

## **Annual Human Rights Report 2024: Election, July Revolution, and Minorities in Bangladesh**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Awami League	AL
Bangladesh Chhatra League	BCL
Bangladesh Nationalist Party	BNP
Human Rights Support Society	HRSS
Human Rights Watch	HRW
Institute of Development and Sustainability	IDOS
International Republican Institute	IRI
National Democratic Institute	NDI
Rapid Action Battalion	RAB
United Nations	UN
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh	ULAB
Voice of America	VOA

## INTRODUCTION

2024 has been a year of incidents triggering human rights issues in Bangladesh. The country has witnessed a radical shift in its governance, led by a mass uprising after more than a decade-long fascism, resulting in gross violations of human rights and democracy. The human rights circumstances in Bangladesh in 2024 can be categorised under three events - the national election, the 'July Massacre', and the post-July minority rights. The year began for the Bangladeshi people with the desire for their right to vote in a fair election, which has been missing for the last two if not three, national elections. While international agencies and foreign governments expressed their concerns over the one-sided election, the people inside the country, raising their voices against it, faced significant difficulties, including enforced disappearances, extra-judicial killings, illegal arrests, and torture in prison. The Hasina government not only misused their power by involving law enforcement agencies and the security forces but also engaged their so-called student wing.

The oppression continued to take place, but the situation escalated with the government's move surrounding the 'quota' system in education and jobs. Reserving more than 50 percent of the seats and not considering reform would trigger the mass population, who have long been victims of systemic oppression. Following a month-long revolution by the students, with the participation of people from every sphere of life, the former prime minister fled the country. The whole ministry cabinet and higher government employees, including leading police officers, also went into hiding, but at least 1000 people died, and 20,000 more were injured by the conduct of the previous regime to suppress the 'July Revolution'. This massacre made the nation strong and led to the overthrowing of the Hasina government.

While an interim government led by the Nobel Laureate Dr Yunus was formed, attacks on minorities took place since the day of Hasina's fleeing. These attacks include political as well as religious extremist agendas. Although the interim government tried to control the situation, urging everyone to maintain harmony, the four-month ruling of this government has witnessed at least two big incidents in the country concerning minority rights protection. Among them, one is surrounding the indigenous minority living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, often a victim of military intervention coupled with Bengali settlers, and the other one is centring the Hindu religious minority following the arrest of one of their religious leaders on sedition charges. This report will highlight all three major events that demonstrated human rights violations.



# **1. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2024 NATIONAL ELECTIONS**

On January 7th, 2024, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, with the Awami League, won her fourth consecutive term in the parliamentary elections, marking the beginning of a year of historical political developments and unrest, resulting in the early termination of Hasina's new term. While previous elections have already shown the potential for conflict, the election period surrounding January 7th portrayed new levels of democratic destruction and violence. Domestic and international human rights organisations and monitors particularly criticised the arbitrary and politicised judiciary and discrimination. Freedom House, a prominent US-based index of democracy, political freedom, and human rights, rates the political landscape in Bangladesh at 40/100 (Partly Free) between June 2023 and May 2024, with the parliamentary elections and the pre-election period as key development factors. Thereby, the main points of concern include increasing levels of violence against activists, journalists, and supporters of the main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), including reports of censorship, arrests, and harassment. Furthermore, reports of election-based violence and discrimination against minorities and the arbitrary and politicised judiciary led to criticism from both domestic and international human rights organisations (Freedom House, 2024).

## **1.1 THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM ENTERING THE ELECTIONS 2024: AN OVERVIEW**

### **1.1.1 THE GOVERNING PARTY**

The Bangladesh Awami League is one of the country's oldest political parties and played a major role in Bangladesh's fight for independence during the Liberation War in 1971. At the time of the election in January 2024, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had been in office since 2009, the longest-serving country leader in history. Overall, the party's main success can be seen in the political and economic development of the country, creating one of today's fastest-growing economies in the region, helping 25 million people out of poverty over the past two decades according to World Bank estimates (Curtis, 2024, Anbarasan & Ng, 2024). Despite this, the past years have also shown increased levels of political dissatisfaction and agitation related to concerns about pronounced autocratic features, such as corruption and suppression of government opposition (Curtis, 2024).

### **1.1.2 THE LEADING OPPOSITION**

The second most dominant and main opposition party is the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Khaleda Zia until her imprisonment in 2018 and now overseen by her son, Tarique Rahman, from London. While the Awami League and the BNP have always

been the main players in Bangladesh’s political landscape, their rivalry has reached new grounds approaching the national elections in January 2024. Early in the campaign, the BNP raised concerns about the fairness of the electoral process, demanding that an independent authority oversee the elections. When the Awami League-led government rejected this demand, the BNP officially boycotted the elections. This decision, supported by allied parties, escalated tensions, resulting in violent clashes and mass arrests of opposition leaders and supporters (Anbarasan & Ng, 2024).

Overall, Freedom House characterises the political sphere as incapable of ensuring fair competition, citing widespread judicial harassment that has targeted millions of opposition activists with court cases and imprisonment, strategically undermining the opposition party (Freedom House, 2024).

## **1.2 BOYCOTTED ELECTION**

The official boycott of the January 7th national elections by the leading government opposition, BNP, can be seen as the tip of the iceberg of political tension built up before the election day. Lately, the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina have been increasingly criticised for increasing autocratic tendencies, mainly targeting political opposition members, leading to the distrust of the BNP in a free and fair election process (Human Rights Watch, 2024). The 2024 boycott by the BNP followed similar election boycotts in the 2014 and 2018 general elections after major vote-rigging allegations (Mahmud, 2024b). For the January 7th, 2024 elections, BNP officials announced their distrust of the Awami League-led polls early, describing the latter as “illegitimate” (Islam, 2024). In the resulting election boycott and non-cooperation movement, protesters demanded independent, democratic elections.

The BNP was supported by many like-minded political parties and movements. According to BNP leader Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan in the Dhaka Tribune, more than 62 political parties joined BNP, including parties such as the Gono Odhikar Parishad party or Islami Andolan Bangladesh (Dhaka Tribune, 2024; Mahmud, 2024b). Following their party campaign, the BNP additionally declared a 48-hour nationwide strike immediately before the election date, reinforcing the voting boycott and demanding the resignation of the Awami League government. Furthermore, they requested the immediate release of the previous party chief, Khaleda Zia, and all leaders and activists arrested since late October (Dhaka Tribune, 2024). Government members reportedly responded with coercive measures, threatening violence and the loss of social protection benefits to compel people to vote (United Nations Press Release, 2024). Additionally, critics accuse Awami League authorities of implementing ‘dummy’ candidates to improve the impression of free and fair elections. Thereby, intimidation tactics are expanded to control independent candidates in favour of the ruling government party through the help of law enforcement institutions and intelligence agencies. Despite receiving multiple complaints from local candidates, the Bangladesh Election Commission did not take action (Mahmud, 2024a).



Figure 1: Members of the Bangladesh Gono Odhikar Parishad party stage a protest rally to condemn the recently held general elections in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on January 12, 2024. Source: © Mamunur Rashid/Shutterstock.

### 1.3 PRE-ELECTION VIOLENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The pre-election period is characterised by a high degree of immediate violence between the political actors involved, as well as a decline in freedoms of expression and association. Given these circumstances, the Daily Star describes the overall deterioration of the quality of elections as a zero-sum political outcome for all parties involved (The Daily Star, 2024). Human Rights Watch (HRW) refers to the six weeks leading up to the polls in January as a “violent autocratic crackdown”, especially referring to the decline of democratic freedoms in the polling process (HRW, 2023). Overall, reports describe countless incidences of human rights abuses such as arbitrary arrests, torture, and extortion, mainly targeting the government opposition party, activists, and government critics.

While official figures regarding the extent of measurable violence differ, they demonstrate the severity of the circumstantial impact on democracy, political stability, and governance. The political boycott of the main opposition party, BNP, and its affiliations, can be seen as the main clashing point, leading to the arrest of nearly 10,000 activists only after the opposition rally in October 2023, as estimated by HRW. Sixteen people were killed, and

over 5,000 were injured, yet the Bangladeshi government denies accusations of arbitrarily incarcerating political opponents of the ruling Awami League (HRW, 2023; Anbarasan & Ng, 2024). Other figures covering the whole pre-election period range up to more than 25,000 arrests of opposition leaders and supporters and 56 deaths related to alleged torture and denial of health care in police custody (United Nations Press Release, 2024).

Overall, the excessive violence described in the clashes between the government and opposition, as well as unidentified groups, includes mass arbitrary arrests or judicial harassment, enforced disappearances, torture, arson, and extrajudicial killings. In many cases, the charges imposed appear unsubstantiated, sometimes supported by the fact that the accused were either dead, abroad, or hospitalised at the time of the alleged offence, introducing the term ‘ghost cases’. Additionally, reports reveal long interrogation processes in police custody before gaining adequate legal support. Notably, law enforcement agencies, including the police, have shown alignment with the Awami League-led government under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) assessed the violent government interrogations as politicised law enforcement aimed at disqualifying opposition leaders and consolidating Awami League dominance (The Daily Star, 2024). This argument is supported by the lack of independent investigations into the reported acts of violence (United Nations Press Release, 2024).

Freedom of expression as a fundamental human right is not only limited by the violent suppression of protests and the right of assembly but also by online censorship. Thereafter, the right to free media is severely restricted by reports of arrests by government forces on the basis of government-critical comments online. Additionally, the government (temporarily) blocked websites, news outlets, and communication forums such as Manab Zamin, Samakal, Jamuna Television, and Voice of America (VOA) Bangla, especially surrounding the immediate election day of January 7th, 2024, for criticising state practices. This fostered an environment of self-censorship of the media due to fear of government retaliation (HRW, 2024; Freedom House, 2024; Islam, 2024).

## **1.4 VIOLENCE TARGETING VULNERABLE GROUPS AND MINORITIES**

The period of unrest leading up to the national elections in January 2024 also included reports on the specific targeting of women and other vulnerable groups. Already in a potentially more dependent or inferior economic position, according to portrayals in the Daily Star, women experienced increasing insults and threats of eviction or loss of welfare. The pressure to vote was applied to evade the opposition boycott and was mainly carried out by male candidates and their followers. Up to the day of the elections, the government had not followed up on complaints regarding this issue (The Daily Star, 2024).

Additionally, according to the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), between the 4th and 13th of January, there have been at least 13 incidents of election-focused attacks and torture against minorities, leading to one person dead and at least 37 injured. The scale of violence against minorities was especially pressing in districts of contest within the ruling party between official nominees and dummy candidates. Again, the government’s denial of minority attack accusations undermined independent investigations and justice for the victims (Ahmed, 2024). Furthermore, religious minorities and refugees, especially in the Rohingya refugee camps, continue to experience human rights violations and increasing discrimination during the pre-election period, worsening the already tense security situation (HRW, 2023; Freedom House, 2024). These incidents and the missing government responsibility raise questions against the Awami League party’s claimed commitment to ensure minority protection (Ahmed, 2024).

## 1.5 ELECTION OUTCOMES AND CONSEQUENCES

The national election took place on January 7th, 2024. The election outcome secured incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League (AL) party her fourth uninterrupted consecutive term in office. According to the election committee, the AL and allied parties won 224 out of 300 seats in parliament. However, according to critics, Sheikh Hasina’s power could reach even further due to her political ties to smaller groups or independent and “dummy” candidates affiliated with the Awami League (DW, 2024).

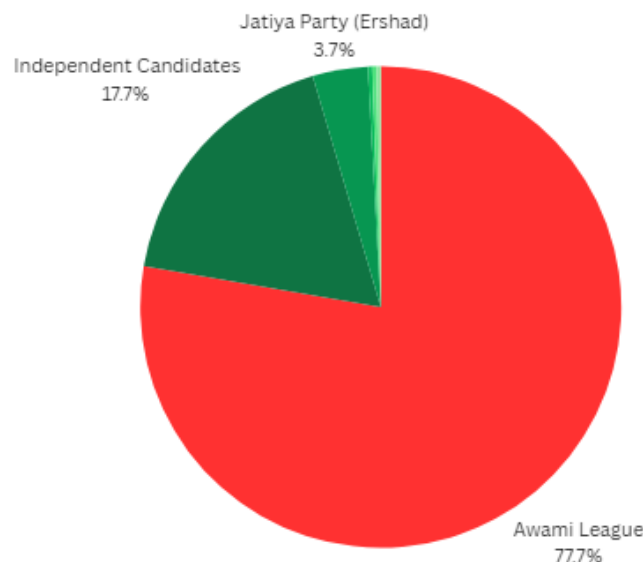


Figure 2: Election results from the national election on January 7th, 2024. Data source: © IPU Parline.

The election was characterised by heightened political tensions, violence, and allegations of authoritarian practices. One of the most influential factors was the political

boycott of the election by the main opposition party, BNP, alleging unfair practices and the absence of a neutral caretaker government to oversee the process. This left the ruling AL with little electoral competition, undermining democratic norms. Whether or not they actively participated in the boycott, widespread distrust in the AL's democratic institutions led many people to lose faith in the value of voting altogether (Dhaka Tribune, 2024). Jasmin Lorch, a senior researcher at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), labelled the January 2024 polls as an “autocratic election”, as quoted from the Deutsche Welle (DW). Furthermore, Lorch stated: “There was no real opposition party in the electoral race, and the Awami League government controlled the electoral process entirely. [...]” (Curtis, 2024, p. 10).

Additionally, following the elections in March 2024, the United States Institute for Peace analysed the events as part of the country's move towards a ‘dominant party’ political system, referring to the ascendancy of the Awami League party (Curtis, 2024, p. 10). Overall, the election turnout reached a national low of approximately 40 percent. In comparison, previous election figures, such as during the 2018 elections, show a voter turnout of over 80 percent (Anbarasan & Ng, 2024).

Altogether, the low voter turnout and the heightened political tension resulting in violent clashes during the pre-election period also induced severe criticism of international organisations and government officials. The Biden administration repeatedly criticised the Awami League-led government's human rights violations during the polling procedure. Western partners also drew consequences due to the decline in democratic standards, affecting diplomatic and economic relationships with Bangladesh (Mahmud, 2024b; Curtis, 2024, p.10). Furthermore, the United Nations (UN) has called for urgent action to address the alarming decline in human rights observed during the election period, emphasising its impact on public trust in political institutions as well as the broader social and economic development. This erosion of trust aligns with the low voter turnout, reflecting widespread disillusionment with the democratic process.

On January 24th, 2024, shortly after the national election, UN experts issued a press release outlining four key demands for the new government of Bangladesh to restore an environment that upholds fundamental human rights. The demands include the “immediate and unconditional release” of detainees without actual or just charges and the assurance of fair, public trials in line with international human rights standards. Connected to that, the government must implement judicial reforms to ensure judicial integrity and independence, safeguarding freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly while holding perpetrators accountable for violations. Finally, the UN highlights the importance of protecting media freedom and ensuring journalist safety by upholding independent, diverse, and pluralistic media practices and enabling critical reporting without fear of threats, harassment, or retaliation (UN Press Release, 2024).

The January 2024 national elections in Bangladesh were marked by profound democratic erosion and widespread human rights violations, highlighting entrenched

authoritarian dynamics built over the past two decades. These events serve not only as a culmination of prior trends but also as the foundation for significant historical developments later in the year, including the July Revolution, making this election a critical turning point in the nation’s political trajectory.

## 2. THE JULY PROTESTS AND MASSACRE IN BANGLADESH

Driven by the dissatisfaction of Generation Z and other excluded groups, the July 2024 protests in Bangladesh were a major turning point in the sociopolitical history of the nation. Decades of distress with systemic issues fuelled the protests, especially the quota reform policy distributing 30 percent of government employment to descendants of freedom fighters (Al Jazeera, 2024). Critics said that this approach produced inequity and excluded some communities. Economic challenges such as inflation and unemployment further stoked public outrage. Reports of corruption and nepotism heightened frustrations, especially among younger people who had limited opportunities in a slowing employment market (Zulfaqar et al., 2024).



Figure 3: Activists demonstrate in front of the Bangladesh High Commission (embassy) in the capital, Colombo, on July 22, 2024, demanding an end to a government crackdown against protesters opposing a controversial job allocation quota system. Source: © Ishara S. KODIKARA/ Amnesty International, 2024.

The protests began peacefully with initial demands, which included the cancellation of the existing quota system for government jobs, provision of the quota at fair rates to minority groups and disabled people, and passing of a new law in the parliament that

establishes a new quota system for a maximum of 5 percent of total jobs (Liang, 2024). After nationwide violence, the students issued new nine-point demands, which are: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should publicly apologise and take responsibility for the deaths of students during the protests; home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader should resign from their cabinet positions and party roles due to their alleged involvement in using law enforcement and Chhatra League to carry out violence against the protesters; police officers, including deputy inspectors general, commissioners, and superintendents in areas where student casualties occurred, should be dismissed from their positions; vice-chancellors and proctors of Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, and Rajshahi University should resign for their inadequate response to the violence against students; a nationwide ban should be imposed on the Awami League’s student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League, in all educational institutions across Bangladesh; all individuals involved in the attacks, including policemen, law enforcement officers, and military personnel, should be arrested and held accountable under the law; financial compensation should be provided to the families of students killed or injured during the protests; all educational institutions and student residential halls should be reopened immediately; and law enforcement officers, including armed forces and other security personnel, should be withdrawn from educational institutions to ensure a peaceful environment (The Daily Star, 2024).



Figure 4: Chhatra Shakti, a students’ platform that came into being in 2023, started to organise peaceful demonstrations all over the country, protesting the reinstatement of the quota system by the High Court on June 5. © Prabir Das/ The Daily Star, 2024.



The protest rapidly escalated, with demonstrations spreading across Dhaka and other major cities. Protesters blocked major roads, organised sit-ins, and called for reforms, including the abolition of the quota system and increased merit-based recruitment in the public sector (The Business Standard, 2024). The government's response was immediate and severe, imposing curfews, detaining student leaders, and shutting down mobile internet services to quiet protests (Al Jazeera, 2024b). Supported by members of the ruling party, law enforcement agencies used excessive force against unarmed protestors, causing hundreds of injuries and deaths (Amnesty International, 2024).

On July 18th, 2024, police officers opened fire on protestors in Dhaka, Chittagong, and Rangpur, therefore marking one of the most violent days of the protests (The New York Times, 2024). Reports from witnesses and media reports described scenes of chaos, with police targeting university campuses where students had sought shelter. In Rangpur, a student named Abu Sayeed was shot dead during a clash, becoming a symbol of resistance (Karmaker, 2024).



Figure 5: Defiant and fearless, Abu Sayeed faces the police (not in the frame) with his arms outstretched as cops and protestors clash near his university on July 16. Source: © The Daily Star, 2024.

Private university campuses, particularly in Dhaka, became centres of violence. BRAC University and North South University went through clashes between students and police, with tear gas and rubber bullets fired into crowds. University of Liberal Arts

Bangladesh (ULAB) students went over terrible incidents, including tear gas being thrown onto campus grounds, forcing students to leave or seek shelter indoors (Dhaka Tribune, 2024).

According to government reports, over 600 protesters were killed and thousands more injured in July (Dhaka Tribune, 2024a). However, opposition groups and independent observers claimed the figures were much higher (Dhaka Tribune, 2024c). Amnesty International pointed out that the use of deadly force was against international human rights standards and criticised the violence (Amnesty International, 2024). Eventually, the whole nation ended up with one final demand: the resignation of the government and the formation of a national government (BBC News Bangla, 2024).

## 2.1 TARGETED VIOLENCE BY POLITICAL GROUPS

The crackdown extended beyond protesters to journalists and activists. Dozens of reporters covering the events were detained, harassed, or injured while documenting the protests. International media organisations criticised the government’s suppression of press freedom, describing it as an attempt to silence dissent and control the narrative (Human Rights Watch, 2024).



Figure 6: An injured protester after Chhatra League activists swooped on students at Dhaka University on July 15. Source: © Rashed Shumon/ The Daily Star, 2024.

Prominent student leaders were arrested, with many facing charges of sedition or incitement to violence. Hospitals where injured protesters were being treated were raided, leading to further arrests and fear among medical staff (Comerford, 2024).



Figure 7: A man, allegedly a Chhatra League activist, shoots at student protesters with a shotgun in Chattogram city's Muradpur area around 4:45 pm on July 16. Source: © Rajib Raihan/ The Daily Star, 2024.

Beyond protesters, the crackdown included activists and media who were arrested, harassed, or injured while covering the events. The July 2024 protests in Bangladesh exposed the lengths political groups and state authorities would go to suppress opposition. Political organisations such as the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and the arbitrary detention of protesters highlighted the targeted violence by political organisations as well as the dominance of systematic assault, therefore underlining the degradation of democratic standards (Amnesty International, 2024b).

Multiple pieces of evidence of BCL's involvement in violence underlined their active participation in assaulting and physically attacking protestors, usually in concert with law enforcement officials (The Daily Star, 2024). Witnesses and human rights organisations detailed incidents where BCL members were armed with rods, sticks, and firearms, targeting students and activists deemed anti-government. Additionally, during a clash in Chittagong, a BCL member fired multiple rounds at unarmed demonstrators, resulting in injuries and leading to nationwide outrage (The Daily Star, 2024b).

The strategic use of violence by BCL often appeared coordinated, aiming to sow fear and disrupt the protests. Protesters reported instances of being followed, threatened, and attacked at their homes.

## **2.2 CORRUPTION AND COLLUSION AMONG AUTHORITIES**

The July 2024 protests in Bangladesh exposed deeply rooted dishonesty and cooperation among the government, as well as major weaknesses within the judicial system (Chatham House, 2024). These issues not only increased the immediate crisis but also pointed out structural weaknesses that compromised governance and democracy in the country.

The judicial system's response to the events of July 2024 highlighted critical shortcomings, including bias, inefficiency, and lack of independence. The failure to uphold justice during and after the protests undermined the rule of law and drove public disillusionment with state institutions (Erasing 76 Crimes, 2024). Opposition groups and activists accused the judiciary of rubber-stamping government actions, including arrests, detentions, and internet shutdowns. Public confidence was further undermined by the Supreme Court's ruling restoring the dubious 30 percent freedom fighter quota in government jobs (The New York Times, 2024b).

Numerous protesters and activists arrested during the crisis were deprived of fair trials and legal representation, therefore breaching constitutional rights. Lawyers representing the detainees faced harassment and intimidation, further compounding the challenges of seeking justice. Another problem the court underlined was the lack of responsibility for the violation of rights. Despite extensive evidence of excessive force, arbitrary detentions, and extrajudicial killings, very few officials faced legal consequences. This absence of responsibility emphasised systemic lawlessness and made it seem like the courts were involved in state repression.

## **2.3 MEDIA SUPPRESSION AND PROPAGANDA**

Numerous journalists covering the protests faced violence, harassment, and arbitrary detention. Local and international media documented cases where reporters were attacked while reporting live from protest sites. Security forces and ruling party affiliates, including members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), were implicated in these assaults. The ruling party controlled the media, which censored coverage of the protests and portrayed the students as violent agitators (Shuvo & Riccardi, 2024). A female visual journalist named Fatima Tuj Johora faced tear gas, rubber bullets, and police aggression while covering the movement (Bhandari, 2024). Also, during the protest, almost five journalists were killed, and dozens were injured while reporting (Mahatole, 2024).

Spreading misinformation through media has been used by the government to spread propaganda, which defined the protests as foreign-instigated conspiracies or attempts to destabilise the country, diverting attention from the real complaints of protesters. This

narrative was amplified through state-run channels and pro-government social media accounts, further dividing public opinion.

## 2.4 INTERNET BLACKOUTS AND INFORMATION CENSORSHIP

The government imposed an 11-day internet blackout during the peak of the protests, severely limiting the public's access to information (Al Jazeera, 2024). This digital suppression disrupted communication among protesters and obstructed real-time reporting by media outlets (Al Jazeera, 2024b).

Television and print media were also pressured to limit their coverage of the protests. Several channels were accused of self-censorship, avoiding critical reporting due to fear of reprisal. Legislative bodies reportedly issued orders to media houses to emphasise government narratives and downplay the scale of the unrest (Bhandari, 2024b).

## 2.5 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN



Figure 8: On July 15, BCL launched a vicious assault with rods, bamboo sticks, and clubs on female student protesters at DU. Source: © Prabir Das/ The Daily Star, 2024.



Figure 9: A female student, who said she was 17, being carried away in a prison van after police obstructed the “March for Justice” near the BMA Bhaban in Khulna city on July 31. Source: © Habibur Rahman/ The Daily Star, 2024.

Women played an important part in the protests, both as leaders and participants. Many were subjected to gender-based violence, including harassment, physical assault, and threats of sexual violence. Activists reported targeted attacks on female demonstrators aimed at discouraging their participation and silencing their voices.

On August 5th, 2024, Nafisa Hossen Marwa, a 17-year-old HSC examinee, was shot dead by police gunfire while marching towards Gono Bhaban (Akash, 2024). This was among the most tragic events of the protests. She was among the many women who regularly attended the protests against family pressures to fight for change. These deaths were part of a

broader pattern of violence, with at least seven women reported to have been killed during the July uprising, according to government reports (Rubel, 2024).

However, the violence continued long beyond the gunshots. Groups connected with political organisations also physically attacked women inhumanely. For example, on July 15th, when the Prime Minister labelled the protesters as "razakars", a wave of anger spread through Dhaka University's female halls (Chandan, 2024). Furious at this insult, both male and female students flooded the streets, only to be attacked viciously by members of the Chhatra League (The Daily Star, 2024c). About 500 armed BCL cadres rushed towards a peaceful protest coordinated by DU's female students (Chandan, 2024b). They specifically targeted female students and beat them up while calling out the Razakars and Pakistani agents with rods, bamboo sticks, and clubs (Chandan, 2024c). During these disputes, many women were assaulted, harassed, and hurt; this reinforced their commitment to raise their voices more, even with the mental and physical wounds they suffered. An eyewitness said,

*I saw a sister faint in front of me, but those thugs still beat her fallen body. Though I was also severely injured, I managed to hobble to the Nilkhet Residential Area gate, where the guards promptly brought me inside. There I lost consciousness, and after some initial treatment, I recovered. (Chandan, 2024d).*



Figure 10: Students carrying a wounded girl to safety after Chhatra League activists attacked quota reform protesters at Dhaka University on July 15. Source: © AFP/The Daily Star, 2024.



Figure 11: A female student, who said she was just 17, being carried away in a prison van after police obstructed the “March for Justice” near the BMA Bhaban in Khulna city on July 31. Source: © Habibur Rahman/The Daily Star, 2024.

On the other hand, children were not safe at that time. For instance, during this movement, 12-year-old madrasa student Zobaid Hossain Emon died after being shot from a Rapid Action Battalion helicopter (Jagonews24.com, 2024). This was not the only case; several reports show almost 121 children were killed during the July uprising (The Daily Star, 2024c).

Despite these challenges, women played a significant role in the protests. Their

contribution challenged traditional gender norms and highlighted the intersectionality of the movement. Figures such as Nusrat Tabassum, who became a symbol of resistance after a widely circulated photograph showed her standing defiantly in front of armed police, inspired many people to join the protest (Islam, 2024).



Figure 12: Abdul Ahad, 4, loved lollies, chips, and chicken. On July 19, he was killed by a stray bullet during the student-led protests and unrest in Bangladesh. Source: © Abdul Ahad’s family/Al Jazeera, 2024.

## 2.6 LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN DEATH TOLL AND ARREST FIGURES

The July movement in Bangladesh was marked by a lack of transparency regarding the death toll and arrest figures, raising concerns about accountability and human rights violations. Official reports were inconsistent, and independent investigations were often obstructed, leading to widespread mistrust of government narratives.

The government reported that 625 people were killed and over 18,000 injured during the protests, but human rights organisations and media outlets suggested these numbers were significantly underestimated (Reuters, 2024). Witnesses and civil society groups alleged that the actual death toll was higher, citing numerous unreported fatalities during clashes with law enforcement and political militias. Witness accounts described security forces using live ammunition against unarmed protesters, including students and bystanders, often in densely populated areas (The Daily Observer, 2024). Many families of the deceased reported facing intimidation and surveillance, discouraging them from speaking out.

Underreporting of arrests occurred, with thousands of activists, students, and bystanders arbitrarily detained, many without formal charges (Human Rights Watch, 2023b). Detainees described inhumane conditions in overcrowded facilities, with some alleging

physical and psychological abuse. Family members and legal representatives faced significant barriers in accessing detainees or obtaining accurate information about their status, further obscuring the scale of the crackdown. Independent journalists and human rights organisations to verify casualty and arrest figures were systematically hindered by internet blackouts, censorship, and restrictions on movement. Activists attempting to document the events faced threats, harassment, and detention.

## 2.7 VIOLATION OF FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND EXPRESSION

The events of July 2024 clearly illustrated the systematic suppression of fundamental rights in Bangladesh as the state implemented restrictive laws to suppress opposition. These acts directly violated Bangladesh's Constitution, which under Article 39 provides the right to freedom of speech and expression and under Article 37 the right to assembly (*The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972*).



Figure 13: Bangladesh Police are detaining a man at the University of Dhaka premises, a day after the clash between anti-quota protesters and Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) members (Ruling Party Student Wing), at the Dhaka University area, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on July 17, 2024. Bangladeshi students are mourning classmates killed in protests over civil service hiring rules, a day after the government ordered the indefinite closure of schools nationwide to restore order. Source: © Zabed Hasnain Chowdhury/Amnesty International, 2024.

The press suffered suppression during the protests, with a lengthy internet blackout severely restricting public access to information and thus compromising accountability and transparency (Bhandari, 2024c). Independent journalists encountered violence, harassment, and legal threats while covering the unrest. Social media platforms used for organising protests and documenting events in real time were heavily monitored by authorities (The Daily Star, 2024c). People sharing material disparaging the government were arrested, underscoring even more the limitation of digital rights.



The constitutional provisions underline the state’s obligation to ensure citizens’ rights to free expression and assembly, emphasising that these rights are foundational to a democratic society. However, the state’s actions during the protests contradicted such obligations, drawing broad criticism from human rights organisations. The suppression of these fundamental rights not only undermined democratic principles but also deepened public mistrust in state institutions. Addressing these violations is critical to restoring trust in governance and upholding constitutional values.

## 2.8 EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE BY POLICE AND RAB

Police and the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) used force extensively and brutally in Bangladesh’s July 2024 protests, therefore violating international human rights norms (Homes, 2024). Security forces used live rounds, rubber bullets, and tear gas against crowds, even in peaceful events (Menon, 2024). Amnesty International and the BBC documented cases where individuals, including minors, were shot at close range, leading to fatalities and severe injuries.



Figure 14: Protesters through the capital’s Central Shaheed Minar on August 2, demanding justice for those killed during the quota reform protests. Source: © Palash Khan/The Daily Star, 2024.

The most horrific events were in Dhaka and Rangpur, where protestors experienced violent crackdowns (Ethirajan, 2024). Witnesses from Rangpur described a chaotic scene where police opened fire on protesters, leaving dozens dead and hundreds injured (International Federation for Human Rights, 2024). In Dhaka, university campuses became

battlefields as police and RAB units used tear gas and water cannons against students inside dormitories and classrooms (Alam, 2024).

Despite overwhelming evidence of excessive force, the Bangladeshi government has failed to hold law enforcement officials accountable. While official statements from the Home Ministry acknowledged some “operational missteps”, no meaningful investigations or prosecutions of officers involved in egregious acts of violence have been conducted.

The United Nations and several international human rights organisations called for immediate investigations into the use of excessive force. In a statement, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) described the violence as a breach of fundamental human rights and urged the Bangladeshi government to ensure accountability (OHCHR, 2024).

## 2.9 SECRET DETENTION CENTRES AND ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE

After the protests, genuine reports appeared about the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), DGFI, Detective Branch (DB), and the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit (CTTC) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police-run secret incarceration centres named 'Aynaghor' (VOA News, 2024). Allegedly used for detention without proper proceedings, these facilities were allegedly used to hold activists, protestors, and opposition members, therefore generating severe concerns regarding violations of human rights, including torture and forced disappearance (Hossain, 2024).



Figure 15: Enforced disappearances: Inquiry commission finds eight detention centres. Source: © Biplob Chakraborty/ The Daily Star, 2024.

Family members of imprisoned protestors regularly stated that plainclothes officials seized them and disappeared for days or weeks. Activists claimed that other prisoners were kept in secret sites without contact with family or legal representation. Former hostages alleged terrible circumstances in these facilities, including physical assaults, electric shocks,

waterboarding, and extended periods of isolation, along with leaked evidence and witness accounts (The Daily Star, 2024d).

The RAB has long been accused of violating the law, and its secret detentions during the July protests brought more attention. These facilities have been documented by independent investigations and civil society reports, but security forces have resisted inspections and accountability.

## **2.10 ARREST OF MIGRANT WORKERS**

A court in the United Arab Emirates sentenced 57 Bangladeshis to long prison terms for organising protests against the Bangladeshi government on Emirati soil (Gritten 2024). The protests in July were against decisions made by Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government at the time (Al Jazeera, 2024a). Charges included inciting riots, disrupting public security, and endangering public and private property. Three people were sentenced to life, others got penalties ranging from 10 to 11 years (BBC, 2024).

In September 2024, UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan pardoned the 57 Bangladeshis following diplomatic engagement with Bangladesh's interim Prime Minister, Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus (Al Jazeera, 2024d). The pardon prevented the implementation of sentences and initiated deportation measures. Human rights organisations welcomed the decision but highlighted the need for greater protection of migrant workers' rights in the UAE and beyond. These incidents highlighted the unstable situation migrant workers find themselves in negotiating foreign political and judicial systems.

## **2.11 AUGUST 5TH: A DAY OF CELEBRATION AND TERROR**

“This is the biggest crisis that Sheikh Hasina has faced over her 15 straight years in power,” said Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center. “It is a really big deal and striking because it seemed to come out of nowhere.” (Campbell, 2024)

August 5th, 2024, became a historic day for Bangladesh, a mix of joy for some and sadness for many. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned after being in power for 15 years (Wong, 2024). She fled the country as violence grew, sparked by protests calling for her removal due to economic struggles and government policies. Her exit brought both relief and uncertainty for citizens in this moment of change (Paul & Ganguly, 2024).

Violence intensified as protesters took over government buildings, including the Prime Minister's residence, looting its property and attacking symbols of national pride (Chughtai & Ali, 2024). Reports said at least 56 people died on that day due to violent clashes between protesters and security forces (Paul & Ganguly, 2024b).



Figure 16: Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina Resigns; Leaves Dhaka Palace For 'Safer Place'. Source: © India.com, 2024.

On August 5th, with Hasina leaving for exile, the nation faced an uncertain future. General Waker-Uz-Zaman, the new army chief, announced that an interim government would take over while calling for peace and unity (Hasnat et al., 2024). He promised justice and efforts to calm the nation, but fears of more violence lingered.

For many, the day marked the end of a long political struggle and a new beginning (Hasnat et al., 2024). However, the violence and ongoing unrest made celebrations difficult. Garment factories were closed indefinitely, worsening the economic hardship for the already struggling population.

The United States and other international groups urged the formation of a fair and peaceful interim government. They hoped this would bring stability to the country. Despite these calls, for many Bangladeshis, August 5th remains a symbol of frustration and change as the nation struggles to find peace amidst political divides and uncertainty.

### 3. SITUATIONS OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN BANGLADESH

#### 3.1 A FOCUS ON INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN 2024

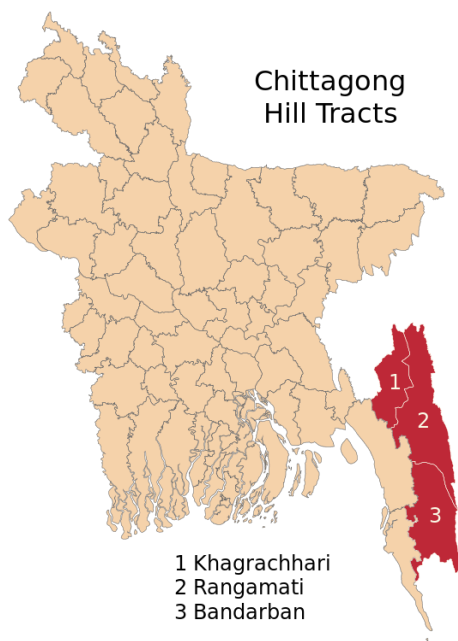


Figure 17: Chittagong Hill Tracts Location. Source: © Furfur, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>> , via Wikimedia Commons

Bangladesh’s population is primarily composed of Muslims of Bengali descent. However, the country cannot be described as ethnically or religiously homogeneous. According to the 2022 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, approximately 1.6 million inhabitants belong to Indigenous communities, comprising at least 54 groups who communicate using over 35 languages other than the official State language, Bengali (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2022). However, Indigenous organisations dispute these figures and estimate their population to be between three and five million, citing issues such as undercounting and obstacles to reliable data gathering (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2024). Besides having a variety of indigenous communities, the customs vary across each other.

Bangladesh has yet to formally recognise the term ‘indigenous’, leaving these communities vulnerable without protection in economic, political, and legal spheres. Although the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, adopted in 2011, recognises people with “special ethnic identities”, it lacks recognised customary laws or remedies for collective rights violations. Furthermore, Article 6(2) of the Constitution states that all citizens of Bangladesh are ethnic Bengalis (Chowdhury, 2014), erasing the distinct ethnic identities and limiting access to recognition, representation, and protection.

Tarique Rahman, a key figure in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), publicly denounced the “politics of minority division” and advocated for a unified Bangladeshi

identity. Without policies addressing historical grievances and systemic inequalities, such statements risk being dismissed as political posturing.



Figure 18: Tribal People in Chittagong Hill Tracts. Source: © Imran Hossain Khan Imu, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>> , via Wikimedia Commons

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), known for its hilly terrain and diverse heritage, comprises the districts of Rangamati, Khagrachhari, and Bandarban. Renowned for its distinct ethnic and cultural diversity, the CHT and the northern plains are home to most Indigenous communities, including the Chakma, Marma, Santal, and Garo. These communities have deep ties to their ancestral lands, where they continue to practice traditional resource management and agriculture. However, state-driven development initiatives, including hydroelectric schemes, monoculture crops, environmental deterioration, and land dispossession, pose growing challenges to these territories (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2024). These challenges are deeply rooted in historical policies and actions that have marginalised the Indigenous communities, including forced displacements and alienation.

Indigenous peoples retreated further into the hills due to forest conservation policies and Bengali settlers' placement by the central government in the 1950s, resulting in their exclusion and resentment. In response, Indigenous student groups formed a political organisation in 1972 to establish Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) to represent their demands for self-determination, preservation of cultural identity, and protection of their ancestral lands. The decades-long armed conflict ended in 1997 with a Peace Accord between the PCJSS and the Government of Bangladesh, which recognised the CHT area as a tribal inhabited region with its governance system. The Peace Accord includes building blocks for future self-determination and the promise to withdraw temporary military camps. However, large parts of the Peace Accord have yet to be implemented, and the CHT remains a militarised zone under governmental control (Dhamai & Drong, 2014).

## 3.2 THE VIOLENCE AND ATTACKS AGAINST RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The latest statistics undertaken in 2022 illustrated that the percentage of citizens identifying as Muslim is 91.04 percent, and those who identify themselves as Hindu is 7.95 percent. Other minorities, including Christians, Buddhists, and other religious groups, are respectively 0.30 percent, 0.60 percent, and 0.12 percent (Subrata Banarjee, 2024). Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the violence against religious minorities has become one of the greatest issues in the State, and the pursuit of equality and human rights protections among different religious groups has become particularly hard. Ain o Salish Kendra, a Bangladeshi human rights organisation, attempted to quantify the attacks against religious minorities within the state. According to the report based on the statistics from 2013 to 2019, there were at least 3,679 incidents affecting the Hindu community, including vandalism, arson, and targeted violence (Subrata Banarjee, 2024). Apart from Hindus, other religious minorities have also been the targets of violent attacks. Recorded by officials, in September 2012, allegations were made against the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jamaat, and Awami League for their involvement in the burning of Buddhist temples in Ramu, destroying at least ten Buddhist temples and 2,100 homes (Subrata Banarjee, 2024).

The facts indicate that the Hasina Government failed to provide sufficient protection for religious minorities and deliver justice and human rights guarantees. Ongoing terror and attacks have implanted in society, forcing minorities to lose their sense of belonging. Such a situation continues even with the resignation of the Hasina Government in 2024, and with the political unrest, religious minorities even face severe and more systematic violence threatening their lives, basic living conditions, as well as culture. Therefore, attacks and human rights violations against minorities in 2024 are not isolated issues but the continuance of the long-existing deprivation in Bangladesh. As Shafiqul Islam, a university professor, said, “This attack happened because of oppression over the last 15 years” (Uttom, 2023).

## 3.3 CHANGING SITUATIONS AND DILEMMAS FACED BY MINORITIES

### 3.3.1 *Political Shift on Indigenous Rights Post-Sheikh Hasina: Mixed Outcomes*

The fall of Sheikh Hasina’s regime in August 2024 and the establishment of an interim government led by Nobel Peace Laureate Dr Muhammed Yunus briefly raised hopes for the protection and democratic reform of ethnic minority rights in Bangladesh, but issues remain unsolved, with persistent challenges and violence towards the Indigenous communities continuing to define the landscape.

#### 3.3.1.1 *historical context and persistent challenges*

In April 2022, armed individuals affiliated with Lama Rubber Industries Ltd. raided Mro and Tripura villages in Bandarban, setting fire to homes and violently removing families

to seize their ancestral land and continue to harass the community with at least 11 recorded attempts until January 2023 (Kapaeng Foundation, 2023). Despite visits from the National Human Rights Commission and district officials, the affected villagers remain under constant threat of violence and intimidation (IWGIA, 2024).



Figure 19: Greed for land burns hills to ashes. Source: © Abu Azad & U She Thowai Marma Available at <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/greed-land-burns-hills-ashes-412390>



Figure 20: A distraught Chamrung Mro, 26, along with her two children, stands on the pile of grey ash and rubble where her house used to stand in remote Rengyan Mro Para in Bandarban's Lama upazila. Source: © Mong Sing Hai Marma Available at: <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/amid-cold-no-food-shelter-3212146>

By the first half of 2024 alone, 100 incidents of human rights violations against Indigenous communities were reported, including land grabbing, physical assaults, and forced displacement, affecting about 5,448 Indigenous people, including members of the Bawm village (Kapaeng Foundation & ActionAid Bangladesh, 2023).



The situation deteriorated further in September 2024, when the death of Mohammad Mamun, a Bengali settler killed during an attempted motorbike theft, catalysed a wave of communal violence in the region. Although Mamun's death was unrelated to the Jumma community, settlers incited attacks by accusing Indigenous peoples of the killing. Over three days, mobs carried out widespread violence, resulting in the deaths of at least four Indigenous individuals, injuries to more than 80 others, and the displacement of hundreds of families.

Cultural landmarks, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council office and the Moitri Bihara Buddhist temple, were targeted, highlighting the deep-seated cultural and territorial tensions. Security forces, accused of acting with bias, suppressed protests by Indigenous youth, further escalating the violence with additional deaths and injuries (Minority Rights Group, 2024; Reuters, 2024).

The violence highlights both the fragile state of interethnic relations and the government's consistent failure to address structural inequalities or protect vulnerable communities.

#### 3.3.1.2 SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION AND THREATS TO INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

An Electoral Reform Commission was established following Hasina's resignation. Initially, it was seen as a positive step towards improving democratic processes, but the commission faced criticism for excluding representative religious and ethnic minorities, raising concerns about inclusion. This omission highlights the ongoing challenges in the political representation of minority groups, a matter that persisted under Hasina's leadership and continues to hinder the current government.

In another case, the construction of a 1,036-kilometre international border with India and Myanmar along the three hilly districts of CHT (Rangamati, Khagrachhari, and Bandarban), aimed at the fight against smuggling as well as boosting trade and tourism, has displaced hundreds of Indigenous families. Managed by the Army Corps of Engineers, the project has been widely criticised for its environmental destruction and disregard for Indigenous land rights. Upon completion, it is projected to displace around 1,500 families, further destroying and losing access to their homes, farms, plantations, orchards, schools, temples, and mosques (Hill Voice, 2023).

In numerous regions where the project has been or is being carried out, Indigenous Peoples own and manage lands according to customary systems. However, state representatives are asserting that many of these lands are *khas* (state-owned) and are even pressuring local headmen to recognise them as such. These ongoing violations, like land grabbing, are part of the systemic oppression faced by Indigenous peoples in the CHT, highlighting the failure of the Bangladeshi government to protect the rights and livelihood of the minority.

The interim government risks continuing the conditions that contribute to instability and threaten Indigenous rights in the region if it fails to address the systemic injustices and

implement necessary reforms. This inaction threatens the region's social and political stability and efforts towards unity (Bangladesh Indigenous Rights Forum, 2024).

### 3.3.1.3 LEGAL AND POLITICAL DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Despite the provisions of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord, indigenous communities in Bangladesh, particularly those in the CHT, continue to face political marginalisation. Promises of greater autonomy through the CHT Regional Council and Hill District Councils have not been effectively implemented (PCJSS, 2024). In 2018, the Bangladeshi government eliminated quotas for ethnic minorities, further reducing their political and economic inclusion in the decision-making process. Indigenous people now hold less than one percent of these government roles (International Labour Organisation, 2023).

Indigenous women and girls are particularly vulnerable due to their discrimination and exclusion from social, political, and economic life. At least 107 victims were subjected to violence, including sexual violence (including rape and attempted rape), abduction, and physical assaults by state actors and non-state actors:

- *On January 10th, 2024, a Bengali settler youth named Mohammad Babu abducted one Tripura girl student studying in class VIII in Birendra Kishore High School.*
- *On March 14th, 2024, six Mro indigenous women and girls fell prey to an attack and merciless beating meted out by one Muslim Bengali settler in Alikadam Sadar Union of Alikadam Sadar Upazila.*
- *On June 10th, 2024, one tender-aged Chakma girl was attempted rape by one outsider Bengali labourer engaged in the construction of the Border Road in the Dumdumya Union area of Jurachari Upazila under the Rangamati Hill District (PCJSS, 2024).*

Amnesty International has reported an eight percent rise in gender-based violence cases since 2023. With perpetrators rarely held accountable, victims are often denied justice, highlighting the broader systemic failure to protect and support the minorities of this country (Amnesty International, 2024).

### 3.3.1.4 CULTURAL SUPPRESSION AND EROSION

Indigenous communities in Bangladesh face cultural marginalisation due to the government's failure to recognise them as 'Indigenous'. The 2011 Constitution amendment, which declared all people to be "Bengali", essentially eliminated the various identities of the country's ethnic minorities, decreasing their collective rights and cultural autonomy (Partha Shankar Saha, 2024).

Intentional attacks directed at Indigenous cultural symbols, like the removal of statues honouring leaders of the Santal uprising and disruption of Indigenous religious events, reflect a broader effort to suppress their heritage and instil fear within the community. Acts of destroying temple lands, destruction of sacred grounds for tourism development, and forced religious conversion are some of the documented attacks that constitute cultural erasure of the Indigenous community (Kapaeng Foundation & ActionAid Bangladesh, 2023). Removing

access to ancestral land not only disrupts their spiritual connection to the land but also hampers the generational knowledge building and threatens their heritage (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2024).

The impacts of violence and cultural suppression are beyond the immediate displacement. They create long-term psychological scars of trauma to the Indigenous community. This destroys their social fabric as well as mental well-being for generations. Furthermore, the absence of government intervention or legal reforms leaves the community with limited recourse. The ongoing discrimination perpetuates a cycle of systemic violence in the community (UNDP, 2024).

Another example of discrimination concerns limited access to education for indigenous students. In Bangladesh, the education system uses Bengali as the primary medium of instruction, placing Indigenous students at a significant disadvantage due to the linguistic barriers and failure of cultural inclusion of their unique history and various cultures. While the 2010 National Education Policy recognises the right to education in one's mother tongue, its practice has been inconsistent (Minority Rights Group, 2023). This creates a significant language barrier for Indigenous students, who struggle to understand the curriculum and fall behind their Bengali peers (UNICEF, 2024). According to the Bangladesh Education Statistics 2022, only 35 percent of Indigenous children progress to secondary education, compared to 60 percent of the general population.

## **3.4 INSECURE SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN 2024**

### ***3.4.1 constant violence and discrimination before august***

The violence and derogation against religious minorities has been happening since the beginning of this year. In the election on January 7th, 2024, the Awami League won for a fourth straight term, which has been alleged to strengthen further the position in parliament of a group of people considered a direct threat to religious and ethnic minorities (Hossain, 2024a). Religious and ethnic minorities, the most vulnerable of Bangladesh's people, were the first to be impacted by the alleged eroding democratic institutions, as most cases of organised violence under political patronage are directed against them in the Muslim-majority nation (Hossain, 2024a). Communal attacks against the Hindu Community occurred in Faridpur, Sirajganj, Bagerhat, Jhenaidah, Pirojpur, Kushtia, Madaripur, Lalmonirhat, Daudkandi, Thakurgaon, Munshiganj, and Gaibandha, among other places in Bangladesh. Other religious minorities, such as Christians, also confronted suppression. On January 12th, 2024, tribal Christian-dominated villages experienced a power blackout in which the local electricity supplier could not restore a connection to irrigation projects in Gobindaganj, supposedly on the orders of the MP (Hossain, 2024a).

Furthermore, the interreligious forum's findings are based on media reports from July 2023 to June 2024, during which 45 members of minority communities were murdered, and

there were ten attempted murders and 36 death threats (Vatican News, 2024). According to the statistics gathered by Ain o Salish Kendra, from January to July 2024, 28 violent incidents against religious minorities happened, 22 attacks against their statues and 20 attacks on houses were recorded, which caused 38 injuries (Ain o Salish Kendra, 2024).

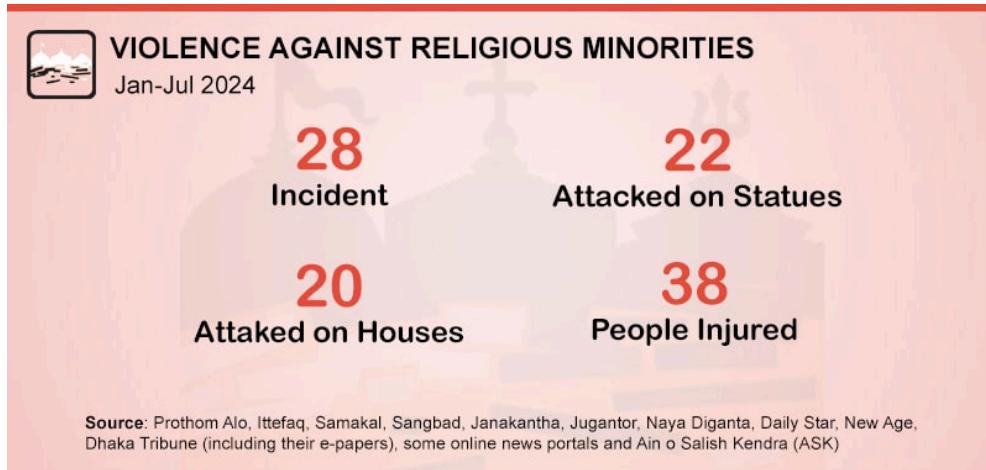


Figure 21: E-Bulletin of Violence Against Religious Minorities Jan-Jul 2024. Source: © Ain O Salish Kendra, 2024. Available at <<https://www.askbd.org/ask/2024/08/10/violence-against-religious-minorities-jan-jul-2024/>>

In all these attacks, the violence against the Hindu community was particularly fierce. On July 10th, 2024, when Magistrate Muhammad Moniruzzaman visited the newly constructed Miranjilla Colony in Dhaka to rehabilitate the Hindu minorities, Muhammad Auwal Hossain, a local councillor, and his supporters disagreed with the decision and assaulted the Hindus (O. Staff, 2024). During the event, the attackers ransacked and vandalised numerous Hindu homes, and at least 60 Hindus were injured due to the assault (O. Staff, 2024).

The Christian community was also attacked: Philemon Baske, a Catholic and Santal leader of the northern Gaibandha district, said the Christian-majority community came under several attacks since July 18th; Santal tribal people tried to file a criminal case but failed due to the internet blackout. On July 25th, rice crops in some 1.5 hectares were destroyed by another group, and since mid-July, local Muslims have occupied over 13.35 hectares of land in the Bagda farm area of Gaibandha (Hossain, 2024b).

### ***3.4.2. violence since the fall of the previous regime***

On August 5th, the former prime minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, resigned and left for India following huge nationwide protests by student groups. After the government's collapse, reports surfaced about attacks on temples, businesses, and individuals associated with minority groups, specifically those with non-Bengali and non-Sunni Islamic backgrounds (Ibrahim, 2024).

According to the Preliminary Analysis of Recent Protests and Unrest in Bangladesh issued by the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission (OHCHR) on August 16th, 2024, attacks against minorities, including Hindus, especially in the days

immediately after the change of government, constantly occurred. On August 5th and 6th, religious minorities faced attacks, looting, vandalism of temples, arson attacks on homes and businesses, and killings in 27 districts, and several places of worship were also damaged, including an International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) temple in Meherpur, Khulna division, which was vandalised and set on fire (OHCHR, 2024).

More reports and news articles indicated a comprehensive illustration that religious minorities have been attacked and targeted specifically from all aspects of their human rights. The worship and culture of religious minorities were assaulted and attacked through the destruction of their cultural sites and worship, as well as attacks against the leadership of the community. Parishad's group estimates there have been more than 200 incidents where temples, religious crematoriums, and other places of worship have also been vandalised and attacked by mobs (VOA Bangla, 2024). Many leaders of Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad, the top Hindu religious body that oversees the nationwide Puja festival of Hindus, have become the target of the attacks since August 5th (Hossain, 2024b). Attacks on properties, houses, and businesses of religious minorities were even more widespread and gradually became nationwide. Rana Dasgupta, the General Secretary of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC), provided that,

*The Radhagobinda temple in Kuakata of the southern coastal district of Patuakhali was looted and vandalized. In Keshabpur of Jashore, a southwestern district, at least 40 Hindu houses were looted and vandalized. About 50 shops were torched in Chourongibazar of the northern district of Dinajpur.*  
(Hossain, 2024b)

The acts of violence following August 5th reflect the ongoing symbolic violence of ethno-religiosity in Bangladeshi nation-building, stemming from unresolved issues of the Pakistan project. They are closely linked to the long-standing disenfranchisement and dispossession of Hindus in Bangladesh (Ibrahim, 2024).

When news of attacks on minorities spread, the public responded by organising community protection for homes and temples, especially in urban areas. However, victims faced stigma as beneficiaries of the previous regime, highlighting a collective denial that such attacks extended beyond political patronage (Ibrahim, 2024). This denial, evident in testimonies from places like Mymensingh and Khulna, reflects Bangladesh's ongoing struggle with its national identity and the gradual marginalisation of Hindus. True accountability requires acknowledging the state's role in enabling these attacks (Ibrahim, 2024).

### **3.4.3 the interim government and religious minorities**

On August 8th, the Interim Government took charge and attempted to change the situation, calling for the halt of the attacks and derogation against the religious minorities and establishing access to justice and protection for the minorities. The Chief Advisor to the Interim Government, Dr Yunus, condemned the attacks on minority communities in the country as "heinous". According to the Religious Affairs Adviser to the Interim Government,

AFM Khalid Hossain, with the destruction of places of worship and other properties, a list of such destruction has been compiled, and a hotline has been established to report on attacks on minorities (OHCHR, 2024).

Unfortunately, the attacks against members and properties of religious minorities continued after the Interim Government took over. Prothom Alo carried out investigations that revealed that up to August 20th, it is evident that at least 1,068 houses and business establishments of the minority community have been damaged, mainly in the country's southwestern division, Khulna (Staff Correspondent, 2024). The BHBCUC also reported that the violence persisted and reached over 200 attacks in more than 50 districts by August 20th (Staff Correspondent, 2024). As Rana Dasgupta told Prothom Alo, the attack was not only a matter of numbers, and the damage caused to the religious minorities should not be limited to destruction and death. He said,

*If one house is attacked, people in ten other houses are in panic. [...] For 50 years now, when political scenarios change, when there are anti-government movements and in other circumstances, the minority community is targeted. The aim is to rid Bangladesh of the minorities.* (Staff Correspondent, 2024)

Although widespread violence has partly subsided following the interim government, minorities said that the fear of persecution still spread among them during the time of political unrest. From August to November, the religious minorities have protested for their rights. On November 2nd, 2024, thousands of Hindus gathered to demand protection from the Interim Government for religious minorities from the attacks and violence from the Muslim majority since the resignation of the former Government (Negi, 2024). While there were sedition charges against Hindu community leaders, minority communities also asked for Yunus's administration, referred to as an "advisory council" responsible for enacting democratic reforms and organising new elections, to take action (Negi, 2024).

On November 5th, 2024, a Muslim named Osman Ali shared a Facebook post about the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), which triggered the crowd to trap him in the Hazari Gali area of Chittagong (The Business Standard, 2024a). When the police arrived, they attempted to free him. The situation escalated as bricks and acid were thrown at the officers, injuring nine, including one who sustained burns from the acid (The Business Standard, 2024a). Eighty-two individuals have been arrested in connection with the attack. The deputy police commissioner noted that most are believed to be ISKCON supporters, with some possible involvement from the Muslim community. Investigations are ongoing (The Business Standard, 2024a). Meanwhile, Osman Ali had also been placed in custody (The Business Standard, 2024a).



Figure 22: Chinmoy Krishna Das showed a victory sign while he was taken in a police van after the court ordered him detained pending further proceedings in Chattogram on November 26th, 2024. Source: ©AP photo, 2024. Available at

<https://dims.apnews.com/dims4/default/69a89bd/2147483647/strip/true/crop/6720x4480+0+0/resize/1440x960!/format/webp/quality/90/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.apnews.com%2F95%2F97%2F0ab12e521fda58943e7c96208e1d%2Fae99368576ad491f8266d82a19519056>

The tension then again reached its peak on November 26th, 2024, when Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari, a spokesperson of the Sanatan Jagaran Mancha and former leader of the ISKCON was arrested and charged with sedition. Chinmoy Krishna Das was accused of raising a flag on a stand displaying Bangladesh’s national flag, which allegedly violated Section 124(A) of the Penal Code and thus constituted “desecration and contempt for the country’s sovereignty, describing it as treasonous activities aimed at destabilising the nation by fostering an anarchic environment” (Darka Tribune, 2024). On November 26th, the Court rejected Chinmoy Krishna Das’s bail petition filed by his lawyer and ordered him to be sent to jail (The Business Standard, 2024b). On the same day, the conflict was catalysed by the arrest and rejection of the bail petition and gave rise to clashes between security personnel and Chinmoy Krishna Das’s supporters, during which a lawyer was killed (NDTV, 2024).

Later, on November 27th, a lawyer brought the issue of banning ISKCON as a militant organisation to the Supreme Court and, a day later, the Court dismissed the petition with the rule, “Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians... believe in coexistence, and this harmony will not be broken” (Deutsche Welle, 2024). Shafiqul Alam, press secretary of Bangladesh’s chief adviser, acknowledged some incidents of attacks on religious minorities immediately after the former Prime Minister left the country and stated, “The interim government believes in freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of assembly for every religious institution. We also believe in ensuring all rights” (Deutsche Welle, 2024). The Interim Government has constantly announced that Chinmoy Krishna Das was arrested solely because of the specific charge of sedition rather than the allegation of religious discrimination (Desk, 2024). However, this arrest led to communal tensions among religious minorities (Deutsche Welle, 2024).

Manindra Kumar Nath, president of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, a non-profit advocating for religious minorities, claimed, “The demand for a minority protection act and a minority commission, etc., has existed for a long time”, and these demands were in Hasina’s regime as well (Deutsche Welle, 2024). However, the discussion on excluding secularism from the constitution of Bangladesh is ongoing, and the execution of such may threaten minority rights in the country (Deutsche Welle, 2024).

## **3.5 CONSTRUCTING FURTHER PROTECTION FOR MINORITY COMMUNITIES**

### ***3.5.1 The Community and the State in Addressing Indigenous Persecution***

#### **3.5.1.1 Community Resilience**

Indigenous communities have always demonstrated resilience to overcome various environmental and socio-political challenges. For example, the Munda community in Bangladesh’s coastal region has developed measures to overcome water scarcity. To ensure water security, they have adopted rainwater harvesting systems, cultivated salt-tolerant crops, and diversified their income streams. With the help of locally driven communication networks and community-based disaster preparedness education, Indigenous communities have successfully strengthened their ability to face climate-related challenges (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2024).

Beyond environmental adaptability, they have displayed tremendous social cohesion and collective action in the face of threats to land grabbing and violence. In particular, PCJSS has played an important role in organising and mobilising Indigenous peoples to resist displacement and push for the full execution of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord.

#### **3.5.1.2 The Role of the State**

Bangladesh has ratified key instruments like the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 107 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), but implementation of national policies has been inadequate. Despite the 1997 CHT Peace Accord, implementation gaps persist, hindering progress toward conflict resolution and the protection of Indigenous land rights. Effective mechanisms for land dispute adjudication and strengthened legal protections are essential to address these challenges (Bangladesh Feminist Archives, 2024).

Additionally, ensuring equitable political representation is pivotal. Indigenous communities are frequently excluded from policy-making processes, including recent reforms in Bangladesh. Efforts must focus on enabling meaningful participation through institutional representation and respecting their right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) on developmental projects impacting their lands (UNDP, 2024). By adopting a collaborative and transparent approach, the government can uphold its commitments to Indigenous rights while promoting social equity and justice.



### ***3.5.2. Resolving systemic causes of the situation of religious minorities***

#### **3.5.2.1 Inequality in political system**

Religious minorities are not represented enough in political systems, which leads to difficulties in stating their own requirements, establishing diverse narratives, and creating equality within the official systems. For example, after the Interim Government takes place, the interim government is expected to reform the state and its institutions free from all forms of discrimination. However, while six committees have started to propose changes to the bodies of the Constitution, judiciary, police, public administration, election, and anti-corruption bodies, all members of these committees are Bengal Muslims, and none of these members is from religious or minority communities, which represent about ten percent of the 170 million population in this Muslim-majority South Asian country (Hossain, 2024c; S. Staff, 2024). The lack of minority narratives within the power system brings about concerns that the status of religious minorities, as well as other minority groups, will be overlooked again and face consistent attacks and violence during any unstable era as they have confronted previously. While the Interim Government has expressed grave concerns about the rights of religious minorities and violence against them, people still call for more direct approaches to resolving their dilemmas, expressing their requirements, and terminating the systematic deprivation caused by the biased officials and government (Chatterjee, 2024).

On October 22nd, 2024, Archbishop Kevin Randall, the apostolic nuncio of the Vatican to Bangladesh, wrote to Yunus that the Interim Government should continue to represent all the citizens of Bangladesh, not just the majority. What he said in the letter, to some degree, explains why religious minorities have been marginalised for so long and why a diversely representative government should be required: “Without representation, their needs will be overlooked and their concerns forgotten. They become captives in their territory and subject to the majority as if second-class citizens” (Palma, 2024).

#### **3.5.2.2 Inufficient Protection in the Legal System**

Legislation in Bangladesh does not provide sufficient equal status and human rights protections for the human rights of religious minorities. From the very beginning, the Constitution of Bangladesh has been criticised for being Bengali-biased, denying the existence of non-Bengali-speaking peoples. Although at the beginning of the legislation of the Constitution of Bangladesh, secularism, nationalism, socialism, and democracy were regarded as the founding principles, after 17-time changes, secularism was degraded by *Bismillah-Ar-Rahman-Ar-Rahim*, meaning “In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful”, making Bangladesh a Muslim-leading state (Staub, 2024). It was only in 2011 that secularism was reformed in the Constitution again. The structure of the legislation determines that there can hardly be a non-biased state when the Constitution *per se* implies inequality and exclusiveness. Furthermore, communication laws such as the Digital Security Act were used to target minority believers, especially Hindus, accusing them of “offending”

the religious sentiments of the Muslim majority, potentially resulting in more serious penalties for religious minorities for posting offensive content on Facebook (Staub, 2024).

Uzzal Azim, a Garo Catholic and leader of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, a leading ethnic minority rights body, informed that appropriate reform of the Constitution is required to preserve the country's multicultural and multi-faith character. Additionally, regional and international organisations called for an end to the "absolute exclusion" of indigenous peoples and religious minorities (Palma, 2024).

### 3.5.2.3 MISINFORMATION AND SYSTEMATIC DISCRIMINATION IN SOCIETY

The discrimination and intimidation targeting religious minorities, threatening their social status and religious freedom, have become a constant situation in Bangladesh. The vulnerability of religious minorities in society brings about the situation in which religious and ethnic minorities are often victimised during political movements in Bangladesh. Dasgupta stated that no political movement ends in Bangladesh without harming religious minorities, especially Hindus (Hossain, 2024b). A Bangladeshi expatriate discussed how discrimination and deprivation against Christians and other minorities in Bangladesh have been building for decades. (Ayers, 2024). Since the discrimination and clashes among religious groups are deeply rooted and composed of social, cultural, and political reasons, the mere change of the concentration of one specific religion is insufficient to resolve the problem. Legislation should be enacted to protect minority rights, identify minority communities nationwide, and strengthen security measures in those areas. Action should be taken to support minorities in all respects, including promoting change through the education system to establish tolerant, diverse, and non-discriminatory conditions for all people embracing different religions, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations (Subrata Banarjee, 2024).

While changes have been made generally after the July revolution, various student organisations and other ordinary people, including Muslims, have been reportedly forming groups to protect minorities and maintain vigilance over religious sites belonging to minority communities (OHCHR, 2024). The state and society should be cautious about disinformation and misinformation, which can cause and have caused fears and divergence, undermining efforts to stabilise the country when the situation remains volatile (Kapur & Mohsina, 2024). Therefore, the establishment of true and precise narratives precluding the disinformation that can deepen the discrimination and divergence in Bangladesh has become a serious challenge in building an equal and peaceful society for all groups, including religious minorities.

## CONCLUSION

Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971 after a nine-month liberation war marked by severe atrocities and violations of human rights. Unfortunately, even after 53 years, the

country's situation regarding human rights protection remains dire. The year 2024 has particularly highlighted a dramatic increase in human rights abuses, especially following the recent elections and the violent protests in July. Although the fall of the fascist regime led by Sheikh Hasina signifies a crucial moment in Bangladesh's history, human rights violations persist under the current interim government. The rights of minority populations continue to be under threat, irrespective of the political landscape. The underlying factors contributing to human rights violations are not solely political, they are also influenced by religious and social dynamics. This suggests that a change in government does not inherently ensure better protection of human rights. It is vital for people to enhance their social and legal understanding of human rights and to actively advocate for the protection of minority rights.

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