted that there are estimated to be 40,000 to one million men who have sex with men (MSM) in Bangladesh. The profile added that there were around 5,000 transgender persons in Dhaka, most of who were sex workers. The same source also noted:

“Male-to-male sexual activity is illegal and [there is an] absence of non-discrimination laws and regulations which specify protection for MSM... Although there were differences within the various geographic regions of the country, many MSM were also purchasing sex from males or hijra [transgender persons] and group sex was reportedly common. Many MSM had female sex partners and/or were married due to societal pressure to marry and become fathers.” [15a]

- 21.06 An article in *The Guardian, Gay, straight or MSM?* dated 6 August 2009, reported that in Bangladesh, how you define your sexuality can depend on class, education and family circumstances. [55c]

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- 21.07 According to the State-sponsored Homophobia survey, published by the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) in May 2010, same-sex male sexual acts are illegal; same-sex female sexual acts are legal. [24x]

- 21.08 A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report of August 2003 noted that Section 377 of the Bangladesh Penal Code of 1860, inherited from the British colonial administration and titled “Of Unnatural Offences” provides, in part: “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.” The report said that Human Rights Watch had not documented any instances in which Section 377 had been enforced in Bangladesh, but continued:

“Most of the arrests recounted to Human Rights Watch were brought under section 54 [of the Criminal Procedure Code - see Section 12 above]. Whether or not the law is

enforced, however, it may effectively criminalize the status of being a kothi or any man who has sex with men. The perception by the police and by society that men who have sex with men are inherently criminal fuels attacks on their dignity and the denial of their equality before the law. A report published by the Bangladesh Ministry of Law, 'Mapping Exercise on HIV/AIDS- Law, Ethics and Human Rights', stated that male sex workers and hijras consulted for the report argued that the section 'exists only to be used by the police to victimize gay and bisexual men whom they catch in public areas with a motive to extort money and blackmail.' The report concluded that 'Section 377 of the Penal Code violates [the] constitutionally protected right to privacy under the expanded definition of right to life and personal liberty (article 32).' To the extent that section 377 discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation, it is in violation of international human rights law." [10g] (p43)

21.09 The Constitution, under Article 28, protects citizens against discrimination by the State on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth - but is silent on sexual orientation. Article 31, however, states that the protection of the law is the inalienable right of every citizen. [4] The ILGA Survey 2010 in its LGBTI rights global overview section did not identify Bangladesh as prohibiting discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Nor did the state make illegal hate crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity and there was no provision in the Constitution to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. [24x] (p44-50)

21.10 There is no military conscription in Bangladesh. COI Service does not have information on whether LGBT persons are generally barred from voluntary service or careers in the military or in the various security services.

See Section 9: [Military Service](#)

21.11 It should also be noted that over 80 per cent of Bangladesh's population is Muslim and that same-sex sexual relations are prohibited in Islamic Sharia Law. [36d] (p29)

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## TREATMENT BY AND ATTITUDES OF THE STATE

### Ill-treatment by police officers and by Mastans

21.12 In their August 2003 report entitled *Ravishing the Vulnerable*, Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that many men who have sex with men (msm) interviewed by them reported being raped, gang raped and beaten frequently by police and by mastans (defined broadly as criminal thugs, sometimes with local political connections). [10g] (p39)

21.13 According to the report:

"Like women sex workers, men who have sex with men are abducted, raped, physically assaulted, and subject to extortion by police and mastans. Men who have sex with men are sometimes arrested and abused without being charged with any crime. They have no effective means of lodging official complaints about the abuses they experience. The police also sometimes harass, beat, and arrest men engaging in HIV/AIDS outreach work. Moreover, men who have sex with men are discriminated against by the wider society: turned away from jobs and harassed at school. An old colonial law against 'carnal intercourse' is interpreted to criminalize men who have sex with men. These

violations stem from and result in a subjugated, subhuman status for this group of people while simultaneously undermining Bangladesh's capacity to fight an emerging AIDS epidemic." [10g] (p37-38) ...

"HRW stated that gay men interviewed by them also reported that they were regularly subjected to extortion by both police and mastans; those men who engaged in prostitution said that their clients were also subject to extortion. Some of those interviewed reported that they had been arrested under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code; this had not led to criminal charges or prosecution, but rather to abuses such as extortion and physical assault. They did not see any merit in bringing an official complaint about police or mastan abuse, as they believed the police would not act on such a complaint. [10g] (p39-41) Human Rights Watch has recorded that only 17 individuals were interviewed in depth for this report; the respondents were identified through organisations of sex workers, organisations for gay men, needle exchange programs and/or drug rehabilitation programs. [10g] (p10 'Methods') ... Most of those interviewed described themselves as kothis (men or boys who take on a feminine demeanour and identify themselves as female in sexual relationships with men). The HRW report noted that, according to some experts, a significant proportion of kothis engage in sex work." [10g] (p10, 37, 38)

- 21.14 A 2006 UNAIDS report cited a study conducted in 2002 (*AIDS and STD Control Programme: Second Generation Surveillance for HIV in Bangladesh*), in which 40.9 per cent of male sex workers and 50.1 per cent of hijras reported violence or rape by policemen or mastans. [36d] (p29)
- 21.15 As is referred to in Section VIII of the 2003 Human Rights Watch report [10g] (p48), the Government has been implementing a Police Reform Programme since this report, and the 2002 report cited by UNAIDS, were produced.
- 21.16 The NGO Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), in its Human Rights in Bangladesh 2008 annual report, undated, stated that:

"Although there has been only one reported case involving Section 377 in the four decades since the independence of Bangladesh, the existence of this offence is reportedly used by law enforcing agencies and others to threaten and harass individuals, and thus inhibit their free exercise of expression and behaviour. In fact, none of the cases reported by or to Bandhu (see below) involved Section 377 directly, although the threat of arrest under this law may have been invoked. More significant is the abuse of Section 54 of Criminal Procedure Code and Section 86 of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance (and related provisions in the police ordinances applicable to other Metropolitan cities) which are commonly used to harass persons using public spaces. Indeed, this situation is not very different from that of sex workers and other socially marginalized groups detained under Section 54 without being shown any cause. And yet, while lawyers and human rights groups are vocal about the perils of Sections 54 and 86, they have tended to be silent about the specific effects of these provisions on this community." [109b] (Chapter 22)

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## SOCIETAL TREATMENT AND ATTITUDES

21.17 Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), in its *Human Rights in Bangladesh 2008* annual report, undated, stated that:

“For a number of reasons, including cultural invisibility, a general reluctance to discuss sexuality in the public sphere, and the stigma attached to non-normative sexualities, information on sexual minorities in Bangladesh is quite limited. For that matter, most human rights organizations, until very recently, have not considered the subject of sexual rights to be an obvious part of their mandate.” [109b] (Chapter 22)

21.18 Commenting on the situation of lesbians in Bangladesh, journalist Richard Ammon noted in June 2006: “The fate of virtually all Islamic women here is marriage and motherhood. Anyone stepping outside that frame by expressing independence or, far worse, as a lesbian, renders herself un-marriageable and sets her on a likely course of rejection and social derision.” (GlobalGayz.com) [44a] Afsan Chowdhury of *Himal Magazine* had observed in 2004 that lesbianism “is kept a secret fearing loss of marriage prospects. And marriage, after all, is society’s idea of a woman’s ultimate nirvana ... Society frowns upon single women, and the social pressure to marry – doesn’t matter who to – is intense. Most succumb to it, despite their sexual preferences, and end up miserably knotted ... The tolerance level for lesbians is very low in Bengali society.” [12a]

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## Hijras

21.19 In the culture of the Indian sub-continent, hijras are regarded as a “third gender”; most hijras see themselves as “neither man nor woman”. They cannot accurately be described as “eunuchs” or “hermaphrodites” or “transsexual women”, which are Western terms. Most hijras were born male or ‘intersex’ (with ambiguous genitalia); many will have undergone a ritual emasculation operation, which includes castration. Some other individuals who identify as hijras were born female. Although most hijras wear women’s clothing and have adopted female mannerisms, they generally do not attempt to pass as women. Becoming a hijra involves a process of initiation into a hijra ‘family’, or small group, under a guru “teacher”. For further background information, refer to sources [101a] [20b] In a BBC News article of 30 November 2000, George Arney wrote that Hijras have been part of the South Asian landscape for thousands of years. He continued: “Even though they generally provoke horror or ridicule, they have traditionally had a role to play on the margins of society as entertainers and as bestowers of curses and blessings.” [20b] A *Daily Star* article of 26 September 2005 commented: “The hijra or hermaphrodite community has been a despised and neglected minority in society [in Bangladesh]. They face discriminations and deprivations throughout their life. As the hermaphrodites are hounded out of school, they are deprived of basic education and job opportunities. It is impossible for them to cast [a] vote in elections, get a passport, open a bank account or even get a descent [sic] house on rent.” [38cs] At a conference on HIV/AIDS and human rights issues, held in June 2007, hermaphrodites (i.e. hijras) were described as the most neglected and marginalised community in society. They were also said to be the “worst victims of mental and sexual abuse as they have no social and legal protection due to identity crisis” (sic). Speakers participating in the discussion called for the recognition of a separate gender identity for hijras to ensure their proper recognition in society. (*The Daily Star*, 11 June 2007) [38ct] In 2008, for the first time, hijras were able to enrol as

voters. (ASK Annual Report 2008) [109a] (Chapter 1) Badhan Hijra Sangha is a social welfare NGO which provides support to transgender people in Bangladesh, focusing on health care, human rights awareness and vocational training. [104]

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See Section 26: [Medical services \(HIV/AIDS- Anti-retroviral treatment\)](#)

21.20 Aidsdatahub country profile of Bangladesh, updated on 2 April 2010, observed that:

- MSM are formally and informally organized and a national MSM sexual health service named Bandhu Social Welfare Society is the largest MSM sexual and reproductive health programme in Asia;
- National Strategic Plan (2004-10) focuses on provision of necessary services to vulnerable populations including MSM;
- Government has mobilized and secured credit funds through international donors to support interventions among high-risk groups, including MSM.” [15a]

See also The World Bank, [HIV/AIDS IN Bangladesh](#), July 2010 and the AIDS Data Hub [Country Review September 2011](#) [15b]

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## 22. DISABILITY

22.01 The UN Common Country Assessment for 2004 had stated:

“According to the National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled [an umbrella organization consisting of more than 80 NGOs working in various fields of disability] approximately 14 per cent of the country's population has some form of disability. The economic condition of most families limits their ability to assist with the special needs of the disabled, and superstition and fear of persons with disabilities sometimes results in their isolation.” [8d] (p68 69)

22.02 The Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) in Perceptions of disability in Bangladesh, undated, that:

“In Bangladesh, physical limitations are often not the most difficult obstacles a disabled person needs to overcome. Attitudes to and perceptions of disability are often even more challenging.

“As with many Southern countries, there is little awareness in Bangladesh of disability, its causes and consequences. Many 'traditional' views on the subject still prevail, especially in rural settings. Disability is often seen as a curse from God, inflicted as retribution for the sins of the disabled person's parents. Many believe that disability is infectious and that having a disabled person in the house will bring on an 'evil wind' after which others will be infected with this condition.

“Treatment for spinal injuries and other disabling conditions is often based on superstitious methods and performed by untrained village doctors in settings which are neither hygienic nor appropriate. This maltreatment often causes further injury or

aggravates the condition of the patient. Avoidable complications are a common consequence of treatment by unqualified practitioners.

“Too little work is done in raising awareness about disability or educating people about how disability occurs and how to prevent it. Children rarely mix with disabled friends. The segregation of disabled children prevents stigmas being removed at an early age.” [123a]

22.03 The NGO Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) advised in their Annual Report for 2008:

“Bangladesh has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Pursuant to constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination, specific laws have been passed to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs) such as the Disability Welfare Act 2001. In addition, the National Policy on Disability 1995 and the National Action Plan on Disability 2006 have also been adopted. However PWDs continue to face legal and practical barriers to equality including unjust treatment, discrimination in access to voting rights, lack of free access to educational opportunities, health services and job opportunities without discrimination. Their right to free movement is still restricted and many PWDs are still victims of violence and abuse without remedy.” [109a] (Chapter 21)

22.04 The ASK Annual Report noted:

- Political participation of PWDs as voters, candidates and campaigners has remained limited. According to ASK: “It is estimated that...eligible people with disabilities have had limited access to voter registration, due to high levels of illiteracy, lack of access to information, vulnerability and poverty. Exclusion from the voter list has in turn excluded them in claiming and receiving services from the public service department and local government.” The Election Commission, in 2007, inserted a provision for identifying voters with disabilities in the registration form. In 2008 the major political parties addressed disability issues in their election manifestos for the first time.
- “Reportedly only four per cent of children with disabilities have access to education in any form. About 1.6 million eligible school-aged children with disabilities are unable to access formal and non-formal education.”
- “In practice, public health centres, such as Upazila Health Complexes and District general hospitals, were also inaccessible to PWDs and provided no disability related services such as early identification, fitting of artificial limbs, aids and appliances, educational or therapeutic services or vocational rehabilitation. NGOs are providing some limited services.”
- “According to a recent study, the mean employment rate of persons with disabilities is less than a quarter of those without a disability.”
- In 2008, some new initiatives were taken by public institutions to facilitate mobility. [109a] (Chapter 21)

22.05 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010*, released on 8 April 2011, noted:

“The law provides for equal treatment and freedom from discrimination for persons with disabilities; in practice persons with disabilities faced social and economic discrimination. The law focuses on prevention of disability, treatment, education, rehabilitation and employment, transport accessibility, and advocacy.

“The Ministry of Social Welfare, the Department of Social Services, and the National Foundation for the Development of the Disabled were the government agencies responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. Government facilities for treating persons with mental disabilities were inadequate. Several private initiatives existed for medical and vocational rehabilitation, as well as for employment of persons with disabilities. Several NGOs including Handicap International have programs focusing on helping and raising awareness about the persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities were legally afforded the same access to information rights as those without disabilities; however, family dynamics often influenced whether or not these rights were used.” [2v] (Section 6)

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## 23. WOMEN

### OVERVIEW

23.01 Bangladesh acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 6 December 1984 and ratified the Optional Protocol on the Convention on 22 December 2000. [8a]

23.02 In the most recent State party report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), dated 3 January 2003, observed that “Bangladesh is a gradually changing society where the position, status and roles of men and women have primarily been shaped by the stereotype of male predominance and authority over women.” [47a] (p16) The report noted, “Traditional socio-cultural values and practices work against raising the status of women. Women still have limited opportunities for education, technical and vocational training, employment and activities.” (p5-6) “According to the Constitution, women enjoy the same status and rights as men in terms of education, health, political process, employment, development processes and social welfare. However, in practice, they do not enjoy the fundamental rights and freedom to the extent as men do. The unequal status of women in society and in public life is largely due to the fact of having unequal status in the family life. Women’s lower socio-economic status, lower literacy, lesser mobility are some of the practical obstacles to the establishment of their fundamental rights.” (p10) The same report detailed recent initiatives both by the Government and by NGOs to reduce discrimination and gender-based oppression. [47a] (p7, 10-18)

See paragraph [27.03](#) Freedom of movement

23.03 CEDAW, in its *Concluding Comments* dated 26 July 2004, urged the Bangladesh Government to implement comprehensive awareness-raising programmes to change stereotypical attitudes and norms about the roles of women; CEDAW also expressed concern over the unequal status of Bangladeshi women within the family and the fact that personal laws, derived from religious precepts which are discriminatory to women, continued to exist in the country. [47b] (p5)

23.04 In an alternative report submitted by the Citizens' Initiatives to CEDAW-Bangladesh dated December 2010 stated that:

“... our concern with the prevailing patriarchal values and traditional norms which regulate social relations and profoundly shape institutional culture. Women have turned

to the State to transform these relationships through legal reforms and policy changes, but even when such reforms are introduced, their implementation is not effective in challenging deeply embedded patriarchal values and structures. Governments and political parties appear to capitulate to the demands of constituencies that are antithetical to the interests of women. This tendency occasionally contributes to strengthening political agendas that directly violate the premises of gender equality. Policies and programs for elimination of discrimination face the challenge of bridging the social divide created by class and gender, along with ethnicity, religion, rural/urban location and other social disadvantages. As in other stratified societies, in Bangladesh an individual's access to opportunities for education, health or employment and control over resources depends upon his or her structural position. Of these divides gender is arguably the most pervasive, permeating all social institutions from the family to the state. However gendered divisions are always mediated by other kinds of inequalities." [147b] (p9)

- 23.05 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Social Institutions and Gender Index (OECD SIGI), profile of Bangladesh, undated, accessed 11 June 2010, stated that

"Bangladesh is a highly patriarchal society and gender discrimination is evident across all levels. Women are dependent on men throughout their lives, from their fathers through to husbands, brothers or sons. The Constitution affirms gender equality, but state legislation and institutions frequently disregard women's rights. For example, women and young girls are more disadvantaged than men in their access to education, health care and financial assets.

"Traditionally, women were recognised mainly for their reproductive role, and were often discouraged from participating in public life. Due to increased poverty and demand for labour, female employment has risen since the mid-1980s." [63a]

See Section 23: [Social and economic rights](#) and Section 24: [Education](#)

- 23.06 Human Rights Watch's *World Report 2011*, Bangladesh, issued on 24 January 2011, covering events in 2010, observed that:

"Discrimination against women remains common in both the public and private spheres, despite the presence of women in several key government positions. Bangladesh maintains a reservation against article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which requires it to effectively adopt laws and policies to provide equal rights for women and men.

"Domestic violence is a daily reality for many women, and there was no progress made in adopting laws on domestic violence and sexual harassment during 2010. The Acid Survivors Foundation reported 86 acid attacks, primarily against women, between January and September. The courts convicted only 15 perpetrators of acid attacks in 2009." [10q]

See also Section 24: [Children](#), which includes some material which is gender specific.

- 23.07 The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the report, *The Country Gender Assessment: Bangladesh*, 2010 stated that:



“Women’s opportunities and public participation in Bangladesh have changed significantly in recent decades. For example, major progress has been made in closing the gender gap in school enrollments at both primary and secondary levels; girls currently outnumber boys in enrollments. The rapid growth of the garment industry has provided a large number of formal sector jobs for women, who comprise more than 90% of its labor force. Many women are now members of the local government councils that have important responsibilities for rural and urban development. Changes in norms, practices, and opportunities that are reflected in these developments are the result of a range of forces, including leadership through government policy, advocacy, innovation by civil society organizations, and actions of individuals and households. Government policy and leadership on gender equality. The National Policy for Women’s Advancement, formulated in 1997, provides an important general statement of commitments of the Government of Bangladesh to equality of women and men. Such commitments are also reflected in the national poverty reduction strategy (National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction, or NSAPR-II), which emphasizes the importance of women’s rights and opportunities for progress in the battle against poverty. Sectoral policies, such as those related to agriculture, food, labor force, and industry, increasingly refer to women’s involvement and rights. The commitment to increased participation by women in public decision making is reflected in legislative provisions that ensure a minimum number of women in both national and local governments.” [146a] (page viii)

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## LEGAL RIGHTS

- 23.08 The Bangladesh Law Commission, in a report dated 18 July 2005; *Opinion on the Study Report for Marriage, Inheritance and Family Laws in Bangladesh towards a Common Family Code* concluded that:

“The personal laws of marriage, divorce, guardianship, maintenance, inheritance etc. of all the communities including the tribal communities of Bangladesh are different from each other in nature and in their manners of application. All these religious or personal laws are based on religious injunctions, faith and beliefs. More so, the personal laws of all communities are sensitive, complex and of diverse origin. It is impossible to bring uniformity in these differing laws by way of modification or reforms for purposes of incorporation in a Common Family Code. Any such attempt is likely to cause injury to the religious sentiment, faith and beliefs of the people of the country. In view of the discussions above, our opinion is that there cannot be any Common Family Code for all the communities in our country as proposed by a few persons only which does not reflect the wish or opinion of all the people of the country. [111a]

See also [Law for Muslim Women in Bangladesh](#) [148a]

- 23.09 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010* (USSD 2010 report), released on 8 April 2011, report noted:

“Laws specifically prohibit certain forms of discrimination against women, provide for special procedures for persons accused of violence against women and children, call for harsher penalties, provide compensation to victims, and require action against investigating officers for negligence or wilful failure of duty; however enforcement of these laws was weak. In 2003 parliament passed an amendment to the law, weakening

provisions for dowry crimes and addressing the issue of suicides of female victims of acts of dishonor.” [2v] (Section 6)

- 23.10 Dr Nusrat Ameen, in her book *Wife Abuse in Bangladesh: An Unrecognised Offence*, published in 2005, noted that a “patriarchal interpretation of the law” by society is common. “Despite Constitutional guarantees that women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life...Jahan points out that many aspects of the legal system reflect the continuing dominance of patriarchal attitudes in society.” Dr Ameen argued that both substantive and procedural law is not gender-neutral and she noted that the laws governing women’s private lives were discriminatory; for example, there was differential treatment of women in divorce proceedings. There was also discrimination between women from different religious groups, since there are different sets of family laws in place for the Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities. Dr Ameen stated that the legal solutions made available to women were often constrained by practical factors, such as the weak economic situation of women, the reluctance of the police to become involved in marital disputes, the difficulty of enforcing and sometimes obtaining injunctions, the emphasis on mediation, arbitration and shalish by legal aid workers and professionals, as well as illiteracy and family pressures. [80] (p7-14)

(Note: Nusrat Ameen PhD was, in 2005, an associate professor of law at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh)

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## POLITICAL RIGHTS

- 23.11 The Constitution provides for equal opportunities for women in politics and public life. [4] There were 64 women serving in parliament, 19 of them were directly elected. According to the law, women are eligible to contest and win any number of seats among the 345 members of parliament, but 45 seats were reserved for women. Six women, including Prime Minister Hasina, held the status of cabinet minister, including the ministers of home affairs, foreign affairs, and agriculture. Khaleda Zia, as the leader of the opposition, and Sajeda Chowdhury, as the deputy leader of parliament, also had the status of cabinet minister. Two women were appointed as state ministers, and a third was serving as a whip of parliament with the status of a state minister. In the January 22 [2009] pazila elections, 481 women vice chairpersons were elected to reserved positions for women. Six of the 89 Supreme Court judges were women. (USSD Report 2010) [2t] (Section 2d)
- 23.12 Of the 345 Members of Parliament, 300 are directly elected. The remaining 45 seats are reserved for women nominated by the political parties, based on their proportional representation within the 300-member group of directly elected members. (USSD 2007 report) [2a] (Section 3) This provision was introduced by an amendment to the Constitution in May 2004, and remains effective until May 2014. (BBC News, 16 May 2004) [20ae] At the local government level, three seats on each of the 4,479 Union Parishad councils and three seats on each Zila (district) council are reserved for women. (CEDAW, January 2003) [47a] (pp5, 22, 23)

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## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

- 98 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

23.13 The USSD 2010 report noted that

“Women remained in a subordinate position in society, and the government did not act effectively to protect their basic rights. For example, under traditional Islamic inheritance laws, women inherited only half that of sons, and in the absence of sons, they may inherit only what remains after settling all the debts and other obligations.

“Employment opportunities increased at a greater rate for women than for men in the last decade, largely due to the growth of the export garment industry. Women constituted approximately 80 per cent of garment factory workers. There were some disparities in pay in the overall economy between men and women, but in the garments sector they were roughly comparable.” [2v] (section 6)

23.14 However, regarding pay and conditions in the Garment industry War on Want has reported that gender parity was less than equal. In *Ignoring the Law: Labour rights violations in the garment industry in Bangladesh*, 2006 they reported that:

“The 2006 Labour Law contains a provision guaranteeing equal rate of pay for men and women. However, according to the research conducted ... women earn far less than their male colleagues. Over 70% of the women spoken to over the course of the study received less than Tk3,000 per month; by comparison, less than half of the men interviewed earn below that mark.

“The wage disparity is the result of two interrelated factors. Male garment workers are far more likely than women to hold jobs that traditionally pay more, such as quality control and floor supervisor, and men also earn more than women who perform the same work.” [143a]

See also: HRW *World Report 2011* - [Harassment and Intimidation of Apparel Industry Workers](#) [10q]

23.15 A further report from War on Want, *Stitched Up: Women workers in the Bangladeshi garment sector*, 10 August 2011 stated that:

“As a result of sustained campaigning by women workers and other trade unionists in Bangladesh, the minimum wage for garment workers was raised in 2010 for the first time in four years. Receipt of wages in the garment industry depends on meeting an assigned production target. If production targets are met, a sewing operator’s salary now starts at 3,861 taka (approximately £32) a month and a helper’s wage at 3,000 taka (£25) a month. Even with the new increases, however, these wages fall far short of the level which is considered to be a living wage....” [143b]

23.16 The ADB report, *The Country Gender Assessment: Bangladesh, 2010* stated that:

“... the rapid growth of the garment industry in Bangladesh, in response to international trade agreements, drew large numbers of women into the labor force. The income brought into households contributed to changing family dynamics. The greater visibility of women on the daily journey to work in Dhaka and other urban areas has also influenced public perceptions of what is possible and appropriate for women. Migration flows provide another example of how decisions by individuals contribute to larger patterns of social change; men have traditionally dominated migration flows, but the proportion of women is increasing and women now predominate among migrants of ages 15–25. The progress that has been made demonstrates the potential for change

despite entrenched views about appropriate roles for women in the private and public sectors. But the broad challenges that remain are evident in gender equality indices of the UNDP Human Development Report. For Bangladesh the gender-related development Index (GDI) is lower than the human development index (HDI), indicating that an aggregated index masks gender inequalities. Of the 155 countries for which both indices could be calculated, 100 countries showed less disparity than Bangladesh. On the gender empowerment measure (GEM), which considers whether women are active in public and economic life, Bangladesh ranks 108th of 109 countries?" [146a] (page viii)

See [23.04](#) regarding the rise in female employment. See also [The ready-made garments industry in Bangladesh: A means to reducing gender-based social exclusion of women?](#) [142a] See also Section 27: [Freedom of movement](#)

23.17 The ADB report *The Country Gender Assessment: Bangladesh*, 2010 stated that:

"Bangladesh benefits from an active women's movement with a large number of organizations that deliver services, conduct research on problems and policies, raise awareness of issues and rights among women and the broader public, and advocate for progress. The women's movement in Bangladesh has also made strategic use of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to advocate for changes in laws and policies. Bangladesh development organizations are widely admired for their success in using micro-credit to benefit women and have also made major contributions to increasing access by women and girls to schooling and health services." [146a] (page viii)

23.18 The OECD SIGI Bangladesh profile, undated, accessed 11 June 2010, reported that:

"Women in Bangladesh have a relatively low level of protection in the family context. The country has the highest rate of early marriage in Asia, and ranks among the highest worldwide. A 2004 United Nations report estimated that 48 per cent of all girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed. Traditionally, parents marry their daughters young to decrease the economic burden on the household. Increased use of contraceptives and declining fertility rates provide more encouraging evidence that the role of women in Bangladesh is changing.

"Polygamy is legal in Bangladesh, but many consider the practice to be outdated. The incidence of polygamy has decreased over the past 50 years (particularly in the cities); at present, about 10 per cent of married men are in such unions. As reported by the Islamic Republic News Agency, in 2006 the city of Rajshahi (the country's fourth-largest city) introduced a new law and a so-called "polygamy tax"; any man taking a second wife must pay a one-time amount of BDT 10 000 (Bangladesh takas) (USD 142). The tax rises to BDT 30 000 (USD 426) for a third wife and BDT 40 000 (USD 568) for a fourth wife.

"In Bangladesh, parental authority is closely linked to religion. Islamic Sharia law regards women as 'custodians' but not legal guardians of their children. In the event of divorce, women can retain custody of sons until age seven and daughters until puberty. If a father dies, his children may be taken away by his family. Hindu law also views fathers as the natural, legal guardians of children.

"Inheritance practices also follow religious teachings. According to Islamic law, daughters inherit half as much as sons. In the absence of a son, daughters can inherit

only as a residuary (that is, only after the settling of all debts and other obligations). In principle, wives are entitled to half of the assets of a deceased husband. Under Hindu law, a widow (or all widows in the case of a polygamous marriage) inherits the same share as a son. For Christians, the Succession Act of 1925 provides equal inheritance between sons and daughters.” [63a]

23.19 With regard to ownership rights the same source noted that:

“Tradition and social norms limit the ability of Bangladeshi women to achieve financial independence. Despite their growing role in agriculture, social and customary practices effectively exclude women from any hope of direct access to land. Similarly, although national law accords men and women equal rights to access to property other than land, women own very few assets. Their situation is further impaired by discriminatory inheritance laws and cultural norms: Bangladeshi women are unlikely to claim their share of family property unless it is offered to them.

“In Bangladesh, women’s access to bank loans and other forms of credit is often determined by the demographic composition of their households. Lack of mobility, particularly in rural areas, forces women to depend on male relatives for any entrepreneurial activities. Several NGOs provide micro-credit to Bangladeshi women, but there is a growing concern as to whether these women actually retain control over their loans.” [63a]

For further socio-economic information see the Gender, Institutions and Development Database 2009 at <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=GID2> and also State of the World’s Children: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc09/statistics/tables.php>

See also Section 2: [Economy](#) and Section 33: [Employment rights](#)

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## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

See also Section 8: [Security Forces: Avenues of complaint](#), Section 24: [Children: Violence against children](#) and Section 25: [Trafficking](#)

23.20 The ASB produced a country briefing paper on women in Bangladesh in 2001 and although now somewhat dated, provides a very balanced overview of the situation facing women in Bangladesh and of the context within which violence occurs. It stated that:

“The majority of women in Bangladesh have yet to be empowered to participate actively in the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the country. Gender discrimination is widespread in all spheres and at all levels, as indicated by official statistics on health, nutrition, education, employment, and political participation. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights to all citizens, but in family matters such as marriage, divorce, custody, maintenance, and inheritance, laws discriminate against women. The policies and programs of the Government, some NGOs, and other institutions do not sufficiently address the need for women’s empowerment. [146b] (p1)

“The traditional patriarchal society of Bangladesh is based on class and gender divisions. Class mobility allows movement between rich and poor, but the division of social space and the difference in behavioral norms between men and women are

rigidly maintained. The family, which constitutes the basic unit of social control, sets the norm for male and female roles. Within this system, the father, or in his absence, the next male kin is the head of the household. As a result, both decision-making powers and economic control are vested in the hands of men. Furthermore, the family operates through a clearly defined system of rights and obligations. This is demonstrated when Muslim women waive the right to inherit their fathers' property in favor of brothers or in the event of inheriting property, pass control to their husbands or sons. In both cases, the man gives protection to the woman in return for control over her property, thus directly reinforcing a patriarchal tradition.” [146b] (p4)

- 23.21 The International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific) in a report [Baseline Report on Violence Against Women in Bangladesh](#) , [147a] undated reported that:

“The Bangladesh Constitution and the general laws of the country entitle women to equal rights and status to those of men in public life, but non-discrimination in the private sphere is not guaranteed. Consequently there are significant disparities between men and women in all realms of life. Lack of equal access to economic opportunities, education, health services and their lesser role in decision making perpetuate women’s subordination to men and susceptibility to violence. All sources of information – be it news reports, records from State institutions or research – show that there is an increasing trend of violence against women. Since the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the Government of Bangladesh has also identified violence against women as a priority issue. Given this recognition, incidences of violence against women today receive greater attention than they did a decade ago. All State records show an increased incidence of violence – but this may be due to the fact that special legal provisions ensure that such cases are now recorded more precisely than they were two decades ago. Some argue that there is a rising trend of all forms of violence but until more reliable longitudinal data is available, one cannot confidently conclude that in general violence against women is increasing (Azim, 2001).” [147a] (p2) ... “Culturally and socially the family is still seen as the rightful place for women and yet it is within this arena where power relations are often played out. It is on the one hand, a source for positive nurturing and caring where individuals bond through mutual respect and love. But on the other hand, in many cases, it becomes the site for discrimination, deprivation and exploitation. It is where discriminatory socialisation processes occur, which in turn result in promoting and justifying violence against women. (Sultan, 1997).” [147a] (p3)

- 23.22 In her book published for the BNWLA in 2005, entitled *Wife Abuse in Bangladesh*, Dr Nusrat Ameen observed that:

“The law in Bangladesh was far more involved with ‘stranger’ violence against women, for example murder, rape or trafficking; there was no specific law on wife abuse, although there were several special laws to deal with violence against women. [80] (pp7&62) Dr Ameen’s book examined in detail the various legal remedies available to victims of domestic violence. For example:

- The Penal Code provides sanction: all forms of physical violence, some forms of psychological violence and threats of physical injury constitute criminal offences. In practice, however, when such an offence was committed by a husband against his wife, it was not considered as an offence punishable in the same way. (p47-48)

- The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act (2000), as Amended in 2003, lays down severe penalties for violent offences against women; it also provides for the speedy trial of offenders in special tribunals situated throughout the country. The Act specifies deterrent punishment for dowry-related crimes and also covered such 'stranger' offences as rape, trafficking and abduction; however, Dr Ameen stated that it "is silent regarding punishment for husbands for abusing wives, except in dowry offences". (p60-61)
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, passed in 1980, also makes giving, taking or demanding dowry punishable offences. (p58)
- There were no specific civil law remedies to which victims of wife abuse could resort, other than divorce and claims for dower, maintenance and custody. A wife could seek an injunction under the Civil Procedure Code, the Specific Relief Act or the Family Court Ordinance of 1985, but these were ancillary to other proceedings. [80] (p53-54)

23.23 The various special laws to protect women from abuse had not proved as effective as they were designed to be; their deterrent value had been diminished by low conviction rates. (p48 & 58) Dr Ameen added, "Owing to the prevalent patriarchal attitude towards women, in most cases complaints are not recorded properly by the police, evidence is hard to produce or establish, there is a very slim chance of the perpetrator being punished. A study by the Family Court in Dhaka shows that husbands rarely appear and thus suits are dismissed ex parte and wives are denied justice." [80] (p8)

23.24 According to a report by the human rights NGO 'Odhikar', published on 15 January 2009:

"Violence against women is widespread in Bangladesh and in most of the cases the victims are underprivileged, poor women. Despite specialized criminal laws for protecting women – the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act, the Dowry Prohibition Act, the Child Marriage Restraint Act, the Acid Crime Control Act, to name a few – instances of violence against women- especially dowry, domestic violence and rape – have not decreased in any significant manner. The major reasons why women do not get justice are: barriers to accessing the justice system, police corruption, mismanagement of vital evidence, and ignorance of the law and a lack of proper medical reports. However, due to social 'values' and stigma many women do not disclose the violence. The number of women who experience violence – including rape, dowry related violence, beatings, torture and murder – is high in impoverished sections of society and particularly among women who live in rural areas of Bangladesh, both in domestic situations and outside the home." [46r] (p32)

23.25 Statistical information from the Combined Sixth and Seventh Alternative Report to the United Nations CEDAW Committee, December 2010, illustrate the Number of cases of violence by category and year.

## Violence against Women

Table 1: Number of cases of violence by category and year (Official Data)

Year	Type of Violence									Total
	Violence for dowry	Acid throwing	Abduction	Rape	Murder after rape	Trafficking	Murder	Injured	Other violence	
2001	2986	153	1691	3178	20	63	82	63	4722	12958
2002	4922	232	2236	4095	22	74	90	83	6700	18454
2003	5869	222	2262	4442	28	74	73	120	7152	20242
2004	3081	198	1594	3097	17	68	62	134	4564	12815
2005	3130	177	2069	2796	22	138	97	49	2949	11427
2006	3417	135	2087	2566	14	107	109	75	2558	11068
2007	4146	137	2736	3495	33	113	142	74	3374	14250
2008	4487	120	2874	3387	65	105	131	87	3023	14279
Total	3,20,38	1,374	17,549	27,056	221	742	786	685	35,042	1,15,493

Source: Police Headquarters, GOB, Date June 2009

Table - 2

Number of Cases of Violence by Category and Year  
(Information from selected NGOs)

Year	Type of violence					
	Dowry related	Acid throwing	Abduction	Rape	Trafficking	Murder
2004	1433	7	233	629	113	11
2005	1441	21	210	932	76	15
2006	1186	14	251	790	64	10
2007	1554	13	279	669	160	158

Combined Sixth and Seventh Alternative Report to the UN CEDAW Committee, December 2010 [147b] (Annex vi)

See *Odhikar: Human Rights Report 2010* - [Rights of women: Violence against women](#) for further information.

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## Domestic violence

23.26 The USSD 2010 report noted that:

“In October parliament passed the Domestic Violence (Protection and Prevention) Bill, which criminalized domestic violence. Women's rights groups previously criticized the government for its inaction on the issue, which was widespread and increased during the year, although data quantifying it was difficult to obtain. After the passage of the bill, critics expressed doubts about its effectiveness. A 2000 study by the UN Population Fund indicated that at least 50 percent of women experienced domestic violence at least once in their lives. The Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) filed 1,721 cases related to violence against women during the year and received over 6,000 reports of violence against women. Most efforts to combat domestic violence were funded by NGOs with little assistance from the government.” [2v] (Section 6)



**See: Government and NGO assistance to victims of domestic violence**

## Dowry

23.27 The IRAW Asia Pacific in the Baseline Report on Violence Against Women in Bangladesh noted that:

“Despite the Dowry Prohibition Act (1980) dowry transactions continue to increase and have become a socially legitimate part of marriage negotiations. Maleka Begum (1994) in her book “Jowtuk” (“Dowry”) suggests that dowry is a major factor in violence against women, starting from verbal abuse, battering, torture and ending in death for many. Incidents documented by the ASK Documentation Unit reveal that unfulfilled dowry demands cause brides to be physically tortured, divorced, abandoned and also burned with acid, kidnapped and trafficking. During 1995-97, two hundred and seven (207) brides were murdered by either husbands or in-laws over dowry related disputes. Many were burned to death after being doused with petrol or kerosene. Although reports from the Ministry of Women’s and Children’s Affairs explains this as a lack of knowledge about women’s rights in general and the lack of implementation and enforcement by the judiciary and law enforcement agencies (MWCA-GOB, 1997) the women’s movement contends that it is more a reflection of the total devaluation of women in society whereby she is considered a burden on the man and his family upon whom she is considered foisted through marriage.” [147a] (p20)

23.28 According to the 2009 Annual Report by the human rights NGO ‘Odhikar’, published on 1 January 2010:

“The most common reason for domestic violence in Bangladesh occurs due to dowry demands. A total of 319 women reportedly became victims of dowry demands during this reporting period. However, Odhikar believes that the actual number of victims of dowry demands could be more, because it is believed that there are lot of incidents which are not taken into account and many women do not talk about dowry-related abuse. In the socio-economic context of Bangladesh, most of the women are dependent on their husbands. Many do not open their mouth and they tolerate torture silently. Furthermore, women in Bangladesh have to live with dowry-related violence due to socio-political pressure and lack of legal support. Due to dowry related violence, a total of 227 women were reportedly killed and 81 were tortured and 11 allegedly committed suicide after failing to tolerate the dowry related torture.” [46w] (p44)

23.29 In her book published for the BNWLA in 2005, entitled *Wife Abuse in Bangladesh*, Dr Nusrat Ameen commented that “Wife abuse is endemic and is overtly or covertly sanctioned [80] (p20) ... Research shows that violence in the family occurs at all levels of society (p22) ... However, the practice of wife abuse is one about which there is least social awareness or outcry in Bangladesh (p27).” Dr Ameen observed that the patriarchal nature of society and of the household, especially in rural areas, permitted socially acceptable violence against women in the form of physical chastisement by a husband. A misinterpretation of religious teaching reinforced this social sanction. (p27-36) Women often faced domestic violence not only from their husbands, but also from their in-laws. (p49) Dowry abuse also continued to lead to cases of serious physical abuse or murder and to the suicides of young married women, though the Dowry Prohibition Act came into force in 1980. (p39-45) A UNFPA report in 1997 quoted a study by the NGO Ain-O-Shalish Kendra (ASK) in saying that up to 50 per cent of all murders in Bangladesh had

been attributed to marital violence. Evidence suggested that only a minor proportion of such cases reached the courts and resulted in convictions. [80] (p49-51)

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## Rape

- 23.30 The NGO Odhikar reported in January 2009 that it was aware of 202 women (over the age of 16) who had been victims of rape during the year 2008; of them, 68 women were killed and five committed suicide after being raped. Of the 202 women, 110 were reportedly the victims of gang rape. A further 252 females under the age of 16 were raped in 2008; 30 of them were murdered after being raped. [46r] The USSD 2008 report stated: "According to human rights monitors, the actual number of rape cases was higher [than the 454 recorded by Odhikar] because many rape victims did not report the incidents due to social stigma. Prosecution of rapists was not consistent." [2b] (Section 5)
- 23.31 As noted in the State Party report dated 14 March 2003 to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act 2000 carries the death penalty or life imprisonment for rape if death or injury results or is intended. Attempted rape is subject to a penalty of five to ten years' imprisonment. [52a] (p31) In January 2005 at a workshop organized by [Bangladeshi Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights] BSEHR, then-attorney general AF Hassan Ariff said that "Judges consider the seriousness of rape to be the same as theft, robbery, and other crimes." (USSD 2007 report) [2a] (Section 5)
- 23.32 Dr Nusrat Ameen noted that the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act (2000) provided for trials to be in camera, for non-publication of the victim's identity and for pecuniary compensation to the victim. [80] (p60-61) An article dated 26 January 2004 from United News of Bangladesh revealed that there were then 2,200 cases pending in the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal. [39h]
- 23.33 According to the USSD 2010 report, there were at least six recorded incidents of rape and sexual abuse by police, officers, or armed forces personnel during 2009. [2v] (Section 1c)

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## Acid attacks

- 23.34 The IRAW Baseline report, undated, accessed 14 September 2011, stated that:
- "Acid assaults are another prevalent form of violence that may well be a phenomenon unique to Bangladesh (there are anecdotal reports of a few cases of such assaults from other parts of the world). The first documented case of acid attack occurred in 1983 in Sylhet (Naripokkho Acid Log, 1997. Acid attacks usually occur when men want to take revenge for the refusal of proposals for sex or marriage, or when demands for dowry are not met or when there is a political clash. Usually acid is thrown on the face of a girl or woman with the aim of damaging her appearance in order to destroy her marriage prospects or on sexual organs (as observed among acid burn cases dealt with by Naripokkho). By and large it is used as a weapon to attack women; however men are also sometimes subject to acid attacks." [147a] (p5)

- 23.35 Noted USSD 2010: “Acid attacks remained a serious problem. Assailants threw acid in the faces of victims--usually women--and left them disfigured and often blind. Acid attacks often related to allegations of spousal infidelity. During the year according to Odhikar, 137 persons were attacked with acid. Of these victims, 84 of the victims were women, 32 were men, and 16 were children. [2v] (Section 6)
- 23.36 The State party report to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), dated 3 January 2003, recorded that two laws were introduced in 2002 – the Acid Crime Prevention Act 2002 and the Acid Control Act 2002 – to restrict the import and sale of acid in open markets, allow for trials in acid-throwing cases by a special tribunal (with a right of appeal to a higher court) to make the maximum punishment for acid throwing offences the death penalty and to provide for the treatment and rehabilitation of victims. [47a] (p20)
- 23.37 Statistics provided by the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) on its website, accessed 15 June 2011 [64a], show that the number of recorded attacks peaked in 2002, and then declined:

Year	Incidents	Total victims
2000	172	232
2001	250	347
2002	366	489
2003	335	411
2004	266	325
2005	214	270
2006	180	221
2007	154	192
2008	137	179
2009	120	150
2010	115	153

- 23.38 Of the 179 recorded victims in 2008, there were 94 women, 55 men and 30 children under 18 years, of whom the majority were girls. The proportion of male victims was higher than in 2007. (ASF, accessed 15 June 2009) [64a] (Statistics) In its Human Rights Report 2008, Odhikar recorded 133 acid attacks: 73 women; 34 men; 15 girls; and 11 boys. [46r] (p34)

Further statistical information, including incidents in 2009, can be found on the [ASF](#) website.

- 23.39 The Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association and the Bangladesh Acid Survivor’s Foundation estimated in 2003 that only ten per cent of attackers were convicted. It was also stated that the total number of acid attacks against women was difficult to document because many cases went unreported for fear of reprisals. (Asian Legal Resource Centre statement to the UN Economic and Social Council, 10 March 2003) [8c] Among the factors inhibiting case conviction rates are (a) lack of sufficient evidence (b) intimidation of victims or witnesses (c) out of court ‘settlements’. [64c] At a workshop held by the Bangladesh Acid Survivor’s Foundation on 30 November 2007 it was stated that, in the 18 districts of the country most affected by acid violence, only 42 out of a total of 622 cases (recorded since 2000) had so far resulted in convictions, 195 of the accused had been released, 177 cases had been dismissed due to a lack of

proper evidence and another 208 cases remained unresolved. (ASF Voice newsletter, Issue 12-13) [64d]

23.40 The USSD 2010 report noted:

“The law provides for speedier prosecutions of acid-throwing cases in special tribunals and generally does not allow bail. The Women and Child Repression Control Act seeks to control the availability of acid and reduce acid-related violence directed toward women, but lack of awareness of the law and poor enforcement limited the law's effect. According to the Acid Survivors Foundation, the special tribunals were not entirely effective; prosecutors were able to obtain a conviction in an estimated 10 to 12 percent of attacks each year.” [2v] (Section 6)

23.41 The motives for acid attacks were not always directly gender-related. For example, 49 per cent of recorded acid attacks in 2008 were, according to the ASF, in connection with land/property/money disputes; 20 per cent of attacks related to marital or family or dowry disputes and 12 per cent of attacks were categorised as “refusal/rejection of love/marriage/sex”. [64a] However, even in the category of land/property/money disputes, the majority of the victims were female; the Director of the ASF has explained that male perpetrators sometimes seek vengeance against other men by throwing acid at their wives or daughters. (ASF) [64c]

23.42 In a report published in February 2008, the NGO Odhikar suggested a number of reasons why annual figures on reported incidents of rape and acid violence remain high and conviction rates are lower than they should be:

- The victims are largely from the poor and underprivileged sections of society, who struggle for access to justice;
- There is not yet a separated modernised investigation department in the police for such offences;
- The police are overburdened and not able to carry out investigations properly;
- There are hardly any checks as to whether businesses are procuring licences for the sale and trade of acid
- Many doctors are reluctant to come to court to give evidence. [46p]

23.43 The Acid Survivors Foundation in Bangladesh runs a 40-bed hospital, at which a total of 416 people were treated in 2006. In addition, the ASF provides professional psychotherapy and counselling to victims, as well as legal services and a full social re-integration programme. (ASF, 14 June 2007) [64b]

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## Vigilantism

23.44 According to the USSD 2010 report, “Incidents of vigilantism against women – sometimes led by religious leaders by means of fatwas – occurred. According to ASK [the NGO Ain-o-Salish Kendra], 22 incidents of vigilante justice against women occurred during the year [2009] and only four incidents resulted in police action. The punishments included whipping, beating and other forms of physical violence.” [2v] (Section 6) As detailed in Section 21, such fatwas and punishments are illegal. Barrister M.A. Muid Khan, in an article dated 20 March 2009, commented:

“In my opinion, lack of knowledge about their very basic legal rights, among [both] the educated and uneducated Muslim women of our country, gives opportunity to rural illiterate and half-literate religious leaders to issue Fatwa with a view to oppress the women. Over the last couple of years, [these] religious leaders have tortured women for various ‘alleged offences’ through illegal and extra-judicial procedures (so-called fatwas).” (UNB) [39b1]

23.45 The US State Department’s *International Religious Freedom Report 2010* (2010 Religious Freedom Report) published 13 September 2011, covering a six-month period from July 1, 2010, through December 31, observed:

“Human rights groups and press reports indicated that vigilantism against women accused of moral transgressions occurred in rural areas, often under a fatwa, and included punishments such as whipping. On July 9, the High Court issued a ruling formally banning fatwas and empowered local officials to combat the issue. From July to the end of the reporting period, religious leaders issued two fatwas, demanding punishments that ranged from lashings and other physical assaults to shunning by family and community members, according to the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, a human rights organization focused on women's rights.” [2w] (Section iii)

See Section 19: [Fatwa](#)

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## Government and NGO assistance to victims of domestic violence

23.46 There were several agencies working to assist women in abused situations, noted Dr Ameen. Typically, an agency would serve a notice to the husband to appear at the agency for mediation, following a written complaint made by the wife. If the husband did not attend, the agency had a right to issue a warrant and to seek help from the police. If mediation failed to work, the case could be taken up in court by family lawyers provided by the agency, who would normally handle the case free of charge. [80] (p83-84) Research suggested that most abuse victims are reluctant to report their cases directly to the police and, of those who did, most were not given adequate assistance. There was a widely-held belief that police officers did not like to become involved in ‘family matters’ and were likely to ask the parties to reconcile matters between themselves. (p84 & 100) There was often also a reluctance by victims to inform doctors of the injuries they had sustained. (p84-85) Most women in Bangladesh could not afford to approach lawyers directly. And most women, even some educated ones, were unaware of the legal machinery and were also discouraged from contacting lawyers by family, friends and sometimes even the lawyers themselves. (p84) Women in villages commonly sought arbitration through Shalish (local mediation councils) – even though the arbiters are usually the ‘local male elite’ and a Shalish decision was not binding. (p85-86) However, there was, in general, a reluctance among abused women to seek relief against their husbands, often due to social stigma, or economic insecurity, or fear of retribution, or acceptance of violence as a social norm. [80] (p86-88)

23.47 The USSD 2006 report recorded that the Women Affairs Department runs six shelters, one each in the six divisional headquarters, for abused women and children. [21] (Section 5) However, the USSD 2010 reported that: “There are no adequate support groups for victims of domestic violence.” [2v] (section 6)

23.48 The USSD 2010 noted: “NGOs such as the BNWLA operated facilities to provide shelter to destitute persons and distressed women and children. According to the BSEHR [Bangladeshi Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights], persons in “safe custody” were no longer housed in prisons. Courts sent most of them to shelter homes. In a few cases, they were sent to prison as a transit destination for short periods.” [2v] (section 6)

## HEALTH ISSUES

23.49 The United Nations/Bangladesh Government report of February 2005 on Bangladesh’s progress toward meeting the Millenium Development Goals (MDG Progress Report of 2005) observed:

“In the health sector, women’s status compares unfavourably with that of men. Although the life expectancy gap between men and women has narrowed over the last decade, Bangladesh continues to be amongst the very few countries in the world where women’s life expectancy is lower than that of men: in 1990, life expectancy at birth was 56.4 years for males; 55.4 years for females. The maternal mortality rate, estimated to be in the range 320 to 400 per 100,000 live births in 2001, is among the highest in Asia. Pregnancy-related problems, including early and frequent pregnancies, are among the major causes of these phenomena.” [8f] (p21)

23.50 Save the Children in its 2010 Report *State of the World’s Mothers* issued in May 2010 stated that “Large numbers of women in Bangladesh have no say in their own health care needs – 48 per cent say their husbands alone make the decisions regarding their health care.” [102b] (p18)

23.51 According to data provided by UNICEF, most rural women give birth at home, without medical assistance. [58a] During the period 2000-2007, 51 per cent of women attended an antenatal care facility at least once during pregnancy; 18 per cent of all births were attended by a doctor, nurse or midwife and 15 per cent of deliveries took place in a hospital or local health centre. The maternal mortality ratio for this period (i.e. the reported annual number of deaths of women from pregnancy-related causes) was 320 per 100,000 live births. During 2000-2006, approximately 56 per cent of women aged 15-49 were using contraception. [58c]

23.52 Save the Children in its 2010 Report stated that:

“Bangladesh has made tremendous strides in maternal and child health over the past 30 years. Between 1990 and 2008, under-5 mortality declined 64 per cent and Bangladesh is on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal for child survival. Bangladesh also cut its maternal mortality rate dramatically during this same period – by 53 per cent. Still, more than 11,600 mothers and 120,000 newborn babies die each year in Bangladesh, mainly because of inadequate care during childbirth. The country does not have enough skilled birth attendants and 82 per cent of deliveries occur at home without proper assistance.” [102b] (p18)

23.53 As noted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (website accessed in August 2008), abortion law in Bangladesh is based on the Penal Code of 1860, which permits abortion only to save the life of the woman. ‘Menstral regulation’ services have, however, been available in the Government’s family planning programme. Menstrual regulation is available on request until eight weeks after the last menstrual period. [8g]

23.54 The MDG Progress Report of 2005 stated:

“While the country’s overall HIV prevalence rate is believed to be less than one per cent, sexual behaviour of partners put women at high risk of HIV/AIDS infection. Sex workers in Bangladesh brothels have an average of 19 clients a week, which is among the highest turnover rates in Asia. This is even higher (44 clients per week) for hotel-based sex workers. Condom use among the clients of sex workers is very low, and condom use among female sex workers is the lowest in Asia (two to four per cent). The majority of married men who frequent brothels or have sex with street girls, engage in unprotected sex while continuing to maintain sexual relationship with their wives.” [81] (p21)

See also Section 24: [Children](#) and Section 26: [Medical issues](#)

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## 24. CHILDREN

### OVERVIEW

This section should be read in conjunction with Section 23: [Women](#), which includes further information on issues affecting children.

24.01 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010* (USSD 2010 report), released on 8 April 2011 stated:

“The government, with the assistance of local and foreign NGOs, worked to improve children’s rights and welfare, enabling the country to make significant progress in improving children’s health, nutrition, and education. Despite some progress, a 2009 Household Food Security and Nutrition Assessment jointly conducted by the government, the World Food Program, and UNICEF found that 48.6 percent of all children remained chronically malnourished ... According to human rights monitors, child abandonment, kidnapping, and trafficking continued to be serious and widespread problems. Despite advances, including a monitoring agency in the Ministry of Home Affairs, trafficking of children continued to be a problem. Child labor remained a problem in certain industries, mostly in the informal sector. It frequently resulted in the abuse of children, mainly through mistreatment by employers during domestic service. According to a 2006 study by the Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies, attacks on children constituted more than 50 percent of the deaths, injuries, and sexual assaults reported among domestic workers during the year.” [2v] (section 6)

24.02 UNICEF on its website, Bangladesh profile, accessed on 11 June 2010, identified the following as major issues facing children in Bangladesh:

- Maternal mortality remains high. Most rural women give birth at home, without medical assistance;
- Millions of children are malnourished. Roughly half of all children under age five are underweight (see Health and Welfare, below);
- Primary school enrolment is relatively high, but many children – especially those in urban slums – are still denied their right to a basic education (see Education, below);
- Seven per cent of Bangladeshi children under age fourteen are in the labour force (see Child Labour, below);

- Birth registration has been very low, hindering enforcement of child protection measures (see Documentation, below);
- The rise in sea levels predicted due to global warming has the potential to displace millions.” [58a] (Background)

24.03 About four million babies are born in Bangladesh each year. There has been a steady decline in the infant (under 1-year) mortality rate from 105 per thousand live births in 1990 to 47 per thousand in 2007. The under-five mortality rate was 61 per thousand in 2007, compared with 151 per thousand in 1990. (UNICEF, accessed 11 June 2010) [58a] UNICEF gave the main causes of death in neonates as Infection. Second is birth asphyxia, which causes one in every five neonatal deaths. Low-birth weight, often caused by poor maternal nutrition and teenage pregnancy, is the direct cause of 11 per cent of neonatal deaths. In children aged 1-4 the main causes were diarrhoea, acute respiratory infection, injury and drowning. [58d]

See [Health and Welfare](#) below

24.04 Bangladesh ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 3 August 1990 (with a reservation to article 14, paragraph 1); it entered into force on 2 September 1990. Bangladesh ratified both the CRC Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography on 6 September 2000; both entered into force in 2002. (Bayefsky.com, accessed 14 May 2009) [100]

24.05 In 2005, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs launched the third National Plan of Action (NPA) for Children, for the period 2005-2010, in order to focus resources and efforts to improve children’s lives, establish child rights, promote gender equality and implement the terms of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). [52g] (paragraph 34) A National Plan of Action against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children, including Trafficking (NPA-SEACT), has also been formulated. [52e] (pp6, 7, 17, 19, 60)

See also UNICEF State of the World’s Children report for statistical information: <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/sowc/statistics.php>

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## BASIC LEGAL INFORMATION

24.06 The State Party report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, dated 14 March 2003, noted “The age of majority in Bangladesh is set at 18 years under the Majority Act 1875, although the Act has no effect on the capacity of any person in relation to marriage, dowry, divorce and adoption or on the religion and religious customs of any citizen.” [52a] (paragraph 45) The State Party report to the UN Committee on the CRC of October 2008 added, “There are a number of laws related to children in Bangladesh. These do not provide a consistent definition of a child. These laws are yet to be revised to bring in a unified definition. Each law has specific objective and it is difficult to synchronize ages in different laws. A high powered Committee has been formed to review and harmonize the national laws in line with CRC.” [52g] (paragraph 73)



The State Party reports of March 2003 and October 2008 have provided examples of minimum legal age requirements set by various pieces of national legislation. Some examples are:

- End of compulsory education – 10 years;
- Admission to employment – various ages between 14 and 18 years;
- Marriage – 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys under the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, although religious personal laws permit marriage at an earlier age;
- Sexual consent – 14 years;
- Criminal responsibility – The age of criminal responsibility has been raised to 9 from 7 years (Penal Code Amendment Act, 2004);
- Deprivation of liberty including by arrest, detention and imprisonment: Juvenile justice cases – linked to age of criminal responsibility (see above); care and protection cases – no minimum age;
- Capital punishment – 17 years. Life imprisonment in certain exceptional circumstances – 9 years if presumption of capacity not rebutted, otherwise 12 years;
- Giving testimony in court – no minimum age but a witness must be capable of understanding questions put to him or her and of giving intelligible and sensible answers. [52a] (paragraph 47) [52g] (paragraph 71)

24.07 Persons aged eighteen and over are entitled to vote. (Europa World Online, accessed 19 February 2009) [1a] There is no military conscription in Bangladesh. The minimum age for voluntary recruitment in the army and the navy is 17 years, and 16 years for the air force. Because recruits initially undergo a period of basic training, there is no scope for any person to be employed for actual service or combat duty before attaining the age of 18. (Third & Fourth Periodic Report of the Government of Bangladesh under the CRC: August 2007) [52e] (p78)

24.08 Bangladeshi nationality can be acquired by birth, descent, migration or naturalization. A child's nationality is based on the nationality of his or her father. (Accessed 11 June 2010) [52e] (p23) [52g] (paragraph 120)

Concluding observations of the [Committee on the Rights of the Child: Bangladesh, 26 June 2009 on reports submitted by states parties under article 44 of the Convention](#) [81] can be seen here.

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## LEGAL RIGHTS

24.09 Agence France-Presse confirmed on 8 March 2005 that the Muslim Marriages and Divorces (Registration) (Amendment) Bill 2005 received presidential consent. [23n] The Act provides for the registration of all marriages to be made compulsory and has introduced stiffer penalties for under-age marriages; the legal minimum age for marriage remains 18 years for a woman and 21 for a man. (United News of Bangladesh: 16 February 2005) [39q] The 2006 MICS survey – conducted jointly by UNICEF and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics – showed that about 33 per cent of female respondents aged below 15 years, and 74 per cent of those under 18 years, were already married. The marriage rate for women under 18 years was higher in rural than in urban areas. [52e] (p17) The USSD 2008 report noted that, in an effort to prevent child marriage, the

government has offered stipends for girls' school expenses if parents promised to delay their daughters' marriage until at least age 18. [2b] (Section 4)

See Section 24: [Education](#)

- 24.10 The High Court confirmed on 9 July 2006 that all children must be tried in juvenile courts. The Court ruled that “When the accused is a child under the Children Act 1974, irrespective of the offence alleged, that child must be tried by a juvenile court and not by any other court.” (Save the Children UK – Bangladesh Office, via CRIN.) [30b]

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## VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

- 24.11 UNICEF, in a newsletter, *In Focus: Protection of Children at Risk*, Issue 11, March 2009 stated that:

“Children in Bangladesh are vulnerable to violence within the family, at schools, at work places, within institutions and on the streets. Violence against children takes different forms: physical abuse, molestation, acid throwing, trafficking and sexual abuse including rape and various kinds of sexual exploitation for commercial purposes.

“More than half a million children are estimated to live on the streets in Bangladesh. Many children who live on the streets are forced to work to support themselves and their families. Approximately 13 per cent of children aged 5-14 years are involved in child labour.

“A recent UNICEF study on the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Bangladesh found that a half of the children surveyed were initially involved in child labour. Involvement in child labour leads to a situation in which a child can easily be pushed out of informal safety-nets and exposed to abuse and exploitation. The survey found the average age at which surveyed children first became involved in commercial sexual exploitation was 13 years. Commercial sexual exploitation of children is often linked to trafficking. Many girls are trafficked into sexual exploitation or bonded servitude and many boys have been trafficked to the Middle East to become camel racing jockeys. Many children are taken with their parents' consent, having been duped by stories of well-paid jobs or marriages. It is estimated that 50,000 children live in Bangladesh's orphanages and child care institutions, however the actual number is probably higher than that.” [58e] (p3)

- 24.12 According to human rights monitors, child abandonment, kidnapping, and trafficking continued to be serious and widespread problems.” [2t] (Section 5) An Odhikar report of January 2009 recorded that 252 females under the age of 16 were raped during the year 2008; 30 of them were killed after being raped. Of the 252, 70 were victims of gang rape. During the same year, 26 children were the victims of acid attacks [46r] [Note: These figures were based on press reports – the actual incidence of serious human rights violations involving children may be far higher.]
- 24.13 The State Party report of October 2008, to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, noted that the Government had enacted a number of laws to address violence against children, such as the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act 2000, The Acid Control Act 2002 and the Acid Crimes Prevention Act, 2002. The report stated

that “offenders are now being arrested and tried in more numbers than before”, but did not provide information on the number of cases prosecuted. [46r] (paragraph 360) The State Party report of 23 December 2005 noted that the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act 2000 lays down severe penalties (including life imprisonment and the death penalty) for various kinds of offences against children (up to 14 years), such as rape, sexual harassment, kidnapping and detention for ransom. [52c] (p14-15)

24.14 The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), a major welfare NGO, stated in their 2008 Annual Report:

“According to the reported incidents of extreme form of violence across the country, rape or attempted rape shows the highest prevalence. Disaggregated by age during 2007-8, the data on rape/attempted rape indicates that victims of these incidents are mostly children. The general lack of child protection against sexual abuse as well as the lack of rehabilitation and social re integration for the majority of child victims has resulted in a large number of children suffering in silence. Social stigmas, negative attitudes towards victims of sexual abuse, lack of mental health counselling services and child unfriendly legal systems lead to continuous re-victimization of the child victims.” [28a]

24.15 The USSD 2008 report noted that:

“The authorities generally ignored the minimum age of 18, often circumvented by false statements of age, for legal female prostitution. The government rarely prosecuted procurers of minors, and large numbers of underage girls in prostitution worked in brothels. Local NGOs estimated the total number of female prostitutes was as many as 100,000. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated in 2004 that there were 10,000 underage girls used in commercial sexual exploitation in the country, but other estimates placed the figure as high as 29,000. Trafficking of women internally and internationally remained a problem.” [2b] (Section 5)

See also Section 23: [Violence against Women](#) and Section 25: [Trafficking](#)

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## Child labour

24.16 UNICEF, in an undated background note, *Child Sexual Abuse, Exploitation and Trafficking in Bangladesh*, reported that;

“Children in Bangladesh are vulnerable to being trafficked into bonded labour or brothels; being sexually abused in the home, the workplace, community and at school; and being sexually exploited. There are few protections in place for children such as these. In a country where less than 10 per cent of children are registered at birth, it is difficult to track whether children's rights are being protected. Those who are abused, trafficked or exploited are explicitly denied their rights to be safe from these practices under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). They are also more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, more likely to not finish - or begin - their education, or realize their right to be brought up with their family.” [58f] (p1)

24.17 The USSD 2010 report observed:

“Under the law every child must attend school through grade five or the age of 10 years, but there is no effective legal mechanism to enforce this provision, and child labor is widespread. The BLA [The 2006 Bangladesh Labor Act] regulates child employment depending on the type of work and the child's age. In 2006 the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that of the 2.2 million workers in 45 targeted hazardous sectors, 532,000 child workers between the ages of five and 17 performed hazardous labor.

“During the year Services and Solutions International, a Dhaka-based research institution, found children frequently worked in the informal sector in industries like road transport, such as rickshaw pulling, automotive repair, and minibus assistance; in machine shops, salt and match factories, and tanneries; and in the manufacturing of bricks, cigarettes, dried fish, footwear, steel furniture, glass, textiles, garments, and soap. Children were engaged in the following hazardous activities: printing, fabrication, stone breaking, dyeing operations, blacksmith assistance, and construction. Children also worked in the service industry in hotels and restaurants ... street children, mostly boys, engaged in various forms of work, such as begging, portering, shining shoes, collecting paper, and selling flowers. Boys and girls, often those living on the streets, were exploited in illicit activities, including smuggling and trading arms and drugs.

“Children routinely performed domestic work. The government occasionally brought criminal charges against employers who abused domestic servants. In 2009 the ILO and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics completed a baseline survey on commercial sexual exploitation of children. According to the survey, among 18,902 child victims of sexual exploitation, 83 percent were girls, 9 percent transgender children, and 8 percent boys. Forty percent of the girls and 53 percent of the boys were below the age of 16. Fourteen percent of the girls and 6 percent of the boys were trafficking victims.

“The Ministry of Labor's enforcement mechanisms were insufficient for the large, urban informal sector, and there was little enforcement of child labor legislation outside the export garment and shrimp processing sectors. The law specifies penalties for child labor violations, typically nominal fines of less than 5,000 taka (\$80). Agriculture and other informal sectors that had no government oversight employed large numbers of children. In 2008 the government, with ILO support, established a child labor unit at the Ministry of Labor and Employment to coordinate planning and execution of all child-related labor interventions.” [2v] (Section 7d)

24.18 The State Party report of August 2007 to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) stated:

“According to the Second National Child Labour Survey (NCLS) 2002-03, of 42.3 million children aged 5-17 years, estimated 7.4 million children (17.5 per cent) are engaged in some form of economic activity. Based on definition used in ILO Convention, it is estimated that 3.2 million (43 per cent) children would be considered as child labour, representing 7.5 per cent of the of the entire child population in this range. Over half of the working children (53 per cent) were employed in agriculture sector, followed by production (15 per cent), trading/sales (14 per cent) and transport (10 per cent). Children often work alongside family members in small scale and subsistence agriculture. Of the total child labour (3.2 million), 26 per cent were attending schools and working simultaneously. As revealed in the survey, approximately 41 per cent of child labour or 1.3 million children were engaged in hazardous labour ... There is no official record of actual number of child [domestic workers] because of the ‘hidden’ nature of

work. According to one survey (ILO–IPEC, 2005/06), the total number of [child domestic workers] is estimated at 405,508, of them 31 per cent are in Dhaka city and remainder in other parts of the country. Of the total domestic help in Dhaka, 92 per cent are full time [child domestic workers] and the remaining are part time ... Given the often-informal nature, regulation is difficult. However, recently the Government has been bringing criminal charges against employers who abuse domestic [workers] ... However; there is no effective mechanism for enforcing the law in favour of child domestics in particular.” [52e] (p66-67)

See Para [24.22](#) for differing numbers of those engaged in domestic work.

- 24.19 The State Party report of October 2008 to the UN Committee on the CRC recorded that a new law, the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 (BLA), had been enacted in October 2006. This prohibits hazardous work by any person below the age of 18. The Government publishes a list of jobs deemed hazardous. For any other (non-hazardous) economic activity, the lower limit of admission into employment is 14 years; however, a child under 18 can only be employed if a registered medical doctor certifies the fitness and age of the child. The employer must also adjust working hours to allow the child to continue with his/her education. [52g] (paragraph 28)

See also Committee on the Rights of the Child, Fifty-first session Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention - [Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Bangladesh June 2009](#) [81]

See paragraph [24.42](#) regarding the difficulties in maintaining a reliable Birth registration system.

- 24.20 A report of the US Department of Labor, 2008 *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor - Bangladesh*, published on 10 September 2009, noted that the law forbids parents or guardians from pledging their children’s labour in exchange for a payment or benefit. [88a]

- 24.21 According to the State Party report of October 2008:

“The Government is very much concerned about child labour and is increasingly undertaking different poverty focused programmes for reduction of child labour through facilitating access to education, with collaboration of NGOs and development partners. A comprehensive Time Bound Programme (2004-15) for eradicating child labour has been undertaken with the support of development partners. There are several other projects also addressing the issues of hazardous child labour, street children etc.” [52g] (paragraph 357)

- 24.22 As commented on the International Labour Organization (ILO) website, accessed in June 2009:

“Extreme forms of poverty play a crucial role. Child labour is part of a vicious cycle, with poverty as a main cause as well as a main consequence. This implies that child labour cannot be addressed in isolation. Among factors contributing to child labour are rapid population growth, adult unemployment, bad working conditions, lack of minimum wages, exploitation of workers, low standard of living, low quality of education, lack of legal provisions and enforcement, low capacity of institutions, gender discrimination, conceptual thinking about childhood, etc. One or more of the above contribute to the large numbers of children working under exploitative or hazardous conditions.” [32a]

24.23 The US Department of Labor report dated 10 September 2009 noted: “According to a survey by the ILO, there are over 421,000 children, mostly girls, working as domestic servants in private households, some in exploitive conditions. These child domestics are vulnerable to abuse, including sexual abuse.” [88a] In the abstract to a report of March 2006, Nasrin Akter cited a higher estimate of the number of children engaged in domestic work:

“Some NGOs estimate that there are approximately two million children engaged in domestic work in Bangladesh. Child domestic workers in Bangladesh stay alone in individual households, hidden from public scrutiny, and their lives controlled by their employers. The destiny of these child domestic workers rests largely on the mercy of their employers. As their parents primarily live in rural areas and usually are unable to afford to visit Dhaka regularly to oversee the condition of their children, they are exposed to abuses and health risks. Although some aspects of child domestic workers, for example, sexual exploitation and education, have recently received attention from scholars, we are not sufficiently aware of the health consequences of child domestic workers in Bangladesh.” [107]

See Para [24.17](#) for differing numbers of those engaged in domestic work.

24.24 In 2001 Bangladesh ratified ILO Convention 182, concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action on Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour. The Government has also declared itself committed to the Rawalpindi Declaration of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) calling for the eradication of child labour by 2010. [52e] (Forward)

Note: The numbers of children engaged in child labour in Bangladesh vary between sources; the percentage of children engaged in child labour is given as 7 per cent of children under 14 in paragraph 24.02, 13 per cent of children aged 5-14 in paragraph 24.11, and 7.5 per cent of children aged 5-17 in paragraph 24.17.

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## CHILD CARE AND PROTECTION

24.25 In June 2007, the executive director of the NGO ‘Incidin Bangladesh’ was quoted as saying “It is impossible to figure out an accurate number but it is assumed that about two million children are living in the streets.” He urged the Government to ensure an adequate provision in the national budget to establish safe night shelter for street children. (*The Daily Star*, 10 June 2007) [38ak]

24.26 The State Party report of October 2008 to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) stated:

“There is no reliable statistics on orphans and orphanages. The registered orphanages provide services to about 50,000 orphans and abandoned children. This is indeed a very small proportion compared to the estimated number of orphans. Devoid of parental support and care orphans are vulnerable to hazardous child labour, HIV, trafficking, physical and sexual exploitation. In case of orphaned girls, the risks of early marriage, abortion, sexual exploitation and other forms of violence are high.” [52g] (paragraph 189)

- 24.27 The State Party report of August 2007 noted that the Ministry of Social Welfare ran 85 orphanages (capacity 10,300 children); six 'Baby Homes', one each in Division (capacity 550 children) for abandoned children aged 1 to 5 years; six Destitute and Vagrant Centres, six Safe Homes with capacity for 400 children, and a number of other facilities. [52e](p33) According to the State Party report of 14 March 2003, there were another 950 orphanages run by NGOs, some with Government funding. These included institutions linked to various religions: over 300 Muslim orphanages attached to madrasa schools, nine Hindu, five Buddhist and four Christian orphanages. [52a] (p29)
- 24.28 The State Party report to the UN Committee on the CRC, dated 23 December 2005, noted that it is an offence under the Children Act for a person who has custody, care or charge of a child to assault, ill-treat, neglect, abandon or expose the child or to cause such things to happen to him or her in a way likely to cause the child unnecessary suffering or injury to their health. [52c] (p14-15)
- 24.29 With regard to children with disabilities, the State Party report of October 2008 noted as follows:

"No comprehensive survey on disability has so far been conducted in Bangladesh. Findings of different partial surveys or supplementary information of other surveys indicate a range of 10-18 per cent Persons with Disability (PWDs) in Bangladesh. Children with disabilities are subjected to various discriminatory practices from the moment of their birth. Considered a social and economic encumbrance, children with disabilities experience prejudicial treatment in terms of family entitlements, learning opportunities, health services and equal opportunities to develop individual capacities. Girls are generally the worst sufferers. Government has undertaken various measures to address the problems of persons/children with disabilities, in some cases in collaboration with NGOs/CBOs and development partners." [52g] (paragraphs 193-194)

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## EDUCATION

- 24.30 The Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Bangladesh, in its *Education Watch 2008: State of Primary Education in Bangladesh Progress Made, Challenges Remained*, November 2009 stated that:

"There are 10 different types of primary educational institutions in the country which follow three different curricula. The government schools, non-government schools (registered and unregistered), community schools, experimental schools, non-formal schools, and primary-attached to high schools follow the curriculum of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). The ebtedayee madrasas and the ebtedayee-attached to high madrasas follow the curriculum of the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board (BMEB). The English medium schools follow the British curriculum (London and Cambridge)." [121a](p6)

- 24.31 EuropaOnline, (accessed 11 June 2010) stated that:

"The Government provides free schooling for children of both sexes for eight years. Primary education, which is compulsory, begins at six years of age and lasts for five years. Secondary education, beginning at the age of 11, lasts for up to seven years, comprising a first cycle of three years, a second cycle of two years and a third cycle of

two further years. In the late 1980s the Government laid great emphasis on the improvement of the primary education system in an attempt to raise the rate of literacy. A scheme was, therefore, undertaken to establish one primary school for every 2,000 people in Bangladesh. In 2003/04 an estimated 89 per cent of children (87 per cent of boys; 91 per cent of girls) in the relevant age group were enrolled at primary schools, while the comparable enrolment ratio at secondary schools was 41 per cent (40 per cent of boys; 42 per cent of girls) in the same year. In 2004/05 there were 80,397 primary schools and 18,500 secondary schools. Secondary schools and colleges in the private sector vastly outnumber government institutions. Educational reform is designed to assist in satisfying the manpower needs of the country, and the greatest importance is given to primary, technical and vocational education. In 2004/05 there were 24 state universities, including one for agriculture and one for engineering and technology, and an Islamic university. In the same year there were 2,728 technical colleges, vocational institutes and colleges offering general education. The Government launched an Open University Project in 1992 at an estimated cost of US \$34.3m. The 2009/10 budget allocated 102,810m. Taka to education and technology (equivalent to 13.1 per cent of total projected government expenditure).” [1d] (education)

- 24.32 Education is divided into four levels: Primary (from grades 1 to 5), Secondary (from grades 6 to 10), Higher Secondary (grades 11 to 12) and Tertiary. The language of tuition in state schools is Bangla. A number of private schools provide an English medium education and offer ‘O’ and ‘A’ level courses. There are also 11 government universities and approximately 20 private universities in Bangladesh. Specialised universities include Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Bangladesh Agricultural University and Bangabandhu Shaikh Mujib Medical University. (‘Bangla2000’ website, accessed June 2009) [26a]
- 24.33 Primary education was free and compulsory, but the implementation of compulsory education fell short, in part because parents kept children out of school to work for money or help with household chores. Government incentives to families who sent children to school contributed significantly to the rise in primary school enrolments in recent years. Despite these efforts and contrary to established policies, public schools imposed fees that were burdensome to poor families and created a disincentive to attend school. (USSD 2009 report) [2t] (Section 5)

### The Primary Education Stipend Project

- 24.34 The Consortium for Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), in the report *Access to and Exclusion from Primary Education in Slums of Dhaka*, 2010 stated that:

“Although PESP is envisioned as an equity-promoting intervention, investigations into its operation have raised questions about proper targeting, administration and application of eligibility criteria. Data from the 2003-04 Education Watch household survey in ten upazilas found that stipend recipients were more or less evenly divided among four socio-economic categories based on food security status (always in deficit, sometimes in deficit, break-even or surplus). Further suggesting poor targeting, over two-thirds of children from the poorest category were not selected as recipients, while 27 percent of children from the most affluent households received the stipend (Ahmed et al, 2005). The survey found that on average recipients did not receive the full amount, students from GPS received more than those attending other eligible schools, and boys received more than girls. Focus groups discussions also pointed to the manipulation of eligibility



criteria by school managing committees and head-teachers, and to management problems such as "cuts" being taken from the stipends.

“Moreover, though PESP seeks to increase enrollment, regular attendance and progression among children from poor families, it has been revealed that these children may in fact have genuine difficulty in meeting the eligibility criteria (Ahmed et al, 2005). It has also been suggested that age and non-financial considerations may also work to undermine the stipend’s effectiveness in ensuring attendance and progression in particular. Because both direct and opportunity costs increase as a child ages, the stipend may not be sufficient in offsetting these costs.” [124c](p48)

- 24.35 The EIU Country Profile 2008, dated 18 July 2008, noted that the level of enrolment in primary schools increased substantially in the 1990s; the number of primary school children increased from 12.0 million in 1990 to 16.2 million in 2005. ... [however, it] described the general quality of elementary education as ‘poor’ and attributed this to badly trained or absentee teachers, large classes and a shortage of books. [40n] (p13) IRIN reported in February 2009 that a study, conducted for the Department of Primary Education, had shown that 69 per cent of students who had completed five years of primary school were unable to read news headlines in Bangla, while 87 per cent failed to do simple mathematical calculations. Students in the fifth grade completed only about 56 per cent of the Bangla syllabus, 46 per cent of the mathematical syllabus and 47 per cent of the English syllabus. The quality of education in remote rural areas was far worse than in urban areas. [103b] Over 98 per cent of secondary schools were ‘private’, [Registered Non Government Schools] but the Government paid 90 per cent of the teacher and staff salaries for these schools. (State Report on the CRC 2007) [52e] (p54)

### The Girls' Stipend Program

- 24.36 The Journal of Education for International Development in *The Girls' Stipend Program in Bangladesh*, 2006 reported that:

“The Female Stipend Program (FSP) was created in 1982 in Bangladesh to help increase the enrolment and retention of girls in secondary schools. Implemented initially in six areas only, the program was so successful that it was extended in 1994... The success of the pilot projects was the basis for launching the nationwide FSP in 1994, planned initially to last for five years, and which was funded by various donors and the government in projects that covered the nation. Under the program, all girls in rural areas who enter secondary school – about 50 per cent of possible enrolments – are eligible for a monthly sum ... Girls receive additional payments in Class 9 for new books and in Class 10 for exam fees. The conditions were a minimum of 75 per cent attendance rate, at least a 45 per cent score in annual school exams, and staying unmarried until sitting for the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) or turning 18. The three criteria have remained constant during the lifetime of the FSP.” [127a] (p1)

- 24.37 In assessing the impact of the scheme the report stated that:

“FSP has clearly had impact in terms of increasing girls’ enrolment. Less clear is exactly what other impact it has had in terms of stated Program objectives such as fertility control, getting girls/women into paid employment, or empowerment of women. While there has been documented progress in such areas, in many cases, it has not been possible to clearly link the FSP to the educational or societal changes that have occurred since the program began. While the FSP has been widely-acclaimed as a

model for achieving gender parity of enrolment, little is known of its impact beyond access to schools.” [127a] (p9)

Further, in depth information on education in Bangladesh can be found in the following research papers:

[Governance and Education Inequality in Bangladesh](#), 2008 [125a], [School exclusion as social exclusion: the practices and effects of a conditional cash transfer programme for the poor in Bangladesh](#), 2009 [126a], [Access to and Exclusion from Primary Education in Slums of Dhaka](#), 2010 [124c], [Poverty and Equity: Access to Education in Bangladesh](#), 2010 [124d], [Age in Grade Congruence and Progression in Basic Education in Bangladesh](#), 2010 [124e]

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## Madrassas

24.38 The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), in a report *Madrasas in Bangladesh* dated August 2007 stated that:

“Madrasa education, as one of the three branches of the Bangladeshi education system – the others being general education and technical vocational education – plays a vital role in the country. Aleya madrasas are a unique system of Islamic religious education that has few parallels in the Muslim world, offering both religious education and modern general education. They function under the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board, an independent body funded by the government that is charged with establishing madrasas, assigning teachers, and formulating the curriculum. This system mandates teaching modern subjects like English, Bangla, Science, Social Studies, Mathematics, Geography, History, and a modified version of the Dars-i-Nizami system. It is structured in five levels – ebtidai (primary), dakhil (secondary), alim (higher secondary), fazil (graduate), and kamil (post-graduate). Although these madrasas are mostly privately owned and run, they receive government support. The government of Bangladesh pays 80 per cent of the salaries of their teachers and administrators and a significant part of their development expenditure, provides scholarships and books, and assigns a substantial sum to the construction of additional private madrasas. The majority of the graduates of the Aleya madrasa system pursues a higher education or joins the job market.” [117a]

“Qawmi madrasas are private nongovernmental institutions which are, for the most part, affiliated to the Deobandi faith and teach the traditional Dars-i-Nizami system. Before the government recognized the system in 2006, they had little or no association with the government, and were solely supported by religious endowments or by zakat, sadaqa, donations, and contributions from individuals or local and international Islamic organizations. These madrasas have been organized under a private institution called the Befaqul Mudarressin of the Bangladesh Qawmi Madrasa Education Board, enjoying autonomy from the state. This has now become problematic as its financial independence has allowed the ulema in Bangladesh to wield religio-political power. What is more, it has permitted the ulema to resist efforts by the state authorities to institute reforms in the madrasa system and bridge the differences between the traditional system of Islamic education and modern secular education. Concerns arise when the entire education system comes to be seen as a religious institution because of

this wing which has a traditionalist hard line policy and is against any kind of modern thinking. It is important to appreciate the distinctions between the two types of madrasas. Qawmi madrasas continue to represent Islamic identity in Bangladesh, catering to its society's need for religious practices and services. At the same time, however, it contributes to a traditional rather than a modern education system. This does not help Bangladesh's development or its education system. Further, the Qawmi madrasas' use of the traditional education system generates incorrect beliefs that madrasas are archaic. Conversely, Aleya madrasas are viewed in a more positive light as they combine religious and modern subjects and, therefore, are seen as contributing positively to the education system.” [117a]

24.39 However, the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), in its Education Watch 2008 report stated that:

“...madrasas are lagging behind in most of the quality indicators. Poor educational provision in these institutions is partly to blame for this. The ebtedayee madrasas which are basically independent institutions providing primary education is at the bottom of the league table. These institutions use separate textbooks and a majority do not have basic minimum infrastructure and learning facilities. Lack of trained teachers is a serious problem in the madrasas. Women's participation in teaching, school leadership and SMC is the lowest in madrasas.” [121a] (page xxxvii)

24.40 The Education Watch 2008 report further concluded that:

“... physical facilities, teachers' education and training and learning provisions for the primary education system in Bangladesh have improved as a whole during the past decade. However, the improvement has been uneven. Madrasas and the non-government primary schools often lack basic minimum standards of enabling condition. There are shortcomings in the teachers' subject based training, management training of the heads of the institutions and effective functioning of the school managing committees. Dependence on private tutoring has increased over time.” [121a] (p124)

Other papers which mention madrasa education are, [The State of Secondary Education: Progress and Challenges](#), Ahmed et al. (2005). [121b], [Access to Education in Bangladesh](#), Ahmed et al. (2007) [124a], [Financing Basic Education in Bangladesh](#), Al-Samarai, (2007) [124b]

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## HEALTH AND WELFARE

24.41 UNICEF in its March 2009 report, *Bangladesh: Demographic and Health Survey 2007* stated that:

“Data from the 2007 BDHS show that under-five mortality (65 deaths per 1,000 live births) has continued its notable decline. Large decreases were observed in both child mortality (age 1-4 years) and postneonatal mortality. One of every 15 Bangladeshi children dies before reaching age five, compared with one in 11 in the 2004 BDHS. Likewise, the number of children who die before reaching the first birthday has decreased from one in fifteen children to one in 19 (52 deaths per 1,000 live births). Around 71 per cent of infant deaths occur during the first month of life (neonatal

mortality). ...Eighty-two per cent of Bangladeshi children age 12-23 months are fully immunized.” [58d] (page xxviii)

The report continued:

“The 2007 BDHS measured all children under five in the household and found that 43 per cent of children in that age group are stunted, and 16 per cent are severely stunted. Seventeen per cent of children under five are wasted, and 3 per cent are severely wasted. Weight-for-age results show that 41 per cent of children under five are underweight, with 12 per cent are severely underweight.” [58d] (page xxix)

- 24.42 UNICEF has noted that various diseases which could be prevented by vaccination have, in the past, killed tens of thousands on children under the age of five; these include diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, tuberculosis and measles. [58d] In 2006, 96 per cent of 1-year old children were immunised against tuberculosis, 88 per cent against polio and 81 per cent against measles. There have also been measures to protect infants against tetanus. (UNICEF) [58c] More than 12 million children have received de-worming treatment. (UNICEF) [58a] It was estimated in 2004 that 74 per cent of the population had access to ‘improved drinking-water sources’. (UNICEF) [58c] Sanitation coverage has almost doubled since 2003; by the end of 2006, the country had achieved 81 per cent coverage. (UNICEF) [58a]

Further statistical data regarding children can be found on the UNICEF website. See also Section 23: [Women](#) and Section 26: [Medical issues](#)

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## DOCUMENTATION

- 24.43 UNICEF, in a fact sheet, *Birth Registration in Bangladesh* accessed 11 June 2010, stated that:

“In Bangladesh, the BR rate is currently at approximately 10 per cent of the total population. This low rate is attributed to several factors, such as the absence of an effective and functioning birth registration system, the weak capacity of the relevant local government authorities and low level of awareness. The biggest obstacle facing birth registration in Bangladesh has been the extremely low level of awareness on the importance of birth registration, which has led to the low demand for the certificates. However, the 2004 Births and Deaths Registration Act that replaced previous legislation from 1873 came into force on 3 July 2006. It provides for birth registration to adopt a cross sectoral approach by linking its activities to the health and education sector. The Act requires birth certificates to serve as proof of age and identity for services such as enrolment in educational institutions, issuance of passports, and transfer of property. Certificates will also be requested for voter registration, issuance of driving licences and passports, as well as for employment in government or non-government organizations. In addition, the Government of Bangladesh has decided to adopt a Universal Birth Registration strategy which provides for free registration for the following two years after the Act came into force. The strategy aims at registering all by the end of 2008.” [58h]

- 24.44 An IRIN report dated 15 July 2008 stated that, “Recent reports indicate that 40 percent of the population had received a birth certificate by the end of March 2008, while more than 30 percent had been registered and would receive their certificates soon. A

vigorous campaign is now under way to register the remaining 30 percent of the population who are hard to reach, mobile, invisible or live on the fringes of mainstream society. “[103a]

- 24.45 The new National Identity Card, issued to over 80 million registered voters (adults) in 2008, also shows the individual’s date of birth. [16f] A sample appears on the website of the Bangladesh Election Commission:

<http://www.ecs.gov.bd/QLExternalFilesEng/21.jpg>

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## 25. TRAFFICKING

- 25.01 The US State Department’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* of June 2011 (USSD Trafficking report 2011) released on 27 June 2011 recorded:

“Bangladesh is a source and transit country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. A significant share of Bangladesh’s trafficking victims consists of men recruited for work overseas with fraudulent employment offers who are subsequently exploited under conditions of forced labor or debt bondage. Bangladeshi children and adults also are trafficked internally for commercial sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and forced and bonded labor. Some children are sold into bondage by their parents, while others are induced into labor or commercial sexual exploitation through fraud and physical coercion. Internal trafficking often occurs from poorer, more rural regions, to locations with more commercial activity including Dhaka and Chittagong, the country’s two largest cities. Women and children from Bangladesh are trafficked to India and Pakistan for commercial sexual exploitation or forced labor. Many Rohingya refugees from Burma transit through Bangladesh using unofficial methods, leaving them vulnerable to traffickers inside Bangladesh and in destination countries. In 2010, some Rohingya girls were forced into prostitution.” [2x] (Country Narratives)

- 25.02 The USSD 2009 report stated that:

“Many NGOs, community-based organizations, and local government leaders worked against trafficking through prevention, research, data collection, documentation, advocacy, awareness creation, and networking, cross-border collaboration, legal enforcement, rescue, rehabilitation, and legislative reform. Despite constraints such as lack of birth and marriage records at the village level, authorities prosecuted trafficking cases. There was limited success in increasing shelter capacity and developing rehabilitation programs, including skills and vocational training, to facilitate sustainable social reintegration of the survivors largely due to lack of adequate funding. Despite efforts to address trafficking for sexual exploitation, the government failed to demonstrate significant progress in criminally prosecuting and convicting labor trafficking offenders and recruiters. In December the government formed a committee at the Expatriates’ Welfare Ministry to review laws and regulations on labor migration for reformation.” [2b] (Section 5)

- 25.03 The USSD *Trafficking in Persons Report 2011* further noted that:

“Bangladesh does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.... [although] The Government of Bangladesh demonstrated increased

attention to the issue of human trafficking. The government continued to address the sex trafficking of women and children, drafted and submitted a comprehensive anti-trafficking law to the cabinet, and created an interagency task force mandated to monitor recruiting agencies and address high recruitment fees. The government did not prosecute or convict those who trafficked men, as well as those responsible for subjecting Bangladeshi workers to forced labor overseas through fraudulent recruitment mechanisms. The government did not report on law enforcement efforts against Bangladeshi officials who were complicit in human trafficking. [2x] (Country Narratives)

25.04 The same report stated that:

“... the government drafted an anti-trafficking law that includes criminal prohibitions for all forms of trafficking, with stringent sentences, and submitted the proposed law into the parliamentary process in December 2010. Bangladesh prohibits the trafficking of women and children for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation or involuntary servitude under the Repression of Women and Children Act of 2000 (amended in 2003), and prohibits the selling and buying of a child under the age of 18 for prostitution in Articles 372 and 373 of its penal code. Prescribed penalties under these trafficking statutes range from 10 years’ imprisonment to the death sentence. These penalties are very stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Article 374 of Bangladesh’s penal code prohibits forced labor, but the prescribed penalties of imprisonment for up to one year or a fine are not sufficiently stringent.” [2x] (Country Narratives)

25.05 The *USSD Trafficking in Persons Report 2011* further noted that:

“The Bangladeshi government took efforts to prevent trafficking over the reporting period. In July 2010, the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE) created a Vigilance Task Force charged that improving the oversight of Bangladesh’s labor recruitment process. ... In the reporting period, the government shut down three recruiting agencies, blacklisted their owners, and seized their assets. The government cancelled the licenses of 25 recruiting agencies for involvement in fraudulent recruitment practices that potentially facilitated human trafficking. ...” [2x] (Country Narratives)

See Section 23: [Women: Violence against women](#) and Section 24: [Children: Violence against children](#)

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## 26. MEDICAL ISSUES

### OVERVIEW OF AVAILABILITY OF MEDICAL TREATMENT AND DRUGS

26.01 The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Country Profile 2007 stated that medical facilities in the country were “extremely scarce”; in the fiscal year 2005/06 there were 49,669 hospital beds, 42,101 registered doctors and 14,689 registered nurses in the public sector. (This translates to approximately 27 doctors and 10 registered nurses per 100,000 population.) [40j] (p16) As was noted in the United Nations Common Country Assessment for 2004, the private sector provides the major proportion of outpatient curative care, especially among the poor, while the public sector serves the larger proportion of inpatient care. [8d] (p30) The EIU Country Profile noted that only about 12

126 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

per cent of all “serious cases” were referred to public health services. The report added, “Whereas health services for the general population remain poor, there are private hospitals that provide first-rate medical services for the wealthy in Dhaka.” [40j] (p17)

26.02 It was reported in an article in *The Daily Star* dated 27 February 2010 that:

“Public health services across the country are being severely hampered by a staggering shortage of health professionals. According to officials from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), there are currently 33,000 vacant posts, which is more than a fifth of the total workforce.

“Government sources expressed doubt that health services could be rendered smoothly with so many posts being vacant. Prof Rashid E Mahbub, former president of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), said that the health sector will collapse if the workforce isn't made more robust. Prof Mahbub said, ‘The government took steps to recruit manpower, which was certainly a good decision. But this has been halted due to corruption in the recruitment process.’ [38ep]

See also section 18: [Corruption](#).

26.03 The World Health Organisation (WHO) informed in its Bangladesh Country Profile, undated, accessed December 2009:

“Significant changes in human resources for health have taken place in recent years leading to overall improvement in the coverage of health services. These include production and deployment of more health and health-related personnel, refresher training for health personnel in service, and greater use of health volunteers ... Actions are being taken, which include the establishment of a permanent health institute, formulation of a human resource development plan, and enhancing the quality of medical education ... As early as the 1980s, Bangladesh had a national essential drugs policy and a list of essential drugs to be procured and used in health services. These have been maintained to date. Most of the essential drugs were known by their generic name and were less costly than brand name drugs. Production and distribution facilities, both in the private sector and public limited companies, are adequate. Despite these advantages, government run health facilities did not have sufficient essential drugs to meet their actual needs, since the budgetary allocation for the procurement of drugs was not enough.” [14a] (Country Health System Profile; p 5)

See also [26.18](#)

26.04 The World Health Organisation estimated that life expectancy at birth increased from 55 years in 1990 to 63 years in 2006, for both males and females. The Infant Mortality rate declined from 100 per thousand live births in 1990, to 52 per thousand in 2006. [14c]

26.05 The database of the Directorate General of Health Services provides a comprehensive listing of medical institutions in Dhaka. [82]

See also Section 23: [Women](#) and Section 24: [Children](#)

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## ARSENIC POISONING

- 26.06 The South Asia Research Institute for Policy and Development, (SARID) in an article *Arsenic Poisoning in Bangladesh*, 8 September 2004 stated that;

“The contamination of groundwater in Bangladesh is often called the biggest mass poisoning in history. It began in the 1970's, when the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) initiated the construction of millions of tube-wells with the aim of providing Bangladeshis with clean and safe drinking water - an alternative to the surface water contaminated with diarrhea-causing bacteria that killed a quarter of a million Bangladeshi children each year. But as the tube-wells eliminated one problem, they, in turn, brought about a new tragedy of unimagined proportions. Arsenic-contaminated water from the wells started poisoning millions, bewildering the scientists trying to understand how the poisoning works as well as how to control it. Meanwhile, the 8 to 12 million contaminated wells across the country continue to be the main source of water for most Bangladeshis, presenting a growing danger to their lives.” [144a]

- 26.07 The BBC, in a news report, *Bangladesh: 77m poisoned by arsenic in drinking water*, 19 June 2010 reported that:

“Up to 77 million people in Bangladesh have been exposed to toxic levels of arsenic from drinking water in recent decades, according to a Lancet study. The research assessed nearly 12,000 people in a district of the capital Dhaka for over a period of 10 years. More than 20% of deaths among those assessed were caused by the naturally occurring poisonous element, it found. The World Health Organization said the exposure was “the largest mass poisoning of a population in history”. It began after hand-pumped wells were installed in the 1970s to tap groundwater. Scientists say even small amounts of arsenic over a long period can cause cancer of the bladder, kidney, lung or skin. Bangladesh was chosen for the study because nearly 90% of the population uses groundwater as its primary source of fresh water.” [20p]

See also Key statistics at [UNICEF: Arsenic Mitigation in Bangladesh](#), (Updated 12 October 2008) [581]

## CHOLERA

- 26.08 Banglapaedia, in the entry on cholera, stated that:

“In the Gangetic delta of which Bangladesh is a part, cholera has been known to wreck havoc, and to wipe out villages after villages killing men, women and children by the thousands. The causative agent of cholera is a comma-shaped bacteria... The pathogen is water-borne and is almost always ingested by human subjects with food and water that have been contaminated with the bacteria through the faecal material of cholera patient. After entry into the gut, the bacteria attaches to the small intestine, multiplies rapidly, and in the process produces cholera toxin. ... Dehydration caused by fluid loss during cholera can be readily corrected by intra-venous administration of a fluid containing a mixture of electrolytes such as sodium, potassium, and chloride together with glucose and a small quantity of bicarbonate. It is a self-limiting disease lasting for three to six days and other than rehydration no drug therapy is usually necessary, although use of antibiotics such as tetracycline may shorten the duration of cholera.

“Bangladesh has to its credit several pioneering contributions towards scientific understanding of the disease, including development of oral rehydration therapy (ORT)



to correct fluid loss by the administration of oral rehydration solution (ORS) instead of intra-venous fluid injection, and development of anti-cholera vaccines and diagnostic tools.” [105b]

## DIABETES

26.09 A 2008 article from the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR, B), website stated that:

“Recent studies indicate that the prevalence of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and cancer is increasing significantly in Bangladesh. This increase is observed not only in the urban areas but also in the rural population. For instance, high levels of non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus, impaired glucose tolerance and hypertension have been found. Diabetes has also started to be documented in the tribal population in Bangladesh... Diagnostic services are also not widely available or accessible, flagging an important health systems issue for Bangladesh.” [145b]

## HIV/AIDS

### ACCESS TO HEALTH AND WELFARE SERVICES

26.10 The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) in the *UNGASS 2010 Bangladesh Country report*, dated 30 March 2010 stated that:

“The prevalence of HIV in Bangladesh is less than 0.1 per cent in the general population and the estimated number of HIV positive cases in the country is around 7500. The prevalence rate among the MARPs - sex workers (both female and male), male who have sex with male (MSM) and transgender (Hijra)) is below 1 per cent with the exception of Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) which is just above 1 per cent (1.6 per cent) According to the latest HSS (Round 8, 2007) of Bangladesh, the HIV prevalence among Female Sex Workers, MSW and Hijras was 0.3 per cent. Although HIV prevalence was below 1per cent in all female sex worker sites, in Hili (a small border town in the northwest part of Bangladesh), prevalence was as high as 2.7 per cent among the casual sex workers, all of whom had crossed the border into India to sell sex. In the MSM community the prevalence was reported much lower (0 per cent for only MSM in Dhaka and 0.3 per cent in combined MSM and MSW sample in Chittagong). Several surveillance rounds as well as a study conducted in Dhaka using Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) method in 2006 established very low prevalence of HIV in MSM, along with low rates of active syphilis. Large proportions of MSM and MSW, however, report STI symptoms (MSW more than MSM), as well as multiple sex partners (including women), group sex (often associated with violence and without condoms) and very low condom use with all types of partners. MSMs are highly networked, so if HIV were to emerge, it could spread very rapidly in this population, if prevention efforts are not adequately scaled up.” [19a] The USSD 2010 report stated that there were no reported cases of violence or discrimination against HIV/AIDS patients during 2009. NGOs believed that this was partly a function of the refusal of victims to self-identify and an absence of research given the relatively low rate of HIV/AIDS in the country. [2v] (Section 6)

26.11 Estimates of HIV prevalence have been subject to fluctuation. See for example paragraphs 21.19, 23.54 and 26.10 tabulated below:

### Estimates of HIV Prevalence in Bangladesh

Source	Date	Estimate of prevalence
UN [8f] (para.23.54)	2005	Less than 1%
UNAIDS [36] (para.26.10)	2009	Less than 0.1%
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare / UNGASS [ 19a] (para.21.19)	2010	Less than 0.1%

26.12 The Bandhu Social Welfare Society was established in 1997 with international funding, to provide sexual health services to the gay community and to campaign for greater openness and legitimacy for this community. The society, which is run according to a model developed by the international Naz Foundation, has more than 220 staff members based in six cities. Field services include an outreach programme, education on safe sex, condom distribution and referrals to clinics for sexually transmitted diseases. The society set up a clinic in Dhaka in April 1998. By June 2003, 21,593 people had accessed the clinic's services, either to obtain treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, or for psychological services, or for general health services. [36d] (p30-35)

#### HIV/AIDS – ANTI-RETROVIRAL TREATMENT

26.13 The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) *Country Progress Report - Bangladesh*, Reporting period: January 2008–December 2009 stated that:

“Prevention efforts in Bangladesh had been initiated way before the first HIV case was detected in 1989. Though there is no comprehensive national study to measure the prevalence of HIV among the general population, however, the prevalence has been considered at less than 0.1 per cent. In all of the eight HIV Serological Surveillance rounds conducted till date (Round 8, 2007) in Bangladesh, the HIV prevalence among the MARPs [Most-at-risk population] remained below 1 per cent with the exception of Injecting Drug User (IDU) population mainly in the capital city of Dhaka. On December 1, 2009, on the occasion of World AIDS Day, the National AIDS/STD Program (NASP) had confirmed a total of 1745 HIV cases reported in Bangladesh. In 2009 alone, a total of 250 new cases were identified, 143 had developed AIDS and a total of 39 deaths were reported. Total number of HIV infected people developed AIDS until 2009 is 619 and a total of 204 deaths had occurred due to AIDS.” [19a] (p23)

26.14 The UNGASS Country Progress Report further reported that:

“The first voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) centre in Bangladesh was set up in 2002 and by 2009 numbers have gone up to about 105. The quality and range of services vary – only a few centres have professionally trained counsellors, physicians to offer medical examinations when other STIs [sexually transmitted infections] are suspected, gold-standard HIV test and laboratory procedures, quality assurance and validation of HIV test results etc. Outside Dhaka, to obtain test results can take up to a week in some centres. Post test counselling for people who test positive also includes referral to People Living with HIV (PLHIV) support groups. In recent years, PLHIV peer support groups have expanded to well over 500 members. They provide counselling,

home visits, referrals and free treatment for opportunistic infections, advice and information on positive living and advocacy and communication with the general public to reduce stigma and discrimination. On experience of stigma and discrimination, there are numerous reports of denial of treatment to high risk individuals by the health care providers. Only a few facilities in Bangladesh (mostly in Dhaka) are able to treat HIV-related infections or provide ART [Anti-Retroviral Therapy] On the indicator - Percentage of adults and children with advanced HIV infection receiving antiretroviral therapy (UNGASS Indicator 4), the current ART coverage has been increased from 13.3 per cent in 2007 to 47.7 per cent in 2009.” [19a] (p39)

See the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh paper [HIV and AIDS in Bangladesh](#), September 2008 [145c] and also the AIDS Data Hub [Country Review September 2011](#) [15b]

See Section 21: [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons](#)

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## KIDNEY DIALYSIS

- 26.15 The website of the National Kidney Foundation of Bangladesh gives details of hospital- and clinic-based dialysis centres in the principal cities, and of renal transplant facilities in Dhaka:

<http://www.kidneyfoundationbd.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=4&p=7> [81]

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## MALARIA

- 26.16 The WHO reported that:

“More than 95 per cent of malaria cases in Bangladesh are reported from 13 highly endemic districts, where 11 million people are at risk. The Hill Tract Districts of Bandarban, Khagrachari and Rangamati, and the Cox’s Bazar district, report more than 80 per cent of all malaria cases and deaths every year, with perennial transmission in two peaks, occurring before and after the monsoon (March–May and September–November). Confirmed malaria cases have declined in recent years to 84 000 in 2009, although it is unclear whether this reflects a real decrease in incidence ... Reported malaria deaths fell from an annual average of 1000 during 2000–2004 to 154 in 2008 and 47 in 2009.” [14g]

## PNEUMONIA

- 26.17 A 2008 article from the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR, B), website stated that:

“Pneumonia kills over two million children each year—more than AIDS, malaria and measles combined. The leading cause of child death worldwide, pneumonia particularly affects the poor in developing countries like Bangladesh, where access to healthcare is limited.

“Many children with severe pneumonia who were referred to hospital (or other higher-level health facilities) for treatment never arrived there. Reports suggest that noncompliance with referrals is due to geographic inaccessibility, financial and social constraints of the caregivers involved, or a caregiver’s failure to recognise the severity of a child’s illness. As a result, many children with severe pneumonia slip through the cracks of the existing health system, inevitably leading to more child deaths”. [145a]

26.18 The same article reported that new guidelines have been developed:

“The Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) clinical care guidelines, developed to fight disease among children less than 5 years old, help workers in local first-level health facilities to accurately assess sick children and establish correct treatment or the need for referral to hospital. The guidelines indicate that children with non-severe pneumonia should be treated with antibiotics at the first-level facility, while children with severe pneumonia should be referred to hospitals or other higher-level facilities.

“Results published in The Lancet in September 2008 showed that modification of the IMCI guidelines resulted in better care for children with pneumonia: numbers of children receiving correct treatment increased from less than 40% to more than 90%. The study also showed that allowing health workers to give oral antibiotic treatment for uncomplicated cases of severe pneumonia was safe and effective and the improved care seems to have resulted in increased community confidence in use of the first-level health services.” [145a]

## MENTAL HEALTH

26.19 Mental healthcare is provided at the primary level by primary care physicians and health workers, at the secondary level by district hospitals (though only one hospital has been equipped to provide the services), and at tertiary level by teaching hospitals. Of the 14 drugs for psychiatric treatment listed in the WHO Project Atlas survey for 2005, only three were not available in Bangladesh. (WHO Mental Health Atlas 2005) [14b]

26.20 The World Health Organization Assessment Instrument for Mental health Systems (WHO-AIMS) 2007 stated that:

“There is no specific mental health authority in the country. There are 50 outpatient mental health facilities and no facility provides follow-up care in the community. There is no day treatment mental health facilities in the country. There are 31 community-based psychiatric inpatient units for a total of 0.58 beds per 100,000 population and on average patients spend 29 days in the facility per discharge. There are 11 community residential facilities in the country and 55% of the beds in these facilities are for children and adolescents and 81% of admitted patients are female and 73% of them are children. There is one 500 bedded mental hospital in the country and on average patients spend 137 days in the hospital. There are 15 beds for mentally disordered people in forensic inpatient units and 3900 beds in other residential facilities such as homes for persons with mental retardation, detoxification inpatient facilities, homes for the destitute, etc. The density of psychiatric beds in or around Dhaka, the largest city, is 5 times greater than the density of beds in the entire country.” [14f] (Executive summary)

- 26.21 The same report also stated that, “A list of essential medicines is present in the country including antipsychotics, anxiolytics, antidepressants, mood stabilizers and antiepileptic drugs.” [14f] (Executive summary)

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## 27. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

- 27.01 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010* (USSD 2010 report), released on 8 April 2011 stated:

“The law provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice except in the cases of some opposition political figures. As the government moved to prosecute war crimes from the 1971 War of Independence, it created a list--consisting entirely of opposition party leaders--of those suspected of war crimes who it considered ineligible to travel outside the country. However, it did not move to strip these individuals of their passports. Immigration officials at Hajrat Shah Jalal International Airport in Dhaka prevented numerous politicians belonging to the opposition BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami from leaving the country, citing the no-fly list and instructions from undisclosed higher authorities. Some of the politicians successfully challenged the unannounced restrictions on their travel abroad and managed to depart and return to the country.” [2v] (Section 2d)

- 27.02 USAID, in a Research Brief *Gender Considerations in Migration and Remittances in Bangladesh*, November 2007 stated that:

“Traditionally, Bangladeshi women have been less likely to migrate than men. This reluctance may be due to a combination of socio-cultural norms concerning women’s mobility, government regulations that restrict female migration out of a desire to protect women from abusive situations, as well as the costs and risks associated with migration. Over the last decade, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has espoused different approaches towards female migration. In 1991, the government lifted the ban on unskilled women’s migration, but then re-imposed it in 1998 on the grounds that the restriction was the best way to protect women from labor rights violations. The effect of the GOB’s bans has been to slow women’s labor migration but not to stem it altogether. Many women continue to migrate for employment, but the process remains undocumented since the Bangladesh government has banned unskilled female migration. The ban was partially lifted in 2002 by allowing the migration of female domestic workers under certain conditions; through a notification in 2005, the government then relaxed those conditions.” [17a] (p2)

- 27.03 The United Nations Development Programme, in a report *Migration and gender empowerment: Recent trends and emerging issues*, dated April 2009 stated that: “...in Bangladesh, even adult women are legally required to take the permission of the father, husband or other male head of household for acquiring a passport, applying for a visa, and so on.” [8k] (p9)
- 27.04 The US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) *World Refugee Survey 2009*, published 17 June 2009, recorded:

“The 1972 Constitution reserves its protection of freedom of movement to citizens, while the 1946 Foreigner's Act, without exceptions for refugees, permits the Government to require foreigners to reside in particular places and to impose ‘any restrictions’ on their movements. Bangladesh has no law, regulation, or formal policy regulating the confinement of refugees and asylum seekers; authorities simply do it arbitrarily.” [37i]

## BORDER KILLINGS

27.05 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) *World Report 2011*, published on 24 January 2011, stated that:

“According to Odhikar, a Bangladesh human rights monitoring group, at least 930 Bangladeshi nationals were killed by India’s Border Security Force between the year 2000 and September of 2010. A number of Indian nationals have also been killed by Indian forces deployed at the border.

“Acute poverty and unemployment prompts millions of Bangladeshi nationals to cross the border into India in search of jobs and commerce. While some of those killed are engaged in smuggling goods and contraband, Indian border forces systematically use lethal force without justification. Bangladeshi authorities have repeatedly complained about killings of Bangladeshis, as have human rights groups in both countries. Bangladeshi Home Minister Sahara Khatun in May 2010 said that she would again ask officials in New Delhi, India’s capital, to stop these incidents. Indian authorities declared that their forces have been instructed to exercise restraint, but there was little sign of progress in ending violations during 2010.” [10q]

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## 28. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs)

28.01 The IDMC report *Bangladesh: Indigenous people and religious minorities still affected by displacement* of 16 July 2009 stated that:

“Indigenous people in the CHT continue to be displaced due to evictions from existing reserve forests and acquisition of their land by the government as well as land grabbing by Bengali settlers. Since 2007 Bengali settlers, with the tacit understanding or direct support of the army, have continued to seize land. The evictions were particularly intense during the state of emergency in effect throughout 2007 and 2008, but have been reported as recently as June 2009 (*The Daily Star*, 15 June 2009).” [45d] (p4)

28.02 The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in an Overview dated 30 December 2010, of the IDPs situation stated that:

“Clashes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) displaced thousands of people during 2010, despite government pledges to resolve the long-running conflict there. The government’s relocation of Bengali settlers to CHT led to conflict between indigenous Jumma militias and army-backed settlers from 1977 to 1997, and wide-spread forced evictions and other human rights violations. At least 90,000 Jumma families and 38,000 settler families were displaced as of 2000. The settlers fled to areas around army camps for safety and assistance, while indigenous people were displaced to more remote areas or into the forests, where they had little access to food and basic services such as health care and schools.

134 The main text of this COI Report contains the most up to date publicly available information as at 31 October 2011. Further brief information on recent events and reports has been provided in the Latest News section to 23 December 2011.

“The conflict formally ended with a 1997 agreement which acknowledged CHT as a “tribal inhabited” region, and envisaged the army’s withdrawal and an end to settlement. Indigenous refugees and IDPs were to be registered and entitled to assistance while land disputes were resolved. But the settlement of Bengalis continued, and some 10,000 repatriated Jumma refugees were forced into secondary displacement.

“In 2009 the new government committed to implement the peace accord and provide assistance and reparation to IDPs. It withdrew the army from 35 of the 300 bases in CHT and announced measures to resolve land disputes. However, new clashes triggered more displacement in 2010, and several indigenous villages were reportedly burned down in February and March. ICRC provided emergency assistance to 3,500 people who were forced to flee when their homes were destroyed.” [45e]

28.03 The same report also stated that:

“Meanwhile, across Bangladesh, up to 1.2 million Hindu families have been dispossessed of their land, with some internally displaced and others fleeing the country. The 1974 Vested Property Act by which the government could confiscate property from any “enemy of the state” was repealed in 2001, but the land grabbing has continued, and the government has not taken measures to restitute land or compensate those affected.” [45e]

See also Section 19: [Hindus](#) and Section 20: [The indigenous Jumma peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts](#)

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## 29. FOREIGN REFUGEES

29.01 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010* (USSD 2009 report), released on 8 March 2011 stated that:

“The country is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol. As a result, and in the absence of any national legislation, the law does not provide a legal framework for the granting of asylum or refugee status. The government had no formal system for providing protection to refugees. In practice the government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedoms would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees. However, delays in granting FD6 approvals by the government's NGO Affairs Bureau have led to extended delays in allowing NGOs to operate in country and implement assistance programs.” [2v] (Section 2d)

29.02 The US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) World Refugee Survey 2008, published June 2008, stated that there had been no reports of refoulement of UNHCR-registered refugees or asylum seekers in 2007. However, the report continued

“In late December [2007]...authorities forced some 14 Muslim Rohingyas from Myanmar back over the border. At least several hundred left for other countries, such as Malaysia, because of the Government’s severe restrictions against them in Bangladesh ...

UNHCR began training [personnel of the Bangladesh Rifles], which patrolled the border, on the difference between asylum seekers and migrants but they still treated asylum seekers as illegal entrants and often detained them, generally releasing them for bribes.” [37h]

- 29.03 The US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) *World Refugee Survey 2009*, published June 2009, observed:

“[The] Authorities generally do not forcibly return registered refugees. As the Government of Myanmar refuses to accept the deportation of Rohingyas from detention in Bangladesh, the BDR increasingly pushes non-registered would be Rohingya entrants back over the border to Myanmar rather than arresting, processing, or formally deporting them.

“Bangladesh is not party to either the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol and has no refugee law. The 1972 Constitution obliges the Government to ‘support oppressed peoples throughout the world waging a just struggle against...racism.’ It also provides that ‘no action detrimental to the life, liberty, body, reputation or property of any person shall be taken except in accordance with law.’ There are no reports, however, of courts applying these provisions to refugees. The Birth Registration Act of 2004 specifically provides for the registration of refugee children. The 1920 Passport Act, the 1946 Foreigner's Act, and the 1952 Control of Entry Act apply to all foreigners without exception for refugees.” [37i]

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## ROHINGYA REFUGEES

- 29.04 According to the USCRI *World Refugee Survey 2009*, published in June 2009:

“Bangladesh hosted some 193,000 refugees, almost all of them Muslim residents of North Rakhine State of Myanmar - commonly known as the Rohingya ... The Government confines some 28,100 of them in Nayapara and Kutupalong camps in the southern Cox's Bazar District. UNHCR has registered these and the Government at least recognizes their right to temporary asylum. The Government estimates that, in addition, there are between 100,000 to 200,000 Rohingya living outside the camps without legal status in the Cox's Bazar district and the Bandarban sub-district of Chittagong. The Government relocated about 9,000 of these from the Teknaf squatter camp on the edge of the Naf River to Leda and another 15,000 set up makeshift housing around Kutupalong camp.” [37i]

- 29.05 The USSD 2010 report stated:

“The government continued to deny asylum to Rohingyas arriving from Burma. The government categorized them as illegal economic migrants and turned back many at the border; however, the border was porous, and attempts to stem the tide of migration proved unsuccessful. According to the UNHCR, some of the individuals who were turned back were likely entitled to refugee status. Some unregistered persons in UNHCR camps returned to the country illegally after their official repatriation to Burma. On a number of occasions, local police picked up unregistered persons outside the camps and imprisoned them under the Foreigners Act.



“Working with the UNHCR, the government provided temporary protection to approximately 28,000 registered Rohingya refugees at two official refugee camps and to individual asylum seekers whom the UNHCR interviewed and recognized as refugees on a case-by-case basis. According to the UNHCR, there were some discrepancies between the government's official list of registered refugees and the UNHCR's. The UNHCR worked to resolve these discrepancies with the government and began a harmonization exercise in September, The initial results were mixed with UNHCR and the government agreeing to only approximately 40 percent of the cases, but the government was willing to work with UNHCR on negotiating the cases that remained. According to international aid organizations active in the area, there were an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 Rohingyas not officially recognized as refugees living among the local population in the surrounding area of Teknaf and Cox's Bazaar, including approximately 25,000 to 30,000 at an unofficial site adjacent to the official Kutupalong refugee camp. International NGOs generally were unable to work officially with unregistered refugees because the NGO Affairs Bureau refused to grant permission for such projects. There were no repatriations of Rohingyas during the year.” [2v] (Section 2d)

29.06 The USSD 2010 report stated: “Working with the UNHCR, the government continued to improve conditions in refugee camps following findings in recent years that sanitation, nutrition, and shelter conditions had fallen below minimum international standards. The government permitted the UNHCR to build replacements for shelters and latrines and permitted more NGOs to work in the camps on skills training, education, and health for residents.” [2v] (Section 2d)

29.07 An Agence-France Presse report dated 30 December 2009 stated that:

“Bangladesh's plans to repatriate 9,000 Myanmar Muslim refugees to their homeland hit trouble on Wednesday when a leader of the minority said they would refuse to leave. Bangladesh's top foreign ministry official, Mirajul Quayes, said Tuesday that neighbouring Myanmar had agreed to take back 9,000 Rohingya refugees in what was seen as a breakthrough in a decade-long problem ... Described by the United Nations as one of the most persecuted minorities, some 250,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh in the early 1990s. But some 230,000 were later taken back by Myanmar following a UN-brokered deal. Since then, thousands of Rohingyas from Buddhist-majority Myanmar's northern Rakhaine state have streamed across the border every year and are now estimated to number nearly 400,000. But only 28,000 of them have been granted official refugee status and are allowed to stay in two UN-assisted camps in the country's Cox's Bazar district just miles (kilometres) across the Myanmar border.” [23u]

29.08 Refugees International in a field report, *Bangladesh: The Silent Crisis*, dated 19 April 2011 stated that:

“The Rohingya ethnic minority of Burma are trapped between severe repression in their homeland and abuse in neighboring countries. Bangladesh has hosted hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas fleeing persecution for more than three decades, but at least 200,000 Rohingya refugees have no legal rights there. They live in squalor, receive very limited aid and are subject to arrest, extortion and detention. Unregistered refugee women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual and physical attacks. The international community must urge the Bangladeshi government to register undocumented refugees and improve protection for all vulnerable Rohingyas. Donor governments must also work to restart and increase resettlement of refugees to a third country and increase assistance for communities hosting refugees.” [74c]

For background to this group: See the HRW report: [\*Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: The Search for a Lasting Solution\*](#).

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### 30. CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY

30.01 The Bangladesh Citizenship (Temporary Provisions) Order 1972 introduced the citizenship laws after the country's independence. Article 2 of the Order stipulates that anyone who was born in the territories now comprised in Bangladesh (or whose father or grandfather was born in these territories) and who was a permanent resident in these territories on 25 March 1971 and continues to be so resident, will be deemed to be a Bangladeshi citizen. Article 2A provides that a person to whom the above article would have applied, but who is resident in the United Kingdom, shall be deemed to have continued to have been permanently resident in Bangladesh. The Government may notify, in the official Gazette, any person or categories of persons to whom this Article shall not apply. In case of doubt as to whether a person is qualified to be deemed a citizen of Bangladesh under Article 2 of the Order, a decision of the Government will be final. [18a]

#### DUAL NATIONALITY

30.02 The procedure is outlined on the website of the Bangladesh High Commission in London as follows:

"1. A Bangladeshi national who has entered UK with a Bangladeshi passport and subsequently obtained British Passport is not required to obtain separate dual nationality certificate. Similarly the children of Bangladeshi father who has obtained Bangladeshi passport before obtaining British passport is also not required to have separate dual nationality certificate. Foreign spouse of a Bangladeshi national may also apply for a dual nationality of Bangladesh.

"2. Dual Nationality Applicants are required to fill up the specific form available in this website in All Forms section)

"3. Dual Nationality Applicants are required to deposit the filled up application form along with other related documents, in person to the High commission where they will be interviewed by the concern officer

"4. After satisfactory interview the application form along with related documents will be sent to Ministry of Home affairs in Bangladesh.

"5. After investigation Ministry of Home Affairs in Bangladesh will issue the dual nationality certificate and send it to the High Commission.

"6. On receipt of the certificate from the Ministry, the High commission will either inform the applicant to collect the certificate or the same may be sent to the applicant by post.

"7. On the basis of dual nationality certificate the applicant can obtain Bangladeshi passport from the High Commission." [79b]

- 30.03 The 1978 Bangladesh Citizenship (Temporary Provisions) Rules allow for the Government to consider an application for citizenship from an applicant who is a foreign woman and married to a Bangladeshi citizen and has resided in Bangladesh for two years, or from any other applicant who has resided in Bangladesh for a period of five years. [18b] Children of Bangladeshi men and, since 2009, Bangladeshi women married to foreigners can claim Bangladeshi citizenship. (*The Daily Star*, 2009) [38b]

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## 31. EXIT AND RETURN

- 31.01 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010* (USSD 2010 report), released on 8 April 2010 confirmed that:

“The law provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice except in the cases of some opposition political figures. As the government moved to prosecute war crimes from the 1971 War of Independence, it created a list--consisting entirely of opposition party leaders--of those suspected of war crimes who it considered ineligible to travel outside the country. However, it did not move to strip these individuals of their passports. Immigration officials at Hajrat Shah Jalal International Airport in Dhaka prevented numerous politicians belonging to the opposition BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami from leaving the country, citing the no-fly list and instructions from undisclosed higher authorities. Some of the politicians successfully challenged the unannounced restrictions on their travel abroad and managed to depart and return to the country.” [2v] (Section 2d)

- 31.02 The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), in a document dated 21 February 2005, quoted the Bangladesh High Commission as saying that the validity of passports or travel documents might vary from ‘months’ to several years (usually up to five years); documents with shorter validity were normally issued to Bangladesh nationals who had lost their passport or were unable to produce details of their previous passport. Passports were issued after standard identity checks, as required by law. [3s]

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## CHILDREN

- 31.03 The Canadian IRB was advised by the Bangladesh High Commission in November 2003 that a woman did not need her husband’s consent in order to obtain a passport. A child under the age of 12 would usually be included on their mother’s passport but, should there be cause for concern regarding the application, the authorities might request the other parent’s consent. There was no official requirement for parental consent for children over the age of 12 who apply for a passport, although children were “typically accompanied by a parent when filing their application”. Passport applicants were required to provide their birth certificates and, since 2002, the names of both parents had appeared in passports. [3p]

See Section 27: [Freedom of movement](#)

- 31.04 A Canadian IRB paper of 20 November 2003 quoted the Bangladesh High Commission as stating that in instances where minor children were travelling from Bangladesh with

one parent, the presence and/or consent of the other parent was not normally required. Children could travel alone provided that a form had been filled out and signed by one parent; the name of the guardian who was to pick the child up at the destination was stipulated on the form. According to the High Commission, there were no provisions in policy or legislation that restricted the travel of children although, in practice, the view was that children should travel in the presence of their mother. Furthermore, immigration authorities had the right to prevent anyone from leaving the country if they reasonably suspected wrong-doing. Where the parents were separated or divorced and a custody order had been issued stipulating that a parent was not permitted to leave the country with their child (ren), immigration authorities were notified of this by the courts. [3q] However, a separated or divorced parent could leave the country with their child(ren) after obtaining permission from the courts. [3r]

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## 32. FORGED AND FRAUDULENTLY OBTAINED OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

32.01 The Canadian High Commission in Dhaka, in July 2005, advised the Canadian IRB as follows, inter alia:

“Many false documents exist; it is relatively easy to verify these documents, but verification takes a long time when it is done outside the capital ... The content of genuine documents is often questionable. The rampant corruption in various levels of the government weakens the integrity and the credibility of officially issued documents ... It is common for [political party] membership confirmation letters to be issued to facilitate verification procedures, even if the information is incorrect ... We often hear people saying that it is normal to provide incorrect information for a third party, because it is considered a duty to help ‘co-nationals/brothers’ to immigrate to a so-called ‘rich’ country ... Genuine medical certificates containing incorrect information can also be issued ... Birth certificates are issued [often years after the person’s birth] upon verbal or written request, and no proof of the person’s date of birth, identity or age is required; these certificates have the same value as the information provided by the applicant ... Similarly, it is relatively easy to obtain a passport under a false identity.” [3b]

32.02 British High Commission in Dhaka stated as follows in a letter of 1 December 2003:

“Forged and fraudulently obtained documents are readily available in Bangladesh and are frequently submitted in support of entry clearance applications. Such documents include forged passports, birth, death and marriage certificates, bank statements (local and British), business plus employment related documents and educational certificates. Maintenance of official records in Bangladesh tends to be haphazard. Most records are kept in hand written logs, with very little in the way of computerised records. There is no local equivalent of the UK Police National Computer system. Instead, records are kept at local police stations with no national link. With regard to birth and death certificates, and marriage and divorce certificates, local municipal corporations or union councils, and local registrars issue these respectively. As with police records, there is no national link up between any of these records. Most banks have similar poor maintenance of accounts, and most rural branches lack computers or even telephones.” [11g]

32.03 The Country Information Service of the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs noted in a 1998 document entitled *Bangladesh: Profile of Asylum Claims and Country Conditions*:

“Asylum applicants from all [Bangladeshi political] parties submit voluminous documentation to support their claims, including in particular outstanding warrants for their arrest if they return to Bangladesh and other alleged court and police documents. Arrest warrants are not generally available to the public, and all such documents should be scrutinized carefully. Many ‘documented’ claims of outstanding arrest warrants have proved to be fraudulent. As of December 1997, the Embassy had examined several hundred documents submitted by asylum applicants; none proved to be genuine.” [50a]

32.04 A sample of the new National Identity Card, issued to all registered voters in 2008 [16f], appears on the website of the Bangladesh Election Commission:

<http://www.ecs.gov.bd/QLExternalFilesEng/21.jpg>

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### 33. EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

33.01 The US State Department *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2010*, (USSD 2009 report), released on 8 April 2011, stated:

“The law provides for the right to join unions and, with government approval, the right to form a union, although numerous restrictions on union registration remained. For example, the law requires more than 30 per cent of an enterprise's total workforce to be members before approval and the union can be dissolved if membership falls below 30 per cent; no more than three trade unions can be registered in any establishment; and managerial staff and other employees designated by employers as "confidential" may not join unions.

“Civil service and security force employees were legally prohibited from forming unions. In 2006 new categories of workers, including teachers and NGO workers, were permitted to form unions; however, due to the broad limitations on union organizing during the state of emergency, these regulations were not formally instituted.

“The total labor force was approximately 50 million, of whom approximately 1.9 million belonged to unions, many of which were affiliated with political parties. There were approximately 4,000 garment factories employing 2.5 million workers; more than 80 per cent were women. No reliable labor statistics were available for the large informal sector in which the majority (nearly 80 per cent) of citizens worked.

The 2006 Bangladesh Labor Act (BLA) consolidated laws from 25 separate acts into one comprehensive law.” [2v] (Section 7a)

33.02 The USSD 2010 report added:

“The law recognized the right to strike; however, many restrictions on this right remained. For example, 75 per cent of union membership must consent to a strike before it can proceed. The government can shut down any strikes lasting more than 30 days and refer the matter to labor courts for adjudication. ... In practice few strikes followed legal requirements, which are cumbersome; strikes or walk-outs often occurred

based on the spontaneous decisions of workers. ... The law establishes mechanisms for conciliation, arbitration, and labor court dispute resolution. Workers have the right to strike in the event of a failure to reach settlement. The government filed cases against some striking labor leaders and workers for destruction of property, blocking roads, or for labor unrest, stemming from the minimum wage announcement. The cases remain unresolved as of year's end. Civil servants and security forces have little recourse for grievances; however, they can file cases in the regular court system. [2v] (Section 7a)

33.03 The USSD 2010 report stated that:

“The penal code prohibits forced or bonded labor; however, the prescribed penalty of imprisonment for up to one year or a fine was not sufficiently stringent to deter the offense, and the government did not enforce the prohibitions effectively. The BLA created inspection mechanisms to strengthen laws against forced labor, but these laws were not enforced. ... Though relatively uncommon in urban areas, bonded labor remained common in rural areas and in domestic service. Bangladeshi children and adults are forced into domestic servitude and bonded labor, including restricted movement, nonpayment of wages, threats, and physical or sexual abuse. Faced with extreme poverty and unemployment, rural workers, including entire families, were engaged in bonded labor, often facing physical abuse and sometimes death. [2v] (Section 7c)

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## Annex A

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### CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS

**Source:** The following Information is from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Timeline: Bangladesh, updated 11 January 2010 [200] unless otherwise stated.

- 1947** British colonial rule over India ended. A largely Muslim state comprising East and West Pakistan was established, either side of India. The two provinces were separated from each other by more than 1,500 km of Indian territory. Serious preparation was being taken in various forums of the central government of Pakistan under the initiative of Fazlur Rahman, the central education minister, to make Urdu the only state language of Pakistan. On receipt of this information, East Pakistani students became agitated and held a meeting on the Dhaka University campus on 6 December 1947, demanding that Bangla be made one of the state languages of Pakistan. [105c]
- 1948** Language Movement began in 1948 and reached its climax in the killings of 21 February 1952, and ended in the adoption of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan. [105c]
- On 11 March 1948 a general strike was observed in the towns of East Pakistan in protest against the omission of Bangla from the languages of the Constituent Assembly, the absence of Bangla letters in Pakistani coins and stamps, and the use of only Urdu in recruitment tests for the navy. The movement also reiterated the earlier demand that Bangla be declared one of the state languages of Pakistan and the official language of East Pakistan. [105c]
- 1949** The Awami League was established to campaign for East Pakistan's autonomy from West Pakistan.
- 1952** Students killed in Language movement demonstrations. [105c]
- 1956** The Language movement achieves its goal by forcing the Pakistan Constituent Assembly in adopting both Bangla and Urdu as the state languages of Pakistan. Both Bangla and Urdu were thus enacted to be the state languages of Pakistan. [105c]
- 1970** The Awami League, under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won an overwhelming election victory in East Pakistan. The Government in West Pakistan refused to recognise the results, leading to rioting.

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### Independence

- 1971** Independence of the province of East Pakistan – as the People's Republic of Bangladesh – was proclaimed on 26 March. The Awami League formed the government-in-exile on 17 April with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, imprisoned in Pakistan, as the President.
- 1972** Sheikh Mujibur became Prime Minister. He began a programme of nationalising key industries in an attempt to improve living standards, but with little success.

- 1974** Severe floods devastated much of the grain crop, leading to an estimated 28,000 deaths. A national state of emergency was declared as political unrest grew.
- 1975** Sheikh Mujibur became President of Bangladesh. The political situation worsened. Sheikh Mujibur was assassinated in a military coup in August. Martial law was imposed.
- 1976** The military banned trade unions.
- 1977** General Ziaur Rahman assumed the presidency. Islam was adopted in the Constitution.
- 1979** Martial law was lifted following elections, which Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) won.
- 1981** Zia was assassinated during an abortive military coup. He was succeeded by Abdus Sattar.

### **The Ershad era**

- 1982** General Ershad assumed power in an army coup. He suspended the Constitution and political parties.
- 1983** Ershad's proposal that all schools should teach Arabic and the Koran led to demonstrations. Limited political activity was permitted. Ershad became President.
- 1986** Parliamentary and presidential elections were held. Ershad was elected to a five-year term. He lifted martial law and reinstated the Constitution.
- 1987** A state of emergency was declared after opposition demonstrations and strikes.
- 1988** Islam became the state religion. Floods covered up to three-quarters of the country. Tens of millions were displaced.
- 1990** Ershad stepped down following mass protests.
- 1991** Ershad was convicted and jailed for corruption and illegal possession of weapons. Begum Khaleda Zia, widow of President Ziaur Rahman, became Prime Minister. The Constitution was changed to render the position of president ceremonial. The prime minister now had primary executive power. A cyclonic tidal wave killed up to 138,000.

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### **Awami League returns to power**

- 1996** Two sets of elections saw the Awami League win power, with Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, becoming Prime Minister.



- 1997** Ershad was released from prison. The opposition BNP began a campaign of strikes against the Government.
- 1998** Two-thirds of the country was affected by floods. Fifteen former army officers were sentenced to death for involvement in the assassination of President Mujibur in 1975.
- 2000**
- September Sheikh Hasina criticised military regimes in a UN speech, prompting Pakistani leader General Musharraf to cancel talks with her. Relations were strained further by a row over the leaked Pakistani report on the 1971 War of Independence.
- December Bangladesh expelled a Pakistani diplomat for comments on the 1971 war. The diplomat had put the number of dead at 26,000, whereas Bangladesh insisted nearly three million were killed. Bangladesh wanted Pakistan to apologise for alleged genocide that it said Pakistani forces were guilty of during the War of Independence.
- 2001**
- July Sheikh Hasina stepped down and handed power to a caretaker government. She was the first Prime Minister in the country's history to complete a five-year term.

### BNP-led coalition Government

- October A BNP-led coalition won an overwhelming victory in the general election. Khaleda Zia once again became Prime Minister. [20i] Three hundred international monitors declared the poll to have been free and fair. [1a]
- 2002**
- March The Government introduced a law making acid attacks punishable by death.
- April The Government approved a temporary law to speed up the legal process for dealing with violent crime.
- June President Chowdhury resigned after the Bangladesh Nationalist Party accused him of taking an anti-party line. The opposition Awami League ended its boycott of parliament and attended for the first time since losing the general election of October 2001.
- September Iajuddin Ahmed, a retired professor from Dhaka University, was announced as the new President. [20s]
- October "Operation Clean Heart" was launched by the Government in response to criticism over rising crime and deteriorating law and order. This involved the deployment of nearly 40,000 soldiers in all major cities to help restore law and order, arrest "listed criminals" and recover illegal firearms. More than 11,000 people were arrested during the Operation, and between 31 and 40 people died after soldiers detained them.
- 2003**
- January Local elections to 4,267 local councils were held. By February 2003, 25 people had reportedly been killed in election-related violence.

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- February The Joint Force Indemnity Ordinance 2003 was passed by Parliament to give legal protection to members of the army and security forces who took part in Operation Clean Heart.

**2004**

- January A bomb attack took place on a shrine in Sylhet.
- May A Constitutional amendment increased the number of seats in Parliament from 300 to 345, the additional 45 being reserved for nominated women members.
- May A bomb attack at a Muslim shrine in Sylhet killed two and injured 25, including the British High Commissioner.
- July-August Devastating floods hit Bangladesh: more than 600 people were killed and an estimated 30 million people were displaced or stranded; 60 per cent of the country, including half of Dhaka, was under water at one stage.
- August On 21 August a grenade attack at an Awami League rally in Dhaka, addressed by Sheikh Hasina, killed 23 people and injured about 200. Rioting by Awami League supporters subsequently erupted across the country; the Awami League called general strikes. [40b](p16)
- September Police carried out “blanket” arrests ahead of an Awami League mass rally on 3 October.
- November The Anti-Corruption Commission was established.
- December An Awami League-led opposition alliance staged two “human chain” demonstrations stretching right across the country.

**2005**

- January Former Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria and four other Awami League activists were killed in a grenade attack in Habiganj.
- February The Government banned two militant Islamic groups, Jumatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB).
- August Some 400 small home-made bombs exploded almost simultaneously in 63 cities and towns across Bangladesh, killing two people and injuring over 100. Jumatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) reportedly claimed responsibility.
- October Bomb attacks inside law court buildings in three districts killed two people and injured dozens; Jumatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) were believed responsible. The Islamist group Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) was banned.
- November Two judges were assassinated on 14 November. Several other judges received death threats from Islamist groups. On 29 November at least 14 people were killed and over 40 injured in a suicide bombing inside the law courts in Gazipur and a bomb blast in Chittagong. JMB were believed to be responsible.

**2006**

- February At least 40,000 members of the Awami League-led opposition alliance held a mass rally in Dhaka. [23o]
- March Sheikh Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam, alias ‘Bangla Bhai’, the leaders of Jama’tul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), were captured by police and RAB units. [20bq] [39ac]
- May Sheikh Abdur Rahman, Siddiqui Islam and other senior JMB members were sentenced to death for involvement in the assassination of two judges in November 2005. [5j]
- May-June Unprecedented labour unrest in the garment sector results in the closure of several factories. [5j]

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- June The AL-led opposition alliance stepped up its campaign of street protests and hartals, demanding reforms to the election commission and the caretaker government due to take power in October 2006. [20bz]

October Renewed labour unrest in the garment industry followed the announcement of a new minimum wage. Micro-credit pioneer Dr Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. [90a]

### Caretaker Government

October On 27 October the term of office of Khaleda Zia's BNP-led coalition government came to an end. [20cf] President Iajuddin Ahmed assumed the role of Chief Advisor of the interim Caretaker Government after former Chief Justice KM Hasan withdrew his candidature in response to mass protests by the Awami League-led 14-party alliance. [40h]

### 2007

January The Awami League-led 14-party alliance announced on 3 January that it would boycott the forthcoming general election on the grounds that it would not be fair; its demands included the reconstitution of the Election Commission and the correction of irregularities in the voters' list. The alliance announced a renewed programme of general strikes and blockades. On 11 January President Iajuddin Ahmed proclaimed a State of Emergency and postponed the general election, scheduled to take place on 22 January, until such time as conditions existed for free and fair and credible elections. [38ah] The proclamation of the Emergency Power Ordinance 2007 effectively suspended articles 36, 37, 38, 39, 40 and 42 of the Constitution. [20cb] [38aj] Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, a former Governor of the Bangladesh Bank, was appointed the new Chief Advisor and was sworn in on 12 January. [38ai] On 17 January the Caretaker Government gazetted four rules as a prerequisite for the separation of the lower Judiciary from the executive branch of government. [38as]

February On 4-6 February, joint security forces arrested several high-profile politicians and businessmen, including nine former government ministers, on suspicion of corruption. (By 13 April, more than 160 prominent politicians, businessmen and senior bureaucrats had been detained.) [38bc] [20cs]

March The re-constituted Election Commission announced on 22 March 2007 its decision to simultaneously prepare national identity cards and a new Voter List, with photographs, for the ninth parliamentary election. [38bq] On 29 March Sheikh Abdur Rahman, Siddiqui Islam (alias 'Bangla Bhai') and four other leaders of the militant Islamist organisation Jamatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) were hanged for murder. [38au]

April On 12 April the Chief Advisor stated the Caretaker Government's intention to hold the ninth general election before the end of 2008. [38bt]

May Simultaneous bomb explosions took place at railway stations in the cities of Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong on 1 May. An unknown group, Jadid al-Qaeda Bangladesh, claimed responsibility. [20cn]

July On 16 July Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina was arrested and charged with extortion [20dh]

August The Government imposed a curfew on Dhaka and five other cities amid violent clashes between police and students demanding an end to emergency rule. [20i] [20k]

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September Former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was detained on September 3rd on charges of extortion and corruption. [61c] On 10 September the ban on indoor political activity was partially lifted. [38d]

- November Cyclone Sidr hit Bangladesh killing thousands. Hundreds of thousands of survivors were left struggling for basic necessities. [5s] The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Ordinance came into effect, separating the lower Judiciary from Executive control and placing it under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. [11i] [20dn]
- December The Council of Advisors approved an ordinance for the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission. [39ak]
- 2008**
- May On 18 May 2008, the Council of Advisors approved the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance 2008. [38dc] The High Court declared valid the claim of the Urdu-speakers known as Biharis (or 'Stranded Pakistanis') to become voters, as citizens of Bangladesh.
- June Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina was released from custody to obtain medical treatment in the US. [20ea] Khaleda Zia, leader of the BNP, was also released on bail. [20o] Voter registration was nearly completed. [16c]
- August Local elections were held in five city 'corporations' and in over 4,000 union parishads. Candidates backed by the Awami League performed strongly. [20o]
- November Sheikh Hasina returned to Bangladesh. [20o]
- December The state of emergency, declared in January 2007, was lifted on 17 December 2008. Following the general election on 29 December, which international observers described as free and fair, a democratically-elected government – that of the Awami League under Sheikh Hasina – took over from the interim Caretaker government that had been in power since October 2006. [20o]
- 2009**
- February Md. Zillur Rahman became President of Bangladesh on 12 February. [38es] About 74 people, mostly army officers, were killed in a mutiny by border guards at a Bangladesh Rifles barracks on 25-26 February; police charged over 1000 guardsmen with offences ranging from sedition to murder. [20o]
- June In a ruling on the decades-old dispute between two main political parties, the High Court decides that it was the father of PM Sheikh Hasina, and not late husband of her arch-rival Khaleda Zia, who proclaimed independence from Pakistan in 1971. [20o]
- October The government bans the local branch of the global Islamist organisation Hizb-ut Tahrir, saying it poses a threat to peace. [20o]
- November Five former army officers lose their final appeal against their convictions for the 1975 murder of Bangladesh's founding PM, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, ending the country's most long-running and controversial trial. [20o]
- 2010**
- January Bangladesh executed five ex-army officers convicted of killing the country's independence leader in 1975. The men killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the president's wife, three sons, two daughters-in-law and approximately 20 others as part of a military coup. [22et]
- February In Bangladesh at least 20 people were injured and dozens of houses torched in fresh clashes between tribal groups and Bengali settlers in the insurgency-hit south-eastern hills. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- February In Bangladesh a fire started at the seven-storey Garib and Garib Sweater factory in the industrial town of Gazipur. Witnesses said the exit gates

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- on the top floor were locked at the time. The fire started on the 2nd floor of the factory, trapping scores of workers. Police say 14 women and 7 men were killed and around 40 people injured. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- March Bangladesh police said Mahbub Sarwar (26), a Dhaka-based Facebook stocks tipster with more than 10,000 followers, has been arrested on charges of illegally manipulating Bangladesh's overheated stock exchange. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- March Bangladesh set up a war crimes tribunal for long-delayed trials of people accused of murder, torture, rape and arson during its 1971 independence war. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- April Bangladesh deployed the army to guard water pumps in the capital Dhaka after acute shortages triggered widespread protests. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- April: Bangladesh Labor and Manpower Minister Mosharraf Hossain said Bangladesh will raise the minimum wage for millions of garment workers, as workers staged another mass protest that blocked the country's main highway. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- May In eastern Bangladesh a speeding bus plunged off a bridge after slamming into another bus, killing 11 people and injuring 32 others. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- May Bangladesh said it has blocked the popular social networking website Facebook over a page that urges people to draw images of Islam's prophet Muhammad. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- June In Bangladesh a four-story apartment building constructed on a former canal collapsed in Dhaka, burying nearby shanties and killing at least 20 people. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- June In Bangladesh an illegal chemical warehouse fuelled a toxic blaze that ripped through one of Dhaka's most densely populated areas, killing at least 117 people. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- July A special tribunal in Bangladesh issued arrest warrants against four senior leaders of the country's largest Islamic party ahead of a planned trial over alleged crimes against humanity during the nation's 1971 independence war. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- July Bangladesh raised the minimum wage for its millions of garment workers by 80 percent, following months of violent protests over pay and conditions. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- August A Bangladesh lawyer said high court judges have passed an order directing that wearing religious attire should be the personal choice of students or employees. No one can be forced to wear them. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- September Bangladesh's high court banned the lease of coastal land to ship-breaking yards, in a ruling welcomed by environmentalists who say the industry destroys fragile eco-systems. Dismantling old ships is a major industry in Bangladesh, providing more than two-thirds of domestic steel and creating tens of thousands of jobs. (
- October Bangladesh boat operators said at least 200 fishermen were missing after 15 fishing boats capsized in the Bay of Bengal during a storm. A storm surge over the past two days has sent waves five feet high crashing into several towns and villages along the coast. Three days of incessant rains have left at least 17 people dead and 41 fishermen missing across the southern coast. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- December The Bangladesh government announced it was planning a "high-level" investigation into the operations of Grameen Bank, a microcredit lender founded by Muhammad Yunus, winner of the 2006 Nobel peace prize. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- 2011**
- March Bangladesh's government ordered Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus from his post as head of his microfinance bank, a humiliating blow for an activist whose

- revolutionary idea of giving out small loans lifted many out of poverty. The Grameen Bank said he remained in charge and that it would fight the decision. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- March In India provisional census figures said the population jumped to 1.21 billion in 2011 from 1.02 billion in 2001, making it more populous than Indonesia, the United States, Brazil, Pakistan and Bangladesh combined. The nation's cultural preference for male children continued to shape the population as child sex ratio in the country declined to 914 females to 1,000 males, the lowest figures since 1947. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- July In Bangladesh riot police fired tear gas in clashes with thousands of stone-throwing Islamist activists protesting constitutional changes that proclaimed the country a secular state. At least 70 people were injured. a 30-hour nationwide strike was called by a coalition of 12 Islamic parties to protest the removal of a clause from the preamble of country's constitution that expressed "absolute faith and trust in Allah." The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party also backed the protest. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- October The World Bank said that it had put on hold a \$1.2 billion loan for a huge bridge in Bangladesh amid allegations of corruption in the bidding process. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- November Bangladesh and Russia signed a deal to build a nuclear power plant in the energy-starved South Asian nation. (TimelinesDB) [27a]
- November The International Monetary Fund urged Bangladesh to tighten monetary policy further to fight runaway inflation and warned that economic growth could undershoot the government's expectations. (TimelinesDB) [27a]

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## Annex B

### POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment [83h], updated 18 October 2011, gave the following:

#### MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES

##### “Awami League (AL)

The AL was established in 1949 to campaign for East Pakistan's independence, appealing to the province's Bengali identity. It rejected the notion that the Muslim provinces of British India should be united in a single, Muslim state. In 1970, the AL led by Sheikh Mujib ur-Rahman won the elections in East Pakistan, but West Pakistan refused to recognise the results. Following a period of mass unrest, East Pakistan unilaterally proclaimed independence in March 1971 and established the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujib's term in office was characterised by corruption, economic collapse and civil unrest. Shortly after he assumed the presidency and declared one-party rule in 1975, Sheikh Mujib was assassinated. The AL had to wait for more than two decades before it came back to power under Sheikh Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina. She overturned the indemnity given to her father's killers, a group of five army officers. They were finally executed in January 2010, after long delays in the trial process while the AL was out of power. [83h] (Internal Affairs)

“An AL-led Grand Alliance swept the general election in December 2008, which marked the country's return to democratic rule, winning 262 seats in the 300-seat parliament (including 230 seats for AL). Hasina began her second term as prime minister in January 2009 as an avowedly secular party; the AL government has also sought to curtail the influence of religion in politics. In October 2009, the government banned the non-violent proselytising group, Hizb ut-Tahrir for its anti-government and anti-democracy stance, and has encouraged constitutional amendments banning religious-based parties. Despite its landslide victory in the elections, the AL is riven by opposing factions at the local level, which has often translated into violence, particularly in universities. In March 2010, the party's presidium began a month-long tour of the country aimed at resolving disputes and instilling a stronger sense of unity, recognising the need to shore up support at a time when the BNP was going on the political offensive.” [83h] (Internal Affairs)

##### “Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) (Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal)

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal) was created in 1978 by Bangladesh's first military ruler, General Zia ur-Rahman, primarily as a vehicle for him to mobilise grassroots support. It has followed a policy of Islamisation, albeit not as comprehensive or as doctrinal as many fundamentalists would like. Zia assumed the presidency in 1977 following a period of civil unrest and declared martial law. His rule was confirmed by a referendum, which gave him nominal democratic legitimacy. After Zia's BNP won the elections of 1979, martial law was lifted and the state of emergency was revoked. Zia was killed in 1981 during an abortive coup attempt and was succeeded by then vice-president Abdus Sattar, who won the November 1981 presidential elections. BNP rule ended in March 1982 following a successful coup by General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, which incited the BNP to invite Khaleda Zia, the widow of Zia ur-Rahman, to assume the chair of the party. [83h] (Internal Affairs)

“The BNP, led by Khaleda and supported by the Bangladesh Islamic Conference (Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh: JIB), returned to power in 1991, following the collapse of General Ershad's military dictatorship. The BNP was defeated in the subsequent election, but was returned to power with the support of its allies in October 2001. Its five-year term ended in October 2006. [83h] (Internal Affairs)

“The party fared extremely poorly in the December 2008 elections, winning only 30 of 300 seats. Despite this, Khaleda refused to accept the party's reduced significance, claiming electoral fraud and demanding that the party receive at least four front-bench seats in parliament. Disputes over this issue led the BNP and its coalition partners to boycott parliament between June 2009 and February 2010. In May 2010, she called for a general strike as part of the party's ongoing attempts to destabilise the government and force a new election. The return of such tactics comes in spite of an election manifesto in 2008 which called for an end to parliamentary boycotts as a political tactic.” [83h] (Internal Affairs)

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### “**Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) (alternatively Islami Oikya Jote)**

The IOJ was established in 1990 and comprised seven parties: Khelafat Majlis, Nezam-e-Islam, Faraizi Jamaat, Islami Morcha, Ulama Committee, a splinter group of National Awami Party (Bhasani) and Islami Shashantantra Andolo. Its main aim is to establish an Islamic polity based upon Islamic jurisprudence and the Khilafat. The IOJ's chairman, Mufti Fazlul Haque Amini, advocates the implementation of sharia (Islamic law) in the country and has routinely issued fatwas (religious opinions) against the media. Despite its nominal representation in parliament (the IOJ won two seats out of 300 in the 2001 parliamentary election) the radical party managed to exercise a significant hold over the then ruling BNP's policies.” [83h] (Internal Affairs)

### “**Bangladesh Islamic Conference (Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh: JIB)**

The JIB grew out of the Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan, which advocated the union of all Muslim-dominated areas of former British India and the creation of Pakistan. The Jamaat opposed the AL's call for Bangladeshi independence and fought on the side of Pakistan during the 1971 war of liberation. Under the government of Sheikh Mujib, the Jamaat was banned and forced into exile in Pakistan. The Political Parties Regulation, introduced by General Zia in 1976, legalised the Islamic Democratic League, which was supported by the Jamaat, along with other political parties that were banned in 1974 under a special act by Mujibur's government. [83h] (Internal Affairs)

“It enjoyed modest support throughout the 1980s, however, the party's support declined dramatically in the 1990s when it adopted a more radical and violent political strategy, killing those it regarded as 'traitors' who had fought against Pakistan in the war of independence. During the term of military-led interim government from January 2007 to December 2008, the JIB fared better than the BNP and AL, although Matiur Rahman Nizami, the head of the JIB was briefly arrested as part of the government's anti-corruption campaign and the party, which had won 17 seats in the last general election in 2001 won only two seats during the polls in December 2008. [83h] (Internal Affairs)

“The government has sought to crack down on the JIB's student wing, the Islami Chhatra Shibir, which has been involved in increasing violence in 2009 and 2010. In February 2010, over 100 Shibir members were arrested in Dhaka and Chittagong as part of a nationwide sweep against religious militants and student agitators.” [83h] (Internal Affairs)

### “**Jatiya Party (Ershad)**

The National (Jatiya) Party was created in 1986 by General Ershad to win popular support for his regime following a bloodless coup in 1982. In the 1986 elections, which were widely regarded as rigged; the Jatiya Party won 153 seats, giving the government an overall majority and a facade of democratic legitimacy. The 1991 elections, which followed Ershad's resignation, gave the party 36 seats. The party broke up in the face of government repression and the imprisonment of senior party members, including Ershad. The Jatiya Party experienced



something of a revival during the political crisis of 1996 when it supported the AL in demanding Khaleda Zia's resignation. The party managed to retain 32 seats in the 1996 election and joined the AL-led government. Ershad was subsequently freed by Hasina. [83h] (Internal Affairs)

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“The Jatiya Party has three factions which effectively operate as separate political parties, only one of which is significant. The faction led by Ershad, the largest faction with 14 seats, has repositioned itself as a party of the centre-left and allied itself with the AL. The party won 27 seats during the parliamentary election in December 2008 where it reportedly agreed to support the AL-led Grand Alliance in exchange for Ershad being promised the position of president, although this did not take place.” [83h] (Internal Affairs)

“**Bangladesh Jatiya Party (N-F), or Jatiya Party (Naziur):** This faction, led by Naziur Rahman Manzur, secured four seats in the 2001 election and formed part of the BNP led governing coalition; secured only one seat in December 2008. The party is secular.” (Europa World Online) [1b]

“**Jatiya Party (Manju)** is a separate party/faction which broke away from the Jatiya party in 1999 and won one seat in 2001.” (Europa World Online) [1b]

A full list of the 95 political parties' allocated symbols for the 2001 general election is on the website of the Bangladesh Election Commission:

[http://www.bangla2000.com/Election\\_2001/150\\_symbols.shtm](http://www.bangla2000.com/Election_2001/150_symbols.shtm)

## STUDENT/YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

### **Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)**

Affiliated to Awami League. (FCO) [11b]

### **Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD)**

Affiliated to Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). (FCO) [11b]

### **Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS)**

Affiliated to Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat). (FCO) [11b]

### **Jatiya Chhatra Samaj**

Affiliated to Jatiya Party. (FCO) [11b]

### **Gonotantrik Chhatra League**

Affiliated to the Democratic League. (FCO) [11b]

### **Khalafad Moslish - Islami Chattro Moslish**

### **Communist Party - Chattro Union**

### **Jashot (Socialist Party) - Jatiyo Shamasto Shamshid Dal / Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)**

### **Chhatro Federation**

A list of student/youth organisations (as at 24 November 2008) can be found at List of Registered Political Parties. ANFREL (Asian Network for Free Elections) [130b]

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## PROSCRIBED AND/OR EXTREMIST ORGANISATIONS

See also Section 10: [Abuses by non government armed groups](#)

The Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi: South Asia Terrorism Portal [59] lists the most important and well known groupings:

### TERRORIST OUTFITS

**Hakat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B)**  
**Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB)**  
**Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)**  
**Purba Bangla Communist Party (PBCP)**

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### EXTREMIST GROUPS

#### Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS)

**Source:** Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi: South Asia Terrorism Portal [59]

#### Jadid (new) al-Qaeda Bangladesh

The existence of this group first became apparent on 1 May 2007, when bomb explosions took place simultaneously at railway stations in the cities of Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong. Messages etched into metal plates left at two of the sites said the attacks had been carried out by Jadid al-Qaeda Bangladesh. Police said at the time that they were investigating whether this was a new group, or a new name for a terrorist group that already existed. (BBC News, 1 May 2007) [20cn] In May and June 2007 the police, on three occasions, recovered bombs planted near the main gate of the Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (RUET). One of the powerful home-made bombs was wrapped in an aluminium sheet which bore the name 'Jadid al Qaeda'. (Daily Star) [38cg] (UNB, 14 June 2007) [39af]

**Biplobi Communist Party** (before 1971 was known as the Communist Party of East Pakistan) Maoist movement. Fought against both the Pakistan army and the Awami League during independence struggle. By mid-1970s largely suppressed by State; revived 1980s. [11a] [38z]

#### New Biplobi Communist Party (NBCP)

Formed in 1999 after the Biplobi Communist Party split. Police estimate about 5,000 'cadres'. Leader was Monoranjon Goshal, alias 'Mrinal'. Has mainly been active in Khulna, Jessore, Bagerhat and Satkhira districts. Financed through racketeering. [38x]

### OTHER GROUPS

#### Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO)

The RSO, a militant Sunni Muslim group, was founded in 1982 as a faction of the Rohingya Patriotic Force, with the apparent aims of preventing the oppression of ethnic Rohingyas in Burma and of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, and the establishment of an autonomous Rakhine (Arakan) state for the Rohingya people. According to a Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment of January 2007, the organisation had by then become dormant – despite claims to the contrary by the Burmese and Bangladeshi governments. The RSO's primary activity was

confined to the Burma-Bangladesh border region; Jane's stated that most terrorist activities attributed to the RSO are more likely to have been carried out by HuJI and other organisations. Last known leader was Mohammad Yunus. [83f]

### **Swadhin Bangabhumi Movement ('Free Land of Bengal')**

Hindu separatist movement. Founded in Calcutta by former Awami League MP, who fled to India in August 1975. Seeks separate state in southwest Bangladesh (where there is a large Hindu minority). Responsible for attempted take-over of Bangladesh High Commission in Calcutta in 1984. Bangladesh security forces launched a crackdown against the movement in 1988, arresting many top leaders. [11a]

### **Shanti Bahini ('Peace Force')**

Armed wing of the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), a tribal insurgency which operated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Founded in 1972. Stood for political independence for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and drew support from Chakma tribes. However, following the Peace Accord of 2 December 1997, Shantu Larma reportedly declared an end to the Shanti Bahini. On 10 February 1998 the Shanti Bahini formally surrendered their arms to the Government, marking an end to the 25 year insurgency. The group is now considered to have disbanded, having surrendered their arms and had criminal cases against them dropped as part of the Peace Accord. [11a]

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## Annex C

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### PROMINENT PEOPLE (Various sources as numbered)

#### **AHMED Prof. Iajuddin**

President of Bangladesh from September 2002 to February 2009. [20s] [20ef]

#### **AHMED Dr Fakhruddin**

Formerly a Governor of the Bank of Bangladesh; served as Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government (in effect, acting prime minister) from January 2007 to December 2008. [38ai]

#### **AHMED General Moeen**

Army Chief of Staff from June 2005 to June 2009. [40n]

#### **ERSHAD General Hossain Mohammed**

Leader of the main faction of the Jatiya Party from 1986 until June 2007. Assumed power following a military coup in March 1982 and ruled the country as an autocrat until December 1990. [1a] [40a] [38ck]

#### **HASINA Sheikh**

Leader of the Awami League (AL); Prime Minister since 6 January 2009. [20ej] Was previously Prime Minister from 1996 to 2001. A daughter of Bangladesh's founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Sheikh Hasina Wajed became leader of the AL in 1981. [40a] [1a]

#### **MUBEEN General Md Abdul**

Army Chief of Staff since June 2009 [83]

#### **NIZAMI Motiur Rahman**

Leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's largest Islamist party. [40a]

#### **RAHMAN Sheikh Mujibur (Mujib)**

Bangladesh's first Prime Minister; assassinated in August 1975. [1a]

#### **RAHMAN Ziaur (General Zia)**

Assumed the Presidency in April 1977; assassinated in May 1981. [1a]

#### **RAHMAN Zillur**

President of Bangladesh since 12 February 2009. [20ef]

#### **YUNUS Dr Muhammad**

Micro-credit pioneer and founder of Grameen Bank. Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. [20cm]

#### **ZIA Begum Khaleda**

Leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Prime Minister from 2001 to October 2006. Was previously Prime Minister from 1991 to 1996. The wife of former President Ziaur Rahman, she became leader of the BNP in 1981. [20i] [40a]

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## Annex D

### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACC</b>	Anti-Corruption Commission
<b>ACHR</b>	Asian Centre for Human Rights
<b>ADB</b>	The Asian Development Bank
<b>AHRC</b>	Asian Human Rights Commission
<b>AI</b>	Amnesty International
<b>AL</b>	Awami League
<b>ART</b>	Anti-retroviral therapy
<b>ASF</b>	Acid Survivors Foundation
<b>ASK</b>	Ain O Shalish Kendra
<b>BCL</b>	Bangladesh Chhatra League
<b>BDR</b>	Bangladesh Rifles
<b>BJP</b>	Bangladesh Jatiya Party
<b>BNP</b>	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
<b>BNWLA</b>	Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association
<b>BRAC</b>	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
<b>BSEHR</b>	Bangladeshi Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights
<b>CAMPE</b>	Campaign for Popular Education
<b>CEDAW</b>	Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CHT</b>	Chittagong Hill Tracts
<b>CPI</b>	Corruption Perceptions Index
<b>CPJ</b>	Committee to Protect Journalists
<b>CRIN</b>	Child Rights Information Network
<b>CRP</b>	Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FCO</b>	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
<b>FH</b>	Freedom House
<b>FIDH</b>	International Federation for Human Rights/Fédération Internationale des ligues des Droits de l'Homme
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
<b>HRW</b>	Human Rights Watch
<b>HUJI/HuJI</b>	Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami
<b>ICDDR,B</b>	International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh
<b>ICS</b>	Islami Chhatra Shibir
<b>ICG</b>	International Crisis Group
<b>IDMC</b>	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IDSA</b>	Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses
<b>ILGA</b>	International Lesbian and Gay Association
<b>IISS</b>	International Institute for Strategic Studies
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IOJ</b>	Islami Oikya Jote
<b>IOM</b>	International Organisation for Migration
<b>IPCS</b>	Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies

<b>JCD</b>	Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal
<b>JMB or JM</b>	Jamatul Mujahedin Bangladesh
<b>JMJB</b>	Jagrata Muslim Janata of Bangladesh
<b>MARP</b>	Most-at-risk population
<b>MOHA</b>	Ministry of Home Affairs
<b>MSF</b>	Médecins sans Frontières
<b>NBCP</b>	New Biplobi Communist Party
<b>NHRC</b>	National human rights commission
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organisation
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PBC</b>	Purba Bangla(r) Communist Party
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>RAB</b>	Rapid Action Battalion
<b>RI</b>	Refugees International
<b>RSF</b>	Reporters sans Frontières
<b>SAARC</b>	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
<b>SARID</b>	The South Asia Research Institute for Policy and Development
<b>STD</b>	Sexually transmitted disease
<b>STI</b>	Sexually transmitted infection
<b>TI</b>	Transparency International
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNGASS</b>	United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNHCHR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USCIRF</b>	US Committee on International Religious Freedom
<b>USCRI</b>	US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
<b>USSD</b>	United States State Department
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation

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## Annex E

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