

Bangladesh

BANGLADESH ASSESSMENT

October 2000

Country Information and Policy Unit

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Scope of document

I SCOPE OF DOCUMENT

1.1 This assessment has been produced by the Country Information and Policy Unit, Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Home Office, from information obtained from a variety of sources.

1.2 The assessment has been prepared for background purposes for those involved in the asylum determination process. The information it contains is not exhaustive, nor is it intended to catalogue all human rights violations. It concentrates on the issues most commonly raised in asylum claims made in the United Kingdom.

1.3 The assessment is sourced throughout, and is intended to be used by caseworkers as a signpost to the source material, which has been made available to them. The vast majority of the source material is readily available in the public domain.

1.4 It is intended to revise the assessment on a six-monthly basis while the country remains within the top 35 asylum producing countries in the United Kingdom.

1.5 An electronic copy of the assessment has been made available to the following organizations:

- Amnesty International UK
- Immigration Advisory Service
- Immigration Appellate Authority
- Immigration Law Practitioners' Association
- Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
- JUSTICE
- Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture
- Refugee Council
- Refugee Legal Centre
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees

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Geography

II GEOGRAPHY

General

2.1 Located in southern Asia, the People's Republic of Bangladesh is bordered almost entirely by India, except for a small frontier in the Southeast with Myanmar (formerly Burma) and the coast line along the Bay of Bengal in the south. The capital is Dhaka. **[1]** A portion of the boundary with India is indefinite, with a dispute over South Talpatty and New Moore Island. **[18]**

2.2 Covering almost 57,000 square miles of land, **[1]** Bangladesh has an estimated population of 127 million, **[18]** and is one of the world's most densely populated countries. **[3c]** According to the 1991 census, the four largest towns were: Dhaka (3.6 million people), Chittagong (1.5 million people), Khulna (over 600,000 people) and Rajshahi (nearly 325,000 people). **[1]** 89% of the population are located in the countryside. **[3c]** Bengalis comprise 98% of the country's population, with the remaining 2% comprising 250,000 Biharis and less than 1 million tribals. The majority religion is Muslim at 88.3%, with the remainder comprising 10.5% Hindus and 1.2% others **[18]**

See also [Biharis](#): paragraphs 5.3.7 - 5.3.10.

2.3 A deltaic plain, Bangladesh is often submerged by the floodwaters of its river system, or from waters driven inland from the Bengal Gulf. With a tropical climate, particularly between June and September, monsoon rains, typhoons and tidal waves also cause devastating floods. **[3a]** There is also an emerging problem of arsenic poisoning in Bangladesh's drinking water. Much of the drinking water comes from wells sunk by aid agencies, and excessive use of fertiliser may be the cause of the problem according to expert reports. **[20e]**

Languages

2.4 The state language of Bengali is spoken by about 95% of the population. **[1]** However Biharis speak Urdu, and the tribal populations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts use various dialects. English is also used in commerce and administration. **[3a]**

See also [Biharis](#): paragraphs 5.3.7 - 5.3.10; and [Chakmas](#): paragraphs 5.3.11 - 5.3.12.

Economy

2.5 Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. **[3c]** Annual per capita income is less than \$300, and more than one-third of the country's population live in poverty. 70% of the work force is involved in agriculture, which accounts for one-third of gross domestic product. The economy is market-based, but the Government plays a significant role in the industrial sector. The industrial sector is slowly growing, based largely on the manufacture of garments, textiles, rerolled steel, cement and jute. A small wealthy elite controls much of the private economy, but there is an emerging middle class. **[2b]**

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2.6 Despite the widespread poverty, poor resource base, malnutrition and underemployment suffered by an increasing population, there are grounds for cautious optimism: food production has improved in recent years; the birth rate has decreased considerably and remarkable achievements have been made in the field of export promotions. **[1]**

History

III HISTORY

Pre-Independence: 1947 - 1971

3.1 Present-day Bangladesh was originally one of the five provinces comprising Pakistan, created following the partition of the Indian sub-continent in August **1947**. Known as East Pakistan, the province was formed from the former Indian province of East Bengal and the Sylhet district of Assam. **[1]**

3.2 East Pakistan became dissatisfied at its dependence on a distant central government in West Pakistan, and the situation was exacerbated in **1952** when Urdu was declared Pakistan's official language. Discontent continued in the eastern wing, mainly due to under representation in the administration and armed forces. The leading political party of East Pakistan, the Awami League (AL), subsequently demanded autonomy from the West. **[1]**

3.3 A general election in December **1970** gave the AL an overwhelming victory in the East and thus a majority in Pakistan's National Assembly. On 26 March **1971** the AL leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, proclaimed the independence of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Civil war immediately followed and the Pakistan President, General Yahya Khan, outlawed the AL and arrested its leaders. **[1]**

3.4 Resistance continued from the Liberation Army of East Bengal (the Mukhti Bahini), a group of irregular fighters who launched a major offensive in November. As a result, an estimated 9.5 million refugees crossed into India. On 4 December **1971** India declared war on Pakistan, with Indian forces supporting the Mukhti Bahini. Pakistan surrendered on 16 December and Bangladesh achieved its independence, quickly achieving international recognition **[1]**

1972 - 1982

3.5 Sheikh Mujibur became Bangladesh's first Prime Minister in January **1972**. A general election for the country's first parliament ('Jatiya Sangsad') was held in March **1973**: the AL won 292 of the 300 directly elective seats. Internal stability was however threatened by opposition groups resorting to terrorism. **[1]**

3.6 In January **1975** a presidential government replaced the parliamentary government; Sheikh Mujibur became President, assuming absolute power. However, Mujibur and member of his family were assassinated in a right-wing coup (led by Islamic army majors) in August. Martial law was then declared and political parties banned. A subsequent counter-coup on 3 November however brought Khalid Musharaf, a pro-Indian commander of the Dhaka garrison, to power. This proved to be extremely short-lived, as a third coup on 7 November overthrew Musharaf, and power was assumed under a neutral non-party government, with Major General Ziaur Rahman (General Zia) taking precedence. **[1]**

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See also [Prosecution of 1975 Coup Leaders](#): *paragraph 5.4.18*

3.7 Political parties were again legalized in July **1976**. General Zia assumed the presidency in April **1977**. In the parliamentary elections of February **1979**, Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) won 207 of the 300 directly elective seats in the Jatiya Sangsad. A new Prime Minister was appointed in April, and martial law repealed. The state of emergency was revoked in November. **[1]**

3.8 Zia was assassinated on 30 May **1981**, during an attempted military coup. Political instability ensued and Vice President Abdus Sattar was nominated President. Sattar (finding it difficult to retain civilian control) formed a National Security Council in January **1982**, led by Chief of the Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Hossain Mohammad Ershad. On 24 March Ershad seized power in a bloodless coup. Martial law was again declared, with Ershad as Chief Martial Law Administrator (although in October Ershad changed his title to Prime Minister), aided by a military Council of Advisers. **[1]**

1983 - 1990

3.9 Although the Government's economic policies achieved some success, increasing demands for a return to democracy ensued throughout **1983**. The two principal opposition groups that emerged were an eight-party alliance, headed by a faction of the AL under Sheikh Hasina Wajed (daughter of the late Sheikh Mujibur) and a seven-party group, led by a faction of the BNP under former President Sattar and Begum Khaleda Zia (widow of General Zia). In September the two groups formed an alliance: the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy. In November, permission was given for the resumption of political activity and a new political party, the Jana Dal (People's Party) was formed to support Ershad as a presidential candidate. Ershad declared himself President on 11 December. **[1]**

3.10 Throughout **1984** the country experienced strikes, political demonstrations, the postponing of the country's local, presidential and parliamentary elections, and demands by the opposition for the repealing of martial law. **[1]**

3.11 In January **1985** a new Council of Ministers was formed, composed almost entirely of military officers and excluding all members of the Jana Dal (in response to the opposition parties' demands for a neutral government during the pre-election). However, President Ershad refused to relinquish power to an interim government. The National Front (NF), a new five-party political alliance, (comprising the Jana Dal, the United People's Party, the Gonotantrik Party, the Bangladesh Muslim League and a breakaway section of the BNP) was established in September to promote Government policies. **[1]**

3.12 The ten-month ban on political activity was lifted in January **1986**, and the NF formally became a single pro-government entity: the Jatiya Dal (National Party). Although smaller opposition parties participated in the parliamentary elections on 7 May, the elections were boycotted by the Begum Khaleda Zia-led BNP. The Jatiya Dal (JD) won 153 of the 300 directly elective seats in the Jatiya Sangsad. Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, the former General-Secretary of the

JD, was appointed Prime Minister in July. [1]

3.13 Ershad joined the JD in September, being elected as chairman of the party. In the presidential election of mid-October (which was boycotted by both the BNP and AL) Ershad received 22 million votes. In November, the Jatiya Sangsad approved indemnity legislation (legalizing the military regime's actions since March 1982). Ershad then repealed martial law and restored the 1972 Constitution. He also formed a new Council of Ministers, including four MPs from the AL.

[1]

3.14 Dissension from the opposition continued throughout **1987** and President Ershad declared a nation-wide state of emergency on 27 November. On 6 December, after twelve opposition members had resigned and the 73 AL members had agreed to do likewise, Ershad dissolved the Jatiya Sangsad. The JD won a large majority of seats in the parliamentary elections of 3 March **1988**. Later that month, Moudud Ahmed, an ally of Ershad, was appointed Prime Minister. Ershad repealed the state of emergency in April. [1]

3.15 Violence, anti-Government demonstrations and strikes occurred throughout the country in **1990**. Ershad re-proclaimed a state of emergency on 27 November, and later resigned on 4 December, simultaneously revoking the state of emergency (again), and dissolving the Jatiya Sangsad. The newly appointed Vice President, Shahabuddin Ahmed, assumed the responsibilities of acting President, and was placed at the head of a neutral caretaker government. In the week following his resignation, Ershad was placed under house arrest. [1]

1991 - 1996

3.16 On 27 February **1991**, the BNP alliance won an overall majority at the parliamentary elections. Later, following discussion with the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), the BNP ensured a small working majority in the Jatiya Sangsad, and Begum Khaleda Zia assumed office as Prime Minister. Abdur Rahman Biswas was elected as the new President on 8 October. In August **1992**, the Government survived an AL-led parliamentary motion of no confidence. [1]

3.17 In January **1994**, the AL won the mayoralties of Dhaka and Chittagong. However, a by-election success in March revealed the strength of the BNP elsewhere. All opposition members of the Jatiya Sangsad resigned en masse on 28 December. Nonetheless the Prime Minister, with her party's parliamentary majority, pledged to maintain constitutional government. On 24 November **1995**, the Prime Minister requested that the Jatiya Sangsad be dissolved pending the outcome of the next general election. Although opposition persisted, Begum Khaleda Zia's administration continued in office in an acting capacity. [1]

3.18 The general election, postponed until 15 February **1996**, was boycotted by all of the main opposition parties. Consequently, the BNP won 205 of the 207 legislative seats declared. However, the opposition refused to recognize the legitimacy of the polls and announced the launch of a non co-operation movement against the Government. Finally, the Prime Minister agreed to hold fresh elections

under neutral auspices. [1]

3.19 Begum Khaleda Zia and her government resigned from their posts on 30 March, when the Jatiya Sangsad was dissolved. President Biswas appointed Muhammad Habibur Rahman as acting Prime Minister. Notwithstanding an unsuccessful military coup on 20 May, a further general election was held on 12 June: the AL won 146 of the 300 elective seats in the Jatiya Sangsad. An understanding was rapidly reached between the AL and the Jatiya Dal (whose major interest was the release of Ershad). [1]

3.20 Sheikh Hasina Wajed was sworn in as the new Prime Minister on 23 June. Her Council of Ministers incorporated one member from the JD and included a number of retired officials and army officers. On 23 July, Shahabuddin Ahmed was elected as Bangladesh's new Head of State. [1]

3.21 Upon assuming power, Sheikh Hasina Wajed vowed to bring to justice those responsible for the assassination of her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In November, the Jatiya Sangsad voted unanimously to repeal the indemnity law that had been enacted in 1975 to protect the perpetrators of the military coup in that year; however the BNP and the JI boycotted the vote. [1]

See also [Prosecution of 1975 Coup Leaders](#): paragraph 5.4.18.

1997 - 1999

3.22 Ex-President Ershad was released from prison on bail in January 1997. Agitational politics continued throughout the year. The trial of twenty people accused of direct involvement in Sheikh Mujibur's assassination began in March 1997. [1] The opposition organized further disruptive strikes in July and August 1997 in protest of the Government's imposition of higher taxes as part of the annual budget, and also because of increased fuel prices. A series of strikes and demonstrations ensued, organized by the BNP in conjunction with Islamic and right-wing groups. [1]

See also [1974 Special Powers Act](#): paragraphs 4.3.3 - 4.3.5.

3.23 On 30 August 1997 the BNP, inflamed by a fresh argument over the murder of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, recommenced its boycott of the Jatiya Sangsad. [4b] In November 1997 the BNP, backed by its allies including the JI, led general strikes in Dhaka and Chittagong. These resulted in clashes with the AL, and subsequent killings and injuries. [4d]

3.24 In December 1997 the AL Government signed an historic peace accord to end the insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. [1] & [4e] Opposition to the treaty from the BNP swiftly ensued. [1] & [4f] However on 10 February 1998 the Shanti Bahini guerrillas formally surrendered their arms to the Government, marking an end to the 25-year insurgency. [4]

See also [Chittagong Hill Tracts](#): paragraphs 5.4.9 - 5.4.13.

3.25 The ruling coalition split on 15 March 1998 when the minority

Jatiya Dal announced that it was leaving the "national consensus" Government. **[5c] & [11f]** Ershad remained charged with sixteen offences, all of which were filed during the Caretaker Government (1990-91) and BNP rule (1991-96). These offences mostly concerned the misappropriation of Government funds (amongst other corruption charges.) **[11f]**

3.26 The BNP returned to the Jatiya Sangsad on 9 March 1998, following the signing of a memorandum of understanding between it and the ruling AL. **[5c]** However the BNP walked out of the Jatiya Sangsad on 12 April 1998, in protest against four bills concerning the December 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord. **[5d]** Nonetheless, the Jatiya Sangsad passed the four bills at the beginning of May 1998. **[5e]**

3.27 In August 1998 the BNP vowed to maintain their campaign against the AL in order to force the Government from power. **[4m]** In November 1998 fifteen former army officers, including Farook Rahman, a retired colonel, were sentenced to death by firing squad for killing the country's founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. **[15]**

See also [Prosecution of 1975 Coup Leaders](#): paragraph 5.4.18

3.28 The seven-party opposition alliance led by the BNP renewed its campaign to oust Sheikh Hasina's government during October and November 1998 by holding a series of strikes. **[5h]**

3.29 A new anti-government alliance was formed on 20 December 1998 between Begum Khaleda Zia's BNP and the leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Jatiya Dal (JD) (the latter had initially supported the AL Government after the June 1996 election). It had been earlier reported on 15 December 1998 that the JD had linked up with seven smaller parties to agitate against the government. The opposition claimed that intimidation and vote rigging had marred a recent by-election in Pabna. **[5i]**

3.30 Prime Minister Hasina's "consensus government" suffered a blow on 30 December 1998 when Communications Minister, Anwar Hossain Manju, was sacked from the Jatiya Party's presidium, from the post of its vice-chairman and the party's membership, for violating party discipline and making outrageous statements. The JP's leader, Ershad, who had recently become an ally of the main opposition, said that he would join any movement to topple the government. Manju was reportedly sacked from the JP for criticising Ershad's moves to topple the Government. The JP also urged Manju to quit the cabinet. **[4k]**

3.31 Two bombs exploded at a music and culture festival in the town of Jessore on 6 March **1999**, killing at least eight people and injuring some 150 others. The festival had been organized by an anti-fundamentalist cultural group, Udichi Shilpi Gosthi. Its president blamed the bombing on Islamic fundamentalists. The attack was condemned by the Prime Minister, who reportedly implied that the opposition BNP were responsible. **[5j]**

3.32 General Ershad was prevented from leaving the country in November **1999**. This came the day after his Jatiya Party counterpart

and former Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed was sentenced in absentia to fifteen years imprisonment for embezzlement. Ershad's conviction for corruption was under appeal at the time. **[20a]**

January 2000 - October 2000

3.33 In July 2000 twenty-four people were charged with the March 1999 Jessore bombing, including a former opposition MP. Police suspected a link between the bombing and the murder of prominent investigative journalist Shamsur Rahman the same month. Rahman had exposed the link between organized crime and politics, and police suspected that his murder was a bid to intimidate witnesses in the bombing case. **[20k]**

See also [Speech and Press](#): paragraphs 5.4.4 - 5.4.7

3.34 The ruling Awami League began a campaign against the Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing - the Islami Chhatra Shibir - following the murder of eight pro-AL students in Chittagong in July 2000. **[22]** The Prime Minister made a statement following this incident which was interpreted as vengeful, and was not well received by the media. Following this there was an attempt on the Prime Minister's life, when a bomb was detected accidentally near Kotalipara a day ahead of her scheduled visit. Ruling party leaders were quick to associate the BNP led opposition with the incident. **[12j]**

3.35 The political tensions heightened further, when on 6th August 2000 police used lathi-charges, teargas and rubber bullets to disperse a peaceful opposition alliance rally in front of the BNP central office. **[12j]**

Instruments of the state

IV INSTRUMENTS OF THE STATE

4.1 POLITICAL SYSTEM

Constitution

4.1.1 A new Constitution for the People's Republic of Bangladesh came into effect on 16 December 1972. The 1972 Constitution based its fundamental principles on nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism. The Constitution aims to establish a society free from exploitation in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms, justice and equality are to be secured by all citizens. [1]

4.1.2 Arbitrary arrest or detention, discrimination based on race, age, sex, birth, caste or religion, and also forced labour are all prohibited under the Constitution. Subject to the law, every citizen has freedom of movement, assembly and association. The constitution also aims to guarantee freedom of conscience, speech, press and religious worship. [1]

4.1.3 The Constitution was amended in 1977 to replace Islam with secularism. A further amendment in 1988 established Islam as the state religion. In August 1991, the Jatiya Sangsad approved an amendment ending sixteen years of presidential rule and restoring the prime minister as executive leader (under the previous system both the prime minister and the Council of Ministers were answerable to the president). Apart from the Ershad-imposed period of martial law from 24 March 1982 until 10 November 1986, the Constitution has remained in place. [1]

See also [Human Rights: Introduction](#): paragraphs 5.1.1 - 5.1.3

Government

4.1.4 Bangladesh is a multiparty, parliamentary democracy. The country's last general election on 12 June 1996 saw the Awami League (AL) come to power. The Prime Minister is Sheikh Hasina Wajed, [2a] (daughter of the AL founder, the late Sheikh Mujibur). [1]

See also [Parliament](#): paragraphs 4.1.7 - 4.1.9

President

4.1.5 The President is constitutional Head of State, and is elected for a term of five years. The AL presidential candidate, Shahabuddin Ahmed, was elected President on 23 July 1996. A retired Chief Justice and former acting President, Ahmed was sworn in on 9 October 1996. [1]

4.1.6 The President is eligible for re-election by universal adult suffrage. The President has control of the armed forces, and is responsible for appointing the Prime Minister and other ministers, as well as the Chief Justice and other judges. The President also has executive authority, which he exercises either directly or through subordinate officers, in accordance with the Constitution. The Council

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of Ministers aid and advise the President. **[1]**

See also [Parliament](#): paragraphs 4.1.7 - 4.1.9

Parliament

4.1.7 Parliament ('Jatiya Sangsad') is a unicameral legislature. Members of the Jatiya Sangsad are directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise from single territorial constituencies. Persons aged eighteen and over are entitled to vote. The parliamentary term lasts for five years, unless the President dissolves the Jatiya Sangsad sooner. There are 300 members **[1]** plus a further thirty parliamentary seats reserved for women chosen by majority vote in parliament. In addition women are still free to contest any seat in parliament. Seats are not reserved for any other minority group. Currently, of the 300 elected MPs, 3 are tribal Buddhists from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and five are Hindu - the remainder being Bengali Muslims. **[2b]**

4.1.8 The general election on 15 February 1996 was boycotted by all the main opposition parties, with a subsequent low turn out. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (who had won the previous general election of 27 February 1991) won 205 of the 207 seats declared. **[1]**

4.1.9 A second general election of that year was held on 12 June 1996, the results of which were as follows:

Awami League	146
Bangladesh Nationalist Party	116
Jatiya Dal	32
Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh	3
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rab)	1
Islami Oikya Jote	1
Independent	1
TOTAL	300

See also [Supervision of Elections](#): paragraphs 5.2.10 - 5.2.12

4.2 JUDICIAL SYSTEM

4.2.1 The court system has two levels: the lower courts and the Supreme Court. Both hear civil and criminal cases. The lower courts consist of magistrates, who are part of the administrative branch of government, and session and district judges who belong to the judicial branch. The Supreme Court is divided into two Sections, the High Court and the Appellate Court. The High Court hears original cases and reviews cases from the lower courts. The Appellate Court has jurisdiction to hear appeals of judgements, decrees, orders or sentences of the High Court. Rulings of the Appellate Court are binding on all other courts. **[2b]**

4.2.2 Under the Constitution all citizens are equal before the law and have a right to its protection. **[1]** In September 1996 the Government established an "expert committee" within the law ministry to develop proposals to further separate the judiciary from the executive. **[3g]** The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary. However,

under a long-standing "temporary" provision of the Constitution, some subordinate courts remain part of the executive and are subject to its influence. Lower level courts are more susceptible to pressure from the executive branch. **[2b]** Amnesty International for example reports that corruption amongst the police and lower judiciary results in impunity for human rights abusers and impedes access to justice for those without money or political influence. **[7j]** The higher levels of the judiciary however display a significant degree of independence and often rule against the government in criminal, civil and even politically controversial cases. **[2b]**

4.2.3 A major problem with the court system is the overwhelming backlog of cases, which produces long pretrial delays. An official source admitted that almost 800,000 cases were pending in criminal and civil courts in December 1999. Approximately 44,000 persons (73 percent of the country's prison population) were awaiting trial or under trial. Government sources also report that the period between detention and trial averages 6 months, although the press and human rights groups report pretrial detention can last several years. Trials are often characterized by lengthy adjournments, which considerably prolong the incarceration of accused persons who do not receive bail. An independent sample survey conducted by Transparency International also showed more than half of those involved in court cases paid bribes to court officials. **[2b]**

4.2.4 Trials are public. The law provides the accused with the right to be represented by counsel, to review accusatory material, to call witnesses and to appeal against verdicts. **[2b]**

4.2.5 Resolution of disputes by traditional village elders is popular in rural communities, largely due to the difficulties in accessing the courts and the length of time litigation takes. Vigilante violence against criminals is common, with authorities rarely punishing those responsible. At the end of September 1999, vigilantes throughout the year had killed twenty people. The media has reported that this is due to the public's lack of faith in the law enforcement system. **[2b]**

4.2.6 The Prime Minister has caused controversy with her stand against granting bail to hardcore terrorists, blaming lawyers and judges involved in the process. The latter expressed outrage at her comments during a BBC interview, claiming that this amounted to violation of the constitution and fundamental rights. Unperturbed, the Prime Minister has stated that she is simply demanding accountability of the judiciary. **[12j]**

4.3 SECURITY

General

4.3.1 The internal security establishment in Bangladesh consists of the police and four auxiliary forces: the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), the Armed Police, the Ansars and the Village Defence Party. However it is the police and the two paramilitary forces, the BDR and Ansars, who are primarily responsible for maintaining law and order. **[3h]** The police Special Branch, the National Security Intelligence and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) run informers to gather intelligence on government opponents. Human rights activists,

foreign NGOs and journalists have reported harassment by these organisations. There is widespread corruption and a lack of discipline among the police, effectively reducing control over them by civilian authorities. Throughout 1999 the government continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily, as well as use national security legislation (the Special Powers Act) to detain citizens without formal charges or specific complaints being filed against them. **[2b]**

4.3.2 On 28 June 1997 the Prime Minister announced plans to introduce effective laws to stop terrorism. **[12c]** In early 1998 the government announced a number of measures to enable the police to deal better with the deteriorating law and order situation. In April of that year it was also reported that new police officers were recruited. The police were also being equipped with new vehicles and communications equipment, country wide radio network, fax and computer systems. They were also promised improvements to uniforms, rations and weapons. **[3h]**

4.3.3 The issue of whether Islamic militants were active in Bangladesh emerged during US President Bill Clinton's visit in March 2000. Such groups are influential in some parts of the country, but have gained little significant support in a country that associates itself with secularism and democracy. The main Islamist party is allied with the BNP opposition yet holds only three seats in parliament. **[20i]**

4.3.3 The government has called in the army to round up suspected criminals in the south-west of the country - an area terrorised for decades by outlaws, smugglers and armed militants from banned political groups. A measure of security was restored, although confidence plummeted in July 2000 following the murder of investigative journalist Shamsur Rahman who had exposed links between organised crime and politics. **[20k]** In the same month the killings of eight students in a politically motivated attack also increased public perception that crime and violence are increasing. **[20l]**

See also [January 2000 - October 2000](#): paragraphs 3.33 - 3.35 and [Speech and Press](#): paragraphs 5.4.4 - 5.4.7

1974 Special Powers Act

4.3.3 The Special Powers Act (SPA) of 1974 gives the Government sweeping powers to detain any person for an initial period of up to 30 days without formal charge or specific complaint, to prevent him or her performing a 'prejudicial act'. **[3h]** Other offences subject to the SPA include smuggling, black market activity or hoarding. **[2b]** Although the SPA provides detainees with limited safeguards against prolonged detention and arbitrary arrest, in practice the grounds for detention are often very vague. **[3h]** The SPA also permits searches without a warrant. **[2b]**

4.3.4 There are credible reports from human rights monitors and political activists that the Awami League Government uses the SPA as a tool to harass and intimidate political opponents. The government cites a significant reduction in the number of persons held under the SPA as evidence that it is minimizing its use of the act. According to the government, 739 persons were under SPA detention

as of August 1999 - a decrease from the 885 persons in detention as of July 1998, and a substantial decrease from the approximately 2,000 persons under SPA detention in mid-1997. Government statistics for January to the end of August 1999 show 2,586 detainees under the SPA, with 2,307 SPA detainees released during the same period. **[2b]**

4.3.5 According to Amnesty International, several prisoners of conscience were detained in 1997 under the Special Powers Act. **[7g]** The Government has in the past held incommunicado some prominent prisoners, although there were no incidents of this during 1999. **[2b]**

Public Safety Act

4.3.6 There has been concern at a new security law, the Public Safety Act. The Act was passed after only a brief debate due to the opposition's parliamentary boycott. Labelled the "Black Law" by human rights activists, it gives the authorities sweeping powers of arrest and detention. The concern is that this may lead to summary trials for opposition members. It has also been reported that the legislation may be used to stop the opposition calling general strikes. **[20b]**

4.3.7 The Bill contains provisions for trial by special tribunals and a maximum of fourteen years rigorous imprisonment for crimes such as extortion, kidnapping, ransom and damaging vehicles. The Prime Minister has called upon her political opposition not to encourage rogue elements of society by denouncing it as a black law. **[12h]**

4.3.8 Analysts are of the view that there will be an element of increased fear in the minds of the perpetrators of the crimes that the Public Safety Act intends to address. However, observers also feel that it would have been more appropriate if the government had allowed much more time for debate on the Bill. This they feel would have removed any element of mistrust about the government's intentions behind the legislation. **[12h]**

Human rights

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Introduction

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 There are human rights abuses in Bangladesh. **[2b]** Under the previous government of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), increasing efforts were made to protect human rights. **[7a]** The current administration is sensitive to international opinion regarding human rights issues. The government has nonetheless been open to dialogue with international organizations and foreign diplomatic missions regarding issues such as the detention of opposition leaders, the proposed National Human Rights Commission and trafficking in women and children. At the end of 1999 legislation to establish a National Human Rights Commission had been submitted to the cabinet for approval. **[2b]** According to Amnesty International at least 23 men and one woman were sentenced to death for murder in 1998, although no executions were reported. **[7h]**

See also [Human Rights Groups](#): paragraphs 5.2.13 - 5.2.15; [Women](#): paragraphs 5.3.19 - 5.3.31 and [Children](#): paragraphs 5.3.32 - 5.3.37.

5.1.2 Availability on the legal redress for victims of human rights violations is reportedly scant. The poor and uneducated have difficulties in registering cases with the police and gaining access to the legal system. However the AL-led government has taken steps to reform the legal system with the passage on 2 September 1996 of the Law Commission Bill, which aimed to change the existing laws and develop new ones to bring the legal system in line with social and economic conditions. **[3f]**

See also [Judicial System](#): paragraphs 4.2.1 - 4.2.6.

5.1.3 On 5 October 1998 the Government acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. **[2a]** The Government generally keeps to the conventions it has ratified. However the more complex issues, such as child labour and full emancipation and greater empowerment of women are being resolved gradually over time. **[11d]** The Prime Minister has expressed her determination to curb criminal activities relating to the abuse of women and children. **[14]** The Government has introduced a repression bill, which includes recommendations to separate the judiciary from the executive, and for enquiries to be made by the judiciary instead of the police. **[6c]**

See also [Women](#): paragraphs 5.3.19 - 5.3.31; and [Children](#): paragraphs 5.3.32 - 5.3.37.

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General Assessment

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5.3 GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Torture

5.2.1 Although the law does not permit the police to torture criminals physically, it is reported that (for the purpose of maintaining law and order and to unearth the truth) the police sometimes beat up those in custody. **[12b]** Physical and psychological torture and other abuse during arrests and interrogations routinely occur. Torture may consist of threats, beatings and occasionally the use of electric shock. The government rarely convicts or punishes those responsible for torture, and a climate of impunity allows such police abuses to continue. **[2b]**

5.2.2 According to the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma Victims (BRCT), law enforcement agencies tortured 543 persons (including women and children) during the first eleven months of 1998. BRCT officials alleged that the reasons for the torture were poverty, illiteracy, corruption in the police department and the judiciary, non-accountability of the administration and the legacy of colonial laws. The BRCT recommended separation of the investigation department from the police administration, inclusion of human rights in the syllabuses of educational institutions (including universities), introduction of behavioural science in police training, reconstruction of the medico-legal system, and the setting up of forensic laboratories in divisional headquarters for overcoming the situation. **[6a]**

Police

5.2.3 Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure authorizes any police officer to arrest "without an order from a magistrate or without a warrant....any person....concerned in any cognizable offence, or against whom a reasonable complaint has been made or credible information has been received or a reasonable suspicion exists of his having been so concerned". Section 54 lays down certain procedures to be observed once an arrest has been made, including that the accused must be produced before a magistrate within 24-hours, and that a magistrate must give prior permission if police want to hold a prisoner for longer. However it is reported that despite these safeguards, Section 54 effectively allows the police to arrest anyone at any time for almost any reason, and is one of the most easily abused provisions in the Bangladesh legal system. **[3h]**

See also [Children](#): paragraphs 5.3.32 - 5.3.37

5.2.4 There is a practice of placing women, juveniles and children in "safe custody" in jails or prisons under certain circumstances. Rape victims, child prostitutes, children fleeing abusive homes and witnesses to murder and other serious crimes (if their presence is necessary for a criminal investigation), are among those who can be placed in safe custody. Human rights groups claim that "safe custody" is a form of punishment, and that women are in prison with convicted

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prisoners and treated as if charged with or convicted of an offence. Human rights groups also argue that there is no basis in law for "safe custody", and for several years activists have been trying to have the practice abolished. **[3h]**

See also [Women](#): paragraphs 5.3.19 - 5.3.31.

5.2.5 Amnesty International reported thirteen cases of death in police custody in 1996, attributing torture as a factor **[7d]** and citing a further two such cases in 1997. **[7g]** Seventy-one people reportedly died in police custody during the first six months of 1998. **[10f]** Government figures reveal that a hundred and one people died in prison and police custody in the first nine months of 1999. Impunity remains a serious problem, however the authorities have taken action in some instances where there is evidence of police involvement in extra-judicial killings. **[2b]**

5.2.6 Shamin Reza Rubel, a 24-year old university student who had been arrested on suspicion of possessing illegal firearms, died in police custody on 30 July 1998. A one-day strike and widespread violence followed in Dhaka. **[5f]** After public criticism, the authorities arrested six policemen in connection with Rubel's death. The Government also appointed a judge to investigate the incident and to recommend measures to prevent a recurrence. **[2a]** According to Amnesty International, following an investigation by the Criminal Investigation Department, thirteen policemen and a local Awami League leader were charged in connection with Rubel's death. A judicial inquiry into the case confirmed that his death was not accidental. **[7h]** On 14th March 1999 police reportedly drowned college student Mujibur Rahman. Having searched his house for stolen goods he was apprehended at a nearby lake trying to flee in a boat. Eyewitnesses allege he was beaten with bamboo sticks having been thrown into the water until he drowned. In another incident Mohammed Shahjada Tuku, having been detained and allegedly beaten, was thrown into a canal where he also drowned. The authorities took no action against the police concerning both of these drowning incidents. **[2b]**

See also *Security*: paragraphs 4.3.1 - 4.3.5; and *Torture*: paragraphs 5.2.1 - 5.2.2.

5.2.7 Amnesty International reported that there were at least three cases of rape in 1998 in custody by the security forces, in addition to the rape of a ten-year old girl by an off-duty policeman in April of that year. **[7h]** Amnesty also reported that there were three incidents of rape in custody by the security forces in 1999 **[7j]**. A British tourist also claimed to have been raped by police in Dhaka after going to report a theft in 1998. The reputation of the police further deteriorated when in September 1999 a policeman was charged with the abduction of a fifteen year old girl, with allegations that he also raped her being investigated. **[20g]** According to human rights and media reports, police looted and used violence after evicting prostitutes from the Tanbazar and Nimtali red-light districts in July 1999. Those evicted were forcibly detained in a centre for vagrants, and were allegedly raped by guards, centre employees and vagrants after refusing them sexual favours. **[2b]**

5.2.8 Police often use excessive and sometimes lethal force against opposition demonstrators. Ruling party activists and police reportedly opened fire on a procession of Jamaat-e-Islami party members in Dhaka. During a general strike in May 1999 police beat several senior opposition leaders, partially stripped a female demonstrator of her sari and fired rubber bullets and tear gas, injuring at least twenty. Opposition activists are often detained prior to and during general strikes without citing legal authority until the event is over, and persons have been detained on occasion for reasons of personal vengeance. In April 1999, a two-judge High Court panel criticized the police for blatant abuse of detention laws and powers. **[2b]**

See [Assembly and Association](#): paragraphs 5.4.1-5.4.3

5.2.9 Police corruption is a continuing problem, and there have been credible reports of police complicity in the trafficking of women and children. **[2b]**

See [Women](#): Paragraphs 5.3.19 - 5.3.31 and [Children](#): paragraphs 5.3.32 - 5.3.37

Supervision of Elections

5.2.10 An Election Commission supervises elections for the presidency and Jatiya Sangsad. The Commission also delimits constituencies and prepares electoral rolls. It consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and other commissioners, as appointed by the President. The Election Commission is independent in the exercise of its functions. **[1]** Elections are held by secret ballot on the basis of universal suffrage. **[2b]**

5.2.11 Under a 1996 constitutional amendment, general parliamentary elections are presided over by a caretaker government, led by the most recently retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. **[2b]** The June 1996 elections were contested by about 2,750 candidates, and were unanimously considered free and fair by election monitors (including 150-250 foreign observers, over 25,000 representatives from the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) and members of the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights). There was little violence during the election **[3e]** and the high voter turnout of 75% set a new record for the country. The FEMA however published its final report on the December 10 1998 parliamentary by-election in Pabna. The report highlighted harassment of opposition supporters by police and ruling party activists. It also voiced concerns about the neutrality of election officials, unfair use of government resources for the ruling party candidate and questionable results suggesting some form of manipulation. **[2b]**

5.2.12 The Bangladesh Election Commission announced in April 1999 that it would issue identity cards to all voters. The secretary of the Commission said that some 60 million eligible voters will be issued with identity cards in the next elections, and that ID cards would also have to be produced to obtain passports, travel documents, driving licences and for buying or selling land. **[4s]**

Human Rights Groups

5.2.13 The government generally permits human rights groups to conduct their activities. A wide variety of groups publish reports, hold press conferences and issue appeals to the government with regard to specific cases. While human rights groups are often sharply critical of the government, irrespective of the ruling party, they frequently practice self-censorship. **[2b]** The Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) has called for revision of Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The BSEHR has also called for the police system to be separate and accountable to the judiciary or parliament. **[6b]**

See also [Police](#): paragraphs 5.2.3 - 5.2.9

5.2.14 The government refuses to register the Bangladesh Section of Amnesty International for the Societies Registration Act. Without this registration a voluntary organisation cannot receive funding from abroad. Observers argue this is a result of resentment of Amnesty's criticism of the government's human rights record. The government has nonetheless consulted with other human rights groups on some draft legislation, and taken their views into account. **[2b]**

5.2.15 The Co-ordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh, an umbrella group of more than 76 non-government organizations, and the BSEHR both operate in Bangladesh. **[3f]** A number of human rights committees have also been set-up by the Asia Pacific Civil Society Forum to oversee the enforcement of fundamental rights. **[12d]**

Specific Group

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5.3 SPECIFIC GROUPS

Religious Minorities

5.3.1 Islam replaced secularism when the 1972 Constitution was amended in 1977. A further amendment to the Constitution in 1988 established Islam as the state religion. However, freedom of religious worship remains guaranteed under the Constitution. Arbitrary arrest or detention based on grounds of religion is prohibited. **[1]**

5.3.2 The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but also stipulates the right to practice the religion of one's choice, and the government respects this provision in practice. However, although the government is secular it is still sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of the majority of its citizens. **[2b]** 88.3% of the population are Muslims, 10.5% are Hindus **[18]** and there are also small groups of Buddhists, Christians and tribals. **[1]** Holy days from the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian faiths are all celebrated as national holidays. **[2c]**

5.3.3 The law permits citizens to proselytize. However, strong social resistance to conversion from Islam means that most missionary efforts by non-Muslims are aimed at Hindus and tribal groups. The government allows various religions to establish places of worship, to train clergy, to travel for religious purposes and to maintain links with co-religionists abroad. Foreign missionaries may work in the country, but their right to proselytize is not protected by the Constitution. Some missionaries face problems in obtaining visas. **[2b]** Bangladesh does not have a "blasphemy law". **[4q]**

5.3.4 Islamic fundamentalism was seen to rise throughout 1993-94. **[1]** Some members of the Hindu, Christian and Buddhist minorities continue to perceive and experience discrimination towards them. For example many Hindus have been unable to recover landholdings lost because of discrimination in the application of the law, especially the Vested Property Act. Prior to its 1996 election victory, the Awami League promised to repeal this particular Act on the basis of it being used to deprive Hindus of their property. However, the Government has so far taken no action. **[2b]** In spite of this, discrimination against Hindus or other religious minorities is neither widespread nor is it a result of any systematic campaign of persecution. **[11b]**

5.3.5 The Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad (BHBCOP) - or Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist and Christian Unity Council - are a non-political organization founded in 1988. Their main objective is to reinstate secularism as one of the four principles of the Constitution, and they believe that conditions for minorities have improved under the current (Awami League) administration. The BHBCOP also believe that the state-sponsored persecution of minorities (mainly Hindus) has now decreased, and members of minority groups are filling a greater number of positions in the public sector. **[11e]**

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5.3.6 Bangladesh has ratified the following international treaties:

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid **[8]**

See also [Taslima Nasreen](#): paragraphs 5.4.17

Biharis

5.3.7 Biharis are the non-Bengali Muslims who emigrated to what was formerly East Pakistan during the 1947 partition of British-ruled India.

[2b] Although they are generally known as Biharis, many also came from other Indian states. **[12i]** Most supported Pakistan during Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence. They later declined to accept Bangladeshi citizenship and asked to be repatriated to Pakistan. **[2b]** Indifference on the part of successive governments of Bangladesh and Pakistan to the issue of repatriation has served to increase the plight of the 'stranded' Biharis ever since Bangladesh's independence. **[12i]**

5.3.8 Pakistan allowed more than 120,000 Biharis to move to Pakistan in 1973. **[13]** In September 1991 Pakistan agreed to initiate a process of repatriation and rehabilitation of 250,000 Biharis. Some refugees travelled to Pakistan from Bangladesh in January 1993, **[1]** but this amounted to only 325 families before fund constraints suspended the process. **[12i]**

5.3.9 The status of the Biharis remains unresolved. They have not yet been granted Pakistani citizenship, but can apply for Bangladeshi citizenship. **[3f]** In 1995 newspaper reports indicated that Pakistan no longer intended to accept the Biharis. However, in June of that year the embassy of Pakistan in Washington advised the US Committee for Refugees that those reports were untrue. **[13]**

5.3.10 According to the 1999 US State Department report, approximately 300,000 Bihari Muslims live in various camps around the country. **[2b]** The SPGRD (Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee) however estimate the total number to be 500,000. With current growth rates, there are reports that the Bihari population could reach one million within the next ten years. **[12i]**

Chakmas

5.3.11 Chakmas are one of the main tribal groups living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). **[3a]** The Chakmas had fled from Bangladesh to India in 1986 to escape harassment by the Bangladeshi military and Muslim settlers in their native CHT region. **[13]** In May 1992 the Bangladesh and Indian Governments agreed a process of repatriation. However the refugees, fearing persecution by the Bangladesh security forces, proved reluctant to move. **[1]**

5.3.12 Following negotiations between the Indian and Bangladesh Governments and the Chakma refugees in early 1994, the process of repatriation commenced in mid-February. **[1]** Although there was no organized Chakma repatriation during 1996, nearly 3,000 Chakma

repatriated on their own initiative according to the Bangladesh Government. The Government said that it provided the returnees cash grants for shelter construction, food and agricultural loans. **[13]** At the end of 1997, an estimated 31,000 refugees were still in camps in India, awaiting repatriation. **[10b]**

Rohingyas

5.3.13 Approximately 260,000 Rohingya refugees (Muslims from the northern Burmese State of Arakan) crossed into south-eastern Bangladesh in late 1991 and 1992 fleeing repression. Since 1992, approximately 238,000 Rohingyas have repatriated voluntarily to Myanmar, leaving 22,000 in two camps administered by the government in co-operation with the UNHCR. After blocking further repatriation since August 1997, Myanmar allowed repatriation to resume in November 1998, albeit at a very slow rate. The UNHCR urged the government to allow any refugees who could not return to Burma to be allowed to work in the country, and benefit from local medical programs as well as being in a position to educate their children. The government has refused these requests however, insisting that all Rohingya refugees must eventually return to Myanmar. There were some reports of refugees being pressured to volunteer for repatriation, although UNHCR insist that procedures were followed to ensure the willingness of refugees to leave. **[2b]**

5.3.14 From July 1997 to October 1998, persistent law and order problems plagued the camps, with one camp effectively under the control of militant refugees opposed to any repatriation efforts, even on a voluntary basis. On 28 February 1998 a hunger strike was started in Kutupalang camp. Organizers claimed that the strike was to protest the death of a refugee in the camp due to torture, but neutral observers said that the man died of a heart attack and that the strike was an attempt to obstruct repatriation. As in previous hunger strikes, protest organizers did not allow even pregnant and nursing women and malnourished children to receive supplemental food. In March 1998 camp authorities responded to the growing law and order problems and the food boycott by arresting some refugees alleged to be involved in criminal activities. The police action resulted in the injury of some refugee bystanders and damage to shelters, but the food boycott was ended. On 21 October 1998 the authorities retook full control of the camp. **[2a]**

5.3.15 According to Amnesty International, Myanmar's military authorities have agreed to accept only 7,500 of the 21,800 Rohingyas living in camps in Bangladesh. The UNHCR has requested the Bangladeshi authorities to allow the remaining 14,000 to settle in Bangladesh. The repatriation process stopped in April 1997. However on 20 and 22 July 1997, the Bangladesh Government forcibly returned 399 Rohingyas, **[7f]** including 67 children without their parents, **[2a]** back to Myanmar. **[7f]** Following protest clashes between militant refugees and the police, coupled with strong lobbying from the UNHCR, the Bangladesh Government agreed to halt the forcible return of these refugees. **[4a]** In August 1997 about 28,000 Rohingya refugees remained in camps in Bangladesh. **[1]**

5.3.16 Several thousand more Rohingyas arrived during 1999, but recent arrivals avoided the camps and attempted to settle in the

south-eastern areas of the country. The government effectively denied first asylum to new arrivals it encountered by categorizing them as illegal economic migrants, turning back as many as possible at the border and denying UNHCR officials access to those who did enter the country successfully. **[2b]**

Ahmadis

5.3.17 The Amhadiya Community (also known as Qadianis) proclaim themselves as Muslims but differ from other Islamic groups, essentially as they believe that Mohammed was not the last prophet of Islam. They also believe that the founder of their movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam, was the messiah. Fewer than 100,000 Bangladeshis are believed to belong to the sect, and their unusual beliefs have resulted in unpopularity in many parts of the country. Fundamentalist groups amongst the majority Sunni Muslims have targeted them. **[20f]**

5.3.18 In October 1999 at least six people were killed and twelve injured in a bomb attack on a mosque used exclusively by Ahmadis in the Southern town of Khulna. Earlier in the year an Ahmadi mosque was torn down in Kushtia, also in the South. Several houses were also burned, **[20f]** and following this attack Ahmadis were harassed on the streets and prevented from praying at their place of worship. The Ahmadiya allege that police did not intervene. Subsequent press reports indicate that the assistant police inspector lost his job and the officer in charge of the local police station was withdrawn for failure to discharge their duties following this incident. **[2b]**

Women

5.3.19 Under the 1972 Constitution, women are guaranteed fundamental rights, and any form of discrimination on the basis of sex is forbidden. **[3b]** The Ministry of Women's Affairs is responsible for co-ordinating policies and programmes to reduce inequalities between men and women, and to rescue women from exclusion. Legislative measures have been introduced to guarantee the rights of women, and to protect them from various forms of violence. A special commission has also been set up to identify any gender bias against women. **[17]**

5.3.20 Legislation includes:

- Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929
- Dowry Prohibition Act 1980 (amended 1982)
- Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Act 1983
- Family Court Ordinance 1985 (amended 1984) **[3b]**
- Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 1995 **[2b]**

Bangladesh has also ratified the following international treaties:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others

5.3.21 However there are problems with the implementation of

women's legal rights. **[3b]** Continued high illiteracy rates, unequal educational opportunities, strong social stigmas and lack of economic means to obtain legal assistance frequently keep women from seeking redress in the courts. **[2b]** Widespread ignorance of legal rights and the lengthy process of law also hinder the benefits of laws to protect oppressed women, and courts invariably have a substantial backlog of such cases. Police charge sheets and inquiry reports may be unreliable; therefore results can be unpredictable. **[21]**

5.3.22 According to Amnesty International, Muslim clerics and Islamic groups in Bangladesh have violated women's fundamental rights. It has also been reported that women are subject to unlawful trials and abuse by village mediation councils. **[7b]** In rural areas vigilantism against women for perceived immoral behaviour may include humiliating and painful forms of punishment. **[2b]**

5.3.23 Prisons are often used to provide "safe custody" for women who are victims of rape or domestic violence. Many women initially consent to this arrangement, but find subsequent difficulty obtaining release or gaining access to family or lawyers. In 1999 a 25-year-old woman was released from "safe custody" after being gang raped four years previously. Sometimes women in "safe custody" are also raped by police. **[2b]**

See also [Police](#): paragraphs 5.2.3 - 5.2.9

5.3.24 Violence against women is difficult to quantify because of unreliable statistics, but wife beating appears to be widespread. A growing awareness of the problem is however being fostered by the government, the media and women's rights organizations. **[2b]** According to the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA), recorded crimes against women including rape, kidnapping and murder nearly doubled in 1998. The organisation also reports that crime in the form of trafficking, forced prostitution, acid attacks, dowry-related violence and incest are growing unabatedly. The executive director of BNWLA said that there were 2,459 such crimes in Bangladesh in 1998, including nearly 500 murders and more than 1,200 rapes - twice the numbers recorded in the previous year. **[4r]** There were also 130 reported incidents of acid throwing in 1998, the female victims of which are often subjects of vengeance by a rejected suitor. **[2b]**

5.3.25 In September 2000, a UN Population Fund (UNFPA) report found that 47% of Bangladeshi women reported to have been assaulted by men - the highest proportion in the world. One report suggested that nearly fifty percent of murder cases against women are related to marital violence or the inability to either meet dowry demands or accept polygamous men. **[23]**

5.3.26 Incidents of rape also appear to have increased, notably in the south west of the country **[6h]** which has been terrorised for decades by outlaws, smugglers and armed militants from banned political groups **[20k]**. It has been reported that 85 women and children have been raped in the region during a seven-month period this year, with fifty percent of these occurring in Jessore. It is alleged that most of the rapes cannot be proved due to inadequate medical tests and delays in police investigations. Even when rape is proved through

sufficient medical testing and investigations, perpetrators reportedly escape arrest as they are sheltered by influential elements of society. Others allegedly escape to India. **[6h]**

5.3.27 Human trafficking involving young girls, women and children is particularly active in the Southern region of Barisal, with easy access to India and other countries. Female victims of husbands' repression are particularly vulnerable. Traffickers with promises of a high salary also deceive guardians suffering poverty, whose dependants are sold into prostitution for a price relating to their physical condition and appearance. The price increases once they reach the Indian States, and the exceptionally beautiful are sent to Gulf States or Arabian contacts where a handsome amount of money can be fetched. **[12g]** The BNWLA conducts awareness programs, and provides legal advice to victims of trafficking as well as initiating legal action against perpetrators. **[2b]**

5.3.28 Women remain in a subordinate position in society. **[2b]** On 28 June 1997 the Prime Minister pledged to introduce effective laws to stop repression against women, and also to eradicate poverty of women. **[12c]** She has expressed her determination to curb criminal activities relating to the abuse of women and children.

5.3.29 Employment opportunities have been stronger for women than for men in the last decade, which is due to a large extent to the growth of the export garment industry in Dhaka and Chittagong. **[2a]** Thirty places, in addition to the regular 300 places, are set aside for female members in the Jatiya Sangsad. **[1]** A notably larger number of female voters participated in the last general election. **[3e]**

5.3.30 The Prime Minister reiterated in December 1998 that her government was committed to establishing the equal rights of men and women, and urged women to win their rights through their own efforts by becoming more confident, conscious and educated. The Prime Minister also called upon all to build resistance against repression and torture of women and children. She stated that the present government had taken a number of steps for the development of women, announcing the 'National Women Development Policy'. For implementation of the policy, the government has undertaken specific programmes for empowerment of women, their education, health care and employment. **[6f]**

5.3.31 In January 2000 Parliament passed a law to address torture, mutilation and the sale of women and children. Stiff penalties were introduced for offences including the use of flammable chemicals, rape, murder, trafficking and kidnapping. The worst crimes were made punishable by death. This was in response to reports that women were often tortured to death for their dowries, or by jealous husbands. Others were reportedly doused with corrosive acid, inducing incurable burns. **[19b]**

See also [Parliament](#): paragraphs 4.1.7 - 4.1.9; [Human Rights: Introduction](#): paragraphs 5.1.1 - 5.1.3; and [Taslima Nasreen](#): paragraphs 5.4.17

Children

5.3.32 Progress has been made in the area of child rights since Bangladesh ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, although in practice many children still do not have full access to their rights. **[6g]** Because of widespread poverty, many children are compelled to work at a very young age. This frequently results in abuse of children, mainly through mistreatment by employers during domestic service (children who work in domestic service may work in conditions that resemble servitude) and prostitution. This labour-related child abuse occurs commonly at all levels of society throughout the country. The government did not grant the Ministry of Labour enough resources to enforce its commitment (as a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) to eliminate hazardous child labour by 2000 and all child labour by 2010. **[2b]**

5.3.33 Thousands of children are allegedly employed by the garment industry, a major foreign currency earner. Young boys are also employed in areas such as brick fields, jute mills, motor garages, chemical industries, textile plants, tea plantations and construction. The service industry also employs them as porters, shoe shining boys and hotel and restaurant employees. Many are separated from their families and some, having escaped such an existence, have relayed accounts of torture by employees. Indifference to the plight of child employees has been attributed to connections between employers and local politicians and officials. **[12e]** UNICEF reports that children under fourteen have been part of the labour force, mainly in the rural and informal sectors. 12% of these are less than nine years old, often employed as maids, servants or rickshaw pullers. The government however has stated that it is attempting to eliminate child labour (defined as those under-eighteen years) by 2005. **[19c]**

5.3.34 Reports from human rights monitors indicate that child abandonment, kidnapping and trafficking for labour bondage and prostitution continue to be serious and widespread problems. The United Nations Children's Fund has estimated that there are about 10,000 child prostitutes in Bangladesh. Other estimates have been as high as 29,000. Prostitution is legal, but only for those over eighteen years of age with government certification. However, this minimum age requirement is commonly ignored by authorities, and is easily circumvented by false statements of age. Procurers of minors are rarely prosecuted, and large numbers of child prostitutes work in government-sanctioned brothels. **[2b]**

5.3.35 According to Amnesty International, the police take young girls into custody on the grounds of "suspicious behaviour" (which is allowed under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure). Amnesty also report that detainees are sometimes gang raped. **[7e]** The BNP has demanded that Section 54 be abolished. **[10f]**

See also [Police](#): paragraphs 5.2.3 - 5.2.9

5.3.36 There is a widespread network of trafficking of women and children to India, Pakistan, the Middle East and South-East Asia. **[3f]** Children are often abandoned when marriages break up and become part of criminal gangs. According to police, traffickers pick them up and then sell them abroad to be camel jockeys. **[19b]** The number of women and children trafficked is unknown; human rights monitors

estimate that several thousand women and children are victims of trafficking each year. Most trafficked persons are lured by promises of good jobs or marriage, and some are forced into involuntary servitude outside the country. The law provides severe penalties for trafficking, but few perpetrators are ever punished. Human rights monitors also credibly report that police and local government officials often either ignore trafficking in women and children for prostitution, may take bribes so that no action is taken, or are actively involved in the operation itself. According to one anti-trafficking organization, 63 persons were arrested during 1999 for trafficking. While most of those arrested were not prosecuted by the year's end, 13 persons arrested previously were convicted for trafficking offences and sentenced to life imprisonment. Exact numbers of those arrested are difficult to obtain as charges against traffickers are usually for lesser crimes, such as crossing borders without proper documents. **[2b]**

5.3.37 The Prime Minister has reportedly succeeded in curbing the practice of child smuggling by increasing border surveillance. **[14]** Legislation introduced in January 2000 addressed the problem of the sale of women and children, introducing stiff penalties both for this and the amputation of children's limbs in order to make them more effective beggars. **[19b]**

Other issues

V HUMAN RIGHTS

5.4 OTHER ISSUES

Assembly and Association

5.4.1 The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, subject to restrictions in the interest of public order and public health; however, the Government limits this right on occasion. The Government sometimes prohibits rallies for security reasons, but many independent observers believe that such explanations are usually a pretext. The Constitution also provides for the right of every citizen to form associations (subject to "reasonable restrictions" in the interest of morality or public order) and in general the Government respects this right. Individuals are free to join private groups, but a local magistrate must approve public meetings. **[2b]**

5.4.2 In 1997 and early 1998, ostensibly for reasons of public security, the Government took measures to restrict where and when political rallies and demonstrations could be held. The Government also used Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to prohibit opposition party rallies and public assemblies. Section 144 allows government authorities to ban public assemblies when two or more groups have scheduled rallies for the same time and place, and when violence is considered imminent. In practice however, political parties (having learnt of a rival party's rally) simply schedule their own event for the same time and place with the result that both rallies are cancelled. **[3g]**

5.4.3 Violent demonstrations, often resulting in killings, are an endemic element of Bangladeshi politics. Rival supporters of different parties or factions often clash with each other and police. Awami League supporters often gain police backing to disrupt opposition demonstrations and rallies. In turn, opposition activists have also used violence to disrupt their rivals' gatherings and to enforce general strikes (referred to as 'hartals'). During 1999, twenty-four people died as a result of hartal related violence, eight of these occurring during the nationwide strike of 9-11 February alone. Eyewitnesses claim that on February 9th 1999, Awami League MP Maqbul Hossain lead a procession of vehicles to defy one such strike. When the convoy encountered a group of BNP activists running from police, armed men exited the vehicles and apprehended two young men shooting one, Sajal Chowdhury, in the chest. The other was beaten. Hossain had allegedly given an order for both of them to be killed. Police in riot gear standing nearby did not intervene or take subsequent action against the perpetrators. Chowdhury's family were summoned by police and repeatedly interrogated after filing a murder charge against Hossain. One family member was arrested under the Special Powers Act. Newspapers largely did not report this incident. **[2b]**

See [Police: paragraph 5.2.3 - 5.2.9](#) and [Special Powers Act: paragraphs 4.3.3-4.3.5](#)

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5.4.4 The Constitution provides for freedom of speech, expression and the press subject to "reasonable restrictions" in the interest of security, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency and morality or to prohibit defamation or incitement to an offence. With some exceptions, the Government generally respects these rights. Citizens freely express criticism of the Government. **[2b]**

5.4.5 Bangladeshi newspapers have flourished since restrictions on the media were lifted following General Ershad's ousting in 1990. **[3e]** All sides of the political conflict in Bangladesh perpetrated violence against media personnel in 1995 and 1996. Journalists and photographers covering political events and street confrontations were reportedly especially targeted, either for reporting on abuses committed by different groups or because of their alleged political sympathies. **[3f]**

5.4.6 The press, numbering hundreds of daily and weekly publications, is a forum for a wide range of views. While most publications support the overall policies of the Government, many newspapers report critically on government policies and activities, including those of the Prime Minister. Many journalists do however fear possible harassment and retaliation if they report particularly sensitive stories, and therefore avoid them. **[2b]** In July 2000, following the murder of investigative reporter Shamsur Rahman, journalists expressed fears for their own safety. Editors also expressed concern that journalists may subsequently avoid coverage concerning criminal gangs, outlawed political groups and even the mainstream political parties. **[201]**

See also [January 2000 - October 2000](#): paragraphs 3.33 - 3.35

5.4.7 Newspaper ownership and content are not subject to direct government restriction. The government still however owns and controls radio and television stations, with the opposition getting little coverage. Steps have nonetheless been taken to introduce privatisation. **[2b]**

See also [Taslima Nasreen](#): paragraphs 5.4.17

Travel

5.4.8 Citizens are able to move freely within the country, and are free to travel abroad and to emigrate. **[2b]**

Chittagong Hill Tracts

5.4.9 The main tribal groups living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are the Chakmas, Moghs, Tripuras and Mrus. Members of these tribes identify with the Myanmar (Burmese) people, and the majority are Buddhists. **[3a]**

See also [Chakmas](#): paragraphs 5.3.11 - 5.3.12

5.4.10 Until 1985 the Government had regularly allotted land in the CHT to Bengali settlers, including land which was claimed by indigenous people under traditional concepts of land ownership. This led to the displacement of many tribal groups, such as the Chakmas

and Marmas. Bengali inhabitants in the CHT increased from 3% of the region's population in 1947 to approximately 50% of the area's population of 1 million in 1997. In response to the Government's action, a tribal resistance movement known as the Shanti Bahini had waged a low-level conflict in the CHT from the early 1970's. **[2b]**

5.4.11 On 2 December 1997, the AL Government signed a peace accord in Dhaka with the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), the political wing of the Shanti Bahini, to end the insurgency **[4e]** and restore peace and development in the region. **[10a]** Despite opposition to the treaty from the BNP, **[4e]** the accord was generally well received throughout the country. **[10a]** On 6 February 1998 the Government declared a general amnesty for all armed rebels in the CHT. Under its terms, no charges were to be filed against individuals who had been previously active in the Shanti Bahini or its political wing. **[5b]** On 10 February 1998, the Shanti Bahini formally surrendered their arms to the Government, marking an end to the 25-year insurgency. **[4j]** In February 1998 the last group of tribal refugees returned to the CHT from camps in the neighbouring Indian State of Tripura, completing the repatriation of over 60,000 refugees. However, some tribal leaders criticized the Government for implementing the agreement too slowly and for the lack of progress in providing assistance to the returned tribals. **[2a]**

5.4.12 The Jatiya Sangsad passed four bills relating to the peace agreement in May 1998. However the bills attracted considerable criticism from the BNP and other opposition parties, which condemned the peace treaty as unconstitutional and a threat to the country's territorial integrity. **[5e]** BNP leaders have indicated that they would scrap the Peace Accord if they came to power. **[10e]** Tribal militant groups oppose the accord, as they believe it favours the mainly Muslim settlers over the predominantly Buddhist and Christian tribals. **[20d]**

5.4.13 The situation in the CHT was peaceful at the end of 1999. **[2b]** Amnesty International reports however that some of the main provisions of the Peace Accord have not been fully implemented, with the Peace Accord caught up in Bangladesh's confrontational party politics. **[7i]** The Prime Minister has stated that delays in implementation are only temporary, although tribal representatives claim that failure to honour the commitment is resulting in increasing support for militants. **[20d]**

Student Organisations

5.4.14 Students have traditionally played a lead in Bangladesh's political life, often being instrumental in bringing about major political change. **[7c]** For example, students were reportedly at the forefront of the nation-wide strikes and demonstrations that resulted in the fall of Ershad in December 1990. **[3c]**

5.4.15 Political parties are reported to rely on their student cadres to get behind party campaigns, using violence and intimidation if necessary. **[9]** It is also reported that paid party agents pose as students, and that parties seek to control university campuses in the hope of political gain. **[3c]** Violence is reportedly endemic between the student political wings of the major national parties. The situation

on public university campuses remains volatile, adversely affecting the quality of education. Armed clashes between rival student groups resulted in temporary closures of universities or colleges in Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet, and Mymensingh. Violence between student political factions has little to do with ideological differences, and more to do with extortion rackets run by non-student party activists. **[2b]**

5.4.16 Amnesty International reports that although the majority of student organizations are engaged in unarmed political activity, there are armed student groups reportedly affiliated to the AL, BNP and JI. These groups are often involved in armed factional fighting or in clashes with their armed political opponents. **[7c]**

See also [Political Organizations and Other Groups](#): Annex A.

Taslima Nasreen

5.4.17 Taslima Nasreen, the controversial author, fled from Bangladesh in 1994 after the government first ordered her arrest over a newspaper interview in which she was reported to have called for the Koran to be rewritten. Nasreen claimed that she had been misquoted, but stated that she favoured more legal changes giving more rights to women. Islamic groups had also been angered by Nasreen's novel 'Lajja' (Shame), which criticised Muslims for attacking Hindus in the aftermath of the destruction of the Ayodhya Mosque in India in 1992. Following the publication of the book, a little-known group called the Council of the Soldiers of Islam had placed a US\$1,250 price on her head. **[5g]**

Prosecution of 1975 Coup Leaders

5.4.18 The trial of those accused of involvement in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination (in August 1975) began in March 1997. **[1]** In November 1999 four army officers were convicted and sentenced to death, along with eleven others (thought to be in exile). A court began reviewing the death sentences of the four in June 2000. **[20j]**

Domestic Servants

5.4.19 The Bangladesh Domestic Workers Association (BDWA) was formed to oversee the rights and security of domestic employees. The association found that fifteen domestic helps were tortured to death in July and August 1999 alone. Of these, three were burnt to death and three housemaids were killed following rape. Young maids are also forced into prostitution, and it is claimed that during the same period over three hundred were trafficked out of the country. **[12f]**

5.4.20 Housemaids are the main victims in terms of human rights abuse. In the event of male members of the employer's family forcing the housemaid into sexual relations with them, either through pressure or even rape, it is the maid who is punished by the family. Victims are also deprived of justice, with the lack of evidence and witnesses making prosecutions difficult. Many victims also fear reprisal. Bangladeshi law does not recognise domestic servants as labourers, meaning they cannot fight their due rights at the Labour Court. Instead they must go to the Criminal Court or the Women and

Children Repression Prevention Court. The Labour Laws in operation concerning conditions of pay and hours are also not applicable to domestic servants. **[12f]** Not all abusers of domestic servants escape justice however, with the government bringing criminal charges in some cases at least. **[2b]**

Prison Conditions

5.4.21 Prison conditions are extremely poor for the majority of inmates. Credible sources indicate that such conditions contributed to the one hundred deaths in prison during the first nine months of 1999. Most prisons are overcrowded and lack adequate facilities. There are three classes of cells: A, B and C. C cells are the poorest, with dirt floors, no furnishings and poor quality food. Restraining devices are often used on occupants of C cells - usually common criminals and low-level political workers. Conditions in A and B cells are a marked improvement on C cells, and these are usually reserved for prominent prisoners. **[2b]**

5.4.22 The Government does not generally allow prison access to independent human rights monitors. They do however appoint prominent private citizens to local prison monitoring committees, although their findings are not released. District judges also visit prisons on a monthly basis, but rarely disclose findings. **[2b]**

Annex A

ANNEX A

POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER GROUPS

Awami League

Founded 1949. Currently headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed. Supports

Parliamentary democracy; advocates socialist economy and secular state; pro-Indian. **[1]**

Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal (Bangladesh Nationalist Party)

Founded 1978 (by merger of groups supporting Ziaur Rahman). Currently chaired by Begum Khaleda Zia, and is the main opposition. Right of centre; favours democratic presidential government. **[1]**

Eight-Party Alliance

Eight-party alliance formed December 1998 to kick-start an "oust-government" [AL] movement. Led by Ershad's Jatiya Party, consisting of: Jatiya Party; Jatiya Janata party of Advocate Abdullah Naser; Jatiya Biplobi Party of Abu Alam; National Awami Party (NAP-Bhashani) of Nazrul Islam; United People's Party (UPP) of Dr Jahirul Islam; Democratic League of Abdur Razzak; People's League of Khandaker Sabbir Ahmed; and Jano Ganotantrik Dal of Advocate Ruhul Amin Khan. **[10g]**

Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh

Founded 1941 (Islamic fundamentalist). Chaired by Ghulam Azam. **[1]** Opposed to Bangladesh's independence in the 1971 civil war with Pakistan, and now form part of the BNP led opposition alliance. Was banned after independence, but got its rights back after General Zia (the late husband of BNP leader Khaleda Zia) allowed them and other fundamentalist parties to enter politics after the first AL led government of Bangladesh had banned them from politics. The party is a strong cadre-based party, yet lacks mass support as electoral results have shown. **[22]**

Jatiya Dal (National Party)

Founded 1983 as Jana Dal; reorganized 1986, when National Front (founded 1985) formally converted itself into a single pro-Ershad grouping. Acting chair: Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury.

Advocates nationalism, democracy, Islamic ideals and progress. **[1]** Linked with seven other smaller parties to agitate against the government on 15 December 1998. Formed new anti-government alliance on 20 December 1998 with leaders of BNP and JI. **[5i]** On 30 December 1998 Anwar Hossain Manju, Communications Minister, was sacked from the JP's presidium, from the post of its vice-chairman and the party's membership, for violating party discipline and making outrageous statements. **[4k]** Former prime

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minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed, who was expelled from the party on 5 June 1997 and formed a 111 breakaway party, JP(Z-M) [11f] returned to the JP. [6d] However in November 1999 he was sentenced in absentia to fifteen years imprisonment for embezzlement. [19a]

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-S) (National Socialist Party)

Founded 1972. Left-wing. [1]

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (RAB)

Breakaway faction of JSD. [1]

National Democratic Alliance

Founded 1993, as alliance of ten small parties. Advocates consolidating Bangladesh's sovereignty and establishing Islamic principles.

Democratic League

Founded 1976. Conservative.

Freedom Party

Founded 1987. Islamic, Co-chaired by Said Faruq Rahman and Khandakar Abdur Rashid. [1]

STUDENT MOVEMENTS

Bangladesh Chhatra League-BCL (Sha-PA)

Affiliated to Awami League. [11c]

Gonotantrik Chhatra League

Affiliated to Democratic League. [11c]

Islami Chhatra Shibir

Affiliated to Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat). [11c]

Jatiya Chhatra Samaj

Affiliated to Jatiya Party. [11c]

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD)

Affiliated to Bangladesh Nationalist Party. [11c]

See also [Student Organizations](#): paragraphs 5.4.14 - 5.4.16.

PROSCRIBED ORGANIZATIONS

Biplobi Communist Party (before 1971 known as The Communist Party of East Pakistan)

Maoist movement. Fought against both Pakistan army and Awami League during independence struggle. By mid-1970s largely

suppressed by State; revived 1980's. Were plans to unite with one of main factions of Sarbohara Party. [11a]

Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party ('East Bengalis Who Have Nothing')

Radical Maoist movement; emerged during lead-up to independence. Seeks communist revolution by violent means. Responsible for assassination of police, officials and merchants. [11a]

Swadhin Bangabhumi Movement ('Free Land of Bengal')

Hindu separatist movement. Founded in Calcutta by former Awami League MP, who fled to

India in August 1975. Seeks separate state in south-west Bangladesh (where there is a large Hindu minority). Responsible for attempted take-over of Bangladesh High Commission in Calcutta in 1984. [11a]

Shanti Bahini ('Peace Force')

Armed wing of the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), a tribal insurgency which operated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Founded in 1972 by two brothers, Shantu and Manobendra Larma. Stood for political independence for the Chittagong Hills Tracts, and drew support from Chakma tribes. [11a] However, following the Peace Accord of 2 December 1997, [4e] Shantu Larma reportedly declared an end to the Shanti Bahini. [4j] The group is now considered to have disbanded, having surrendered their arms and had criminal cases against them dropped as part of the Peace Accord. [7k]

See also [Chittagong Hill Tracts](#): paragraphs 5.4.9 - 5.4.13.

Annex B

ANNEX B

PROMINENT PEOPLE

AHMED, Khandakar Mushtaq

Installed as president in August 1975, following assassination of Sheikh Rahman. [1]

AHMED, Shahabuddin

Current president. [1]

AZAM, GHULAM

Current chair of Jamaat-e-Islami. [1]

BISWAS, Abdul Rahman

President 1991-1996. [1]

CHOWDHURY, Mizanur Rahman

Current acting chair of Jatiya Dal. [1]

ERSHAD, General Hossain Mohammed

Came to power following coup in March 1982; resigned December 1990. Joined Jatiya Party in 1986. [1]

RAHMAN, Farook

Leader of 1975 assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Sentenced to death on 8 November 1998 by the Awami League for his involvement in assassination. [15]

RAHMAN, Sheikh Mujibur (Mujib)

Bangladesh's first Prime Minister; assassinated August 1975. [1]

RAHMAN, Ziaur (General Zia)

Assumed presidency April 1977; assassinated May 1981. [1]

RAHMAN, Zillur

Current General Secretary of Awami League. [1]

SATTAR, Abdus

Succeeded General Zia as president in 1981. [1]

WAJED, Sheikh Hasina

Daughter of late Sheikh Mujibur. Current Prime Minister of governing Awami League. [1]

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ZIA, Begum Khaleda

Widow of General Zia. Head of Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Prime minister: February 1991 - June 1996. [1]

Annex C

ANNEX C

CHRONOLOGY

August 1947

Creation of Pakistan; former Indian province of East Bengal and Sylhet district of Assam becomes one province: East Pakistan. [1]

1952

Dissatisfaction flares: Urdu declared Pakistan's official language. [1]

December 1970

Awami League (AL) wins general election and gain majority in Pakistan's National Assembly. [1]

26 March 1971

AL leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, proclaims independence of People's Republic of Bangladesh ('Bengal Nation'). [1]

November 1971

Liberation Army of East Bengal (the Mukhti Bahini) launch major offensive. [1]

4 December 1971

India declares war on Pakistan (supporting Mukhti Bahini). Civil war follows; AL outlawed. [1]

16 December 1971

Pakistan surrenders: Bangladesh achieves independence. [1]

January 1972

Sheikh Mujibur becomes Prime Minister. [1]

April 1972

Bangladesh joins Commonwealth. [1]

November 1972

New Constitution approved by Bangladesh Constitution Assembly. [1]

March 1973

AL win 292 of 300 directly-elective seats in general election for country's first parliament (Jatiya Sangsad). [1]

1974

Bangladesh becomes member of UN. [1]

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February 1974

Bangladesh recognised by Pakistan. [1]

December 1974

State of emergency declared. [1]

January 1975

Parliamentary government replaced by presidential government. Sheikh Mujibur becomes President. [1]

August 1975

Sheikh Mujibur and family assassinated in right wing coup. Khandakar Mushtaq Ahmed installed as President. Martial law declared; political parties banned. [1]

3 November 1975

Counter-coup brings Khalid Musharaf to power. [1]

7 November 1975

Third coup overthrows Musharaf; neutral non-party Government formed - Major General Ziaur Rahman (General Zia) takes precedence over colleagues. [1]

July 1976

Political parties re-legalised. [1]

November 1976

General Zia takes over powers of Chief Martial Law Administrator. [1]

April 1977

General Zia assumes presidency; Constitution amended making Islam (not secularism) its first basic principle. [1]

May 1977

99% of voters affirm confidence in President Zia's policies in national referendum. [1]

June 1978

Country's first presidential election result gives clear victory to Zia. [1]

February 1979

Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) wins 207 of 300 directly elective seats in parliamentary elections. [1]

April 1979

New Prime Minister appointed; martial law repealed. [1]

November 1979

State of emergency revoked. [1]

30 May 1981

General Zia assassinated in attempted military coup led by Major General Mohammed Abdul Manzur. [1]

November 1981

Vice-President Abdus Sattar nominated President, following presidential elections. [1]

January 1982

Sattar forms National Security Council, led by Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Hossain Mohammed Ershad. [1]

24 March 1982

General Ershad seizes power in bloodless coup; martial law re-declared. [1]

October 1982

Ershad changes his title to prime minister. [1]

September 1983

Two principle opposition groups merge to form the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy. [1]

November 1983

Political activity again permitted; new political party, Jana Dal formed. [1]

December 1983

Ban on political activity reimposed; leading political figures detained. [1]

11 December 1983

Ershad declares himself president. [1]

1984

Strikes; political demonstrations; postponing of country's local, presidential and parliamentary Elections. Opposition demands the repeal of martial law. [1]

January 1985

New Council of Ministers formed, composed almost entirely of military officers and excluding all members of the Jana Dal. [1]

March 1985

Ershad receives 94% of votes in referendum; elections planned for April abandoned; political activity again banned. [1]

August 1985

Work completed on demarcation of Bangladesh / Burma border. [1]

September 1985

New five-party political alliance, the National Front (NF), established. [1]

January 1986

Ten-month ban on political activity lifted; NF becomes single pro-government entity, named Jatiya Dal (JD) (National Party). [1]

March 1986

Martial law relaxed. [1]

7 May 1986

JD win 153 of 300 directly elective seats in Jatiya Sangsad in parliamentary elections (boycotted by Begum Khaleda Zia's BNP). [1]

July 1986

Former JD General-Secretary, Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, appointed Prime Minister. [1]

September 1986

Ershad joins JD. [1]

October 1986

Ershad receives 22 million votes in presidential election (boycotted by both BNP and AL). [1]

November 1986

Martial law repealed; 1972 Constitution restored; Jatiya Sangsad approve indemnity legislation, legalising military regime's actions since March 1982. [1]

1987

Opposition parties hold anti-Government strikes and demonstrations, with support of trade unions and student groups. [1]

August and September 1987

Floods cause widespread devastation. [1]

November 1987

Opposition groups combine in attempt to oust Ershad. [1]

27 November 1987

Ershad declares nation-wide state of emergency, suspending political activity and civil rights. [1]

December 1987

About 6,000 people detained; opposition parties announce intention to resign seats from Jatiya Sangsad. [1]

6 December 1987

Ershad dissolves Jatiya Sangsad. [1]

3 March 1988

JD win large majority of seats in parliamentary elections. [1]

Late March 1988

Moudud Ahmed, an ally of Ershad, appointed Prime Minister. [1]

April 1988

State of emergency repealed. [1]

June 1988

Islam established as state religion. [1]

August 1988

Devastating monsoon flooding. [1]

July 1989

Jatiya Sangsad approve legislation limiting tenure of presidency to two electoral terms of five years each. [1]

August 1989

Prime Minister Moudud Ahmed appointed vice-president; former Deputy Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed appointed Prime Minister. [1]

March 1990

Local elections boycotted by opposition parties. [1]

October 1990

Eight demonstrators shot dead; 500-plus arrested; Dhaka University closed; violence continues elsewhere. Communal violence breaks out between Muslims and Hindus following Hindu attack on a mosque in Ayodhya, northern India. Curfews imposed on Dhaka and Chittagong. [1]

27 November 1990

Ershad re-proclaims state of emergency. [1]

4 December 1990

Ershad resigns, revoking state of emergency and dissolving Jatiya Sangsad. A week later, he is placed under house arrest. [1]

Late 1990

Opposition groups, supported by thousands of students, work more closely together. [1]

27 February 1991

BNP win overall majority at parliamentary elections; Begum Khaleda Zia assumes office as Prime Minister. [1]

May 1991

Cyclone kills 250,000; massive economic disruption ensues. [1]

August 1991

Jatiya Sangsad approves constitutional amendment, reducing presidential role and restoring Prime Minister as executive leader. [1]

September 1991

BNP gain absolute majority in Jatiya Sangsad. Pakistan agrees to initiate process of repatriation and rehabilitation of 250,000 Bihari Muslims. [1]

8 October 1991

BNP Abdur Rahman Biswas elected president. [1]

November 1991

BNP abolish the upazilla (sub-district) system of rural administration. [1]

Throughout 1991

Rohingya Muslims cross from Myanmar into Bangladesh to escape political persecution. [1]

Early 1992

Government's initiatives to transfer public sector industries to private ownership and to curb labour unrest is met by strong political resistance from opposition. [1]

April 1992

AL boycott Jatiya Sangsad demanding that Golam Azam, leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, be tried for complicity in Pakistani war crimes in 1971. [1]

May 1992

Begum Khaleda Zia visits India and negotiates agreement to facilitate

return of Chittagong Hill Tracts' refugees from India. [1]

August 1992

Government survive parliamentary vote of no confidence led by AL. [1]

January 1993

Bihari refugees begin return to Pakistan. [1]

Late 1993

Large scale anti-Government demonstrations organized by JD and AL, with co-operation of Jamaat-e-Islami. [1]

1993 - 1994

Islamic fundamentalism rises. [1]

January 1994

AL win mayoralities of Dhaka and Chittagong. However, a later by-election success in March reveals strength of BNP elsewhere. [1]

Late 1994

Opposition strikes and protests escalate. [1]

28 December 1994

Opposition members of Jatiya Sangsad resign en masse. [1]

June 1995

Former President Ershad acquitted of illegally possessing arms. [1]

September and October 1995

Opposition cause more general disruption by organizing nation-wide strikes. [1]

24 November 1995

Jatiya Sangsad dissolved at request of Prime Minister; she continues in office in acting capacity. [1]

15 February 1996

General election boycotted by main opposition parties. By end of month, BNP win 205 of 207 legislative seats declared. [1]

30 March 1996

Prime Minister and her Government resign from posts; Jatiya Sangsad dissolved. Former Chief Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman appointed acting Prime Minister. [1]

20 May 1996

Unsuccessful military coup. [1]

12 June 1996

General election: AL come to power with support of JD. [1]

23 June 1996

Sheikh Hasina Wajed sworn in as Prime Minister. [1]

23 July 1996

AL's former acting president, Shahabuddin Ahmed, elected new Head of State. [1]

November 1996

Jatiya Sangsad repeal indemnity law. [1]

December 1996

Indo-Bangladesh relations boosted following signing of historic 30-year water-sharing agreement. [1]

January 1997

Indian Prime Minister visits Bangladesh. BNP end two-month boycott of Jatiya Sangsad. Ex-President Ershad released from prison on bail. [1]

March and April 1997

Repatriation of nearly 7,000 refugees from India to Chittagong Hill Tracts. [4c]

July 1997

Government agree to halt forcible repatriation of Rohingya refugees. [4a]

30 August 1997

BNP recommence its boycott of Jatiya Sangsad. [4b]

25 September 1997

BNP call one day national strike (resulting in clashes with Government). [5a]

November 1997

More tribal refugees return from India to Chittagong Hill Tracts. [4c]
General strikes called by BNP in Dhaka and Chittagong result in clashes with AL and subsequent killings and injuries. [4d]

2 December 1997

Government sign peace treaty to end insurgency in Chittagong Hill Tracts. [4e]

7 December 1997

BNP lead strikes in Dhaka [4f] and Chittagong in opposition to Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Treaty. [4g] Bengali settlers exchange gunfire with police and paramilitaries. [4h]

10 February 1998

End to insurgency in Chittagong Hill Tracts as Shanti Bahini guerrillas formally surrender arms. [4j]

9 March 1998

BNP return to Jatiya Sangsad. [5c]

15 March 1998

Jatiya Dal resigns from ruling coalition. [5c] & [11f]

12 April 1998

BNP walk out of Jatiya Sangsad in protest of Chittagong Hill Tract bills. [5d]

May 1998

Four bills, relating to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, passed by the Jatiya Sangsad. [5e]

July - mid-September 1998

Most prolonged monsoon floods on record claim 1,500 lives and leave 23 million homeless. [5g]

20 December 1998

New anti-government alliance formed between leaders of BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and Jatiya Dal. [5i]

6 March 1999

Two bombs in Jessore town kill at least eight and injure 150 others. [5j]

November 1999

Opposition sponsored general strikes against the government continue. One in Dhaka results in a spate of bomb attacks killing one person and injuring others. Police fire tear gas and use batons and rubber bullets to disperse opposition militants who were firing at opponents. [20h]

December 1999

Opposition activists march in Chittagong against mayoral election, reportedly setting off home made bombs and hurling stones at security officers. Police fire rubber bullets and tear gas shells, leaving at least a hundred injured. [19d]

Annex D

ANNEX D

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