Home Office

Report of a fact-finding mission
Bangladesh: Political situation

Conducted between 7 June 2026 and 15 June 2026

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Executive summary

From 7 to 15 June 2026, 3 officials from the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT) carried out a Fact Finding Mission (FFM) to Bangladesh. The purpose of the mission was to gather information from a range of sources about the political situation since the July 2024 uprising and the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in early August of the same year. Below is a summary of information provided by sources.

The political situation has stabilised and generally improved since the July 2024 uprising, following the interim government period and the formation of a Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led government following the February 2026 elections. Political parties, journalists, civil society organisations and human rights groups reported greater freedom to operate, express views and engage in public debate than under the previous Awami League (AL) government. However, concerns remain regarding corruption, police accountability and effectiveness and the limited implementation of wide-reaching reforms proposed following the uprising.

The BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), National Citizen Party (NCP) and other political opposition groups are able to organise, campaign, protest and criticise the government. Political violence continues to occur, but is generally localised and most often relates to disputes over local influence, business interests, resources and political control at the local level. Sources described the 2026 election as generally peaceful and significantly less violent than previous elections and noted that political violence has reduced since the election.

The AL remains banned and public hostility towards it as an organisation remains, due to human rights abuses committed during its period in power and the events surrounding the July 2024 uprising. Low-level AL supporters who were not associated with corruption, violence or repression are generally described as able to remain in their communities. However, those openly expressing support for the party may face harassment, societal hostility or violence. Some former AL members have aligned themselves with other political parties, relocated within Bangladesh or left the country.

Most people arrested on politically motivated charges under the former AL government have been released and most cases have been withdrawn. Police sources stated that more than 21,000 politically motivated or false cases have been withdrawn and that reviews of historical cases remain ongoing.

Large numbers of AL politicians, activists and officials continue to face criminal proceedings relating to alleged actions during the former government and the July 2024 protests. Cases are proceeding through both the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) and the ordinary courts. Some prominent individuals have been granted bail and released, while others remain detained pending trial.

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Introduction

Background

This report contains the (approved) notes of interviews with sources during a fact-finding mission (FFM) to Bangladesh.

It does **not** provide advice on handling particular types of protection claims. For this, see the Bangladesh: Country Policy and Information Notes.

The FFM was conducted in Bangladesh between 7–15 June 2026 by 3 officials from Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT), with support from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The team visited Dhaka.

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Purpose of the mission

The purpose of the mission was to gather accurate and up-to-date information from a range of sources about the political situation since the July 2024 uprising, primarily on the treatment and activity of different political groups. Additionally, the mission sought to gather accurate and up-to-date information from a range of sources about law and order since 2024, the status of historical politically motivated arrests and the progress of cases involving alleged human rights abuses under the Awami League government.

See the Terms of Reference (ToR) for topics identified as relevant areas to explore.

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Research standards

The FFM was undertaken with reference to the EU [European Union] common guidelines on (Joint) Fact Finding Missions: a practical tool to assist member states in organizing (joint) Fact Finding Missions, November 2010 (EU Guidelines 2010), and CPIT's internal guidelines for conducting FFMs.

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Identification of sources

The FFM team sought to interview a wide range of informed sources (interlocutors), including members of non-government organisations, government officials, and academics. Sources were identified primarily by desk-based research and in consultation with the FCDO.

The sources contacted and interviewed are those that the FFM team were able to identify as relevant to the mission's ToR. But, as with any FFM, factors including time constraints and availability of sources mean that the list of sources consulted and information provided are not exhaustive.

That a particular source was interviewed and the notes of the interview have been included should not be taken as endorsement of that source or the information provided. Rather, all sources and information provided need to be critically assessed and considered against other publicly available material.

See List of sources.

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Arranging and conducting interviews

The FFM team met 15 sources, consisting of 24 people in 15 face-to-face interviews.

All interviews with sources were conducted in English.

At the start of each interview the FFM team explained the purpose of the mission, including that the notes of the interview may be published in a report on the GOV.UK website and the sources would be able to review the notes before publication.

See FFM introductory note.

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Notes of interviews/meetings

The FFM team took notes of all meetings, which were then sent by email to the sources for review and approval. This email explained that if a source did not respond within a specific deadline, then CPIT would assume that the source was content with the notes as sent to them.

Of the 15 sources, 12 approved the notes with a number making amendments to the original drafts. 2 did not respond. One did not agree to publication of the notes.

One source provided footnotes when making amendments to the original drafts.

All sources are described and referred to according to their preference.

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Terms of Reference

A ‘Terms of Reference’ (ToR) is an outline of what the FFM seeks to cover. Prior to the FFM, the following topics were identified as relevant areas to explore. Note: the FFM focussed on the country situation since **July 2024.**

- Political climate
    - Changes in political leadership, party alliances, and the government's public support
    - Government’s mandate
    - Progress/recommendations of commissions set up
- Treatment of political groups since July/August 2024
    - State’s general approach to political opposition
        - ability to function, any restrictions on fundraising, advertising, recruitment, censorship, legislative changes, social media interest/surveillance
        - freedom to assemble/protest (and police response)
        - attitude towards political groups and journalists, civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
        - enforcement of previous politically motivated arrest warrants
    - Arrests during 2024 protests
        - number of people released/still detained
        - what type of charges people have been held on
        - how many cases have/will go to prosecution and timeline for this
    - Awami League (AL) and affiliates
        - status (numbers, location, and profile of those active)
        - activities, arrests (time period), prosecutions (including profile of those arrested/prosecuted and offences), detention and release
        - violence (local state forces/centrally controlled forces/societal violence and profile of perpetrators)
        - role of auxiliary/student organisations
    - Bangladesh Nationalist Party and affiliates
        - as above
    - Jamaat-e-Islami and affiliates
        - as above
    - Regional differences in treatment
    - Political affiliation of the local/district level leaders
        - Whether previously well-established AL leaders are still in their communities and their continuing/lack of influence. If no longer have influence, has that void been filled by others and if so who
- Law and order

- Under the interim government and now
- Reforms
- Accountability and redress for past abuses

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List of sources

National Citizen Party (NCP) Member of Parliament

International Non-Governmental Organisation

Human Rights Non-Governmental Organisation

Human Rights Support Society (HRSS)

Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK)

Jamaat e Islami (Jel) Member of Parliament

Local Journalist

International Human Rights Non-Governmental Organisation

All Victims and Veterans Network

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (SHUJAN)

Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)

Bangladesh National Party (BNP) Member of Parliament

Bangladesh Police

BRAC Institute of Governance and Development

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FFM introductory note

Aim of the fact-finding mission

The purpose of our visit is to obtain accurate and up-to-date information on the political situation since June/July 2024. We would like to meet with you to fill gaps in our knowledge on this subject.

The fact-finding mission team will be made up of 3 officials from the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT).

About CPIT

CPIT is part of the UK Home Office, the government department responsible for immigration and asylum. We collect country information through both desk-based research and in-country visits.

The reports CPIT produce are published online. They are used primarily to assist UK immigration officials and judges involved in the asylum and human rights decision-making process.

More information about the CPIT's range of products, including reports of other Fact-Finding Missions, can be found on our website: Country policy and information notes - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Format of the fact-finding mission

During our visit we will be meeting a range of sources who can provide an informed view on the issues of interest, which are listed below.

We intend to take notes of the meetings. These notes may be made publicly available on the GOV.UK website and/or used in litigation proceedings.

However, we will not publish any information you provide if you do not consent. If you prefer that the information is not made publicly available, this will be respected.

We will provide you with an opportunity to review/amend the meeting notes to ensure they are an accurate reflection of our discussions. We will also ask you how you wish to be cited in our final report. If you are not willing to be named individually, you can choose to be identified in more general terms. Examples include: by the name of your organisation or department ('an official from the Department of Health'), or by your occupation (an 'academic' or 'journalist').

Areas of interest

- Government's mandate, implementation of commission recommendations and new policies
- Treatment of political groups since June/July /August 2024
- Political violence
- Arrest/detention/release of political prisoners
- Law and order

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Interview notes

Interview with National Citizen Party (NCP) Member of Parliament

Date: 07 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: Navid Nowroz Shah; 3 CPIT officials; 1 FCDO official

How has the political environment has changed since 2024?

Basically, all of us know Awami League (AL) and the Interim Government (IG) era governance struggled a little, especially the police force. There were a lot of people involved who were chosen by the previous regime that remained in the police force. A lot of people lost their faith and trust in the police force, and they struggled to carry on in their regular functions. As trust was lost, people hesitated to reach out to them when anything urgent arose. At the time, we thought when the elected government took over things would change and improve, of course things have improved a little, but the AL have increased again nowadays which is an issue.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the ruling party, are favouring AL 'goons'. They are in the judicial process and are on trial, but they are favouring them and [AL members] are coming out of prison and obtaining positions even though their activities are banned. But still they are released and committing vandalism. That is the whole situation in relation to law and order after the July [2024] uprising.

In terms of the power of people, I should say, people understood they had power. The government, police and other forces are behaving better than previously so there has been positive change and they are respecting people. It is better than ever, but we have a lot to do as political party, as general citizens, as a nation, we are working towards that.

What about the impact on your political party and how you operate, as opposed to previously during the Awami League government? Is there more freedom to operate now?

Of course, during the Awami League era opposition parties could not operate at all and now it is quite ok, the political situation is very normal. The government is doing its job, they do make some mistakes, but we are fulfilling our responsibility [as opposition] in criticising the government. There have been some 'corrective politics' happening and a little bit of unfair pressure from the government. There have been some incidents in the past 100 days, 6 or 7 people have been arrested for criticising the government which has been a negative, but still the situation is better than before. The government is not autocratic yet, we can still say that things upset us.

There was an incident before Eid [2026] in Jheinaidha district which is in the southern part of the country, 3 people from the NCP were attacked by BNP people but the police arrested NCP members and kept them in jail during Eid. Everyone knows it was a fake case and a political arrest from the government. In general, it is a better situation but it is not up to the mark we expected after the uprising, we were not expecting unlawful arrests. So many lives were lost in the uprising, and they sacrificed themselves for freedom of speech and politics.

What is the new government's commitment to the recommendations on reform and the July Charter?

It is a huge blow, the government is not interested in implementing reforms. During

the whole reform process, over a year the interim government collated opinions from civil society and politicians and then they proposed the July Charter. Even though there was dissent from BNP, it was still went to a referendum and the 'yes' vote won. The people voted in favour which the government has totally ignored. In the last 100 days, there has been no sign of any reform or issue in favour of reform. This has been a huge upset to people who voted BNP and voted yes to the July Charter, they have been betrayed from what was proposed in the election mandates.

One example of this is the government refraining from their commitment on a judicial secretariat. In the BNP election mandate, they vowed to implement an independent judicial secretariat but after forming the government they did not do that.

That's a very big upset for the whole nation but still we are voting in favour of reform. But we are still not taking to streets or protesting because after almost one and a half decades the elect[ed] parliament is functional. We have 6 MPs and 2 more female MPs who are also advocating in parliament for reform. But, if the situation continues there will be no other option than taking to the streets because this is the whole point of the uprising, people want change.

What the main aims and objectives of your party?

We are trying to do proactive politics. Our main agenda is reform and secondly employment, as the uprising started from need of employment.

Recently, we presented the shadow budget, before [the] official budget, if we had been in power what we think the budget should have been. We outlined what should be done. It focused on reform, employment and investment. Our focus was on those 3 points. We have shared it with the government, and we will see if they take our recommendations as people need jobs. The whole world is seeing inflation; there is chaos everywhere. Jobs are the most important issue. All other policies will come later as ideology doesn't matter if you don't have a job and can't feed your family. We need skilled workers and levelling up for the youth. We have a huge youth population and they should be skilled. Many workers are not skilled, and they make low wages compared to other countries. Our whole population should be skilled, even if they go abroad to work, they would be able to send back more money if they got more wages and a higher salary.

What is the profile of your supporters/members - who is voting for your party?

Mostly the youth. During the election, we had a hard time convincing the older population as we are very young. The older generation have difficulty trusting the youth because they think they have more experience. Due to the changes, civil society, senior politicians and senior activists have joined [our] party but it is mostly youth. Most of them are not voters yet which was a problem we faced during the election. I visited my local district Comilla [Cumilla, Southeastern Bangladesh], we had a political event within the upazilas [administrative districts]. 70% of those who willingly came to meetings and assemblies are under 18 and they have a huge interest in our party, think we are talking sense and could represent them well. From our perspective, we have to be in field for the next 4/5 years and then we will see if we have their votes.

Have you got national presence or are there certain areas where you have more support?

Mostly, in Dhaka and urban areas. Our whole movement is based on universities, schools and colleges. Our supporters are more from urban areas. The rural areas are run by local senior citizens so we have to take some more time to reach them

and gain trust but we [are] working on that.

Can you explain your alliance with Jamaat e Islami (Jel) and how that is working?

Basically, ideologically we are totally different. From the beginning, our politics has been centrist beliefs, people in our party are very progressive, I am a centrist liberal, but we have to follow the alliance due to our reform agenda. We had discussions with other parties, we felt that the BNP is anti-reform and want to use the previous structure to rule the country. They are better than the AL, for sure, and they have good intentions for people but we can't rely on intention, we need change in government structure. So, the alliance is ideological, we have an alliance based on the need for reform, that is it.

We are operating separately as single party[ies] as we have to spread out across Bangladesh. Jamaat is already established. Our point of common interest is reform only and we openly criticise Jamaat in talk shows and across social media, we criticise on issues such as women in power and religion. We are in an alliance for reform because we haven't seen any improvement on that front yet, we will see how it goes over next few years. There are local government elections next year, we are preparing for those on our own. We want our political party to win, if we see that to beat BNP we have to form alliance, we might or we might not.

During the election period there was some reporting on inter-party and intra-party violence - did you experience this or were you aware?

Many incidents happened but this has been one of the fairest elections in the history of Bangladesh. There were some incidents, in specific seats. If the election was totally free and fair, then maybe the BNP wouldn't get 200 plus seats but would still form the government. Maybe with around 20 or 30 seats. Maybe the BNP did some election engineering, but it was a free and fair election. There were some incidents, but there were very few. Still, we expect none to happen, but compared to other elections, there were very few.

Since the elections have there been any violent incidents?

Yes, there have been violent incidents, political incidents. It has calmed down and has not got worse yet. Most incidents are intra-party, BNP people fighting as they are a huge party. Of course, in the absence of the AL they are trying to control local powers and are fighting amongst themselves. There are few inter-party incidents, I already mentioned the one in Jheinaidha where 3 members of my party were arrested. There have been a few other incidents with the BNP. For example, there was an incident where the BNP vandalised the place where we arranged an assembly and are targeting top leaders and attacking them, so that we can't expand our party across the region. It's alarming, the BNP are showing signs of autocracy, I hope they will get over it soon.

What about the police response to those types of incidents?

It is a sad reality that the police are favouring government, as always. We protested during the Awami League era and the police were in favour of the Awami League. Whenever we try to say anything against the government, the police have not improved. However, the situation is not the same under the BNP, the BNP is showing some promise, so still we are hoping and waiting. It is still only 100 days, so we are ready to give that time to the government, but we are doing our job as an opposition party. It is early days, there hasn't been much time to implement institutional reform, we are ready to give that time to the government.

Regarding the July 2024 protests and the arrests that took place then, are you aware of cases of people being prosecuted or still detained?

Most cases have been withdrawn and no one has been detained. Some cases are pending but they will withdraw cases soon, so we hope for no problems.

Are people able to protest now against whatever they want? Is there freedom to protest, to assemble?

Yes, people can protest now, the situation is okay, but as I mentioned there have been a few incidents. The general people can protest, and the BNP are not putting any pressure on police, but if we as a party organise a protest or assemble, some people have been attacked by the BNP. But the situation is not that bad, so let's see how it goes.

Does the police response depend on the topic of the protests, for example land rights versus political?

No, I don't think so, there is freedom to protest, it's ok for now. But if you specifically criticise the prime minister then the situation gets worse, which we saw during AL as well; you could criticise the AL but not PM Sheikh Hasina, they made her a god-like creature. A few people have spoken out against Tarique Rahman, they have been arrested, but this is not the general scenario. We hope that this government will allow freedom of speech because the government knows what happens if freedom of speech is actually attacked.

Can BNP members now operate freely? Does it differ at local or national level?

The situation is ok, I think. There are very few incidents but not like before.

Is there any more information you are able to give in relation to the political situation now?

If I could say one thing, the whole political situation is better than during the interim government and during the AL era. However, this was not the expectation after the July [2024] uprising. There were millions on the street in July [2024] and so many lives lost in order to build a new country. The situation is not that promising yet, we are not sure that the government is intending to bring that positive change. It is better than the AL and BNP is a better party, but they are unsure of the reform needed which is what the people wanted. As I mentioned, it is better, so we can still hope, even as the opposition we still have hope.

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Interview with a Political Analyst at International NGO

Date: 8 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: Political Analyst at International NGO; 3 CPIT officials

Can you give some background on your role within the organisation and current priorities?

I have been with [NGO] since 2012, the team works directly with the political parties, not with other organisations. The project started in 2011, and between then and 2024 only the AL has been in power. Now we are working in a situation where the AL it totally out of the political space.

Our objectives have been to support political parties to be more democratic, have a more inclusive organisation, promoting women [and] youth participation and also to

help parties to have more horizontal and vertical dialogue, to have more communication across different tiers of their organisation. We help parties to build their own training units at district level. We help them build tools for conflict mitigation at district level. Around the election we helped them to build teams for campaign management, poll watcher management, and candidate training. The aim was to provide support to all but there was a different approach in relation to the party in power and others, according to party priorities. We worked with Jamaat e Islami [JeI] until 2013 but then JeI was pushed out of the political space until 2024, now we have again started working with them.

Since after the 2024 uprising, we have been working with the new political parties such as NCP [National Citizen Party], GOP [Gono Odhikar Parishad] and loosely with some left-wing political parties and continued work with BNP. However, until July 2024 our core work was with the AL and the opposition BNP, with some engagement with Jatiyo Party. Work with Jatiyo Party is currently on hold.

[Part of our work is] promoting political cooperation and tolerance. We have multiparty forums engaging all major political parties and they work together as a team. There have been wonderful activities and examples of working together (cooperation across parties) in 22 districts. We have many examples of co-operation, for example when police were harassing BNP members previously or if they were arrested, AL counterparts helped them to get bail or protect their properties from vengeance.

The same happened in August 2024 when the mobs were torching AL properties, BNP's local leaders were protecting them and their properties, and this was due to their connections in multi-party forums. Multi-party forums work together to solve community problems (ie water, health, drainage). When they work together the problems get solved quicker.

How has the political environment changed since August 2024?

Our program has changed.

What was your experience during the election period in relation to election-related violence?

There was no widespread political violence during the pre-election period. We promoted peaceful election processes across the parties. It was a realisation from opposition parties that if there was violence BNP, JeI etcetera would be the losers. We shared survey data with decision makers and campaign managers in political parties which found that 92% of people would not vote for a party engaged in violence. This enabled an understanding at grass roots levels.

We had a response system - if we suspected any violence was bubbling then we would contact the political parties to get them to internally resolve. We were afraid that the interim government (IG) was not really prepared to handle the situation if there was widespread violence. The IG control of police was weak, and police morale was low but because participating political parties did not want violence, it was one of the most peaceful election periods. Our interventions also helped to prevent political violence.

Has the newly elected BNP government implemented any recommendations from commissions formed under the interim government – if so, what?

They have said they will proceed based on their manifesto and their own reform agenda rather than those under the July Charter. The IG had a long list of recommendations including 9 reform commissions prior to the July Charter and

although not all were taken forward, significant ones were. The BNP have backtracked saying they will apply their manifesto, not the July Charter. We are still waiting to see if they will apply their manifesto. They claim some progress against the core commitments, for example about Family Card distribution (which they are piloting). In many other areas however, for example freedom of expression and of media, we are not seeing much movement towards reform, although it is still early in the new government.

Are members of political parties able to freely express themselves? Are they able to organise/attend demonstrations?

Yes, there has not been a widespread protest. In general, Jel and NCP, they have been calm, they are not protesting that much. However, we have seen them protest when they want, and some 'soft' protests. So far there is no evidence that they have been oppressed.

We are seeing a rise in AL rallies outside Dhaka, and they are sometimes turning into violent exchanges with BNP activists locally. Not many but at least a few recently, last week.

What has been the police response to AL rallies?

In Dhaka, AL rallies have been on a small scale because police disperse them quickly. The AL are now choosing different areas, for example in rural areas where there are 3 police officers and 1,000 people rallying.

However, where there has been violence, there have been some arrests of AL people.

On that matter, police arrests after August 2024, we are seeing that police behaviour is a continuation of the misuse of power that they were using under the AL. Police behaviour did not change dramatically or improve.

Would police behaviour be politically motivated, i.e. acting on the behalf of the BNP?

Mostly officers will act on their own behalf. But they also need to show the new government that they are doing something, i.e. prove themselves. There is also the bribery culture in Bangladesh, we call it 'police trade', i.e. pay for release which has been going on as long as I remember, and it's continuing.

Is that a systematic attitude?

Yes, it was during the AL. The BNP were picked up in a van for hours and were not even taken to the police station. Then they paid some money through their relatives for release. If they did get to the police station, then the rates would increase. So, victims try to negotiate as early as possible.

Have there been examples of post-election inter-party and or intra party violence, ie BNP/NCP/Jel?

It has not been widespread, and it has been low level, more disruption for example throwing eggs or stones or shouting at each other, low level violence.

Has there been any violence committed by the state under the new government?

No, there have been some arrests by law enforcement, but we haven't heard about violence which we did hear of during the AL time.

Is there any update on those held for their actions under the Hasina regime?

Are people still in custody? If so, on what charges and at what stage of the process are cases? For example, are cases proceeding towards trial?

Trials are ongoing, and we are observing a few AL leaders and some people who had an understanding with the IG and BNP government, the court accepted bail and they were released. When a court grants bail, there is always a suspicion that there is a behind the scenes understanding.

Selina Hayat Ivy, a prominent leader of the Awami League and the former mayor of Narayanganj City Corporation has been released. The AL leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury's bail was fast tracked. He secured bail within 48 hours of arrest in October 2024.

However, most of the leaders who were arrested are still in custody and trials are moving forward and will be heard soon.

Has there been any accountability or justice in relation to police who were involved in violence during the protests?

No, it doesn't seem to have been reported. Some policemen have been arrested but I have not seen any public article or news about what is happening with their trials, so it's hush hush. Maybe there is something happening, but it is not publicly talked about.

Is there an update on those held on politically motivated charges under Hasina – do people remain in custody? On what charges? What is the profile of such people?

Most of those arrested have been released after August 2024, by early 2025, under the IG.

If members of the AL now experienced problems in their community, would they be able to seek protection from the police?

It's unlikely but depending on the local context they may. It depends on the police officer himself and his intention, and the motive and intention of the local administration. Some may not want the trouble, in other areas it might be the opposite, so the context matters.

In the community, are AL supporters/members able to express their political opinion?

People in the local community know each other. Pre-election, Jel and BNP went to the AL leaders in their community and sought their support. Mostly, this was from the BNP and Jel but some[times] also NCP. So, most are safe due to negotiated deals and alliances with other groups. Safety and protection are one of the main reasons they did this. The direction from the AL out-of-country leadership was to not take part in the elections, but ordinary AL people realised they had to protect their businesses and futures by siding with other political groups.

There is no widespread persecution of AL people, they are generally safe. However, there are some that want to protest violently or be active in politics to demonstrate to Sheikh Hasina that they still support her and are doing something for her. It is those people who are getting into trouble.

Could someone re-locate to another area?

Yes, many have shifted to other districts, perhaps living with relatives. Many thousands moved, some have started to come back to their areas after the election although not all.

What is the role of auxiliary organisations (particularly student wings) in political parties?

The important ones are the student, labour, youth, voluntary and women's wings. They work as 'brotherly or sisterly' organisations or wings. They are important as they provide significant mobilisation power to each party.

How closely affiliated are they to the main party or are they focused on their own priorities?

They are not. We have asked these questions, why is the woman's wing not focused on women's issues, why are you only carrying out party programmes, not really working as independent organisations. The party leadership decides who will be the top leaders of these organisations. Even Tarique Rahman will choose the leader of the student wing of [the] BNP, he is very fond of the student wing and he personally manages that, there are other leaders who manage each of the wings.

Has this influence remained?

The practice has not changed yet, I don't think that with the old political parties this is going to change soon. However, JeI is different, they will not run theirs by senior leadership, their student organisation is quite independent, but their women's organisation is kind of more dependent on the main leadership. The student wing is very independent and important for them, based in universities and they have town/city-based communities. Many of the current BNP and JeI leaders have track records of student politics from the student wings. Student politics is very important in Bangladesh.

Are they based in universities?

They have a presence in all educational institutions, and also in communities. [**This information was added after the meeting** The student wings have units in all administrative units of the country, i.e. city, municipality, ward, district, upazila, union, along with the university and college campus-based units.] They are students when they join these organisations, and there was a time when they would continue to be in the student organisation even after they finished. However it has changed, they no longer have members who are not studying in the universities, this changed around 2016/2017 onwards. AL and the BNP were the ones who decided to change that. [**This information was added after the meeting** This change is mostly visible in their campus units. For the units at the communities this is a work in progress.]

Does the AL student wing which was banned under the IG remain banned under the BNP?

It is still banned. The BNP has passed a law in parliament, so it is more solid now, previously it was just an order of the president, but now it is a law. When the AL is banned, auxiliary organisations are also banned.

However, AL's exclusion from the political space is a high-risk factor for politics and could cause future instability in the country, which will not be good for our economic development. We are working on an analysis of AL's pathway in the next year. They have a strategy plan for the next 12 months or so which includes flash mob kind of rallies in places beyond significant police control. They also have plans for participating in local elections, so if there is resistance from any of the parties, there can be violence at the local level, at grass roots level. Local elections when they happen, it is not nationally important, and the military are not involved at same level as national elections. Candidates would be billed as 'independent' candidates. It would be hard to resist AL candidates, but I fear there will be resistance from BNP

and JeI especially. JeI because they are especially keen to gain local government influence.

So, to have an inclusive political process is a long-term desired scenario, and I think BNP has a very difficult task in their hands as a government. There is pressure from NCP and JeI to not allow AL to come back. We see that on the one hand the government have passed a law banning AL more permanently, at the same time we see they are not really strongly supressing AL at the grassroots. I'm not sure how much of it is planned, we are trying to assess. Is this a planned strategy to manage JeI? AL is always a fear-factor for JeI, so they can use it as a card to negotiate with JeI, so are they doing that? This is something we are trying to understand.

There are elections within lawyers' associations (known as bar associations). Outside Dhaka, we see AL lawyers are winning in some places and there is not much resistance against that. They are not winning main positions but they are winning important positions within the bar associations. This could be part of the AL's comeback strategy, as bar associations and social organisations have value in society, and it could help them to reintegrate into society. It could be part of their 1-year tactic, to gain space, and local elections might be another. The AL also has very strong online activism. Some activists who are not in Bangladesh are very vocal on Facebook, and those who are in Bangladesh are becoming more and more vocal every day.

Is the government interested in social media posts?

The AL had a tight control over social media, but the BNP does not seem to have such a strict control. Although there have been some arrests for expressing criticism against individuals such as the Prime Minister (PM), it was not widespread like previously. The PM and ministers have said that they believe in the democratic process and allow freedom of expression. Arrests of some activists, journalists, there are some issues, this is something to observe. If these kinds of arrests continue or increase, then the government statements will not match their actions.

Does your organisation hold any data on reasons for arrests?

We don't but there are other organisations who have, so we do look at it. [We look at available data from other organisations and avoid duplication of efforts.]

It is still early in the BNP government to find out what's happening [it's too early to establish a trend]. It is very difficult to understand unless you have grown up in Bangladesh. There are lots of nuances that are difficult to understand from afar. Good to get the local level detail.

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Interview with Advisor at Human Rights NGO

Date: 8 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: Advisor at Human Rights NGO; 3 CPIT officials; 1 FCDO official

Advisor at Human Rights NGO: [Human Rights NGO] provides legal assistance to communities and human rights monitoring. I work on the forced migration portfolio, legal aid to refugees and human rights documentation.

How has the political environment changed since August 2024?

I think the first thing is, if we are holding 2024 as benchmark, it has improved a lot in terms of stability. In terms of the interim government, there was uncertainty and we

were unsure of how political progress would unfold.

There was a kind of stability and rebuilding of democratic means of government, for which the BNP and Jamaat e Islami (JeI) should be credited. We are still seeing the same kind of exclusion of [the] Awami League (AL) and AL members being accused of serious crime, or even low-level members accused of crime. So, in a nutshell, there have been improvements in terms of political mobilisation between the opposition and the government. A lot of it is still limited to parliamentary debates, which is good. There have been some street demonstrations, but the concerning thing is for law and order as a whole. We are seeing a slide-back to some of the characteristics under the interim government (IG), especially regarding mobs and religious conservative ideals.

Around the same time of the election, we saw a marked decrease in incidents, most stakeholders were fighting a political battle and were concerned about votes. Now this is not on the cards for another 4 or 5 years, we are seeing a return to concerning patterns that were endemic during the IG. Politically, it is a concern the way in which the BNP has consolidated power across the country. They have named administrators for the local government positions; these are elected positions. The lowest level is union, union chairman and upazila (sub-districts) and city corporations – they are supposed to have elected representatives since there haven't been local government elections yet. These positions have been taken by the BNP. This is concerning in different ways as the BNP has shored up influence across different areas and has complete control over local budgets and local organisation. The process is less than transparent and there are legal black holes in regard to electoral laws. This is what happens when there are no elections, this situation is taken advantage of to put party men in positions of power. We are seeing a period of stability and of political consolidation.

Jamaat are more concerned at the way in which institutional assets are being handled, such as the Islami Bank, the biggest Islamic bank. Jamaat were in charge of the Islami Bank until the AL regime. Now the BNP have removed the head and replaced [them] with a BNP loyalist. The Islami Bank is the biggest bank in the country in terms of people who save money and it was the first Islamic bank. We are seeing that the BNP is starting to consolidate some of these private assets amongst party members, it is an institutional exercise but perhaps it is happening to a lesser degree than [under the] AL.

The other significant thing is the growth of the NCP after the election, they absorbed a number of political parties, and they are focused on building ground strength across different districts. Their numbers have quadrupled since the election. That would be my take on the political situation. There is stability, that's a key thing to acknowledge. We are seeing stability we haven't seen since 2023.

Would you anticipate the local elections to follow same pattern as the national election in terms of being (widely reported as) free and fair?

I think it's going to be different. Local elections historically have low interest due to the ways in which the AL had consolidated power. There is going to be more interest now for people to run and independents to run. I'm not sure to what extent it will reflect how the 2026 election unfolded. Primarily, BNP members now hold local government positions and have a degree of power in districts they never had before. Historically, the BNP is not as big of a mass party as the Awami League, which had this expansive influence, so I'm not sure how that will reflect in the elections. I am certain that there will be allegations from the opposition about lack of transparency, that much is for certain. In terms of the role of the election commission, positions

have been politicised similar to the Bangladesh bank and other governance bodies. Statutory positions and constitutional bodies are now under the influence of the BNP or BNP-leaning men, so there is fear that it might not turn out to be as good as the 2026 general elections.

You referred to a slide towards mob justice. During voting, there was pre-election violence, how does that compare to now and what are you seeing regarding political violence?

I think one of things prior to the elections which was of concern was around the formation of mobs, but they were fragmented, not systematic. The biggest mobilisation was against shrines, Sufi shrines, or against Muslims or groups of followers who didn't follow strict Islamic rules. We have documented that 98 shrines were decimated, destroyed or looted, these represented the biggest systematic formations of mobs. Beyond that, the formation of mobs also was due to the perception around lack of security and law enforcement, where people thought it would be better for them to take the law into their own hands to seek justice rather than following procedure. Mobs were lynching people accused of theft, this was a big phenomenon for 6 or 7 months after the interim government took charge. There were community level watches and communities standing guard when the police were not there. There were a lot of organised assaults against people who may or may not have been thieves.

Returning to the most concerning statistics, 56 or 57 individuals in the last 3 to 4 months have been subjected to mob beatings. A large chunk of that is against individuals accused of sexual violence, it is one of the biggest things now. Recently, there was the brutal rape and killing of child in Dhaka. They handed down the death penalty to the accused yesterday. It was a concerning development that the trial ended in 6 days. The public sentiment was such that if the government didn't bow down to populous demand there would be consequences.

It is a serious concern, a document from BLAST shows 2 incidents of individuals killed in mob beating, one an hour from Dhaka and one in the north of the country, two young men publicly beaten to death after allegations of sexual assault. These types of crimes are now being leveraged as an excuse to form mobs and do justice on perpetrators, and some may be wrongfully accused. Time and again police are unwilling or unable to deal with mobs. I would stress on the unwilling part more, because we have seen instances where police can disperse large crowds, but they simply do not engage anymore because of the public sentiment toward law enforcement. During the interim government confidence was shattered. If there's anything unpopular or not public sentiment, they won't show up or they will show up after and say [they] couldn't get involved due too many people.

To clarify; is it that law enforcement won't engage until the very end or will they let an incident happen and come in later?

So law enforcement is not going to engage until the very end, they let the crime happen then come in later. We have seen a rise in religiously driven mobs. Recently, we saw a mob target a Hindu school teacher who had talked about evolution in classrooms and made a comment around the loud call to prayers. He had a massive mob against him. Thankfully, he was not hurt but he was handed over to the police. The idea is that after 2024, there is a lot more emphasis on populism on all sides of the political spectrum than ever before. The government won't make an unpopular decision.

As a legal aid organisation, this demand we are seeing now around 'fast justice' is

really concerning. It's a sliding scale. The trial we followed, the rape trial, there was nothing there, it was incredibly problematic how this trial operated. If any high court was to hear this appeal, they would likely acquit him. He had no chance to bring up witnesses or to question the prosecution. That again is a concerning thing – the high court will indict people. It's a big problem now, that institutions are thinking and acting in populist terms.

What has the police response been in relation to inter- and intra-party violence?

The biggest standout during the interim government in terms of political violence was intra-party from within the BNP. The BNP was fragmented during the Awami League, so when it resurfaced there were a lot of cases. Most of the deaths from political violence were within the BNP. A lot of the pre-election violence within the BNP has dissipated. Now we are seeing some, again quite low numbers for Bangladesh, of inter-party political violence. Sometimes there will be skirmishes with political leaders. The NCP leader was subjected to attacks, heckling and the throwing of eggs from BNP members/supporters. There were no big clashes between student wings which was previously common. The AL and BNP student wings were not clashing violently on streets which is big positive. Student politics and violence has subsided over the past 2 years and a big reason for that is the starting up of student union elections. When democratic pathways are opened, violence goes down. A lot of violence now is around localised issues around land grabbing and control over resources and using that in terms of political rhetoric to mobilise support.

After the election, there were documented incidents such as the sexual assault of a woman who voted NCP being turned into political ball game. It was said that the BNP was enacting sexual violence against the opposition. Most political violence is also located in areas where Jamaat and NCP have members of parliament. Obviously that struggle is between BNP-led administration, placed in different stages/areas of local government, and members of the opposition. We have been seeing skirmishes in Chuna, where Jamaat or NCP won.

What about state perpetrated political violence, what is the situation now?

Violence against members of the Awami League hasn't changed. The expectation from the Awami League was that after the BNP came to power they would reintegrate into society but that hasn't happened. The BNP is less firm around AL reintegrating but still as firm as the interim government in terms of ensuring the Awami League remains heavily persecuted and the public sentiment hasn't stopped. The public has anger (justifiably) against those in a position of power who committed serious crimes. We are seeing some ridiculous results of that. For example, the 23rd Chief Justice has been behind bars for 2 years now. First and foremost, he was aligned to the party but the biggest problem with him wasn't that he was present during the shootings at the July [2024] protests, it was that he was the architect of, or credited with, the changes to the constitution which benefited the Awami League and he is being punished for that.

There are a lot of individuals remaining behind bars, but they have not engaged in crimes. Not to say they weren't engaged in crime, but they are not in prison for the crimes they have committed. Awami League activities remain banned, and members continue to leverage random acts of violence, but there is no indication of some of those acts taking place. The biggest action, in terms of state action against AL and members, or those with any kind of affiliation, is that they have been removed from any bureaucratic position during the interim government.

There were big numbers of arrests/detentions of AL personnel reported in the media to start with. What's the situation now?

I think prior to the elections, there were staggering numbers of arrests under the Anti-Terrorism Act. Many were arrested arbitrarily, there were around 15,000 every month, which led to the massive overcrowding of prisons. This is not happening anymore. A big reason for this is the end of the joint security operations, Devil's Hunt [brought in by the IG to maintain law and order and address mob violence[1]] and then Devils Hunt 2, which were used to formally round up AL members across the country.

We are still seeing individuals getting detained under the Anti-Terrorism Act, but there has been a noticeable decrease of that. There haven't been any high-profile arrests since the arrest of the previous Speaker [in April 2026], who has been bailed, but I don't think that the BNP is targeting high profile individuals. However, they retain the capacity to do so under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

If an arrest warrant was issued under Hasina's rule for charges against the BNP or Jel, a politically-motivated arrest warrant, would that still be acted upon?

There were a number of false cases dismissed during the IG period. They did a whole exercise where a significant number of cases against these individuals were dismissed. There was obviously a procedure to go through to dismiss cases depending on the stage of the case and the judge etcetera.

There were a number of individuals who have cases against them but they are inactive and they are being not followed through. This is the same as the policy under the IG on cases that were politically motivated and enacted during the AL government. These are not prosecuted anymore. Cases are seen through. The person accused will appear at hearings and the case will run through and end, or the charges are dismissed.

Although it does depend of the charges/type of case, police cases can't be dismissed. For example, if a criminal case was filed against me for murder, the police can't show up to the judge and ask for the case to be dropped. There is a procedure to follow on certain cases, but the expectation [for politically motivated cases] is that it won't amount to anything and the judge will close the case.

Is your organisation tracking arrests or do you have statistics on politically motivated arrests?

No, I think Odhikar does though.

You touched earlier on barriers to seeking protection, can you expand on that? For a political opponent, if they are struggling with societal violence, are they able to seek protection from the police?

The BNP now is very focused on rebuilding law enforcement strength. The police under the IG felt blamed for something, and that was not just their doing, but they were the ones with weapons on the street. There was justified public anger against the police. They did not understand that public sentiment, despite police officers being engaged in the killing of protesters. People did not see justice or action for that. We saw the police IGP [Inspector General of Police] was sentenced to 5 years in prison for acting as a state witness under Hasina, however people feel the police are getting off easy for their role during the July [2024] Uprising.

[1] The Diplomat, Breaking the Promise?..., 6 March 2025

The police still feel as though the interim government humiliated them as a force; with the changing of the uniform, the constitutional reforms, the police reform commission. The recommendation of the commission proposed the implementation of the Police Commission Act (PCA), an independent body to look over the Ordinance Act of Police. However, the BNP has completely shelved this PCA, so it is not in the works anymore. The BNP wants the Home Ministry to have complete control over law enforcement, and they are starting to shield lower level individuals accused of crime. At best, what we will see is some of the officers, the big ones, being sentenced for the killing of protesters and extrajudicial disappearance. They may be sentenced to death, but it may not go beyond that.

The BNP feels it needs police on side to enact its will across the districts. To your question of political opponents, I don't think the police is centralised enough under the BNP for this to be a concern yet. If someone far away seeks protection, there will be a police response, it is not as politicised as under the AL. It might get there if the BNP is successful. It has removed people from key police posts like the Inspector General, which are now controlled by police individuals who are BNP aligned. We might see it again in time.

Has there been any progress on the BNP government implementing recommendations from commissions set up during the interim government?

There has been negative progress. The BNP have done away with useful architecture the IG set up, like the HR [Human Rights] commission. They have scrapped the enforced disappearance law, but they are coming up with their own version of that but it's limited in scope. With the NHRC [National Human Rights Commission] Act, they have been trying to push to expand the commission's power but are shielding security forces. The NHRC can't investigate cops or military. It is the same for the Enforced Disappearance Act, it is going through parliament now. It has been very watered down, the sections on proving a case are now much stronger. It is now going to take a lot more to prove that someone involved in law enforcement was involved in an enforced disappearance.

The BNP is interested in doing populist things and has successfully engineered public attention away from reforms. It has also not been easy under the circumstances with the Iran crisis, fuel crisis and the cost of living. These are crises the BNP need to handle.

The BNP did set up a constitutional reform committee in parliament, which is different from the interim government which recommended a constitutional council. The July Charter was cancelled by the BNP. The constitutional reform committee will be a committee of parliamentarians who will decide how to change [enact reform], but the NCP and Jamaat are not involved as they want the July Charter.

Beyond the constitution [reform committee], the reforms on anti-corruption, public affairs and women, none of the recommendations are being taken up. As the anti-corruption commission was repealed as well, we are back to how it was performing under the AL. Women's affairs [commission] proposed a number of important changes to law and statutory bodies, but it has not been taken up.

It is important to note the reforms the BNP have done. They have kept some useful things proposed by the IG. They kept a lot of criminal procedure revision, the biggest of which was section 54 amendments. The Code of Criminal Procedure allowed for arbitrary arrest and now there are stronger accountability and safeguarding measures, which is a positive. The BNP have also retained changes to the Violence Against Women Act, which provides protection for witnesses, and have retained

good language in other acts like the Trafficking and Migration Act.

They have retained most things but in terms of implementing most reforms, this has not been done, and they often point to the global crisis. Once the parliamentary session on budget ends [July 2026], the reform position will be picked up by the opposition.

Again, it is important that we acknowledge it has not been long, we have had 4/5 months of government. I think we should give them a bit more time before making a harsh assessment.

Can you expand on justice and accountability for previous human rights abuses under the Hasina government?

I think the biggest problem is that the BNP wanted control of the justice sector. They repealed justice reform acts that the IG set up. The control of the judiciary is back to party loyalists. This is significant as it allows the ministry to control which judges are assigned where, what bench. It allows the ministry to control proceedings in the High Court through the Attorney General. The biggest criticism is they have reverted back to [the] structure [that was in place] under AL.

There were elections across the Bar Association, which ended with a clean sweep of BNP men everywhere. From the Supreme Court to lower courts, they were elected. It will be a highly politicised court. We haven't yet seen it, but I imagine if someone wants to file case against the BNP leader somewhere, I don't think it will be possible with how the Bar Council is set up. They won't let lawyers from different political parties practice without their consent.

Look how due process was completely disregarded in the rape case I mentioned earlier. It was a horrific case; however, we can't live in a world where a trial ends in 6 days. The prime minister promised that the trial would end in two weeks. It is not his job to tell us how long a trial will last. It will get to point where public sentiment is ok with stripping due process. We do not see any organisations speaking against it as it is so sensitive. Our statements have been around following due process, and we haven't criticised but it deserves criticism. It is nothing to celebrate, it's shocking.

What is your organisation's ability to practice and follow your aims and objectives under this government?

So far, it's not been terrible. Obviously, under the AL, it was really difficult in terms of day-to-day operations. Our funding stopped, we were heavily scrutinised, a lot of our senior staff were targeted through online mobilisation against them, in particular our Executive Director. This changed during the IG. One of the reasons for this is that people in the IG were colleagues at one point in time.

The BNP has been sincere in their engagement with us across issues for the Human Rights Commission Act. They have been sincere in receiving recommendations, that forum exists. That did not happen previously. I'm not sure if they will follow up, but that forum exists now, which did not happen before. They have also worked with us around the Violence Against Women Act.

On the issues of torture and arbitrary detention, while the Special Rapporteur was here, the government were sincere in their engagement. In that regard, I don't know how long it will last. We are able to work and do what we do without taking into account political sensitivity. We can critique government decisions in front of the minister, which we previously hadn't been able to do.

What is the legal status of the AL student wing?

It is banned as a terrorist organisation.

Regarding freedom of movement, how does local politics play out? Can a low-level political opponent move to another area if they had problems with the local community?

Can they internally relocate? Yes. Political violence has not reached levels seen under the AL when we saw horrific persecution. Again, now that the BNP is in power, political opposition groups have to come to a status quo. Locally, we haven't seen violence. A lot of this is contingent on how local elections turn out and if we see a return to political violence. Locally, political violence has decreased.

For example, members of the political opposition can relocate. It seems to be fine and is definitely possible. If they are AL, it could be a problem. They may be liable to arrest and extortion, in exchange for not being arrested. The AL situation is not good. Really low-level members are not being persecuted. Student politicians engaged in the student league and involved in violence have been targeted. However, we've seen over course of last 5/6 weeks, for example, in Ranpur (Jamaat controlled), a big political personality who was AL is still there. Individuals have either switched sides or have come to an understanding with Jamaat or the BNP. If public sentiment isn't against individuals, they are generally left alone.

Some AL union level chairmen are still there as the public didn't have that feeling of resentment, especially if they have not been accused of corruption. I'm not saying everyone who was AL and arrested deserved it. I've seen at a local level those persecuted had negative public sentiment against them. Many did abuse power for 15 years, they looted public funds and did commit different crimes. It has to be a restorative process, which we are perhaps not seeing now. At the local level, there is status quo.

If someone was a low-level Awami League supporter previously, despite the ban, can they express their political opinion?

The expression of political opinion does exist, and it is usually ok to do so. But you cannot express openly your support for the AL. If you openly voice your support for the AL, there may be backlash. There could be public mobilisation and violence. The sentiment against the AL has not eroded and the anger is still there. People feel the justice process has not been sufficient. There has been the symbolic death penalty of the former Home Minister and the former Prime Minister, but other than that no one has seen any justice.

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Interview with Human Rights Support Society (HRSS)

Date: 8 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: Saiful Islam, Program Officer; Saneequdrat Saqee, Program Officer; Abu Shadat Md Sayem, Monitoring Officer; 3 CPIT officials; 1 FCDO official

Can you give an overview of your roles within the organisation and your current priorities?

Saiful Islam (SI): We are not a registered NGO yet. In terms of our work, we rely on 15 national daily newspapers and other volunteer sources. We publish monthly, yearly and half-yearly reports and special reports. We fact-find state-sponsored violations and support victims. We are training young people over months and years on human rights mechanisms. They are working as watchdogs and activists, and we

have over 1,000 volunteers and committees in 15 universities and districts. We understand that human rights education starts in school and we have also introduced a college campaign and human rights Olympiad [a human rights competition for secondary students].

How has the political environment changed since August 2024?

SI: Nothing has actually changed much. Regarding HR [human rights] violations, enforced disappearance has nearly stopped – we only had one case (a month ago) since 2024, that is a huge development. Otherwise, it is the same. In some cases it's a bit worse. Especially regarding societal violence, including mob violence and social conflict. Political conflict is also not decreasing – it is more or less the same. Regarding state-sponsored extrajudicial killing, that is a bit lower. Other state-sponsored violations are happening, detention, imprisonment and death in custody. Violations against women have increased to some extent. It is concerning that the reforms instigated by the IG have mostly been scrapped – HRC (Human Rights Commission), EDACT (Enforced Disappearance Act) have been scrapped. That remains a huge concern.

Regarding political violence, have you seen a difference between pre- and post-election?

Abu Shadat Md Sayem (AS): Violence spiked during the election. After and long before the election, the frequency appears normal. It normally spikes during election periods and without exception it happened with this election too. [**This information was added after the meeting** Generally, election-related violence remains high from the announcement of the election schedule until election day. Within a week after the election, the situation usually returns to normal. This is the common trend in almost every election in Bangladesh.]

Intra-party violence was more intense during the electoral period from 2014 to 2024, largely due to the limited participation of other political parties in the elections. Now there is a more democratic space, there is both intra- and inter-party violence as there is competition, particularly between JeI and the BNP after 2024.

But during the AL regime, elections were not participatory so there was less inter-party violence because there was limited competition. In many cases, particularly in the 2024 election, independent candidates were from the Awami League too.

During this election was there any violence between student wings? How aligned are they with the main parties?

AS: Election [violence] mostly affected areas accessible to the general public. In the student areas it remained 'normal,' so there was no exceptional violence during the election period. Generally, student wings are involved in disputes and occasional violence related to student union elections, control of residential halls, and campus influence.

What is the role of the auxiliary organisation (student wing) in political parties? How aligned are they with the main parties?

AS: Most of the parties have student auxiliaries, especially those aspiring to gain state power. Their first priority is to catch people at the university campus, as that's where protests begin and spread. They always try to have their student wing in each university. AL had BCL [Bangladesh Chhatra League] etcetera.

Saneequdrat Saqee (SS): It is a common trend in our country.

Are there any specific membership requirements?

AS: Generally, any student can become a member of these student wings. However, if they don't have proper linkage to their political leaders or funding from their family, they may not get an expected position in the main party after their time in the student wing. A person would have to have proper backing/support from their leader and in their locality. 'Muscle power' works too. All those things will help to get a role in the main party.

There are different ways of functioning, i.e. JeI have proper ranking in terms of their political posts, although personal influence, muscle power, and family background may still play a supportive role. All other parties rely on a political power structure from money, family linkage/power etc.

SI: Jubo League is more senior than the student wing BCL. Also, Judo Dal is senior to JCD [Bangladesh Jatiotabadi Chatrodal]. [**CPIT addition**: This is in reference to the hierarchy of different student wings. The Jubo League is a different youth wing of the AL, and the Judo Dal is a different youth wing associated with the BNP.]

AS: Mostly, the phenomenon we experienced in the campus during our student life was that many student leaders had married but did not say so, because there was a de facto rule not to get married. In order to stay in the student wing, or to get a good position, one should not be married, so they would not disclose if they were married, but it's not the same in [the student organisation] Shibir.

SS: The concern is only about their studentship.

AS: Regarding age, there was no age limit, but they do say a student wing person should be a student, as far as I can remember. In reality, this is not the case. They have to attend lots of programmes, lots of rallies, and that's why they cannot keep up with their studies. In practice, most of the senior wing leaders are not students, or they are waiting to take their exams for 10 years for example.

Regarding protests now, is there freedom of expression (FoE) and is there any police response to protests?

SS: In campus, most students will be forced to go to their main party protests. However, now that practice is a bit diminished. Now, people can protest, apart from the Awami league. But the police still deal with them the same way, ie tear gas, rubber bullets and batons. We have seen several cases.

SI: After 2024, the barrier to FoE has been reduced a great deal. During Sheikh Hasina's rule, there were a lot of restrictions. But after, people could express their political dissent more freely than ever. This sometimes caused problems, such as mob violence. As the IG were not elected, all the political parties and people generally could express themselves freely. We did not see any examples of detention.

Since the BNP have come in, we have started to see some sort of barrier in this area, in relation to online bullying, fake posts and videos of opponents which have been widely used by all political parties (BNP, JeI, AL, all parties). So, we have seen some legal action taken against some people. For example, we have recently witnessed the arrest of someone who was an activist, who had a Facebook page covering the local news about many things, but he was criticising a parliament member. He was detained.

The Cyber Security ordinance passed under the IG is now the Cyber Security Act. If someone is malicious online, only the victim can file a complaint. The above case [involved] normal information about corruption. He was detained and then bailed.

Some advisors to the PM have spoken to say there should be some measures in

place to control malicious content online. It does need to be addressed, but if we cannot define it specifically and objectively then it can be used wrongly. We have seen 2 cases [**This information was added after the meeting** a man called Hasan Nasim and a woman called Sawda Sumi were detained, both were bailed but that was after their case went viral on the internet.]

On the national level, political leaders are criticising each other, there is no problem. However, at the grassroots levels there have been some reports [that] it has been harder to criticise the government.

Do journalists and CSOs/NGOs operate freely under the new government?

SS: It is still in a good position – they can work freely. However, we should have received our registration from NGOAB [NGO Affairs Bureau] within 45 days of the application submission, it's held with the ministry. In practice, we are still working.

Is there any update on those held for their actions under the Hasina regime? Are people still in custody? On what charges? At what stage of the process, ie proceeding towards trial?

[**CPIT addition**: These answers are in relation to those arrested during the Hasina regime, such as student protestors.]

SS: There are 2 types of cases, one from the army and one from law enforcement. They were mainly accused of human rights violations. Some of the accused were arrested but due to the ordinance [July Mass Uprising (Protection and Determination of Liability) Ordinance, 2026], we would expect them to get bail without charges as it's a crime that is very hard to prove. Some of the main perpetrators got arrested, some fled the country.

During the July 2024 uprising, there were 1,200 killed, as documented. Most of the cases against the perpetrators were politically driven. To give an example, a person was killed in front of the police station on 5 August 2024 in Jatrabari. But when he filed the case, they wanted him to file the case against 200 unknown people and another 300 [person] list of former political members.

Which political parties went to the victims' families to ask them to file against more people?

[**This information was added after the meeting** In most of the cases, BNP men convinced victims' families to file cases.]

Is there an update on those held on politically motivated charges under Hasina – do people remain in custody? On what charges? What is the profile of such people?

[**CPIT addition**: These answers are in relation to those held for their actions under the Hasina regime.]

SS: Many are still in custody, but a lot of them have been freed.

SI: In bigger cases, it is hard from them to get bail. But less significant cases or smaller leaders, they are getting bail. The judiciary is still trying to separate who were the perpetrators and who were not.

[**This information was added after the meeting** These answers are in relation to those who were arrested for their actions during the Hasina regime.

Most of the political[ly motivated] cases filed during the Hasina regime were dismissed. Some of the major cases are pending, but the accused got bailed.

Major accused and arrested persons were leaders and supporters of both BNP and BJI [Jamaat] and their student wings.]

AS: The people who were arrested under the Hasina regime, most are free. Two who were on death row are now free.

SI: Those are believed to be false cases. In many cases, we saw witnesses against political leaders (former state witnesses, who later decided to defend the accused) abducted from the court area but later found in India. Many leaders were perpetrators, but not to the extent alleged. And the trial process was not clear and has been criticised.

[**This information was added after the meeting when asked by CPIT to expand on the above example** Shukhoranjan (Sukhranjan) Bali was a Hindu resident of Pirojpur whose brother was killed during Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War. He was initially listed as a prosecution witness in the war-crimes case against Delwar Hossain Sayeedi. However, Bali later said that he did not believe Sayeedi was responsible for his brother's murder and agreed to testify for the defense instead.

On 5 November 2012, while on his way to testify before the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) in Dhaka, defense lawyers and witnesses alleged that Bali was forcibly taken away by plainclothes law-enforcement officers from outside the tribunal. Human Rights Watch called for an independent investigation into the alleged abduction.

Bali then disappeared and resurfaced in May 2013, when he was found in detention in India - about six months later.

According to statements later attributed to Bali, he told journalists and human-rights organizations that he had been abducted by Bangladeshi security personnel, detained and mistreated in Bangladesh, and then illegally taken across the border into India, where he was further detained. Human Rights Watch reported his allegations that he had been forced across the border and held in Indian custody.]

Are there any barriers to members of the political opposition seeking protection? I.e. a member of the Jel or NCP if they were being threatened by a non-state actor?

SS: There have been cases of giving protection but there have been cases where they have not, including during the election.

SI: You have to remember, in local police stations police are short on manpower, in many cases there are not enough police. Even if they are willing to provide protection, they don't always have capacity. But we have seen the police provide protection.

In Dhaka University, members of Chhatra Dal (BCL) had put up malicious content online and then there was some mob violence (people in the crowd got a few punches in) and the victims were sheltered in the police station. They could deal with it because it was Dhaka but it depends on what the ratio is of people to police.

Under Hasina police would just shoot on sight. However, now they are showing restraint, both during the interim government and since. They are actively seeking to avert harming protesters and do not want to use force. If protesters are then attacked, then police have to either just react or leave.

AS: One phenomenon is that the BNP and Jel were [previously] aligned [allies].

Regarding lower-level issues, Jel is smaller than the BNP, so have less influence. Another aspect of conflict at local level is because of disputes at a local government

level such as business tenders. In those cases, BNP are quite powerful and get the tenders. Where JeI has more influence, there is some conflict to get tenders but it's mostly peaceful.

[**This information was added after the meeting** JeI is not regarded as a full political opposition and is not considered a significant threat to the government, as it had not yet posed a substantial challenge through protests, rallies, or other political activities.] If there is no conflict, the government will not react and there is believed to have some consciousness [cooperation] with the top levels of both parties due to their prior political coalition.

Is there police protection available for AL people who fear a person in their local community?

AS: Mostly, the police will give protection to those who have power and the police also give protection if a victim's content is on social media. [If there is media attention] it is in the interest of police. Unless there is political pressure, the police won't react against the AL, for example.

If someone was a vocal AL supporter, would they be at risk of societal violence?

AS: It has improved. There is a low possibility of mob violence against a person with a political profile, including AL. It was a bit more under the AL [more likely for societal violence to be perpetrated against a member of political opposition under the AL government].

SI: People who did not politically oppress others [under the AL government], they live in harmony. But people who did oppress, they faced a difficult situation during the IG. Some of them were charged with many cases, and many benign AL supports have also been arrested, but right now the situation has improved. So it depends on their past actions as to how they might be treated in the community.

An AL leader who highly oppressed opponents and grabbed lands illegally, he can't enter the village right now, but many of my school friends, they were BCL members, they are still in the village, nothing has happened to them. They are fine as they weren't oppressive.

If someone was being threatened in the community (i.e. an AL member) could they move to another area?

SS: Depends on their level of seniority. If they were not senior or popular/known they can move to another area, as many are, but those who are very known, they have to flee the country, many are living in Nepal, India, and western countries as well.

SI: We have also noticed in my constituencies in the northern part of Bangladesh, I have seen that there is business between JeI and BNP. The connections have been there for a long time, they have come to their understanding. Money is the big issue here.

Surveillance had gone down a lot since the AL. They would hunt opposition like criminals. 250-300 cases would be put on one person, they would detain people at funerals, weddings, etc, they would hunt opponents. But this type of surveillance and monitoring has reduced. During the IG and now, this strong monitoring has reduced.

SS/SI: The NTMC [National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre] its functions are paused.

AS: After August 2024, the agencies faced problems. The previous government (AL) used those agencies for surveillance and forced disappearance. When they were

dismantled by the IG, including the LIC [Lawful Interception Cell], their actions were reduced.

[**This information was added after the meeting** The LIC is a unit used for surveillance under the police. None of the surveillance infrastructures were dismantled. They are still there. Another is the NTMC. Their functionality is on hold for now.]

SI: During the past 15 years, they [the Awami League] have taken a lot of money from the country. They are now taking shelter in other countries, saying if they go to Bangladesh they will be mobbed, but right now we don't have that problem, they will be passed to the police. People grab them and hand them over to the police, this is the situation. Nobody is willing to get involved in mob violence.

In general, they can go back to their community in Bangladesh. The situation is different for a criminal.

AS: There are two problems on what they might face in communities and a potential trial. However, now the trials for political leaders are quite transparent. We don't know how the government will react to those people coming back, so the risk is still there, but perpetrators are hiding out in another countries. Is there any legal mechanism in other countries to hold those people accountable?

SI: In regard to the ICT, they were criticised but now they have been trained and they have more transparency than they used to have.

SS: Two days ago, someone at the top of the AL was bailed. Someone else is being bailed today or tomorrow and the Speaker was also bailed. So I think, broadly, the consensus in our country is to follow the legal process for justice. The current government needs to do that. If they successfully do that, it will move us forward a lot.

[**This information was added after the meeting** One AL member is Selina Hayat IV, former Mayor of Narayanganj City Corporation. She is expected to run for mayor again in the next city corporation election. Another one is Professor Abul Barakat, who was known for creating groundwork for the financial corruption done by the Awami League regime.]

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Interview with Human Rights Activist and Political Analyst associated with Ain O Salish (ASK)

Date: 8 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: Human Rights Activist and Political Analyst associated with Ain O Salish; 3 CPIT officials

How has the political environment changed since August 2024?

Starting from 2024, there were 2 phases. Immediately after the escape of Sheikh Hasina and the fall of the Awami League (AL) government, there was a vacuum in the government and in the situation, particularly in law and order. The law enforcement agencies were in hiding; they were not on duty. I would say there was a huge scope [sic, spate] of criminal activities and acts of vandalism during that period, especially that 3 or 5 days when there was no government at all.

Initially, students took up the responsibility of taking control in the streets. The interim government (IG), its formation process was more or less democratic, and it consisted

of consulting most of the political parties, but there was concern that it didn't involve the AL. Most of the AL leaders were in hiding, and many left Bangladesh (and so could not contribute). There were less options. The formation was mainly led by the military, supported by civil society, students, and other organisations.

During that period, it seemed that Professor Muhammad Yunus might be the best option to lead, and gradually the law and order situation started to improve. One concern for us human rights activists and political analysts was the filing of thousands of cases against several thousand unnamed persons, mainly against leaders and activists of the AL, but many became very controversial because they involved some people who were not at all involved with those cases. There were other similar cases like that as well.

Gradually, the political situation started to improve, [including] the decision-making process. The IG appeared weak in controlling the overall situation because people were coming out to the street, different groups and different parties, demanding rights, so that was a big challenge initially for the IG. So, we saw a surge in arrests, that was a big concern for us. We were concerned about detention without trial, prolonged detention, refusal of bail, they were the main concerns. We received complaints about torture in custody as well, these [the numbers] were not that high but still, there were complaints about it.

One of the improvements was on enforced disappearance, that went down to zero under the IG so that was a big achievement. Still the number is very low, today there is only one suspected case. That is an improvement in the human rights situation. The number of extrajudicial killings also went down. But they are still happening, some extrajudicial killings.

There were some demands from students in particular about the ban of the AL. The government banned the activities of the AL, until the ICT resolves the case[s]. There are several cases against the AL and its leaders including Sheikh Hasina. However, making provision for the trial of one political party, this is a difficult idea of accusing a political party and punishing it, but the law is implemented which was concerning. We have concerns about the death penalty and procedural issues e.g. one tier of the International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh (ICT) is ignored.

[**This information was added after the meeting** cases in regular [Bangladesh] criminal courts pass through the trial court, then the High Court Division of the Supreme Court and finally the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. However, the ICT is in the status of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, and the appeals go to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. Thus, one tier of the court is removed for cases in the ICT. This was the same when JI [Jamaat e Islami] leaders were tried in the ICT.]

AL activities were banned. However, some activists and leaders have tried to join demonstrations together, and in these cases the police have tried to arrest them. There are some concerns that the activists of the BCL cannot pursue their education, some AL professionals cannot carry out their profession, or regular activities.

There are suspicions of corruption regarding some advisors of the IG. They tried to declare a roadmap for election, and finally it was held in February 2026. When the election days were approaching, the government appeared weak and there was not much confidence in the government regarding whether they would be able to handle the election or not. The educated class in Dhaka were initially not confident that the election would take place, but it did. The violence was increasing in the approaching election period, so that was another big concern for us, the violence and whether

that would disrupt the election, but again this didn't happen and the election was peaceful.

The political parties participated in the election, but the quality of the election can be questioned because the AL were not part of the process. It can be argued that they have lost their right to participate but I personally think they should be given a fair chance to contest the election. My feeling is that if the AL was there, people would have rejected them so that would have been democracy.

Another big issue was the amendment of the constitution and the reformation of the whole government process. Those commissions set up under the IG were very important and had some good recommendations as well but mostly they were washed away and not implemented. The referendum process was arranged, but the system was difficult to understand for the common people. Some of the IG's activities became very controversial, they were saying vote for one option. [**This information was added after the meeting** [The NGO Affairs Bureau] NGOAB, the regulatory body of the NGOs, called a meeting chaired by the Head of the Reformation Commission and advised the NGOs to campaign in favour of the referendum. They were asking for specific commitments about the number of people etc that we will reach.] They said we should advertise on Facebook for a 'yes' vote. In that situation, we had to give some commitments and just walk away from there. When the regulator calls and asks us to do something, we feel pressure. Similarly, they pressured private banks as well, saying they should advertise their propaganda for the referendum.

Finally, the 'yes' vote won. After the formation of the new government, the BNP were expected to be in favour of reform but the BNP, after coming into power, refused to implement the recommendations of the July Charter, the issues of the referendum. The BNP said they would reform, but not as per the Charter, they said 'we will reform on the issues for which we gave our consent' [notes of dissent did not progress to referendum]. So according to them, reformation is a continuous process.

After the installation of the new government, there was a long holiday of Eid and the situation appears, at this point, more or less peaceful. The law and order situation is improving.

As human rights activists, we have concern about arrests, detention without trial, prolonged detention, torture and mass arrests. Hundreds or thousands of people have been affected. Another thing we see from the past is that there is a long culture of torture, so that is a big concern for us. In the July 2024 movement, we saw a huge number of deaths, 1,400, that is the calculation of the UN. We want justice for all the issues and allegations of human rights violations but that should be a fair process. We want justice for the victims of the July [2024] movement. We want justice for the victims in the last 15 years and for the victims of today. That is the broad idea of human rights activists.

[**This information was added after the meeting** In the political ecosystem of Bangladesh, currently there are right, centre right and left [leaning parties] only and there is no centre left. This is an imbalance. There is a very slim chance of the inclusion of centre left in recent times. So this imbalance will continue. There are concerns about the rise of right-wing political groups. Attacks on Sufi shrines and attack on Prothom Alo and Daily Star offices are indications of this.]

In terms of the justice process for events surrounding the July 2024 protests, what has been the experience so far? Have there been trials?

There are some trials going on in the ICT and in the regular trials court as well. Our

experience of the justice process is that it is very long and we cannot say that this process will be unbiased. There is always an indication that the judges are looking at the signals of the government and want to deliver a judgement that the government likes.

Another interesting point in the recent past is the apprehension that there will be huge attacks on religious and ethnic minorities after the escape [fall] of the AL government. The minorities are usually perceived as voters of the AL (although this may not be true). So that created some problems in 2024, immediately after Sheikh Hasina, but the situation calmed down. There was some misreporting in the Indian media about attacks on the religious minorities, particularly the Hindus, in Bangladesh. However, this was not correct. After 2025, during the largest Hindu celebration, we saw a number of attacks on Hindu people during that time. There was some violence on [against] the minority community. When the election was approaching, we saw an increase in violence on [against] minorities, but the situation has calmed down now. There are still some attacks, but not many, I'm not trying to normalise it, but it is less.

Another point of concern at the moment, which has added a new dimension to this aspect, is the winning of BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] in West Bengal. This can also work as a pull factor for Hindus. There can be some attempt of pushing-in Muslims. This may result in communal tension on both sides of the border. Apart from these, many Hindus who are educated have property in India. Apart from that, this new development in West Bengal works as a pull factor.

Have those arrested during the July 2024 protests, i.e. students, been released?

They have been given an indemnity for all the protests, so that is another point of concern for some groups of analysts. The other school of thought is that the situation was one of mass uprising and therefore there was no choice but to proceed that way. If there is a change of law, a new government could change this indemnity and could arrange a trial of the students.

Have those charged under the Hasina government on politically motivated charges been released or are there people still in detention?

In the past, there were hundreds and thousands of cases under the AL against Jamaat and BNP, the political opponents. After the IG came to power, they dismissed most of the cases, though a few cases are maybe still pending.

If an arrest warrant was issued under the Hasina government against a political opponent (or perceived political opponent), would that arrest warrant still stand, would they take action on that?

No, they won't be operationalised at this moment, because the cases are lifted so the warrant won't work at this moment. We are seeing most of the BNP activists who were hiding to dodge the process, they are now mostly free so they are walking around the streets, participating in the political activities of the BNP and Jel. Their concern has gone away. But now we have this concern around AL activists.

People who made money through corruption or other means (AL), most of them have escaped from Bangladesh or they are hiding but activists who couldn't manage to escape, they are getting harassed at this moment.

Are members of the political opposition able to seek protection if they are being harassed by non-state actors? If so what, and at what level – local/national authorities?

At this moment, the overall sentiment is against the AL and it is very high, so protection inside Bangladesh is a bit difficult. But they are managing things in an understanding with the BNP and JeI. After the change in the government, these things are working differently. This process of bribing shows us there is a mutual understanding that operates on the ground, between the activists.

Bribery, is that at local or national level?

On every level. One example is a Minister, Nasrul Hamid Bipu, who fled Bangladesh. He was managing big businesses during AL's rule. It is alleged that former Advisor to the IG Ms Syeda Rizwana Hasan's husband was managing Mr Bipu's business. After Hasina fled, everything was cracked down upon, so the BNP have filled the vacuum. The AL had their own system of managing things, that is a parallel system. The BNP guys have stepped in and they are seeking assistance from the AL for business interests and illegal business, extortion, bribery etc.

Is there societal violence against low-level AL supporters now?

That is happening to some extent. Many low-level members are just silent, trying to live in this difficult time.

Would this come from members of the community?

This mainly comes from their political opponents. Another issue is the Jatiya Party (JP). They are not banned. However, whenever they try to organise activities, they face restrictions.

On freedom of expression, are people free to express their political views and are they free to protest?

We have concern over freedom of expression (FoE). Under the previous government, cases were filed under anti-terrorism (AT) law and the person was immediately put into jail. Initially, the IG allowed some space for FoE but gradually the IG also became a bit conservative about FoE, especially when a person was championing the rights of the opposition, they were accused of supporting the AL. Some journalists went to prison during the IG.

Now it is still a bit difficult to express opposition views, particularly if the view favours the AL in any way, so there are concerns about that, but the position until now has improved. Moving forward it will depend on the political strategy of the BNP regarding whether they allow the AL to carry out their regular activities or not. Until now, it appears that the BNP are running a 'one-man show' because they are not threatened by JeI and the NCP, so they can manage them and do not have that much interest in them. They cannot take challenge from a big opposition; they are enjoying this situation so they are not interested in allowing the AL to come back.

Was there any inter-/intra-party violence pre-election? What was the police response?

During the election period, violence was happening both inter- and intra-party. There was some violence within the BNP, and between the BNP and JeI, and we also saw some clashes with the NCP. So the clashes were multidimensional.

And in the post-election period?

Since the elections, instances of political violence have decreased and the situation has improved in some places, to some extent. Political violence is still going on, but mostly within the BNP, intra-party clashes and control over business interests, a system of extortion, who will take control of which area, what types of business will they control etc.

What has been the police response?

Some victims have tried to file cases against BNP activists, and the police have offered mediation, and then the perpetrator has escaped, so no case has been filed.

Post-election, has there been any state violence – if so, which security forces, ie at local or national level?

Most of the violence has been taking place at a local level.

Would you have an example of that?

Many journalists were arrested by the IG and many implicated in the July [2024] uprising and in the ICT cases, which is a big concern. Some other journalists were also arrested during the IG period for expressing opposition views that somehow do not favour the IG, or that may favour the AL's view, though they were not necessarily supporting the AL. But they were expressing their view and put in jail. They got bail, but their cases are not withdrawn so they are awaiting trial.

On freedom of association, how is your organisation affected, are you able to operate freely?

Firstly, under the AL, we were under huge pressure as an organisation, there were directions that each and every proposal and suggestion should get approval from Sheikh Hasina's office. Many proposals were delayed or blocked, and we were under surveillance. We were also under psychological pressure from law enforcement, so this made our work very difficult.

Under the IG, initially we saw that the situation was much improved. Our projects got approved quickly and funds were released. But gradually we saw the IG became very cautious about the activities of NGOs as well. For example, we applied for observation status for the National Elections (NE) with the Election Commission (EC), that was not granted. We had approval at some level but not by the EC on a technical issue. We tried to change this decision, however, we were told they did not have confidence we would support the government. So, after the election until now, the situation is comparatively better than under the AL government, but restrictions are not completely gone because we are seeing the old tactics of bureaucracy to frustrate, and the harassment of CSOs is coming back.

On the justice front, and regarding proposed reforms under the IG, have you seen any reform of the judiciary or any changes in the way that trials are processed?

Initially, there were some initiatives in the IG period, such as a separate secretariat for the Supreme Court, but the new government didn't pass the ordinance in parliament, so this initiative is gone. The IG also made an ordinance on the Human Rights Commission (HRC), this was good and included many of our demands, but the new government also didn't adopt it so we are back to an old 2009 law which is very restrictive and it actually sets a negative tone with the HRC. So some attempts of the IG for reform are actually gone.

Another thing about interfering with the judiciary during the IG period - on some occasions, some AL leaders and activists got bail. The law advisor was furious and said in public to go to the High Court and ask why they are granting bail to AL leaders and activists. There are still attempts to influence the position of the judiciary so it is not completely free.

What is the situation in relation to police independence now? Is there any government influence?

The police force usually try to figure out the sentiment of the government at the time, and if there is reward for loyalty then they will align with the government. They previously had complete loyalty to the AL government. There were hundreds and thousands of cases against AL activities. One view is that the police force were trying to flatter the [interim] government so they found some people and filed cases against these thousands of people, then they reported back to the top to say we have done these things; filed cases against AL leaders etc. Maybe this was another element that derailed the IG. That same thing is going on now, they can arrest some AL activists. The higher-ranking police officers, they publicly crack down, there is no change in the culture and practice.

Is it national or local – does it depend on the local influence of the police, or is it top down?

Many things go from down to up. What I was saying about the police forces who went to physically find false cases, this is a bottom-up idea. For example, this takes place in one or two places then the 'high ups' see this as an interesting thing that they are doing to help us, and say let us pick it up and make it policy, so then it comes from the top down.

For freedom of movement – if someone were to have a problem in one area could they move to another?

Yes, that is currently taking place, especially with AL cases. Leaders and activists facing cases in one district are trying to hide in another district or another area, and trying to pursue their business there. That is happening, they can move frequently, but it is a difficult situation.

Someone who is AL, can they express their opinion?

They can but it is difficult to express it publicly. When we are discussing with an AL activist, we may not like their ideas, but we are not attacking them. The problem is when they are saying things on social media or in electronic media, that is a problem. But at a community level, in day-to-day life, that is not a big problem. It is also true that sometimes people say we were doing good under Hasina's regime, but when that belief is noticed in the public or in the media, then there is this case.

To clarify, organised activities would be different to political beliefs?

That is different. When 10 or 15 activists gather, use slogans, and place demands, that becomes difficult. But when they are separated and are talking (speaking privately) then that is not a big problem. A week after the election, many AL offices were reopened, but the BNP guys were trying to grab spaces and have some control.

One thing I want to add, India has become a big issue in Bangladesh at this moment, so we will see what happens. There are two types of conspiracy theories. One said that when Hasina loses control, she will take protection in India and that became true. The other is that Hasina said some political parties are trying to topple our government, and that also become true. We have seen that a large number of leaders/ activists have taken shelter in India, and that could not have been done overnight because they obtained property, have trade licenses etc, so India's involvement in Bangladesh's politics has become very negative.

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Interview with Ayesha Kabir, Journalist

Date: 9 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: Ayesha Kabir; 3 CPIT officials; 1 FCDO official

What is your role in your organisation and what is your current work focus?

I am a journalist. I work with the newspaper Prothom Alo, the leading newspaper in Bangladesh (although the information I am giving reflects my own opinions, rather than those of the organisation). I look after the English-language content of Prothom Alo and deal with everything on that side, but politics and security are my main interest and focus. I have worked at Prothom Alo for 12 years. Prothom Alo has a sound reputation, the reporting is objective, analytical and investigative. Over the past 2 decades, during the AL time, our ideology seemed almost identical to theirs: secularism, valuing the liberation war and democracy and human rights values.

We really suffered under the Awami League. They professed these ideals but in reality, it was a different story. We reported thoroughly on crime and corruption and came under a lot of repression and oppression from the government, the business community, those aligned with the (AL) government and from other sectors, even religious sectors. The AL claimed to be secular but would cater to some extreme religious groups. So, over those 15 years we went through a really bad time. Journalists were arrested, even one of our female crime journalists. Our editor, a very respected man, is now 80 years old but still very active. There were nearly 60 cases against him all over the country.

There was just sheer harassment. For example, in terms of low levels of oppression, say this meeting today, I wouldn't have agreed to it, as if I left the office I would have been followed and then faced questioning. Journalists faced both subtle and deep harassment during the Awami League time.

We were active during the fall of the Awami League. Many photojournalists and journalists were injured. During the interim government, to tell the truth, I felt a huge sense of relief. We have not let up our ideology, or our goal to always report on crime, corruption, irregularities, but there was sense of relief that we were managing to do that.

However, during the interim government, many had doubts about their intention after 15 years of the whole system being politicised. It wasn't easy for a non-political government. The police force was shattered, there was corruption in the bureaucracy and in every institution, so it was difficult to run the country. During this time, we came under attack. There was the sprouting of mobs under the guise of religious elements. We don't know absolutely for certain who was behind them but it would be good to know. Our building was burnt down, they smashed everything including valuable equipment, luckily there weren't many journalists in the building and they were all safe. The mobs burnt down everything. It was really traumatic, financially too. They also attacked the [Bangladesh] Daily Star. During the interim government, there were other incidents of mob violence on a smaller scale.

Then, this government came to power. So far, I'm not saying it has been perfect but that sense of relief has been revived. We have been reporting again about certain weaknesses, the government is not perfect in many ways but we haven't come under attack for our reporting. We are able to do it freely, with no repercussions. This is talking about us [as journalists]. That is it in a nutshell.

The mobs under the interim government who were responsible for violence,

was there accountability? Was justice pursued?

We were very upset on two accounts. No law enforcement came forward to prevent this. We had got warning when the crowd naturally gathered at a distance beforehand. We reported this to the Home Ministry and police. Police only arrived very late and so did the fire engines. The fire engines were prevented from coming close. It was only after the damage had been done that the police actually came to the scene. People have been arrested but they were people who didn't orchestrate it. The interim government had turned a blind eye to this. There are certain elements outside the country who use social media to incite violence. They incite religious elements, but they are not necessarily religious. There's one man who is stationed in France, he's a well-known Hindu man, but he incited the Islamic community by saying Prothom Alo is atheist. The incident was very traumatic. Everyone in the interim government was apologetic after the damage was done.

The cases are ongoing; there have been more people arrested but the actual matter hasn't been totally solved.

Around election time, did your organisation receive hostility around election reporting?

Not really. We didn't have any issues, and the election went quite smoothly. There were warnings and threats, but we could report on the election, even on any irregularities that may have occurred in the election.

Regarding the harassment you talked about, are there any legal restrictions now on your activities that prevent freedom of speech?

Officially we haven't got any warnings.

The Prime Minister has been interacting with media houses and editors occasionally. We haven't been threatened yet. I don't know how long it will last as it is still quite early for the new administration. We are sceptical of how far it can change. But so far, the vibe has been good.

The Prime Minister has been very positive. The speeches he has done, everyone appreciates, even people who are politically neutral. Since he has come to power, he hasn't been abusive towards the previous government under Sheikh Hasina. She would use filthy language against him, terrible language, and would say things against our paper and editor. It was very crude. In that sense, there has been no vengeance from the new Prime Minister. It is a good thing. Some of his ministers sometimes say things they shouldn't.

But the problem lies at the grassroots level. Everything is politicised. The AL were in power in towns and districts, running businesses and extortion schemes. The BNP have that sentiment that "it is our turn now" in these local areas. The government/central power have a difficult time controlling those at the grassroots. For example, my office is in the middle of a market, previously it was the AL or their student league who would collect tolls from shopkeepers and rickshaw drivers, now it's the BNP men (though to a lesser extent). In the bigger cities, they [central leadership/government] are managing to control it to an extent but at the grassroots it is more difficult to control. It's not that the government aren't trying to control this, but it's not always possible. It's a big drawback, but we will see how far they go in controlling this.

The ministers, there are a lot of new faces, that is a good thing. But the newly appointed Bangladesh governor, the central bank governor, is a businessman, that is a huge conflict. This came as a surprise and a disappointment. I am not saying that

he's incompetent, but it's a conflict of interests.

Under the new government, has there been any more discussion about how they proceed with the reform commissions put forward under the interim government? Has there been any progress?

They have been very slow at that. When the reforms were being formulated, BNP had a lot of points they disagreed with and they did note their dissent. They have been a bit slow on reform and that is where the opposition is objecting. The BNP are saying that they will carry out reforms slowly.

It can sometimes be one step forward and two steps back. They have brought in certain positive things from their own manifestos. Under the previous government, ministers and MPs would get duty free cars cheap and that has now stopped. They also used to get huge plots of land for hardly any money but that has stopped. Lots of things like that have been stopped.

[**This information was added after the meeting** The previous prime minister(s) had a lot of protocol that would cause public inconvenience. A huge entourage of cars accompanying them wherever they went. Roads being blocked for long periods of time when the Prime Minister was to pass. Huge accommodation and extravagant perks. The present Prime Minister is more down to earth in this regard. No fanfare of toadeaters [hangers on] following him around.]

No reforms of the anti-corruption and information commission have been done yet. Nothing has been done about these institutions. I personally feel reforms are needed in the civil service. There has been a lot of corruption and politicisation in the civil service and police. The government is professing that they are reforming these, and they are making small steps, but they are not doing enough. In the judiciary and civil service, they are ostensibly removing one set of partisan people for another set of partisan people. Perhaps not as extreme as in the past, but the remains the case.

How does the local influence of the AL play into the actions of the police at that level? Previously and now?

Just as the BNP was a popular party, the AL was huge party and a popular party. They were an old party who were involved in the liberation war and ostensibly led liberation. They claim that they freed the country (even though everyone was involved). They always had to have the upper hand and some of those people are still there.

In the election, a lot of people sided with the BNP or even JeI, so they are still there, they are still active. The police, if they wanted to, could have done a lot with the grassroots but they are still corrupt, they might be working on behalf of the AL, or the BNP, so that is there and we must not forget that the AL have got huge amounts of money and they are using that to keep up the corruption. We shouldn't blame them alone, but we can't rule that out. It's all well being the good cop and putting on a nice face, but when it comes to the people's sake, I think the government needs to be much, much stricter.

Do you think government has control over security forces and is there a BNP directive of how police should act at lower levels?

I must bring in JeI as a factor too because until the IG came into power, because they were opposed to the formation of the 1971 war with Pakistan, they had a black label and negative image, but when the AL needed them they would use them to fight against the BNP. They have never had many seats in parliament; they have had very few. When the IG came, not only is JeI a very religious party, they got the upper

hand, because the ban against them was lifted and the interim government gave them a lot of leeway. Other religious groups managed to also raise their heads.

What was disappointing was that the young people who had led the July/August [2024] movement, the young people on the streets, who managed to put a fight against Sheikh Hasina. These young people managed to do it even though the major political opposition had struggled to oust Hasina. They had such a large following during July/August [2024], parents and grandparents were even joining them on the streets or taking food for them, there was a lot of hope put into these young people.

It is disappointing because many of these young people are now regressive instead of progressive.

People would ask, are they [young people] disillusioned that the BNP came into power. But these young people and the NCP were part of that anti-government movement, they were really strong. They should have remained so, instead of themselves becoming like political forces which they opposed.

Many of them are regressive. We imagined them to be progressive. You can be religious and progressive but they became regressive, anti-LGBT, and not anti-women but against women's progress and women's participation in sport, trying to dictate how women should dress in public, etc. This is what started and the young people initiated it, and we were disappointed with Professor Yunus being in power. He didn't do anything to stop this trend. Many of the young people who were in the movement were pretty happy when our office was attacked. When the election came, the NCP imagined a sweeping victory but people didn't vote for them. They got seats but when they realised they wouldn't get that many seats, they joined with JeI and they managed to get enough seats. [**This information was added after the meeting** They should have been more realistic and not expected to sweep to power in the very first election that was held. After all, they were new to politics and inexperienced. They were popular, but they needed to be patient and build up public confidence in them.]

And also, about the AL itself, the AL government would speak harshly about BNP activities, leaders, and PM Tarique himself. He was mistreated and oppressed by the AL, you would imagine there would be a blood bath of revenge (AL professed it would be so). His [Tarique Rahman's] mother was an uncompromising leader, she could have left the country if she chose to, she was really mistreated, as was Tarique himself too. But there hasn't been that backlash, or vengeance at all, even at the grassroots. At the beginning, yes, certain symbols and Hasina's father's house was burnt down, this is during the IG, so all of this happened then, but now also there hasn't been any backlash.

The AL was a dynastic party; Sheikh Hasina or her family were the leaders, other than them nobody has been at the head. Even now, she [Hasina] refuses to let go, she is in India. The AL is a bit of a cult rather than a party so the party also say 'Hasina or nobody', they are not letting go. There are many people who would like to come forward, it is such an old, traditional party, with such a lot of support, but they have no regret, remorse, or admitting that they made mistakes. When we lived through times of enforced disappearances, keeping people detained in small and cramped rooms for months or years at a time, it was scary, like in medieval times.

Are there any reports of enforced disappearances?

No, there are no enforced disappearances now. Just arrests

Has there been any accountability for lower-level AL people accused of human

rights abuses, those that are still in Bangladesh?

That's a big thing about the politicians and others, including journalists, jailed during the interim government, a lot of them are still in jail. Some have been released and some cases are still going on. There has been a lot of talk on this.

There are two opinions on these cases. One is that maybe they were guilty. Some journalists were known to have aided and abetted Sheikh Hasina by saying enforced disappearances didn't happen and such. Journalists are usually overworked and underpaid, but some of these people became like millionaires overnight, driving big cars etc. Maybe they deserve to be arrested for this but the cases against them are flimsy. They deserve to be punished for crimes, but they can't be kept in jail with these flimsy cases. I tell those in the legal field 'why don't you fight to get evidence?' or get journalists to come forward with evidence. Then fresh cases can be filed against them. But like it or not, keeping them behind bars with no evidence is wrong.

Recently, many of them have been released. We recently had a huge media conference within Bangladesh, alongside politicians from other countries. Some of these journalists who have been released were invited but they came with no remorse. They had the same sense of entitlement and asked why they aren't getting jobs. There's no sense of remorse or regret about how corrupt they have been. Justice and law is not one and the same, unfortunately.

According to the law, I know that some of them should be released or maybe just questioned. At the same time, there are some who have been released who maybe shouldn't have been. There are corrupt. Business people not in the country now that are looking at maybe returning. At the same time, the government has been trying to get back the laundered money. To me, corruption is one of the main problems in our country and these people have so much money that it's easy to buy their way out.

Those who were held on politically-motivated charges during the protests, many have been released. Are you aware of any that have not been released, for example students?

Most of them have been released, I'm not aware of any cases where they have not been.

This is a legal question. If a politically-motivated arrest warrant was issued under the AL, would that still be legally valid?

It would still stand because of the code of criminal procedure. So as far as I know it would still stand.

Do you know whether there would be a direction issued on how to deal with those cases and whether those warrants would be enforced?

I couldn't give an exact or accurate answer to that.

Are you aware of any official statistics on arrests and detentions of people over the years?

Not off the top of my head.

And the same question about violence, any official statistics?

Again, not off the top of my head.

You have touched upon police efficacy; if someone in the local community, in say Jel, had problems in the community, would they be able to seek protection from the police?

Yes they would be. I wouldn't call the police inefficient. But they don't have enough capacity even if they want to help, because many of them fled after the AL was ousted from power.

Jel have 'infiltrated' themselves into the police, military, armed forces, in different areas of bureaucracy, especially during the interim government. Even beforehand, Jel have a very different format than the BNP and AL. They are like a communist party, very regimented, very dedicated. The AL has a student wing and Jel infiltrated there, committing crimes in the name of the student party, but the moment the IG came in they said they were Jel students. They are very efficient like that.

If you look at the BNP or AL, the AL is like a cult and the BNP is like a club. Jel are extremely regimented and dedicated. In the AL, other than Sheikh Hasina, you can't think who would be the next leader. The BNP has an element of dynasties, Tarique [Rahman]'s father was president (although the BNP would not be fanatical like AL). Whereas Jel is just like a communist party, the present head of Jel, we hadn't heard much of him before. He's got a relatively more modern outlook. He [the Jel leader] was shunned before, but the moment the AL fell, now when he goes to events at foreign embassies, the diplomats rush to meet Jel. There were suddenly accepted into society, which they didn't have before.

Regarding a person's political leanings, does that affect whether they can get police protection in their community, generally?

It has been like that so far. Since the changeover, a bit less than before [under the AL]. Naturally, that is there, but before, the AL was all-encompassing, but right now it's a mixed bag so it's not that bad, but the corruption is still there in the police.

You touched on student wings, what's their role in political parties?

They are the muscle men for the political parties, and it's always been like that. Before, they were very politicised but it was seen very positively. I lived through 1971, they were leading in the movement for the Liberation War, then the military leader was in power, they were leading in the movement for his downfall, and always seemed very positive. I was in university, even though the BNP was in power, it was the left-wing student league who were very powerful.

The student wings weren't hoodlums or extortionists, but things slowly changed and they became corrupt. For example, contracts for repairing buildings were given to student leaders and they would make so much money. If you were part of a student group, only that group would be able to stay in the halls, so it was complete exploitation. Student halls have gone completely, that has been removed now – they were like torture chambers their halls, they would make 50 people stay in a small room until you pledged your loyalty to them, that has gone now.

How closely aligned are they with the policies of their main party?

Because the policies of the main parties are just actually theory, and previously it was the AL ruling the country and making money, ideologically there was a lot of things they couldn't say. It was blasphemy to speak against the AL or Sheikh Hasina.

Right now, it's almost like people are waiting for the other shoe to drop. Everything has been going well, but it is not perfect, with the police and judiciary a lot of reforms are needed. [PM] Tarique is giving out good vibes, but how far can the BNP keep it up? The government, policy-wise, is good. People want to believe in them, but once bitten, twice shy.

Social media is a big factor too, it's full of disinformation. People read our newspaper because it is so reliable, so we are constantly having to point out this and that is fake

etc. People like to be believe what's not true, so that's a constant battle that the government is having to deal with too, but how effective they are we'll see, it's still early days. But, PM Tarique, I think he is fine. The ministers, so far, so good, but we are so used to seeing corruption, it is hard not to be cynical.

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Interview with Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem (also known as Barrister Arman) Jamaat e Islami MP for Dhaka-14

Date: 8 June 2026

Location: Bangladesh Parliament Building, Dhaka

Present: Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem (also known as Barrister Arman), Jamaat e Islami MP; 3 CPIT officials; 2 FCDO officials

Could you outline your role within your political party and your current aims and objectives?

I first have to talk about the past. I was a victim of enforced disappearance and was held incommunicado in Aynaghar for 8 years. It's important to explain this because it shapes what we are doing now. I was released after the revolution [July/August 2024]. No-one thought they would see me again, except my wife and mother who never gave up hope. Because of this, I know first-hand what it's like to be a political dissident and be under a government with unchecked power.

I am a practising Barrister at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. My Head of Chambers, Barrister A Raazzaq, has said our constitution gives power to the head of state similar to a Roman emperor. We want balance of power, accountability and transparency.

The current legal regime consolidates power in too few hands. [To change this] we need to implement the July Charter. It would bring real accountability, and it is something we want to see through. I am Member of Parliament for Mirpur in the east end of Dhaka. It is one of the poorest and most neglected parts of the city. I was born and raised there. Most people assume Mirpur is full of elites and wealth, but they are wrong. In reality, there are people living in poverty and they live in worse conditions than in many rural areas. The reason they elected me is because I called for real change and an overhaul of the system. People are not happy with the current system.

As well as being an MP, I am also the Advisor of Foreign Affairs to the Leader of the Opposition. In this role, I engage with stakeholders such as international politicians, communities and press. I am assigned to liaise with the outside world on behalf of the party.

Our main goal is to overhaul the system. We are not happy with the constitution and penal system, unless implementation of significant change is brought in compliance with the July Charter as promised during the election. Right now, the judiciary, the anti-corruption commission, and the civil bureaucracy provide almost no real check on the executive. Put simply, our institutions are not working as they should.

How has the political environment changed since August 2024, including under the interim government and now?

First, we have leadership who held public office before back in office. Our country has never had a strong record on accountability or tolerating dissent, and unfortunately the new government has not been different so far. Usually, we do not get to see many new faces in government, but it is different in this parliament as 2

thirds of MPs are new. Even so, “the old guard” mentality is in control, so little has changed. Principles and policies have taken a back seat, and we are back to the old way of doing business. It is how we saw things in past; policy pushed through by force. Policy is driven little by concept, it is done by the ruling class and individuals with business interests to see how much they can gain. It is more transactional.

During the interim government, we saw signs of real reform, and they had a clear plan to see this out. We are now seeing that vanishing and big decisions are being based on “transactions”. I am happy to say that on record.

What is your party’s relationship with the BNP now?

The BNP is our brother in arms; we have been in alliance for over 21 years, and we were part of the government together. Back then, our interests were mutual and we shared a common adversary. During the election period, we fought the election against each other and now one of us is in government and the other in opposition, but we still have a working relationship.

We see the government is trying to portray tolerance in parliament when getting criticism from political leadership. We don’t see a political backlash just because we have criticised them. There is a semblance of tolerance there but there are signs of that moving away. For example, 7 online activists have been detained so far for criticising government officials or the work of the government. We are only 100 days in and there have been 7 arrests merely because they were critical of the government. As tensions grow and the government makes more politically driven decisions, we expect to criticise more, which increases the risk. In general, power and tolerance move in opposite directions: the more power is concentrated, the less tolerant those in power tend to become. People fear that as power consolidates further, legal reform will stall.

You’ve touched on tolerance at a higher level – what about the tolerance at constituency or grassroots level – what is the BNP’s tolerance for Jamaat in the community?

Dhaka is different [from the rest of the country]. In other areas, government policies are fuelling divide. For example, when distributing government grants for members of parliament, it is meant to be equal. They are deliberately leaving MPs out of grants. Government grants are being given to ruling party people, even in areas where the MP is part of the opposition. I’ll share the brief we have prepared on systematic exclusion. They leave the opposition out of grants, which is giving rise to tensions on the ground.

Dhaka is a bit different, there is law and order and police presence to stop it getting out of hand and becoming a bigger issue. In rural areas, there is only about one policeman for every 7,000 people and there have been a few demonstrations where dissenting opinion has converted into commotion. We have already seen a dozen serious injuries and at least one death linked to police confrontations.

Is that pre-election?

No, this has continued even after the election. In the Bangladesh context, one death is not abnormal. I am not proud to say that, but one or two deaths doesn’t make headlines. When a fellow student died, we staged a demonstration; people were surprised there was a demonstration over one person who died. That’s the reality, that it hardly makes headlines. That shows how normalised this has become. My concern is that this could get worse as political tension increases.

Around freedom of expression, you’ve mentioned protesting - what is the

situation now? Can your members protest and how does that compare to the period under Awami League rule?

Under the Awami League (AL), repression was institutionalised under the oppressive Cyber Security Act which criminalised social media posts criticising the government. There is now a new law proposed, aimed at misinformation and deliberate posts targeting racial and communal tensions. They are trying to bring back the old law in a new name, and their statement is that it is to counter misinformation. If provision is reinstated, it might be abused. They are not saying it's against political dissidents and political criticism isn't in the scope of the law, but the law isn't rigorous. If the new law goes through, everyone deciding to criticise the government might face criminal prosecution under the new law. We don't believe in this law, there is scope for prosecution based on fabrications and trumped-up charges.

In developing countries, the police and judiciary can be used as a political tool against the opposition, and we have seen this happen before in Bangladesh. At the moment, it is not widescale, but without reform and major amendments to branches of power, there is nothing preventing this.

Were there protests around the election and post-election period and what was the police response?

It was a very peaceful election, we didn't see any major violence. Even after the result, many were not happy as they believed people's views were not reflected. We decided to accept the result for the sake of the stability of the country. Because of this more patient stance from the opposition, we haven't seen much post-election violence.

However, there was violence around two recent by-elections. In Sherpur, one person died, and we saw serious problems – armed groups took control of polling stations, among other issues.

[**This information was added after the meeting** Several senior leaders from the ruling party contested multiple seats in the general election. After winning, they retained one seat each, triggering by-elections for the vacated seats.]

Which groups were involved?

This was the BNP against Jamaat e Islami. There was violence, and the physical expulsion of polling officers. Polling centres were occupied by ruling party-linked groups and they won the by-election.

What was the police response?

They [the police] were bystanders and watched from afar, they simply did not act. The military were deployed during the general election and were more proactive in stopping problems and ensuring fair votes. In my area, out of 177 polls at least 30 were taken over by such groups during the general election, and the military was quick to expel these thugs; we didn't see the military taking any actions against miscreants in the by-elections.

On justice and accountability, is there any update on those held for their actions under Sheikh Hasina? There has been media attention on the ICT charges of high-profile people, but has there been anything in relation to lower profile people or action in the normal domestic courts?

To be very honest, those who could afford a good lawyer and were not charged under the ICT, the majority of them have been released. After the BNP came to power, there were a significant amount of people linked with the Awami League who

were granted bail. The assumption is that they somehow ended up manging to have a “back channel” with the ruling party.

In my area, local leaders who fired automatic weapons at protesters are now out on bail, which was a shock to us. Those who could afford a good lawyer or had the capacity to get a back channel with the ruling party are now out. That didn’t happen with the ICT, as at that higher level there are more checks and balances, and the cases have lots of attention.

In the rural areas, a significant number of cases have been bailed. The former speaker of Awami League was released within 3 weeks, and 2 MPs who were jailed during the interim period are out. From what we hear from within the legal community, including a friend who is defending AL members, they are very optimistic they will get out on bail. The political urge that they don’t get bail is not there anymore. In short, those who can get a back channel into government [have the right connections] and those who can get a good lawyer can get out.

What about the independence of the judiciary and the judicial system?

As a lawyer, I used to pride myself as an officer of the court but with the way things are now, I’m not proud. During the interim government, an independent judicial secretariat was set up but has now been dissolved. The ruling party promised to bring it back in a stronger form, but we are still waiting for that. Once in power, any executive is tempted to control everything, including the judiciary – and that is what has happened here; this reform has not moved forward.

Proposed laws from the interim government had to be approved by the full parliament and many of these have been allowed to lapse. The judicial community and human rights groups have been pushing for the reinstating of the law. The government have been saying they will bring it back in a “year or two” but based on what we are seeing, we doubt this will actually happen – which speaks volumes on the intentions of the ruling party.

Is there an update on those held on politically motivated charges under Hasina? Do people remain in custody and if so on what charges, and what is the profile of such people?

Most people held on politically motivated charges under Sheikh Hasina’s government, including those with a political background, have been released. However, some people accused of crimes during the 1971 Liberation War are still in prison. The fate of these cases hasn’t changed much. Also, those held for the border guard mutiny during the AL, 175 have been executed so far, and those who were not executed but serving a life sentence are still inside.

Is it a unique profile of cases?

Yes.

If an arrest warrant was issued against a political opponent and was not executed during that period, does it still stand legally now? What is the process of a warrant being executed?

Legally, there is no time limit on the validity of a warrant, unless there is a revision by law or it is taken back by the relevant police department. If there no action taken to withdraw the warrant, then it remains valid indefinitely. That is the legal position.

But, in practice, the police are understaffed, overburdened and underfunded. Even a valid warrant may never really be enforced.

So, in practice, say a Jamaat supporter previously had an arrest warrant,

would that be pursued?

I know of 2 Jamaat leaders who, due to a fear of prosecution, fled during the AL rule and when they returned, they were detained at the airport. They were taken to court and released on bail. One warrant was in place for 7 years and now that there is a digital system, a warrant will remain there forever and you can get caught no matter how many years later. Those with existing warrants may get arrested on return, they may get bail or may be detained for a few days, or after a long time, it depends on the degree of severity of the charges.

Does it go through the court process?

Yes, it has to go through the legal process and then they get bail. One of the senior religious leaders accused by the AL had to go through the legal process to get out. He spent time in jail but then got out and the case was closed.

And the people who took part in the 2024 protests, students etc who were initially arrested, do any remain detained?

No – all of them have been released.

But there are growing concerns about "July protesters". In the media and especially on talk shows from AL supporters, journalists and those with international backgrounds are questioning whether they should be detained for the killing of police officers. Some of the "July warriors" are expressing concerns that AL leaders getting bail might mean they retaliate and that the BNP are not owning up to their part in the July [2024] revolution. Those who were the most visible are finding themselves without support, they are worried about safety and security.

Those affiliated with the Awami League who remain in the community, do they still have power and influence?

Those in the AL had a long tenure in power and gained a significant amount of wealth and business. The BNP has resorted to the transactional approach to governing and are able to extract benefits from them because of this.

I wouldn't be surprised that an AL leader with financial capacity might go after prominent local participants in the July [2024] movement for vindication. I wouldn't be surprised if this happened, even based on business disputes. When the AL were in power, those with business disputes couldn't go anywhere for protection. During the interim government, members of the local community generally had the upper hand in land and business disputes, but now that AL figures are back out on bail, they are trying to reclaim that position, often bypassing the courts entirely. This is a genuine concern.

On police capacity to deal with issues at the local level – would someone be able to go to the police with a political problem and would it depend on which political party was involved?

Honestly, it depends on the capacity of the victim. If the victim has the capacity to draw attention in practical means, i.e. through social media or financially, they might get relief. And the other factor is the attention given to the case by the ruling party, if they get involved nothing will help the victim.

In my constituency, one of my key campaign promises was to tackle corruption and extortion. In the downtown area, gangs were running an extortion racket. One of my campaign promises was to make sure this doesn't happen as they were terrorising local businesses. I asked someone to help organise local businessmen against this – and he was subsequently charged by ruling party-linked individuals with intimidating

local businesses. He was just trying to gather businessmen against extortion and now he's being charged with intimidation. The only reason for this is that the gang have an informal alliance with the BNP-linked figures who take a cut of the proceeds. I called the police commissioner, and he couldn't help because he couldn't get back to the area and he has a warrant in his name. I'm an MP and I'm calling the police saying that this man is innocent, he did it on my instruction to gather businessmen. They said they are powerless and advised talking to local ruling party leaders in my area. The police force does not have a history of independence, and that has not changed.

I hope that someone will read this and do something to change it. We have to admit that something is broken and to change it. Trying to sugar coat it won't change it. This is the situation, the first step to fixing it is to admit it is broken.

Around the role of auxiliary groups, particularly student wings – can you explain how it works and their links to the main party?

The BNP, AL and Jamaat all have student wings. The BNP and AL have a similar modus, they are two sides of same coin when it comes to their political structures.

Jamaat is different: we are more internally democratic and disciplined. Our student wing, Shibir, has no official organisational link to Jamaat. They are an independent organisation, even Jamaat cannot dictate who will be president. When it comes to the BNP, their constitution gives its party chair the power to appoint the head of its student wing, making it formally part of the party structure. Ours is different and independent. We don't have organisational control over the student wing. In practice, when there are common issues or goals, they join us together, for example at the moment we are protesting on freedom of speech so we may join together in protest.

The BNP and AL's constitutions specify that the head of the student wing will be decided by the party leader. In terms of the student wing organisation, it is part and parcel of the wider party machine, in both law and practice. In our constitution they are totally separate, Shibir is completely independent in practice.

Jamaat leaders allow its students to have a mind of their own. They are local observers, they can verify more, they are more politically agile and more locally connected. During the interim government, they won Student Union elections in public universities, but we couldn't replicate that in the general election. Shibir are more adaptive to change, the main organisation is not that flexible. Jamaat has an internal council through which the Ameer [leader] and other leaders are elected by party members and this council does not happen in other parties.

The AL, unlike the BNP, has not changed its organisational practices in over 15 years, in either its main party or its student wings. In both the BNP and AL, the leaders of the student wings tend to be older, they rarely change the leader, and they are effectively chosen by the party leadership – even positions like the vice-president of the student wing.

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Interview with Human Rights Professionals at International NGO

Date: 11 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: 2 Human Rights Professionals at International NGO; 3 CPIT officials; 1 FCDO official

What have been the key changes in the political situation since 2024 from your

perspective?

I think the uprising brought a lot of political discussion and transformation to the country, especially the perception of trying to move forward toward democratisation of the country. We received a lot of good signals that started during the interim period, which finished on 12 February [2026] with the election. [For example] The 5 reform commissions and the Commission of Inquiry on enforced disappearances (CoI-ED) which was one of the recommendations from the OHCHR-FFM report.

[**This information was added after the meeting** Reference was made to the publicly available OHCHR Fact-Finding Mission report[2] as a key source of information on the human rights context surrounding the July 2024 events and the recommendations relevant to subsequent legal, institutional and accountability reforms[3].]

After that, there were a lot of initiatives that were made by the Interim Government (IG), especially the ordinances, 133, not all related to human rights, but on a range of topics. So, this could reflect on what the country was moving towards. Over the following year and a half, through both official engagement and discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, there appeared to be increased openness to reforms aimed at strengthening democratic governance and bringing legal and institutional frameworks more closely into line with international human rights standards.

[**This information was added after the meeting** In addition to the 133 ordinances adopted during the interim period, which signalled an intention to pursue reforms across a broad range of sectors, reference was also made to the report of the CoI-ED, published in December 2025 and publicly available[4]. It was explained that the report represents an important piece of the broader puzzle from the history of Bangladesh's rule of law and the evolution of its criminal justice chain and the institutional context leading up to the July 2024 events. By documenting patterns, institutional practices and structural shortcomings affecting policing, investigations, detention, prosecution and accountability over time, the report provides an important reference for understanding both the historical trajectory of the country's justice system and the structural challenges inherited by the current reform process.]

Did that change now? Not sure, but we cannot say that it is systematic compared to what it was before. This one is an additional outcome that happened during the interim period.

[**This information was added after the meeting** While a number of reform initiatives have subsequently been undertaken, it was noted that it remains premature to draw definitive conclusions as to the extent to which the structural shortcomings identified in the report have been addressed. On 19 July [2026], [Human Rights Watch] HRW reported the first case of [enforced disappearance] ED after the July [2024] uprising[5].]

Also, additional developments during the interim period, the Government's openness to discuss specific human rights issues, including publicly[6], particularly the openness to receive special procedures[7], including sensitive mandate holders[8], not on country visit, but at least on 'technical visits'. [**This information was added after the**

[2] OHCHR, OHCHR Fact-Finding Report: Human Rights Violations and Abuses..., 12 February 2025
[3]OHCHR, UN Human Rights investigation may support accountability..., 12 February 2025
[4] COIED, Unfolding the Truth: A Structural Diagnosis of Enforced Disappearance..., 13 January 2026
[5] HRW, Bangladesh: First Enforced Disappearance Case Since July 2024 Uprising, 19 July 2026
[6] BSS News, Govt working to build broad national consensus around renewed..., 29 July 2025
[7] Prothom Alo, UN group on enforced disappearance arrives after over a decade of..., 15 June 2025
[8] Barrister Shyikh Mahdi, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions visits..., 31 Dec 2024

meeting The Government facilitated the visit of the WGEID [Working Group on Enforced Disappearances] in June 2025 and the visit of Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions in July 2025. Both visits were very productive.]

Both were academic visits which does not result in any public reporting or statement. The government allowed technical exchanges and observations, some aspects of which are reflected in publicly available information with regard to both visits, in particular the WG visit.

[**This information was added after the meeting** The outcome was very normative and at the legal level, it informed some aspects of the ordinance on enforced disappearance[9]. The Special Rapporteur on summary executions' visit was particularly interesting[10] and came out with very tangible results. Discussion with the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health helped identify a way of exhuming a mass grave with the support of international forensic expertise[11]. The forensic supported the establishment of a temporary mortuary at the exhumation site and provided technical guidance on the forensic recovery, examination and scientific identification process, in line with international forensic standards[12]. Some aspects and figures have been reflected in publicly available information[13].]

Regarding justice reform, there were extensive discussions around legal reforms, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and of course, continued advocacy to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). In fact, the [OCHCR] FFM report made recommendations on the ratification of the international instruments to which Bangladesh was not yet party. As proof of good signals, just after the report, Bangladesh directly ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. It came very early after the uprising. The advocacy continued, in particular for the ratification of OPCAT[[14]], which happened in October 2025.

[**This information was added after the meeting** Another positive development during the interim period was the Government's decision to strengthen its engagement with the United Nations Human Rights Office, including through the establishment of a country presence, continued cooperation with UN human rights mechanisms and support for technical assistance. The engagement is centred on technical cooperation and situational assessment to support its advisory work on justice, rule of law, legal and institutional reforms, national human rights institutions and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders[15].

The discussion also covered the gender dimension of the participants' work. Reference was made to ongoing efforts to mainstream gender considerations across technical engagement, including support to initiatives, work relating to the implementation of CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women], participation in the UN Gender Champions Network, and the integration of gender-sensitive and gender-balanced approaches across consultations, capacity-building activities and stakeholder engagement.]

A lot of what you've touched on started in the IG period, how is it working now

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[9] OHCHR, Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances Technical..., 25 June 2025
[10] The Daily Star, UN expert: Tech support vital for probing unlawful deaths, 31 July 2025
[11] OHCHR, Bangladesh: Forensic identification of victims of July 2024 protests..., 12 December 2025
[12] Ratopati, Bangladesh begins exhuming mass grave from 2024 uprising, 7 December 2025
[13] Voice7 News, Govt to Exhume July Uprising Victims from Mass Grave for..., 5 August 2025
[14] OMCT, Government must end torture and fully implement recommendations..., 25 June 2020
[15] OHCHR, UN Human Rights Office to open mission in Bangladesh, 18 July 2025

in terms of your ability to fulfil your mandate?

The first action of this government was a little bit alarming following the repeal/lapse of 22 or 23 ordinances, out of the 133 adopted during the interim period. [**This information was added after the meeting** The repealed ones were all related to human rights. This was initially perceived as an unfortunate development, as several of the repealed ordinances had benefited from broad stakeholder consultations and participatory drafting processes.] It was a signal of 'what is going on, why are we shifting again'. But now it seems they were in a bit of a rush because it was not their choice as government.

[**This information was added after the meeting** Following an election procedures-wise, according to the constitution of the country, the government has around 30 days to review the 133 ordinances adopted during the interim period, by adopting, or repealing. The repeals came without specific explanations from the government or any indication suggesting that the government will start working on draft laws or draft bills related to the subject matters. It was a blank communication-wise and this initially created uncertainty regarding the continuity of the reform process. Let's put things in their contextual timing: it was the first 10 days, the government has to act rapidly, in Ramadan and Eid periods, and without specific communication it created some tension.]

But after March/early April [2026], the government reverted with a positive speech, showing that they were working on making and drafting a new law on the NHRC and on enforced disappearance, getting support from UN agencies and the EU, were working on laws related to anti-corruption, and things like that, calling for consultations. All these are indications that the dynamic reverted.

On 17 May 2026, the Ministry of Law opened a consultation for a draft NHRC law and the draft bill on enforced disappearance[16].

[**This information was added after the meeting** The Ministry of Law shared openness to receive comments from all stakeholders[17] [18] [19] working on providing them with comments. The WGEID from its side prepared and shared comments on the draft bill related to enforced disappearance[20].]

From a transitional justice perspective, a step back is noticed compared to what it was with the IG. In the electoral manifesto, there was a very good paragraph speaking on engagement for a process on transitional justice. Different political parties during the election/referendum; NCP, JeI, BNP, and the AB [Amar Bangladesh], all put a clear reference marking a commitment to engage in a transitional justice process in their manifestos. The BNP legal advisor, who is now advisor to the office of the PM, was always present in every event related to the subject matter during the period of the IG, and always delivered a positive speech on transitional justice and always delivered to the public the BNP vision on transitional justice.

Since they [BNP] entered into power, [they have given] no signal to go through [the] compliant process on transitional justice. A national dialogue may have to start; tackling issues related to institutional reforms starts by dealing with the past violations. Maybe it is not a one-fit model, but there is a pressing need to discuss

[16] The Daily Star, A watchdog without teeth: The problems with the draft NHRC Act, 22 June 2026
[17] UN, Empowering National Human Rights Commission is a must for Bangladesh, 11 March 2026
[18] Transparency International, Draft National Human Rights Commission Act 2026..., 10 June 2026
[19] Jurist News, Rights groups urge Bangladesh to amend national human rights..., 23 June 2026
[20] OHCHR, Mandates of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary..., 17 June 2026

before starting. [**This information was added after the meeting** Apparently, there are some indications to establish a truth and healing commission - but mandate functions, composition and scope (temporal and material) have to be discussed at broader national level.] [There has been] no positive signal that any dialogue or process is about to start.

[**This information was added after the meeting** The last approved version of the NHRC bill and the enforced disappearance act may have some indication on how the country is intending to deal with past violations. In fact, the draft law related to enforced disappearance is just focusing on things that will happen; it means it is not making any retractive indication that any regime will be applied to past violations.]

However, enforced disappearance as a crime is [a] continuous crime if the fate and the whereabouts of the person is still unknown. [**This information was added after the meeting** Therefore, some situations are still under this consideration and are still ongoing. In such cases, what will be considered? Will it be considered under this law, or under which regime there will be a legal response?] In any event, with both draft bills, nothing is indicating that a transitional justice process is to be considered. [There is] no visibility on how the government of the country will deal with past violations.

Other interlocutors may provide different perspectives. During the international day of peacekeepers, the PM was leading the Ceremony[21] and provided a speech which commented on human rights and gender, it was a very open speech. It was not a speech to the international reforms, but the speech mentioned the military police, and the forces of the country, it was a very good speech regarding human rights, gender, and a culture to end impunity, things like that, so they are just starting.

[**This information was added after the meeting** From an analytical perspective, Bangladesh's request to postpone its graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category was considered as one contextual indicator among others when assessing the country's broader reform trajectory. At that stage, there were both encouraging and less clear signals: progress was observable in certain legal reform initiatives, including work on the NHRC and enforced disappearances, while other areas, particularly the future direction of a comprehensive transitional justice process, remained uncertain.]

Also, generally it is something like custom, internationally recognized political practice, that once entering into power, [a] government generally requests a 100 day settling period; this government asked for 180 days. [**This information was added after the meeting** Maybe because it is a political transition; and it is a demanding period, that will necessitate a lot of preparatory work for effective reforms. Knowing the charge of the workload that is waiting and putting necessary time-allocation might be also perceived as a good signal. From an analytical perspective, there are both good and bad signals and things are evolving every day. From a human rights perspective, every [piece of] information has to be monitored, but things have calmed down in comparison with the period of the election.

There was significant violence during that [election] period. However, compared with previous electoral periods, including 2024, the level and nature of violence observed during the 2026 elections appeared to be different and comparatively lower. While incidents of violence remained a concern, this was discussed as one of several contextual indicators suggesting that the situation may have evolved.]

[21] BSS News, PM for upholding values of peace, humanity to build safer world, 9 June 2026

What about post-election violence, and is it affecting specific groups?

[**This information was added after the meeting** It was noted that, compared with previous elections, the level of violence during and immediately after the 2026 elections appeared to be comparatively lower. Although localized political clashes and isolated incidents continued to occur, no election-related deaths were reported during the electoral period.]

There were allegations of Jel and NCP, that they have experienced a few cases of violence in their constituencies, but overall, the violence was much less than in previous years.

On specific groups, violence against women [was] still the same, during elections violence against women will escalate.

When we talk about the representation of women in parliament or the political parties, there are 50 seats reserved for women in parliament, to encourage them to participate, but in practice what we see is it hasn't really helped in increasing the number because there were zero nominations in opposition parties for women. In the government party, the BNP, they have nominated some, but only 6 or 7. This is still only 2-3%, so it is a very serious concern for citizens, stakeholders, and female MPs. Now that parliamentarians have joined parliament in this session, parliament looks inclusive, because there are women involved, but if you think about it there hasn't actually been empowerment at the grassroots level. The Election Commission did not have specific measures in terms of protecting the safety of women candidates, because in the digital space the women candidates experience a lot of harassment. There are no measures from the Election Commission, so this was of concern.

You've touched on justice and accountability and what's happening in that space. We have heard in the press about the ICT charges and the higher profile cases. Do you know anything about whether people have been charged for their actions under the Sheikh Hasina government at the lower levels?

There are politicians and supporters of the AL who are facing charges and their cases are being heard at the local courts. According to their statements and opinions, most of their cases are not aligned with their actions. There are allegations of charges such as murder which wasn't the case if you look at the newspapers, the media, they are saying they are being charged under accusations that are not true. They could be charged under actual allegations, corruption, money laundering. They [politicians and supporters of the AL] engaged directly with relevant UN human rights mechanisms by submitting communications to Special Procedures mandate holders, including the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers.

[**This information was added after the meeting** Following engagement with these mechanisms, allegations of reprisals were received. The relevant Special procedures are aware of what is happening and in discussions with the government. Reference was made to a discussion that brought together members of the international community, including the British High Commission and a limited number of individuals associated with the former administration, to exchange views on their experiences with ongoing judicial proceedings. Participants presented concerns which they considered human rights violations in relation to the ongoing proceedings. The was a question that they never managed to answer. Whether the procedural concerns described reflected differentiated treatment linked to political affiliation or broader systemic shortcomings affecting the justice system more generally. No clear distinction emerged during the discussion. Examples discussed, such as late notification of court appearances, appeared to reflect concerns that had

also been reported more generally in relation to the functioning of the justice system. The discussion also referred to observations reportedly shared by organizations with longstanding engagement on detention-related issues in Bangladesh.

A number of stakeholders, including the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] and the EU reportedly noted that many of the described detention-related concerns or proceeding-related shortcomings appeared consistent with longstanding structural challenges affecting the judiciary and detention conditions more broadly. Anyway, the detention conditions are not in line with international law, and this is what everybody in the jail is facing, it is the same conditions. From an analytical perspective, it was observed that establishing differentiated treatment would require a much more detailed factual assessment. The discussion highlighted that distinguishing between systemic shortcomings and treatment linked specifically to political affiliation would require detailed case-by-case analysis.

From a human rights professional perspective, such distinctions are often found in the practical implementation of detention regimes rather than in the formal rules themselves, and therefore require detailed, facility-specific and case-by-case assessment. For example, where a general practice permits contact with the outside world at regular intervals, differentiated treatment may instead be reflected in subtle variations in how that practice is applied to particular individuals. Similarly, access to medical care may appear comparable in principle while differing in practice through delays or more restrictive application affecting particular detainees. These are often highly fact-specific issues that can only be identified through detailed and sustained case-by-case monitoring. The arguments of the EU and the ICRC are totally relevant, and it needs assessing in more detail to get a sense on if there is discrimination grounded on political affiliation.

From a comparative human rights perspective, political transitions often require close observation of institutional practices over time. It is often these subtle differences in practice that require sustained observation in order to determine whether differentiated treatment exists. In other contexts with comprehensive monitoring mandates, including through regular engagement with places of detention, it was possible to develop a much more detailed understanding of institutional practices over time. The current operational framework in Bangladesh is different and therefore does not provide the same basis for such assessments.]

The IG released a lot of those held on politically motivated charges under the AL. Do you know if people remain held on politically motivated charges?

Many individuals were released and a number of the cases have been dismissed. At the same time, reports indicated that some individuals remained in detention pending ongoing judicial proceedings. It was also reported that some individuals associated with the former administration remained in detention and continued to allege that the charges against them were politically motivated.

Do you have any information about how many, or their profile?

[**This information was added after the meeting** Some reports[22] provide figures and other information, although no official or sufficiently reliable data are currently available to confirm them.]

To add, on violence, during the electoral period, an increased amount of violence was allegedly shared [perpetrated] against the Christian community.

[**This information was added after the meeting** At the same time, it was noted that

[22] The Business Standard, Over 5,000, including heavyweights, arrested in July..., 4 August 2025

it was not possible to determine whether this reflected an actual increase in incidents, improved reporting, or greater willingness of affected communities to report such incidents. Some interlocutors nevertheless perceived that reports had become more frequent than previously, because the freedom of speech during that period is allowing such environment [enables this]. Some interlocutors also expressed the perception that changes in the political environment may have affected the sense of protection previously perceived by parts of the Christian community. Information was reportedly shared by diplomatic interlocutors and representatives of minority communities, including civil society organizations working on freedom of religion or belief[23], raising concerns regarding the protection of members of the Christian community. The concerns were described as affecting different parts of the country rather than a single locality. The information available at that stage remained allegation-based as no comprehensive monitoring is ongoing. It was noted that these reports would require further verification and corroboration before broader conclusions could be drawn. The perception of increased violence against the community might also be due to the actual environment related to freedom of speech that has enabled incidents that had previously gone unreported to be brought forward. No conclusion could be drawn as to whether the reported incidents reflected a systematic pattern, while some allegations referred to incidents affecting Christian schools and other community institutions.

More generally, it was observed that a broader range of human rights concerns had been raised publicly since the July 2024 events, making it difficult to distinguish between an increase in incidents and an increase in reporting.]

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Interview with Mosifiqur Rahman Johan, Chairman of All Victims and Veteran Network

Date: 14 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: Mosifiqur Rahman Johan, Chairman of All Victims and Veteran Network (AVN); 3 CPIT officials

Introduction

I'm a human rights activist, and work in a multi-disciplinary way, engaging with different organisations to have maximum impact. For 7/8 years I worked with an organisation called Maayer Daak that was a platform for victims and their families of enforced disappearance. We carried out demonstrations. I also work for AVN - All Victims and Veteran network in Bangladesh, of enforced disappearances and extra judicial killings, we connect with victims. At the moment, I am trying to organise some protests on human rights.

Broadly, how has the political environment changed since August 2024?

There have been so many frustrations. During the [protest] movement, our understanding was that the political system would change and so many institutions would change, for example the police, civil, and judicial institutions. We believed they were not functioning, but we were not sure how we moved forward from this space, this was the struggle. Since the uprising, many people from different sectors came but there were broken promises in a way. It has been extremely difficult to navigate in that direction, and the Interim Government (IG) made so many commissions which

[23] Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, Reports, no date

is really good, but the problem is they didn't know how to implement them. So, they don't add any value because they were not implemented. Also, the Human Rights Commission and the Enforced Disappearance ordinance, all of them have lapsed. So, our comment is that we have to ensure that we build new institutions and new policies, so that we will build a new Bangladesh.

The current situation remains confrontational, the mass people [the masses] are not happy. The BNP is in government now, but they are struggling because it is a deep-rooted problem, it is rooted in infrastructure. The BNP now has to take control of the police and civil administration.

Also, the political opposition sometimes don't have that legitimacy, so it is quite complicated to push and quite complicated to see how all of the parties are navigating these dimensions.

With the changes in the political environment, has that affected different political groups?

The political landscape has certainly changed, and so have the roles of many political actors. Groups such as the BNP and Jamaat, which were previously victims of repression under the Awami League government, now hold considerably more political influence. However, I do not think they have consistently upheld the standards they once demanded from those in power.

The situation today is not as severe as it was under the previous regime, but that does not mean the underlying problems have disappeared. One of the biggest disappointments has been the lack of commitment to meaningful reform. After the uprising, many of us hoped that the kinds of human rights violations we witnessed during the Awami League era - such as arbitrary arrests, politically motivated cases, and abuses of state power - would not be repeated.

[**This information was added after the meeting** Instead, while the scale may be different, some of the same patterns continue to emerge. That raises concerns about whether there has been a genuine shift in political culture or simply a change in who holds power. The real test of democratic transition is not only replacing those in government, but ensuring that the institutions and practices that enabled abuse are fundamentally reformed.]

Has the newly elected BNP government implemented any recommendations from the commissions formed under the interim government – if so, what?

They gave up on the idea of implementing the recommendations but said that they will implement new laws that would be modified by them. Regarding the Human Rights Commission ordinance, who will be the law enforcement agency? It should be an independent body, not the institution themselves. Now it's complex, if the police, for example, have committed extra-judicial killings or custodial torture, who will do the investigation? They (the BNP) are saying they came up with a new law and it has to be changed, the institution (i.e. the police) will essentially investigate themselves.

In terms of members and leaders of political organisations, are they able to freely express their political opinions?

At the moment, people are generally able to express their political opinions more freely than they could under the previous government. The situation is better, although I am not sure that this openness will necessarily last.

One of the biggest challenges is that society is deeply traumatised. Many people have experienced arbitrary arrests, torture, enforced disappearances, or other forms of repression. These experiences have left lasting psychological and social scars. At

the same time, there is still no strong human rights protection mechanism or comprehensive process for truth, accountability, and justice. Many victims continue to struggle to obtain justice or even official recognition of what happened to them.

Because of this, it is difficult for society to move forward. If we want to build a new Bangladesh, we need a shared understanding of the past and a credible process for accountability that is based on the rule of law rather than revenge. One of the most difficult questions concerns how to navigate the Awami League period. I do not think there is yet a clear or widely accepted approach to that issue.

These are questions that Bangladesh will have to confront in the coming years. If they remain unresolved, there is a real risk that the country will fall back into another cycle of political violence and retaliation instead of breaking with the past.

Is there any update on those held for their actions under the Hasina regime? Are people still in custody? On what charges? At what stage of the process, i.e. proceeding towards trial?

There are currently two main legal tracks for addressing crimes committed during the Hasina government: the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) and the ordinary criminal courts.

[**This information was added after the meeting** From what I have observed, the ICT process is moving in a relatively structured direction, following its legal procedures. However, the ordinary courts present a more complicated picture. A large number of Awami League members and supporters have been charged, and there are concerns that some individuals who were not personally responsible for serious crimes have also become defendants. That raises important questions about individual criminal responsibility and due process.

The ICT itself also has a complicated legacy. Historically, it has been criticised for its use of the death penalty and other due process concerns. While it is now dealing with a different set of crimes, those institutional legacies remain relevant. At the same time, the tribunal is working under significant time and political pressure to investigate an enormous number of cases.

I work closely with many victims and families who have filed complaints with the ICT. One of their biggest frustrations is the lack of information about the progress of investigations, particularly in cases involving people who remain disappeared and have never returned. Families often do not know what evidence has been collected, whether investigations are progressing, or who may ultimately be held accountable.

Another major challenge is that enforced disappearances and other state crimes were carried out through institutional structures rather than by a single individual. A victim might be abducted by one law enforcement agency, transferred to another unit, detained in secret facilities, and processed through multiple layers of officials. Responsibility was often distributed across different institutions and chains of command. Because of that, identifying only a handful of direct perpetrators cannot fully explain how the system operated or ensure comprehensive accountability.

As the ICT continues its investigations, some suspects are likely to be arrested, while others have already left the country or may evade prosecution. But the larger challenge is uncovering the institutional system that enabled these crimes. Without addressing those structural issues - not only prosecuting a limited number of individuals - it will be difficult to achieve meaningful transitional justice and prevent similar abuses from happening again.]

And how about the lower levels, who are the people going through the normal

courts?

[**This information was added after the meeting** In the ordinary courts, there have been many cases against Awami League members and supporters. Some have been subject to arbitrary arrest, while others have later been released. At the same time, there are concerns that some of those most responsible for serious human rights violations have not yet been held accountable. That distinction is important.

The central challenge is identifying and prosecuting those who bear the greatest responsibility for these crimes, rather than pursuing broad or politically motivated cases. Accountability should be based on credible evidence and individual responsibility.

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances has released material that illustrates the complexity of these cases. In one public interview, a retired senior military officer, Lieutenant General Akbar, described how enforced disappearances were carried out and stated that he had raised concerns directly with Sheikh Hasina, who reportedly said she would look into the matter. After making those statements, he left Bangladesh and is now reported to be in India.

Cases like this raise important questions. If individuals who may have crucial information about how the system operated are able to leave the country without being questioned or brought before investigators, it inevitably affects public confidence in the accountability process.

There have been arrests of some political figures, but many victims continue to ask whether those who designed, authorised, or coordinated the system of enforced disappearances and other serious abuses are actually being held accountable. Without a genuine commitment to identifying the principal perpetrators and ensuring fair, evidence-based prosecutions, it will be difficult to build public trust in the justice process.]

For those who were arrested for politically motivated charges under the Hasina government, reporting indicates some have been released. Are there any still imprisoned, and if so, what is their profile?

Have you heard of knee-capping? Knee-capping under the AL was when the police took a person then they tortured them. When they were in the police custody at night, police took them to a silent place, mostly in areas by the river or the forest, and they shot them in the knees. Later they would file charges against them and say it happened in a gunfight. They would go to prison. There are around 185 cases like this. I have interviewed 35 people in this situation, I try to do analytical research. As I said, they are the victims in that they have lost their whole legs, but since the police filed the case against them, some of them are in prison. Now even after 10-15 years, many cases are not resolved yet. Last week I saw two people in custody who were the victims of the last regime. They [the victims] were BNP and Jamaat e Islami, they were opposition. You have to resolve the case, the interim government didn't come up with a brilliant idea. Also, the BNP, those are the victims, now some of the leaders from the BNP told the victims to resolve these kinds of cases, that is the problem.

Regarding arrest warrants under the Hasina government, against the opposition, would those arrest warrants still be enforced by the police?

It is the same system and the culture of showing an arrest warrant is not there, from what I have seen since working on human rights (and what is online).

But if a politically motivated warrant was issued then, say against a Jel person, say 5 years ago, and not executed then, would that warrant still stand now, or

would the government intervene and withdraw it?

During the Hasina regime, they could take anyone without an arrest warrant. That was the basic procedure for cases under AL. As far as I know, the BNP has not used that as a tactic. It is an institution, not in a political office. The warrant is in the system, because it's the same police.

However, JeI is not facing problems at the moment. The only people facing a problem at the moment are the AL, although they are not facing that much trouble either. Because if you follow the statistics, extrajudicial killing, torture in custody, it is not there.

Would you have any statistics?

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) and Odhikar maintain data related to human rights violations. These are the human rights-based organisations.

As far as I know, those who were arrested for participating in the July [2024] protests have all been released.

However, there have been other concerning incidents since the uprising. For example, a Baul folk singer was arrested after receiving threats. The authorities said they detained him for his own protection because they believed he could be attacked if he remained outside custody. This reflects broader concerns about the inability of law enforcement to provide effective protection.

[**This information was added after the meeting** There have also been attacks on artists, filmmakers, and religious shrines, raising concerns about freedom of expression and public safety. With the Awami League largely absent from politics, a political vacuum has emerged, and there are concerns that more radical groups are becoming more active. The key challenge is ensuring that law enforcement can effectively protect people's rights and maintain public order.]

Are there any July 2024 protesters still in custody or have they all been released?

The protesters, they are all released now. Also, the IG gave the indemnity to the protesters, and I don't think there are any still detained.

For protesters now, is there a police response?

Under the AL, alternative to policing came from the Army, they militarised and killed people. Police don't kill people, it is more controlling. They used pellet guns, stun grenades, and tear gas. In the July [2024] uprising so many people were killed because of that practice. Now I observe the government trying to get away from that. In the IG they didn't use these things but they used water cannons.

In BNP times, no mass protests have happened yet. But we have to see, since the Police Reform Commission has not been implemented yet, I'm not sure yet what the police response will be if there is a huge protest. That's why it's important. After 15 years of militarisation of the police, the commitment to change has to been there. However, at this moment I haven't seen force. A few arrests have happened due to criticising the PM, a few cases have been filed on that.

The government sometimes didn't take it very seriously and I believe they should be accountable for that.

Is there violence between or within political parties, and if so, is there a difference in levels pre-election and post-election?

In the last [2026] election, I did not witness much violence, it was handled well since

the AL did not participate. So, the good part is it didn't happen, the bad part is that it might still happen. The system is not fixed; it is still a broken system.

Has there been any state violence under the IG or under the new government?

Yes, political violence has happened throughout the last 2.5 years, a few incidents took place, but not that many have died. Obviously even one person is too many, it is not about the number, a family has lost their loved one if anyone has died. The IG tried to minimise that, the system was very vulnerable, but they did try really hard to get away from that practice.

[**This information was added after the meeting** According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), there were 35 alleged extrajudicial killings between August 2024 and July 2025.]

Are NGOs able to operate?

At this particular moment, there are no barriers. It's a new government, we have to observe them.

What about the independence of the judiciary?

No, there is no independence of the judiciary, that is the problem. If someone faces a problem, they go to the judiciary to get justice. The court does not provide this; this is the fundamental problem. Accountability has to be there but it is not there. It is really disappointing; it is highly politicised as well.

In the last 4 years, I have worked on death penalty cases and from what I observed so many crimes happened and the judiciary was not functioning independently, most of the cases are highly politicised. It is really wrong what happened in the whole procedural system. 3% is the conviction rate.

There are massive inequalities in the overall system, but what the AL did, the system is broken. Political violence is deep rooted in Bangladesh, but what I believe is that the institutionalised violence under the AL, they came up with the idea of enforced disappearance and knee-capping, which wasn't there under the previous government. The victims of extra judicial killings from events in 2013, those victims did not get justice. It is a highly politicised judicial system.

There were 2 people who were wrongfully convicted on death row, they were kept in a 6x8 feet cell, they got released but they spent 8-20 years on death row. In Bangladesh, many people celebrate the death penalty, while their families are broken. There was the recent trial of the death of a child in 4 days, it was because of popular demand. But the problem is the state, and the judiciary shouldn't be influenced by the people, they should do their own work.

[**This information was added after the meeting** In Bangladesh, a Section 164 confession refers to a judicial confession recorded by a Magistrate under Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 (CrPC).]

I have seen all people on death row be beaten and face torture, and while on remand.

The organisation that I am also working with, I'm volunteering, we work on all of the aspects of violence, all violations not just enforced disappearance. We are prioritising border and extrajudicial killings. We are trying to follow death penalty cases, each day we try to look at who has been given a death penalty, who has been executed etc.

In relation to statistics, there have been 3,000 extrajudicial killings between 2009 and

July 2024, under the AL.

In July 2024, [there were] approximately 1,400 extrajudicial killings. Between 3rd to 5th August 2024, there were approximately 200 people killed.

Enforced disappearances: according to the Enquiry Commission, there were 1,700 cases verified between 2009 and 2024.

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Interview with Badiul Alam Majumdar, Secretary at Shushashoner Jonno Nagor (SHUJAN)

Date: 15 June 2026

Location: SHUJAN office, Dhaka

Present: Badiul Alam Majumdar, Secretary at SHUJAN ; 3 CPIT officials; 1 FCDO official

Please could you provide some background on your organisation and its current priorities?

I have been an activist, and my background is that I went to America in the early 1970s. I studied there, and I spent some time with NASA. I spent 20-ish years in America, mostly I was a Professor there, then I came back in 1991. I was an activist in the liberation war. I felt I had an obligation to come back and play my part. I took sabbatical leave from university. I came back and I never left. Initially I had a USAID [US Agency for International Development] project, then later, in 1993, I joined the Hunger Project, an international NGO, and I retired in 2004. During the Hunger Project years, in 2002, we set up this organisation as an independent organisation and the Hunger Project provided the secretariat service. Two of us, the late Professor and I, set up in 2002. We carried on, we have been very active in the role of promoting free and fair elections, reform, human rights and governance related issues. We have been at the forefront, not only have we carried out activism but we also generated reform ideas and mobilised people and created public opinion. But being a neutral organisation has its challenges, nobody likes you, everybody accuses you of being their enemy.

So, during the AL time, we were their enemy in their characterisation, and we were the supporters of their enemies, the BNP. Then Sheikh Hasina became an autocrat and destroyed our political system and carried out all kinds of human rights violations, including stealing, squandering, looting, you name it, she did it. The old institutions were corrupt, so we were very vocal and we fought in the legal area. For example, the first time I went to the court was for the right information, for people to get the audited statements of the political parties. The Electoral Commission couldn't give us these. This was in the AL era, and things gradually got worse and worse. The government had lost all sense of shame, and locally they were doing all kinds of things to oppress the opposition.

There were no values to the point where anything would go. All the institutions were politicised and compromised so we were very, very active protesting and creating political public opinion. Another oppression we went to court about was when Sheikh Hasina did a constitutional amendment, the 15th [constitutional] amendment and we challenged the system; in 2011, she set up a parliamentary committee of her party as well as her allies, they unanimously recommended that the constitution should be amended keeping the caretaker system, but she unilaterally got her way. The 13th amendment [to the constitution] included the caretaker system into our constitution. The caretaker system was the temporary government during the time of the election,

for 3 months, and then whoever was elected would form the government.

So, I went to the Supreme Court, I went for a review and got the court's position on the 13th amendment, which was that it was found by the Supreme Court to be unconstitutional. About the 15th amendment, I went to the court. I have other cases that I have been pursuing, so we basically fought, like Churchill once said 'we will fight them in the air, on the ground', we will fight them and everything, that is what we tried to do. So, I was involved in activism and had an obligation to the people. We were a volunteer-based organisation, with 30,000 volunteers being part of the Hunger Project until I retired in 2004. Since 2005, we have been separate, we had a few staff in this small office, and we started it as a separate entity and we are now registered as a trust, so we have been carrying on during the last election.

And what happened during the current elections?

The election was unique in that it was the only election to elect 300 MPs but also the referendum. When the IG took over in 2024, I was asked to head a commission for electoral reform, so I was the Head of the Electoral Reform Commission.

It gave some recommendations for electoral reform. The government set up for 6 reform commissions, and later formed 5 more. I was the head of the first 6. We talked and negotiated, and did everything we could for 8 months. We called political parties and came up with the agreements, the consensus - the July National Charter. I was pretty active during Sheikh Hasina's rule until she and others departed Bangladesh. The constitution was in bad shape. We agreed on 84 areas of consensus, and the political parties signed that they would implement it word for word.

How have things have progressed with the recommendations?

So, there was the referendum, and people supported it. The agreement was that whatever the verdict of the people would be implemented. The people who had been elected, they had 2 roles, firstly they would be an MP for 5 years on top of the constitutional reforms commission for 180 days. Out of 84 areas of consensus, 48 of them were constitutional-related reforms and the referendum was on those 48, because the constitution is law so any change would require their [voters'] consent.

But to our dismay, after the election, the BNP, who won two thirds of the votes, their parliament members and reform assembly decided they would not take a second vote. One of the excuses they are giving is that they are now on a reset. The reform ideas they have given dissent to and they will not implement, so it is now in limbo.

So, to answer your question, the July [2024] uprising, you can call it a revolution. A revolution is something which is successful, but if it is not successful then you get hanged or go to the gallows, but it was a successful but an unfinished revolution because unfortunately the behaviour of our politicians and others hasn't changed. It is as if nothing has happened, it's business as usual. This is also to some extent pained by the fact that our neighbours in India have given refuge to Sheikh Hasina.

She is a narcissist, she probably suffers from PTSD because she went through many tragic things in her life, her whole family was killed as you probably know.

As you know, the July [2024] uprising was very bloody, a lot of people died, and thousands and thousands of people were injured. Sheikh Hasina denied all this, she made threats and took revenge. She has a lot of supporters who were the beneficiaries of her, of looting and plundering, she created oligarchs. They are threatening everybody on social media, they could show up any day and take revenge on us all who have been critical and who were instrumental in what

happened.

So, this is where it stands, as if nothing has happened, to some people. A silent majority of people feel that people gave their lives for nothing. So, the BNP won more than two thirds of the vote so now they feel they can do anything.

You said you saw an erosion of political rights under Sheikh Hasina. In terms of political groups, post-2024, in terms of freedom of expression and their right to assemble, what is the situation?

Once Hasina was gone people enjoyed freedom of expression, but the IG was not very effective, they did not do a lot of things they should have done. They could have said 'tell us what we should change', they could have implemented the July charter, they could have gone ahead, they could have done anything that people wanted. So, the IG was not very successful in the sense that the people who were in the government, many of them were not very competent. And to be fair to them, they were trying to put things together so that it functioned.

People had freedom of expression and that was sometimes expressed too liberally and every demand people had, they were on the streets, demanding their rights be ensured and all their demands met. So, the good part was that they had the rights but the bad part was that they overdid it and the government could not really handle it well. So, there were demonstrations, mobs (the creation of mobs is not new). The powerful people, the government, and their people, always used physical violence to get their way. For example, my home was attacked in 2018, this is not new.

During the IG, this was beginning to happen again, [to] anybody that was critical of the government. The sense of shame has gone, that boundary has gone, people can express their views but there are certain things you cannot do. Now, the ruling party has hundreds of thousands of supporters.

The 2 other major parties, the AL or JeI, have different ideology and I don't really know the difference. So they are basically supporting their families. Perhaps they felt deprived. What happened was that after the uprising the IG government came to power, the BNP did not benefit. There were lots of aspersions [a remark that damages another person's reputation] and lots of rent collection. Those things are still going on, and I suspect that it will go on continually because these people are in the government because they want to be taken care of, they want all kinds of benefits from their government, but there are limited opportunities as you know.

Also, some activists, those who graduate, there are hundreds of thousands of people now who are part of the government and asking for their part of the cut. So, this is the biggest challenge, and it is not very disciplined.

Other parts of the challenge that the government faces, the institutions have grown, they have no initiative, none whatsoever, for example, the betting system was removed, and an MP was made the governor of Bangladesh Bank. He was voted out basically using mobs after this government came into power, so they are not doing anything, and the international community is reluctant to support the IMF [International Monetary Fund], to provide funds, because they want some reforms. So, this is one challenge they have, the thousands of supporters they have, they don't really have education or skills and they need to be taken care of, how do you create a miracle?

Also, other institutions are in bad shape. We had a [recent] budget and this was an opportunity for us to go back to the drawing board. All the major ministries, there was no effort to reform. I am critical, I'm a civil society person, I'm not a supporter or

member of a political party, I was critical of Hasina, and I write books and columns.

The other challenge is the MPs, they are 350 people, and they are potential oligarchs. There are no boundaries set for them to stay away, no effort to declare a conflict of interest. They are trying to give them all kinds of opportunities. They are supposed to sit and do their thing, not directly but indirectly. They are given office at the local government, the upazila [sub district], not the lowest level of local government but the next level. So, the constitution evolves and they don't care, and they are just going ahead and doing whatever they want to do, and all this populist rhetoric, and they have these family cards [state welfare card].

Before coming to that, I want to finish saying that MPs, we have been instrumental in many forms including compiling statements of each constituency. We have shown in the past that people who became part of the power structures, they became rich. This is one of the powers that has some unique features, where there is power, there is concentration and misuse. These MPs, I'm afraid they will become the next oligarchs.

The police force now, are they politicised, and if so, where is their allegiance. Does it depend on the local situation? Is there independence in the police?

We don't know how it's going to play out. They had unconditional support for Hasina. They continued to prove they were one-sided. There are rumours that the neighbouring country, India, that they want Hasina to go back. But I take that with a grain of salt, I'm not sure. But there are rumours that a [Hasina] government will only come to power with India's blessings and I think that is the case. That has become the reality, they may have some sort of understanding. There is seriously bad blood between the AL and the BNP and JeI, because they and the students took the brunt, the BNP and JeI people, so I don't know how it's going to play out. I'd say it's a fluid situation.

The AL continue to threaten us [human rights activists], if you look on social media, it's like Hasina is going to come the next day and she is going to take revenge. It is as if she has done nothing wrong, as if the killing and all those things [that] have been done by Yunus never happened. It's as though they're coming to power and to take revenge.

The new government started on the wrong foot, first the denial of the [reform] recommendations, and instead of elections to appoint local government, they appointed their own people. Many of the major reforms, not only these, but the 133 ordinances, they needed to be ratified but the government didn't ratify the most important ones including those on human rights, the rule of law, and the judiciary, the BNP said no. Shamelessly, I would say. For the independent judiciary initiative, the rule of law, this has been for every government, there were quite a few poor judgements. So, we are in flux and the decisions this government is making, they don't make any sense. They haven't learned anything from Sheikh Hasina's 16/17 years and also they are not aware of anything, so I'm really disappointed.

The independence of the judiciary was one of the recommendations under the interim government, what is the situation with that?

In the appointment of the judges and the secretariat, there were 3 ordinances that they didn't ratify, this was in September 2025. So, they not only ignored it, they were directing the government to frame the law for the independent judiciary for the appointment of the neutral people, and the secretariat, it was even set up.

Due to the poor judgement of the [current] government, they decided not to ratify, so

they have totally ignored us and I would say shamelessly. The future, to me, based on my experience, doesn't look good for this government because their MPs are looters and they are plundering; they have an insatiable desire to become rich by using their power unless [restrictions] are enforced, and there are none. Some BNP people are not oligarchs but have a tainted past.

There were hundreds of thousands of people who were very undisciplined during Hasina's government, and she had some control of the Supreme Court. What makes me really concerned is when we see that this overwhelming majority could be a curse and there is a famous phrase, about when a government is voted in with a two thirds majority. In Bangladesh it's happened over and over again. In 1973 we had two thirds majority, with Sheikh Hasina's father, then again in 2001, then 2008, then 2018, but that was not an election, but still. There was no peaceful transfer of power any of these times, so history is not on our side.

So, I'm sorry to say I can't be very optimistic, I think that more difficult days are coming, and also an organisation like us will not survive because there is not the support. It's hard to think about it, now it's 35 years for me.

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Interview with Rasheda K Choudhury, Executive Director for the Caretaker Government and Executive Director for the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)

Date: 14 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: Rasheda K Choudhury, Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government and Executive Director for the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE); 3 CPIT officials

Please can you provide us with some background about your role in your organisation and current priorities?

I am a campaigner, I call a spade a spade, I work for women's rights and human rights.

Our organisation was established more than 35 years ago. The first education conference in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, was where the 'education for all' declaration was adopted. Some of our civil society leaders were there. We had military rule at that time, and we were in front of a global audience, decision makers from the UN and multi-lateral agencies. Bangladesh had 12 civil society organisations there, and the military ruler at the time was there. When he was asked to attend, he asked them who he should invite, one from the local or grassroots, you don't have a platform, so they accepted this as a challenge. All the big names in education, non-state actors, 15 big agencies formed a platform in 1991, it was a voluntary platform and everyone contributed.

FITB [FutureEd Institute of Business & Technology] is regional organisation, supported by the FCDO, is well-known for its education programmes, so it was a completely voluntary initiative. We grew one year, then secured funding and OXFAM funding came in, then we started working, and the constitution was agreed. We started working in particular areas, especially in education and culture. We could feel the heat of extremist groups coming into education, so that's why we were very careful. We had included Catholic groups and faith-based groups, but other groups didn't want to be under our umbrella. It became 15 groups under our umbrella, and BRAC guided this organisation, then at one point in time they became elevated by

CEDAW, then they wanted to have someone, not somebody voluntary, but a CEO to be recruited, then I was invited to join.

I was working for UNICEF as a consultant on gender issues, my specialisation is in gender issues. I was part of the research at the Education Institute of Dhaka University. When I was invited to join they asked me to look at the organisational mandate and make suggestions so they could amend the constitution. I challenged them that it needs to be open and broad-based, including teacher groups, that's how it evolved. Now we have the membership of 172 NGOs, from BRAC to local community-based organisations.

To be a member there is criteria. Education must be in the mandate, they must be registered as a legal entity and have 3 years of operation. This is part of our governance structure and now through that process NGOs can express interest.

After 2005, we realised we needed to include teacher groups but teachers were not interested in being part of a NGO body, so they can be affiliate members and others are fee-paying voting members.

Then came other stakeholders after. Sustainable development groups, aid groups, private sector, non-profit organizations are not part of a big umbrella body. There are other groups and entities who prefer to be part of the network but not to be a voting member. So we have a slot for private sector bodies and 2 slots for provisional bodies. BRAC elects it own representatives.

We have 4 primary functions:

1. Coordination and networking
2. Capacity building of our partners
3. Research and dissemination
4. Advocacy – social networking etc

As a civil society organisation, has there been any change in your ability to function say under the Awami League era, under the IG, and now?

Yes, we follow 3 fundamental principles, we say non-negotiable principles:

1. Education is a fundamental human right

2. It is a state responsibility

3. We don't want to be part of any government plans, we need our independence to work independently.

So, that's where we sometimes came into conflict, for example we had a flagship programme, Education Watch, every year we publish on the basis of empirical, scientific data, both quantitative and qualitative data. So that is the Education Watch group, with 50 plus members. Multilateral agencies are also involved. Whenever we produced those reports, we used to run into conflict with the government, because of the data. It is the research that is saying nothing is happening inside the classroom, and that more students are going to faith-based schools like madrassas, and they didn't want to accept it. Our principle was that we would not go for any government funding at any time, or our independence would not be there. Often, they refused to come to our meetings, it was a love-hate relationship otherwise. We used to complement or supplement programmes, like bringing in stakeholders to our workshops, or if they requested that we attend meetings/workshops we would do it.

Our role is to promote education but most of the time, because of our stance on

data-based findings, and our policy options that we used, they wouldn't accept that. The other one was at a local level, related to male governance. Local level, 170 plus members, used to see a lot of rent-seeking [CPIT addition: a situation wherein people or organisations exploit their position for personal gain[24]] from local authorities. We still have provisions in the regulations act that local administrators need to get a no objective certificate from local administrators before applying for the next funding cycle from, for example, the FCDO. There is a lot of rent seeking, we could not do anything at the national level and at the local level, local partners were harassed. It was not part of a political thing, but politics promoted that kind of rent seeking. It is part of the picture of male governance.

I was advisor to the last caretaker government, in 2007 and 2008. It was not because of a revolution, but because of turmoil in the political sector. Parliament was called again and the BNP decided to form of the caretaker government to supervise the elections. There was a lot of resistance from the political parties but we were invited to be part of that community. The military backed the caretaker government. It was very peaceful and there was no mob violence like during the IG this time.

How has the political environment changed since August 2024?

At that time, the steam was building up among young people, you could feel it, in terms of employment, and them having a job quota for their favoured ones. So they came out in the streets, and the (then) PM had an emergency meeting with some civil society leaders who were close to her and she was challenged because she said 'of course I will be giving a quota to these kids and their grandparents because they fought for Bangladesh, they are not razakars' (collaborators with Pakistan in 1971). So, that was the trigger point, in the evening, it was not the mainstream students, but from the women's halls, all the women came down on the streets and said 'who am I? I am a collaborator' like the PM said. The women came first and it was still peaceful. It spread to all the halls of residences of the university. Then it was peaceful, but the next day, the law enforcement agencies started, not only tear gas, but it was like in Myanmar, Sudan, they started killing. Then people from the general masses, they came out and joined the student movement, thousands of people were on the streets of Dhaka, because they were seeing that people were getting killed just because they were on the streets. People were unarmed.

One mother I still remember, called me the next day asking 'what should I do?' She lives in an apartment block on a main road. She was trying to get the windows shut because of tear gas and her daughter who was a 4th grader saw for herself the military killing people. This created trauma and the mother was asking me what to do. I don't know her but she knew me through links.

And then came student leaders, it was so hurriedly done, and there was no backing from law enforcement agencies who were very much loyal to the then PM. The change was not only sudden, but to be very frank created a lot of turmoil because some people were hurriedly inducted to part of the decision [part of the IG]. The IG that formed, under Dr Muhammad Yunus, was a shell of the old and the new government but it was a government of necessity, that we had to have that government.

I saw myself a copy of a letter on the 5th August [2024] from the PM [Sheik Hasina]'s secretariat, her military advisor and the principal secretary that they had asked the PM for guidance on demonstrations. She wrote in Bangla to shoot on sight and kill. I saw this myself. How could an elected PM order this kind of thing? I asked the

[24] Economics Online, Economic Development Stasis: Rent Seeking in Bangladesh, 25 October 2024

human rights mission to assist. Over 1,400 were killed.

So, we accepted this IG. The general people and the new young leaders were created. The younger people were raising funds for the one third of Bangladesh that was affected by floods because of climate change. After 2 months, people discovered that most of the money donated had gone here and there, not on what it was supposed to. That started creating an environment where people were not relying on the government's stance on anything. Dr Yunus was a good, committed person, he wanted to do good, but he was not a politician, he could not control the young leaders. This was the worst part of the cabinet. There was lots of bureaucracy. Then there was the rise of extremist and far-right groups.

Far-right groups protested to the government. For example, talking about teachers in school, maybe music teachers, then through circulars they would protest and then the teacher would be removed. We asked, what's wrong with sports teachers or music teachers? We challenged two advisors and asked why did you remove teachers, and they said they would raise questions but they said it came from the bureaucracy. We were frustrated, there were many CSOs and people in the IG who were close to us and we expected more but they could not control the mob culture. Education activists were being terrorised by these young students, even a female headteacher was abused. The mob culture was taking off and the IG would not do anything about it

What was the police reaction?

The IG were telling us that they instructed the police, but the police were demoralised and not willing to do anything, and then military weren't interested to partake in anything.

Under the military supervision in 2008, we conducted the best ever, free and fair elections. It was globally proclaimed. We had the first national identification cards, the first time these were introduced was with the help of the military. It has become empowering to rural women because they don't have passports. This is being used for business, just this photo ID, we introduced that in 2008.

The military was out of the scenario under the IG and the mob culture lasted for a long period.

What is this BNP government's commitment to reform?

I think the fault also lies with the IG, because they could have done it. The Women's Reform Commission, they were humiliated, we had to demonstrate on the streets, protecting those commissions, the IG could not provide that. People started asking whether they were really interested in getting those reforms in place. The IG also created a consensus commission, but even the formation of the commissions, even the consensus commission, didn't have one single woman there. We protested this whole attitude of men, neglecting the gender equality thing. I was so frustrated because Dr Yunus was the promoter of women's rights at the local level but he didn't even notice it. So it happened, the commissions' reports were mostly articulated in the forms of different ordinances. So most of the ordinances, other than 16, were passed by the parliament and came to effect as laws or acts, but the remaining ones, like the independence of the judiciary, civil society has problems in accepting why these did not go forward. It was a shock for us from this new government. And the independence of the anti-corruption commission, and the human rights commission, they were ignored totally. That was the first shock from this parliament.

We have to accept that this government got an absolute majority. The leader of the

current government, he lived in London. Looking at his reflections, his attitude, his body language, it looks like he has learned it from a democracy like yours, that is good. Many of us we were really not expecting this kind of attitude from him. Because the leader had started doing it, others had followed. The marginal communities, then it spreads. The election manifesto, it's a good one, but now they are trying to implement it [July Charter] from manifesto commitments which is confusing.

Anyway, it is a very good budget, there are lots of commitments, but balancing it with the balance sheet, this is where we have our concerns, but the priorities are right. We have been demanding education to be prioritised, and it is the 2nd of 10 priorities. The first is removing inequalities from all sectors, the 2nd is education, and the 3rd is health. So we have been demanding a roadmap for implementation, the other is governance. Still there is lots of rent-seeking going on, but it is nonsense, they are not in a position to control it, it looks like, despite their commitments. There are also calls for digitalisation.

You touched on the independence of the judiciary, what is your sense of that now, particularly in relation to any politically-motivated trials?

In terms of people going to trial, there was a lot of mishandling of the cases because all those young people went to the police station and lodged a complaint of 'this person killed someone' during the protests, so the accuser used to get the upper hand. Sometimes the media actually printed the cases with the name of the petitioner, they didn't even know that he or she was fighting that case, that kind of fraud or error happened, after the election period.

Many were arrested, some of them got out on bail. Even some AL ministers, one was well known for their integrity, and had never been a person linked to anything bad, let alone murder, and he was accused of killing someone in their constituency, so people lost confidence in the trial. Even the party is saying we can't do anything about it because that case was not filed by us. It is a tricky scenario now. Others like the politicians, those cases where there was a lot of corruption, those were true actually, like the order during the protests to shoot, and the police army because of the abduction cases. People were abducted suddenly and never came back, under Hasina, but the question is a fair trial, whether they are getting it or not, where is the evidence, so this is where we are stuck now as a nation.

To summarise the Bangladesh issue, at this point in time we need to gain credibility and create confidence among its partners, especially in the global north. At the same time, the global south, we are having issues with India. Myanmar and Nepal are not a problem. But with India we are having issues because of their political scenario and groups.

There are right-wing groups there, we should say that we feel that this government is neither right not left wing but trying to follow a moderate policy, that is what their motto is at this time, supposedly.

Yesterday I was talking to the Women's Affairs and Social Welfare Minister. We tried to give them suggestions, but they can't make these at the moment, it is not possible for them to amend the constitution. We suggested they should have a framework, to bring all education under one Act but they are not sure about it at the moment. Over all these years, what we feel as civil society is to look at the picture at a more rural level, how groups are claiming their space within the broader family, rural areas etc., and the Middle Eastern culture, they have brought in their culture, and their families are very much influenced in their dress, attitudes and everything. I said this is your

fault, you have been working so hard on the revolution to notice that they [other groups] are taking over your space. A lot of political workers have been trying to help women with health tips, even going door to door to help them, even with family planning. Like Dr Yunus, they said this is our failure, we allowed them to capture the civil society democratic space, but now we are realising and it may not be too late. The first issue should be gender.

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Interview with Zeeba Khan, BNP MP

Date: 15 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: Zeeba Khan, BNP Member of Parliament; 3 CPIT officials; 1 FCDO official

What are your current priorities as an MP?

I have been working with international affairs of our party for a long period of time. I have worked on several areas globally, of course in Bangladesh and in the region as well. My priorities have been to see how to ensure some form of relationship between these countries, it's very complex. Relationship building is very important for us.

What about domestic priorities?

There are many, one of the most important I feel is to ensure the people are happy, and predominantly it is commodity prices that matter to individuals. If they get the basics, they are happy.

However, 2024 suddenly changed everything. We always thought that Bangladeshis would be very complacent with having food on their tables. We though that this would be enough, but it seems like it wasn't. They were not happy. Our priorities include making sure that people are fed and comfortable.

2024 changed some people's needs in Bangladesh. Everyone is very involved with politics here. Even the tea maker in village markets in his store is talking about politics. They do their morning prayers, come out of the mosque and they discuss politics. In the evening they watch the TV screens in the tea stalls together and sip on their tea and discuss politics. People are very involved in politics in Bangladesh. And with mobile phones, everyone knows what is going on, especially with fake news, and on social media. So, whatever is happening in Dhaka, everyone knows. The priorities have changed for the people, they don't just want food on the table anymore, people want more.

Someone approached me for funding for a local mosque in the village from government funds and they were asking for air con which is a luxury. People want more and they want luxury, expectations are high and patience is low.

How has the political environment changed since August 2024?

The political environment hasn't changed. The environment is still very vibrant and people's expectations of the politicians are very high. But the political people have changed. The environment of corruption is still there, not everywhere and not to the extent that it was before, that was beyond corruption. It has come down some notches now. Our Prime Minister is being very stern and having zero tolerance for corruption. For example, the budget for food in the PM's office is 100 Taka, so it's a small, simple meal. That is the way he is now trying to promote Bangladesh, he wants us to be frugal. So, this has changed within the political spectrum. We also

have to politically correct ourselves.

How have the changes since then affected the political groups?

I think all political parties can now operate freely. None of us could operate freely before. I think the first term of the Hasina government, from 2008 to 2014 was liveable but the election in December 2014 was a total sham. In 2014 government was formed with uncontested seats and everything went downwards. So, from 2014 onwards, Bangladesh saw a change and I wouldn't call that politics, it was more like a dictatorship. It wasn't a government anymore, it was one woman, one word. So, our whole politics changed.

I hope politics in this country has changed for the better and never goes back to the authoritarian rule of the Hasina Regime

We have our problems, of course, that cannot be eradicated in one day. When you have 10 years of bad politics, it takes a little time to get it back to some form of normality.

Yesterday in parliament there was a big skirmish between members, and there was uproar, but this is what you want in politics. Some of our MPs were a little 'OTT [over the top]', they were beating the table, shouting, and standing up etc, but that's what you want in parliament.

We still have to wait and see how parliament functions, so far it is okay.

What is the BNP's relationship with Jel now that they are the opposition?

It is interesting, in 2008, when we were in opposition, I used to go to parliament to watch from the opposition side and sit in the box in the gallery. Members used to debate, and opposition used to have walk outs. What I saw outside of the chamber, in the lobby, was that people were not so friendly. The situation was always a little tense. That has changed. What I see now is that when they come out into the lobby from the main parliament area (there are different lobbies; women have a lobby together whether in opposition or government they have tea and snacks together, but men have separate lobbies for opposition and government). So, I have not been to the men's side but the women, we do not have any problems, we are sitting and eating together. Even outside the lobby, I've seen people talking together, so it is a much better environment.

I've been to Westminster many times and seen people in the members' restaurant, everyone is sitting together, and that is a similar atmosphere to what I am seeing here now, this is a healthy environment for democracy.

Jel is always threatening us [that they will] walk out but we talk to them, we are saying let's not go back to olden days. Let us work together and let's move forward. So we'll see what happens.

In terms of the reforms proposed by the interim government, what is the progress with reform now?

The reforms have been discussed because we did sign the Charter (with a note of dissent). Reform has to come but it has to come with legality. It can't be signed as a Charter and then be made law. We just now had the budget, and the budget is waiting to be approved. What we need now is for each point of the Charter to come up in parliament, for debate and then for a vote, like the laws that were enacted recently. When you are in a democratic system, the bills need to come through the parliament for a vote. The Referendum said yes, but the Referendum was so confusing for people. We wanted the Referendum as well, so that we have the

people's vote to go ahead and implement these laws. But to implement these laws, you need to make it into law. If you want to make it into law, you have to come and vote in parliament. I think we will do it, and the reforms will become law. We won't just say this is a reform.

One question that was always there was, is Yunus' government legal, can they do reforms or not? So, one of the things from our government is that we want to make these reforms lawful.

There was the idea of women going into reserved seats, maybe 50 to 100, and many people thought that was great. I'd love that, however, I prefer elected women parliamentarians rather than reserved seats. If we could give 33% of nominations to women, I would prefer that. But it is difficult in rural areas of Bangladesh to campaign because some areas don't even have any roads. Maybe in the future it will be better.

We have 50 women's seats at the moment, and they are very active, including the women in JeI alliance. They have 14 women. We are all functioning. We are all participating and are standing up to present ourselves. If they want to say things, they are saying it, it's lovely, and that is what we want. We are trying to encourage women to participate in the local elections, because that will be the route under which we can bring more women to parliament.

In the local election there are 3 unions, and each one has about 9 wards. Out of the 9 wards there will be 3 women contesting, so there will be one woman for every 3 wards. Let's see how many women come through from the local elections.

In terms of members and supporters of different political groups, are they able to openly attend demonstrations and protest now?

Yes, they are able to protest. In Bangladesh, outside a polling station, for example, we have hundreds of people, they call it a festival, I call it a commotion. Election day is a bit like going to the airport to see someone off in Bangladesh, everyone is there, they are all out in the street, it is like a festival. The interesting part is you're not supposed to feed them, the voters, but who is going to stop them, they are all having food.

During the pre-election period, were there political protests?

We didn't have many protests this time, but we did have some skirmishes between JeI and us (BNP), but there were very few isolated incidents and they were not bad. We had EU observers, who came and did a report which covered prior to the election and after the election. I was invited by the EU to a meeting after the election. I was representing the BNP, and there was JeI, NCP, and the Electoral Commission, and we had these discussions and we agreed that there were skirmishes during the election period, but they weren't significant. The EU did an extensive report which was very positive.

In the post-election period, once the BNP was in government, what about the situation then, was there any political violence?

As I said, there has been one or two, but not really.

Sources noted a breakdown in law and order during the [2024] uprisings, and then the IG came in. What is the situation now with law and order, and with police capacity and capability?

There are two things we find very tough. One of the biggest issues is drugs, and we have also seen some very horrible scenarios of the rape of young girls. But this was happening before as well, so this is not something new. So, it's not a case of the new

government has come in and that has happened.

There was the case during the Hasina regime in Madaripur of a 12-year-old who was raped by her brother-in-law, her brother-in law's-father, and her brother-in-law's brother, and this was supervised by the brother-in-law's mother. She died. This was horrific and it comes from a culture that was unfortunately brought in by the previous government.

I said in 2008, to some US observers and diplomats, who went to observe the 2008 election, that the culture I have seen is that the BNP is known to be a party of higher cultured and of more educated people, people who have been in politics for generations, such as retired officers and retired bureaucrats. The AL was a worker's party, Sheikh Mujib was a worker, he was never educated himself, he was from the Shamik Muslim League. A lot of the top politicians that were in the AL although they had very seasoned politicians, but they all came from the background of 'muscle power'. So, they are two different set-ups. The AL, for the last 10 years they became very powerful, and they really were going round and doing things that destroyed our country. So, to take them out of the muscle power system, it will take time, it won't be overnight.

Drugs have flooded everywhere now, but it is a global problem, but in this country and the region. Poverty is there still, and drugs are an excuse to get out of poverty. So, we need to do a lot of rehabilitation.

One of the things I am not happy with is when people are sentenced to death. But the law of the country is sentenced to death in cases like with the rapes and killing. This happened just a couple of weeks ago with the Ramisa case. Even the wife of the rapist was involved. They had to be sentenced to death. It's disgraceful that individuals will commit such heinous crimes. My question is what kind of pleasure does someone get out of these crimes? However, these things are happening quite a lot and the criminals have to be punished accordingly.

I've dealt with abuse cases as well in the UK, there are sick people in this world. We can't just stop these sick things that happen in the world, but we need to work towards it getting better. The drug problem in Bangladesh has predominantly come from the culture of India. One of the things we have to remember is that, religiously, these things, like drinking alcohol, they are forbidden in our culture. So, these things are hidden. Of course there are people who drink alcohol, but it is not done in the open. But in India it is their culture, they do these things within their religions, they drink and use drugs for pujas [Hindu ritual], so culturally it is acceptable. But in predominantly Muslim countries as in Bangladesh, it is not acceptable.

I don't know which way we have to go, for example, in the Netherlands I think marijuana was legalised, so it was treated like cigarettes. We as Muslims can't make this legal. We have to find ways to stop this kind of criminal activities be it drugs or other offences.

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Interview with Bangladesh Police

Date: 15 June 2026

Location: Police Headquarters, Dhaka

Present: 4 police officials; 3 CPIT officials; 2 FCDO officials

What are the current policing challenges and what are your priorities?

Under the new government, there are many socioeconomic issues which bring many

problems. There are unemployment issues, that is the buzzing problem of the day. The new government has had many tests and trials with the economic situation, but they are doing their best. Recently, there have been two big religious festivals, and we have been able to maintain law and order during these. In general, we are maintaining the law-and-order situation to the best level. If you are talking about the capital Dhaka, at times the population can exceed more than 40 to 50 million. People use Dhaka as part of their journey from one part of the country to another and will have a short stay. This can contribute to traffic pressure and the number of people living in housing. It is a very busy city. So, there are a number of problems. Environmental issues contribute to city life, law and order and unemployment. If there is too much rain, in the rainy season, it contributes to waterlogging and traffic, and people can lose employment.

Overall, we have been able to maintain law and order. There were a lot of political cases which didn't seem to be accurate. We agreed with our Ministry of Home Affairs to form a District Committee, which would allow someone who thought they had a false case to appeal to the committee who would look into matters. If it was found to be unjust then the Committee could recommend withdrawal of the case.

Are these cases lodged under the Hasina regime?

Yes, and soon after the AL's departure there were some cases registered during the student uprising. You can always register a case, but it is during the time of investigation that it will be revealed true or false. Someone can claim a case is false and malicious, he can appeal to a District Committee, and they will decide to recommend it to MoHA to withdraw.

What is the legal status of arrest warrants if they have not been executed?

The arrest warrant is a part of the Code of Criminal Procedure. It remains valid until it is put into action. There are some exceptions; if the person goes to court and receives bail, the warrant is withdrawn because they have already appeared before court, or if someone is dead, or if any cases are withdrawn, that is the usual disposal. Some people have had cases withdrawn even if they haven't appealed, but if the person did not go to the court then the arrest warrant is not withdrawn, so they have to proceed to the court to ask for it to be withdrawn. If a person goes to court with a recommendation for the case to be withdrawn they can keep a copy of that with them, so they have it in case law enforcement go to their house, so it can be mitigated but they have to go the court to get it withdrawn. We do not have the system in place to share this between police stations. This is the process. But even if someone is apprehended and taken to the court, he can show the papers to the court that the case has been withdrawn and they will be released.

Is there a difference in procedure between different areas of Bangladesh?

Our criminal justice system is same everywhere, metropolitan areas, all the same.

Are the [computer] systems connected between different police areas?

We have the Crime Data Management System (CDMS) which is accessible to all investigation officers.

If a police officer doesn't follow procedure or is found to be complicit in corruption or human rights abuses, what happens, what is the procedure?

If someone does not act under the purview of law, it is an individual responsibility, it is an individual liability and a matter of discipline.

Is there a mechanism for victims of crime to report police who have not taken

their case seriously?

Of course, he can go to the higher ups, even if he is wrongly fined in the streets, he can appeal to the deputy commissioner. There cannot be a despotic attitude in the police. Human rights are very important. The Bangladesh Police have been contributing to operations around the world. I'm sure you understand the political situation, but our police have a good reputation in keeping order in society. Sometimes with the nature of the environment here, you have to be cruel to be kind.

Does a person's political opinion affect someone's ability to seek protection from the police?

Any individual can seek assistance from the police, he can go and file a case regarding troubles he faces, and the local police definitely will give him support and care; grievances will be addressed. There are different types of cases, if you look at the registers of the police stations, for what kind of cases they receive each day. When too many people live in a small area, differences will come up. It is how society tolerates it, tolerance and justice are the backbone of a society.

Look at the incidents that took place in Belfast and the [UK] stabbing case, the Nowak case, he said I cannot breathe and a few minutes later the man died. There were allegations against the police because he was handcuffed when he said I can't breathe. You understand, the police have to work under stress in society, it is a stressful job. In our country, there are socioeconomic problems, we will get complaints, otherwise no one would be able to work. You understand that the police are a shock absorber of society, everyone complains. We understand that there are limitations too, so you have to go through the society in a 'test and trial' process. There are many complaints: theft, mugging, rapes. There are very few incidents of food insecurity nowadays as many people now have produced crops in good amounts, but there are cases of land litigation, business fraud, and forgery.

If someone, for example, from Jel, had a political dispute with the community in their area, would they be able to seek police protection and what measures are in place for impartiality?

As I told you, whatever political identity you have, everyone is equal. I'm sure you are aware of political developments; I don't want to comment because I am a professional and deal with matters professionally. If there is an incident, we go by the book and go by the code of criminal procedure. Whatever political opinions they have, it doesn't make a difference. However, if someone [in the police] goes beyond and is delinquent, that is their individual responsibility. But anyone can solicit help from the police.

How do you foresee implementation of reform after the [July 2024] uprising?

It is not easy to change everything overnight. Every incident has some echoes. We had 16/17 years of rule by the previous government which left behind legacies. So, we are not able to change everything overnight. It is a continuous process. One thing that is very important is tolerance; you have to have tolerance. Political parties have to practice it. If political parties have mutual respect for each other, this will trickle down to other members of society, and everyone will learn. About reforms, no one wants to venture into reform because they think about the consequences. It is natural for people to be resistant to change in the system because they have fear of the unknown. Another thing is good governance and having quality people. Confidence comes from knowledge and knowledge comes from learning. If there aren't the right people, in the right places, then you cannot deliver.

Regarding police reform, we cannot reform by ourselves because we are controlled by the Ministry of Home Affairs, we are under their umbrella. If you talk about overall reform, there has to be a democratic system. Appointments, transfers and promotions should be fair, and the system should be based on merit and talent.

How would you describe the police response to instances of political violence after the uprising?

The response is good. I'm sure you understand that during the uprising police officers sacrificed their lives. It has had an impact on the police, and we are trying to recover. You have to understand that when you face trauma, you need time before you can go back out. Being in the police is a job where you need the support of the local people, and people need to have confidence in the police. Whatever the problem is in people's houses, whether a gas leak, fire, they approach the police station first, so they definitely have confidence, maybe their expectations are too high. Close to 800 people have one police officer, this is on average, across the country.

The overall criminal justice system, I personally believe it has to be given due attention, because the access to justice should be equal. If there are allegations against someone, there should be a speedy investigation and trial, because if he is found innocent and it takes 2 years, then he will have a lot of harassment in his life; whether they are working, a student, or otherwise occupied, this is a pressure. You might be excluded from jobs. The police alone can't do anything, other stakeholders need to be involved, prison management and the judicial system should come under one umbrella to manage. If a witness goes to court to give witness and the judge is not available that day or the prosecutor is not available, what happens is that they have to come to court another day. Sometimes a witness can't come on a different day, and then it will delay the criminal justice procedure. We have to have some mechanism so that proceedings are completed within the least possible time.

What is the progress of cases in relation to abuses under the Hasina regime of officials? Sources note there are the ICT trials, but do you know about lower-level cases?

Yes, the cases filed during the Sheikh Hasina government, 21,585 cases have already been withdrawn as we came to know.

They were accused of crimes under that government?

Yes, they were found to be false.

Were these politically-motivated cases?

Yes. More cases have been examined, and more cases will be withdrawn, I believe.

CPIT clarified the original question: What about the arrest of officials that were in the AL government/acting on its behalf? We know about the trials at the ICT, but are there domestic trials?

Well, it depends from man to man, and on whatever offence they have committed. You come across a lot of events in the daily newspaper, some people who were connected to the previous government, and who had important roles during the uprising, oppressing, harassing people, have been brought to justice.

The criminal justice system, you can always complain, you can always go to the court, whichever police station, but when you go to court, to prove an offence, there needs to be enough evidence. Sometimes there is not enough evidence, because of a lack of evidence the crimes can't be proved. This happens everywhere. Sometimes

the offence is true, sometimes the grievance is higher than the offence itself, these are the issues we come across. Those who have played roles in torturing people have been brought to justice and they are facing trials now. Of course, in the trial the offences may be proved or not proved.

Your colleague was going to give some statistics?

Another Police HQ official: 21,585 cases withdrawn.

There have been recommendations by the government, from district level or committee which we have in metropolitan areas. We believe it has given relief to 500,000 individuals. It's a continuous process and recommendations are still coming to districts, magistrates or the committee, to withdraw cases.

Could you explain the process to get cases withdrawn?

You go to the district committee and appeal to district level. You put in a plea for withdrawal and they will examine the allegations.

Who raises this issue? Does the government identify these cases?

Another Police HQ official: An accused person or their relatives may apply to have their warrant withdrawn.

We have a well-structured procedure. The accused person or relative may apply to the district. We have 64 districts, 64 committees. At district level, the application is reviewed within 15 working days through the public prosecutor. If it is identified as politically-motivated, or harassment-related, we withdraw the case, then a recommendation is forwarded to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Then if it goes back to the district magistrate, to the court, the court issues an order, and the process is complete and comes to an end.

How does the police operate in terms of central control, is there central control over the local forces?

We haven't been able to change much of the administration that the UK left, neither did India or Pakistan, because it was so well structured. If you look at history, it is not easy to change as there are lot of pillars and if we take out one, the whole system would collapse. There is only one national police, the Bangladesh Police, and then we have divisions. Some of the districts fall under the division. Each division has a Deputy Inspector General, he looks after law and order, but he has to report to us directly at the HQs as well. So whatever directives he receives, the other Inspector Generals also receive, it is the same whether it is the metropolitan area, or beyond the metropolitan area. It is all the same in the committee.

What are your current policing priorities, going forward?

Like any other country, I personally believe, you cannot have any other option other than the rule of law as the main objective of a police force. When you establish the rule of law, then you can establish human rights and other issues. It sounds easy to pronounce the rule of law, but in practice, in a country like ours which is infested with problems, it is not easy. You have to treat people equally; everyone should have equal access to justice and facilities and if you fail to provide that then resentment goes up. Rule of law is best.

Secondly, women's empowerment. It is very important because 50% of the total population are women. Many now are working ladies, some are housewives who stay within rural areas. In urban areas, most women work. You have to take care of women and give preference to them within the system. We have to have positive discrimination; if a man and a woman are found equal, then the woman should be

given preference as part of the empowerment policy, you have to empower women, this is very important. These issues will follow the rule of law, and you must have that first as the single motto at the head of all police forces. If you establish that, the better society goes too.

Are there any official statistics on arrest numbers collated by the police, for politically-motivated reasons, is that tracked?

We do not have any statistics on politically-motivated arrests, we cannot say that. This is the language of newspapers, media, social media. We work under a lot of pressure, and this has to be taken into account. We have to be allowed to work freely, without influence. Our police cannot function in the way that UK police function. If someone influences me to go beyond the law then the onus of that bargain falls onto my shoulders. We cannot say we have done it under duress or under the influence of someone, that is an individual choice. If someone goes beyond that, it is his personal responsibility.

Some NGOs tracked pre-election violence and violent incidents between party members, I'm just wondering if you have comparable information?

No.

Are we able to look at a blank arrest warrant, to see what it looks like? Do they look the same all across the country?

We can show you one. It is the same across the country, it has been and goes back to 1898 when it started. We have incorporated some Bengali words in lieu of English but some English words are still there, that is what you left. It is also available on the internet.

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Interview with Senior Fellow of Practice, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development

Date: 15 June 2026

Location: British High Commission, Dhaka

Present: Senior Fellow of Practice, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD); 1 CPIT official; 2 FCDO officials

How has the political environment changed since August 2024?

It's quite a long period of time. Looking back, at the beginning, it was hard to know what was going on; what was being said and what was not being said. There were a lot of rumours, so it was very difficult to assess what was happening. We [BIGD] were very interested from the beginning. There were promises of democracy. We are interested in social movements and governance, and we were following the process to understand youth involvement in the [July 2024] uprising. Youth social movements led the uprising and we wanted to understand what their role was. It wasn't so clear on how political groups got involved and to what extent. Some of this came out later. On the front it was a spontaneous, youth-led movement. However, it was not so spontaneous as there was some organising behind it. We were interested to see who these groups were.

At the beginning, the youth didn't say they were a political party/affiliated, they said it was an anti-discrimination movement. It then transferred to the citizen's platform and then into the NCP. After this, we began to see who remained and who dropped out. From a gender perspective, there was strong participation of young women in the

anti-discrimination movement. Then they began to be sidelined and then they dropped out altogether from September [2024]. It was a matter of concern for us. At the beginning, I tried to interview some of the young women to see how they came into their role, and to capture what they did before they disappeared from the movement. Some didn't want to speak; some were willing to talk and some of the most visible figures stayed on the national media.

There were a lot of organisations interested in hearing stories about women's role in the anti-discrimination movement. Some activists were more visible than others, some went back to their studies and families, some remained active in BRAC and Dhaka University.

The women's rights group, Naripokkho, held meetings and consultations, bringing in young women to find out what's on the pulse and what could be done for the women's movement.

Now that everyone is talking about the anti-discrimination movement, it would be a good time to put through the agenda for women's equality, but we found this faced a lot of resistance. With the opening of the civic space, there was a lot more space for right wing groups and conservative views and organisations to add their views. This led to some protest and they countered what was being said by the Left or the women's movement. In some cases, it turned violent. The LGBTQI movement faced violence. The women's movement faced backlash which was mainly online on social media. In some cases, women were harassed, some young girls or sex workers expressing themselves.

We thought, with the interim government, there would be more of a space for the women's movement. The interim government set up reform commissions. I was part of the women's affairs reform commission. It was a good opportunity to put an agenda in front of the interim government. We were promised a lot of reform. The whole anti-discrimination movement was saying they did not want a repeat of Sheikh Hasina. Everyone was talking about putting safeguards in place and reforms. There were different reform commissions, and we thought this would put ideas forward on what reforms needed to be done. In terms of transfer of power, we were very disappointed. The interim government couldn't or wouldn't take on the discussions from the reform commission and put them into law. The recommendations went to a consensus commission which political parties dominated. After this, the women's rights agenda went backwards, and other issues. Women were not consulted and there was no space for women's rights groups in the consensus commission. We found the space was starting to exclude. Jel were getting stronger, the Awami League was pushed out. The Awami League have done a lot of bad [things], but they have done some good things. Some progressive leaders couldn't be named, even professionals that worked with the AL became persona non-grata and there was a lot of blacklisting.

[Under the interim government] there was political violence against AL supporters. A lot of people went into hiding. Their houses were ransacked and they were having to hide. There were a lot false cases. There were cases where 100 people were named and just because you were the 99th person on the list you were named in the case without evidence. So it was a difficult period.

There was a lot of extortion. Many went to jail from the AL or AL supporters. They would come out of prison if they paid huge amounts of money. Many took the opportunity to move against enemies. Even if it wasn't for political reasons, they would use it as a chance to add people's names to lists to be used in false cases. There were so many false cases, a lot of torture and a lot of bribery. One district

advisor said they couldn't file a case until it was vetted by a magistrate. There are a number of people [who were associated with the Awami League] I know that are still in hiding, some have left the country and some are in jail.

For those who managed to get bail, it was by spending a lot of money. For people dealing with prisoners, they have to pay the guards so much, around 1,000 to 5,000 taka, even to get put into the division for political prisoners you have to pay. David Bergman [Journalist] has documented this and has written about some of these cases. Even in the ICT, the prosecutors were asking for bribes. Mostly in the Awami League cases.

So it's been difficult. Everyone is still hoping with the new government that things will improve and that the persecution of the Awami League will also stop. Under the interim government, the BNP was more about banning Awami League activities, not banning the party. At the local level, we have been interviewing female youth leaders. We have seen that people at the local level in political parties who know each are other providing protection. Also, some AL members have joined Jel or BNP and have been welcomed in. There has been a culture of compromise in local areas, people are often from the family [families connected to political parties], neighbourhood or have other close ties.

Are there examples of this happening in specific parts of country?

Yes. The BNP was a bit wary of taking in too many AL members, so maybe central leadership was not happy, but at the local level they've been absorbed into the party.

Government parties, whichever party comes to power, in terms of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), all talk about anti-discrimination and non-discrimination, but they haven't done anything for the CHT. Recently, there was a bombing incident, and months later people in CHT communities have been arrested and put in jail, including children and pregnant women. CHT human rights leaders are threatened, and local tribal leaders are threatened when they speak out on issues. There is censorship.

Under which government?

Ever since I can remember. Ever since the military has been involved, no political government has tried to make changes. People often migrate from CHT and have gone to Australia and other countries where they have found it more welcoming.

Has the newly elected BNP government implemented any recommendations from commissions formed under the IG? If so, what?

That's a sore point. Both Jel and BNP had discussed reform in their manifestos. The BNP are taking up some reform ideas.

In terms of the women's reform commission and the recommendations suggested, the commission have tried to engage with the new government. At the beginning, they said they were so busy that they couldn't take meetings. Then when you meet them at events, they tell us to come and speak to them. It feels like there is no real buy in. There was so much effort put into the commission. The interim government didn't manage to do much to implement recommendations, it feels like a real loss of time and effort.

I'll pass you a copy of report we have done on reform.

What is the role of the auxiliary organisations (particularly student wings) in political parties and what are their activities?

Student wings had elections at all universities. They seem to have been fair. People

were quite worried that the Jel student wing came out strongly but maybe that is to be expected as they have been very good at organising. The BNP and AL wings were more about patronage and violence and not really working for the welfare of students. If you focus on student housing, scholarships, and student nutrition then the student wing is more likely to get votes. It is interesting to see how student leaders develop and enter the mainstream.

Our research on student politics found it was a training ground for political parties. It really teaches them how to organise, how to do public speaking, reach out and build relations with mainstream parties. There are a number of people in mainstream parties who came through student politics. There have been debates on whether student politics should be banned or encouraged. We need to have a democratic and safe culture of student politics. There needs to a more constructive culture with democratic norms, and less violence and asking for money and all of that. That's a different debate on how you ensure that there is a healthy student politics – we have to figure that out.

Was there any violence during student wing elections?

There was not that much compared to before; it was very peaceful. There were minor incidents before they released the results. On the whole, it was very peaceful which shows it can be done.

What were the levels of pre-election/election period intra- and inter-party violence? How does this compare to levels under the AL?

What has been coming out from our interviews is that the official reporting of violence is much less than what took place. The election complaints mechanism didn't work very well. You will see in the EU report, they did a survey which found that people didn't know they had a complaint office in their location, didn't know about them at all or they didn't know they could complain.

In interviews, people said that when they did lodge a complaint they weren't taken seriously or that they took the complaint and nothing happened.

In Dhaka, this was reported in national media, a Jel candidate made a violent statement against women. There was a complaint filed that the speech was promoting violence against women. It went to the Chief Election Commissioner and nothing happened. This was a public incident of violence, we thought that because it was done publicly there would be some impact but there was no action from the election commission.

There was an incident where a rape by [a] BNP [member] was reported in Hatia due to the woman voting for the NCP. In the end, there was no evidence found to support this claim.

Compared to other elections, it has been more peaceful, and I haven't heard of many incidents of violence against minorities.

Some Jel candidates put a religious angle on the election. For example, saying if you want to go to heaven you have to vote for us. The central leadership denied this and we don't know if they gave any instruction to do this, but it happened more in rural areas.

There were also allegations of vote buying. All parties, except for left wing parties, spent a lot of money on votes.

In the election, so few women were nominated. The left wing parties did the best compared to other parties, about one third or half of their candidates were women.

What was the police response during the elections?

When people complained, the police didn't take it seriously. Even BNP candidates complained that there was police bias towards Jel, and independent candidates complained there was a bias toward larger parties. So, there was a lot of jockeying before [the] election. The interim government said local administrations at all levels, including district commissioners, would be neutral. There was some reshuffling and each party accused the other of putting in their people and that the local administrations were biased.

Another thing during the IG, they took all locally elected people out and administrative people were appointed by officials.

There is a problem with the whole politicisation of the local administration. Each new government when it comes in will recruit people who are party loyalists. They will have background checks, looking at family connections, etc. This also happened during the AL period, and Jel were discriminated against.

Recently, there was a huge purge in the police of those perceived to be affiliated with the AL. There was a new batch of police officers supposed to be sworn in after one year of training, and the whole ceremony was cancelled the day before.

Also, each party tries to win favour by protecting minorities, they want to buy loyalty. We will have to see what the BNP does.

[**This information was added after the meeting** The AL claimed that they would protect the Hindu minority. This resulted in many of the Hindu voters supporting them.]

What is the police response to protest? Are there differences to their response under the AL, the IG and now?

During the IG, we seemed to have protests all the time for anything. It was quite disruptive, every day there was some sort of protest. I think people felt it was safer to protest. During the AL period, you had to get permission for demonstrations or protests, so there were no direct political protests as they would have had trouble. It was ok for environmental or women's rights protests, they were allowed. There were also LGBTQI protests under the AL.

During the IG, there were some parties supporting the IG. Some movements were very conservative and targeted any protests they thought came from the LGBTQI community.

Just a few days ago, they [LGBTQI activists] have gatherings every Friday in one of central places. This was published on social media, and they were attacked by religious groups, not by the police.

Now the police just stand and watch, they do not take action rather than attacking protestors. Under the AL, the police were joining AL leaders beating up Jel. After the elections we haven't seen that kind of violence and I hope we won't.

But if the AL, let's say, makes itself visible on the streets, they would be at risk. There has been violence against the AL. Sheikh Hasina's house has been burnt down, there have been repeated burnings and attacks on symbolic AL places where there is nothing. The anger is still there and that might erupt again. We are hearing rumours that the AL is trying to organise and put money back into the organisation. There was a fear around the election that the AL might cause disruption. A lot of that fear comes from the digital sphere and social media. In Bangladesh, people watch political channels associated with parties and hear different things which can create

different perceptions of reality. There was rumour that there would be a massacre on a specific day or that Hasina would come back by a certain date.

Social media is emerging as form of political violence. Everything is at stake. For example, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) criticised public servants wanting a pay hike under the new budget. This created such a strong reaction online. CPD staff were attacked online for their clothes, sari and haircuts. Some young research assistants, young women working there, when they go to seminars they dress nicely, and they are being attacked personally online for that.

Before the IG, BRAC had done research on online safety for young people and young online activists. This includes LGBTQI individuals. The BRAC event came under attack. We had to remove the event from Facebook. The LGBTQI individuals had to go into hiding. We have now had to change protocols, events are now closed-door, people are screened and invited.

During the IG, the head of the women's reform commission had her photo printed off and people were throwing shoes at the picture. She received death threats and there was a dummy doll put up and beaten publicly.

Can NGOs/CSOs operate freely? Are there any legal or practical barriers?

During the AL, there was a culture of the detective branch and NS [national security] Intelligence coming to events in plain clothes to see if there was any anti-state activity. They considered women's organisations as generally harmless and sort of open about what they are doing so they didn't always come. Although, if we had people from Pakistan, the government would want to know. There is surveillance for NGOs who are receiving foreign funding, there is a clause that they can't carry out anti-state activity without there being a definition of anti-state. Previously, they have suspended funding for BLAST and TIB [Transparency International Bangladesh]. In proposals submitted to the government, we would have to word things in way to make it clear we were not attacking the government.

Any kind of criticism was seen as attack, if we were talking about good governance, transparency and accountability. But we can use those words now and we can do real work. Although, we have seen that where organisations have been too critical, they won't get invited to committees or meetings where draft law is being discussed. It happened under the AL. Under the new government, it is hard to say as they have been so busy settling down after being elected. The women's reform commission have been trying to get an interview with the minister, but he hasn't responded after 110 days, so does he think the subject matter is too hot to handle or is it not a priority? Although he has been going to other NGO events, and when they were in opposition they did mix with NGOs, so there is a working relationship there that we can build on.

Hopefully it will change under the new government. Trade union registration will become easier. The law has changed to allow those with smaller membership, whereas previously they had to pay a lot of bribes to get registration.

Under the IG we hoped corruption would go down but it didn't.

Is there any update on those held for their actions under the Hasina regime? Are people still in custody? On what charges? At what stage of the process, i.e. proceeding towards trial?

In terms of accountability and justice, those who were disappeared and big cases going back to 2016 like the [Sohagi Jahan] Tonu case, a young girl who was raped and murdered by those in [the] army, [which] was swept under carpet, is now coming

back. BNP or left political[ly] motivated cases like Taqi, a 14 year old killed by AL leaders, are coming back [under investigation].

There have been all these people disappeared. There was a commission that looked into this and the UN came in. Many people have still not been accounted for. People were held in isolation and in torture chambers. Two of these people who were forcibly disappeared have become MPs. These people have been released and rehabilitated but whether there will be justice for the people responsible for what happened to them we don't know.

There have been some ICT hearings but we don't know if anyone has been punished for their crimes, I'm not sure. Hasina and others carried out orders but it is not being addressed properly. Under the IG there were reformed rules for the ICT so that justice would be given in fairer way and follow different international standards. However, they are not following what has been agreed on in those rules and what there has been a discussion on. For example, charge sheets being delivered within a certain timeframe and if that's not done then the person has to be released, they are not following that. Also, if people try to speak on behalf of the AL then they are labelled an AL supporter. They are getting labelled even though the press is supposed to be free, people like David Bergamn who are speaking out on the human rights of AL members.

Are there any barriers to freedom of movement, for example if an AL member encountered difficulties in their community could they relocate to a different area?

They have relocated. When we have been doing interviews, people from different political backgrounds, women from minority Dalit communities and others like that, who had been elected under the AL and seen as AL supporters, are no longer in this area. Some of the ones we contacted said that they can't come and meet, a few we contacted said it's better that we don't come to meet them and that they can't come to meet us as they are in hiding.

Others are much more open. They were previously with the AL but they are no longer with them as they have other identities, such as working with a NGO, even though people know they were elected to the local government as an AL supporter.

In one example, one of the women [associated with the AL] was attacked and was traumatised, her husband is depressed and their one son left. They said they will never do politics. They still live in the same city they lived in before but do not go back to stay the night in their village home and they take precautions if they visit their village.

Some have gone totally underground. Some went to home to their in-laws' area and there are those who left the country and went into India. There are AL communities in Kolkata, Bangkok, Canada and the UK.

More students now go abroad but there has always been that trend. There are those who flee for refuge or economic reasons and those who are really at risk if they stay in the country. I don't know how to determine those who are leaving for economic reasons and those who are at physical risk. There are some people who stayed in the country who would be at risk of harm. Grievances may come up, people might be vulnerable and police might not help. There are case backlogs, issues with gathering evidence and witnesses, and jail conditions are bad even if someone wants to surrender.

The former Speaker [of the National Parliament], Sharin Sharmin, had a case

brought against her where there was no evidence and it was alleged that she shot someone elsewhere in the country. There are these weak, false cases brought against people. The situation is very complex, it is not simple.

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