

Conference on
**Democracy and State Building in Bangladesh after the breakdown
of One-Party Dominance**

26-27 March 2025, University of Hull

Dr M Jashim Ali Chowdhury*

1. Context of Conference

Bangladesh's political journey has been a tumultuous one, marked by profound ideological shifts and political upheavals. Since gaining independence in 1971, the country has grappled with defining its constitutional identity amid extreme political and religious contestation.

The 1972 Bangladesh Constitution¹ adopted a Westminster parliamentary system. In 1975, it was radically transformed into a national party-led presidential system², soon to be overthrown by a military coup³. While the 1972 Constitution emphasised the secular Bengali ethnic and linguistic identity as an organising principle of the state, the post-1975 regimes Islamised the country. The military regime re-introduced the multi-party politics but retained the presidential system too. Though parliamentary democracy was restored in 1991, it failed to stabilize the political landscape⁴ due to mutual distrust among the ruling and opposition parties, suppression of intra-party dissent and parliamentary opposition, violent street agitation, election rigging, and back-door conspiracies for ascending or clinging to power, which eventually became the norm.

The introduction of a non-party caretaker government⁵ system in 1996 aimed to ensure fair elections. However, it was later manipulated⁶ and ultimately repealed⁷ in 2011, leading to legitimacy crises in subsequent elections of 2014, 2018 and 2024 marred by allegations of

* Lecturer in Law, University of Hull. Email: J.Chowdhury@hull.ac.uk



The articles in this journal are published Open Access subject to Creative Commons 4.0. CC BY-NC license. The Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial (CC BY-NC) License allows others to use, adapt, remix, or redistribute a copyrighted work for non-commercial purposes only, while requiring attribution to the creator or author.

¹ The Constitution of Bangladesh 1972 <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Bangladesh_2014> accessed 18 December 2024.

² Md. Morsbedul Islam, 'The Politics behind the Passage of Fourth Amendment to the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Its Provisions: A Modest Analysis', (2014) 4(9) Public Policy and Administration Research, <<https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/PPAR/article/view/15674>> accessed 18 December 2024.

³ Emajuddin Ahmed, *The Military and Democracy in Bangladesh*, ANU E Press (2004) <<https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p33231/pdf/ch0731.pdf>> accessed 18 December 2024.

⁴ Shafi Md Mostafa and Db Subedi, 'Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism in Bangladesh' (2020) 14(3:1) Politics and Religion 1

⁵ Dr Rafiqul Islam, 'Political process under caretaker government' *The Daily Star Dhaka* (12 May 2007) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/law/2007/05/02/vision.htm>> accessed 18 December 2024.

⁶ Barrister Harun ur Rashid, '14th amendment of the Constitution: A legal view' *The Daily Star* (13 June 2004) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/law/2004/06/02/index.htm>> accessed 18 December 2024.

⁷ Adeeba Aziz Khan 'The politics of constitutional amendments in Bangladesh: The case of the non-political caretaker government' (2015) 9 *International Review of Law* <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a00f/743096214f991d5656d26c39ca09e31364ea.pdf>> accessed 18 December 2024.

manipulation⁸. In 2024, widespread protests—initially sparked by demands for reform of civil service quotas—culminated in the fall of the authoritarian Awami League (AL) government⁹.

2. The Recent Reform Initiatives

The interim government formed in 2024, under the leadership of Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus—a figure widely regarded as a development icon and favoured by Western powers—generated significant public expectations. It was perceived as an opportunity for systemic realignment, the establishment of safeguards against authoritarianism, and a decisive break from entrenched political practices. Endorsed by protest leaders, the administration initially constituted six reform commissions tasked with recommending institutional changes in the judiciary, bureaucracy, police, electoral system, anti-corruption mechanisms, and, most notably, the Constitution.¹⁰ Subsequently, four additional commissions were introduced to address health care, mass media, labour rights, and women’s rights.¹¹ Among these, the Constitutional Reform Commission attracted the greatest attention, symbolizing prospects for a new political beginning. Although early demands for a complete abrogation of the Constitution—advanced primarily by Jamaat-e-Islami, which opposed Bangladesh’s liberation war, and certain far-left groups—were prominent, these calls gradually weakened as the reform conversation progressed.¹² The leading centre-right party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), opposed wholesale constitutional replacement, partly due to concerns over potential delays in electoral timelines.¹³ Consequently, while the movement for a new constitution subsided, proposals for substantial constitutional reform remained strongly supported by BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and most anti-Awami League political actors.

The Constitutional Reform Commission initiated consultations with major political actors to build “consensus” on the reform agenda. However, these efforts were undermined by persistent disagreements and the absence of a shared constitutional vision among the actors. Despite these challenges, the Commission produced an extensive set of recommendations encompassing both constitutional amendments and administrative restructuring.¹⁴ Following its report, the interim government established a “National Consensus Commission”, which notably excluded—and formally banned—the Awami League, Bangladesh’s largest political

⁸ Antonio Spinelli, ‘Overcoming Bangladesh’s electoral integrity deficit: time for political compromise and dialogue’ Idea International (5 February 2024) <<https://www.idea.int/news/overcoming-bangladeshs-electoral-integrity-deficit-time-political-compromise-and-dialogue>> accessed 18 December 2024.

⁹ The Conversation, ‘Bangladesh’s civil service is plagued by corruption – the country can’t get back on its feet without major reform’ 10 September 2024 <<https://theconversation.com/bangladeshs-civil-service-is-plagued-by-corruption-the-country-cant-get-back-on-its-feet-without-major-reform-237732>> accessed 18 December 2024.

¹⁰ The Daily Prothom Alo, ‘6 reform commissions gazette awaiting notification’ 2 October 2024 <<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/y5wowab63f>> accessed 12 October 2025.

¹¹ Ali Asif Shawon, ‘Four new reform commissions announced’ Dhaka Tribune, (17 October 2024) <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/government-affairs/362244/four-new-reform-commissions-announced>> accessed 18 November 2025.

¹² M Jashim Ali Chowdhury, ‘The Agenda and Dilemmas of Constitutional Reform in Bangladesh’, ConstitutionNet, International IDEA, 18 November 2024, <<https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/agenda-and-dilemmas-constitutional-reform-bangladesh>> accessed 10 July 2025.

¹³ Shafi Md Mostofa, ‘From Revolution to Reform: The BNP’s Uphill Battle in a New Bangladesh’, The Diplomat, 10 April 2025 <<https://thediplomat.com/2025/04/from-revolution-to-reform-the-bnps-uphill-battle-in-a-new-bangladesh/>> accessed 14 August 2025.

¹⁴ Muhammad Ekramul Haque and Sumit Bisarya, ‘July Charter and Constitutional Reforms in Bangladesh’, ConstitutionNet, International IDEA, 1 December 2025, <<https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/july-charter-and-constitutional-reforms-bangladesh>> accessed 1 December 2025.

party representing approximately 40 percent of the electorate, along with its allied groups on the left and moderate right. This exclusionary approach raised concerns regarding the legitimacy and inclusiveness of the reform and consensus building process.¹⁵ Critics argue that the commissions operated with evident bias and favouritism, reflecting a top-down agenda rather than a participatory, bottom-up model typically expected of any democratic reform initiatives.¹⁶ Allegations of partiality intensified as rival parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), accused the interim leadership of favouring the student-led National Citizens Party (NCP), a key actor of the protest movement that facilitated the government's rise to power. Further controversy emerged when Jamaat-e-Islami advocated for proportional representation—a proposal widely perceived as advantageous to its interests over those of the BNP. Overall, the exclusion of the Awami League without broad political consultation and the perceived co-optation of reform processes underscore the fragility of the interim government's so-called “consensus-building”.

Concerns about the integrity of the reform process were further heightened by demands from student representatives to elevate the “July Charter”—a government-issued document—above the Constitution, proclaim it under the government's asserted revolutionary authority, and subsequently constitutionalize it through a national referendum. It became a major point of contention. The claim of constitutional supremacy for the “July Charter” was strongly disputed by legal and political actors.¹⁷ Subsequently, the “July Charter Implementation Ordinance”, issued by the President under the claimed authority of the “July Revolution” rather than constitutional mandate, required its incorporation into the constitutional framework through a national referendum. It further directed Parliament to reconstitute itself as a constitutional reform assembly and, failing that, provided for the Charter's automatic inclusion in the constitutional text—a provision widely criticized as impractical and procedurally flawed.¹⁸ After its promulgation, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—a principal stakeholder in the interim administration—accused the government of fraud and breach of trust, framing the move as a betrayal of the “July Revolution”¹⁹.

¹⁵ Arafat Hosen Khan, ‘Bangladesh's Constitutional Reforms: Caught Between Democratic Hopes and Authoritarian Resilience’, ConstitutionNet, International IDEA, 16 May 2025, <<https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/bangladeshs-constitutional-reforms-caught-between-democratic-hopes-and-authoritarian>> accessed on 22 July 2025.

¹⁶ Kawser Ahmed, ‘Bangladesh's Apolitical Constitution-making Initiative: Silver Lining or Slippery Slope?’ I•CONNECT Blog, 20 April 2025 <<https://www.iconnectblog.com/bangladeshs-apolitical-constitution-making-initiative-silver-lining-or-slippery-slope/>> accessed 25 November 2025.

¹⁷ Ridwanul Hoque (Interview), “July Charter cannot be placed above the Constitution”, Daily Prothom Alo, 21 September 2025 <<http://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/interview/3d09w3we01>>; Sangita Gazi, ‘Can the July Charter override the constitution?’ The Daily Star, 21 September 2025 <<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/can-the-july-charter-override-the-constitution-3990396>>; Ahmed, Mustak, ‘The July 2025 Interim Ruler's Charter under the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh: A Legal Analysis of Treason and Constitutional Violation’ SSRN 22 October 2025 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5640410>>; The Business Standard, ‘Can the July Charter take precedence over the Constitution?’ 18 August 2025 <<https://www.tbsnews.net/features/panorama/can-july-charter-take-precedence-over-constitution-1214476>> all accessed 21 November 2025.

¹⁸ Kallol Mustafa, ‘How the consensus commission jeopardises the July charter’ The Daily Star, 31 October 2025 <<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/how-the-consensus-commission-jeopardises-the-july-charter-4023156>>; Moinul Hoque Chowdhury and Masum Billah, ‘Legal and political storm brews over July Charter: who has the power to issue order, and under what law?’ Bdnews24.com, Dhaka 1 November 2025 <<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2c5f3ffd2895>>; Political consensus eludes Bangladesh, The Kathmandu Post, Smruti S Pattanaik, 6 November 2025 <<https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2025/11/06/political-consensus-eludes-bangladesh>> all accessed on 17 November 2025.

¹⁹ The Daily Sun, ‘BNP won't bear liability for unsigned parts of July National Charter: Fakhru’ Dhaka 1 November 2025 <<https://www.daily-sun.com/printversion/details/837235>> accessed 22 November 2025.

Beyond procedural flaws, serious doubts have emerged regarding the interim government's commitment to its professed reform agenda. While it claims to seek a sustainable constitutional framework to prevent authoritarianism, its actions suggest continuity with or even more regressive than the previous regime's authoritarian practices. Pending recommendations from reform commissions on the judiciary, electoral system, anti-corruption mechanisms, and public administration, the government has compelled the entire Appellate Division to resign²⁰, placed a substantial number of Supreme Court judges on forced leave²¹, appointed²², elevated²³ or removed²⁴ a substantial other on purely political considerations. One judge was impeached solely for a judicial opinion on quota litigation.²⁵ Additionally, the government appointed a highly politicized Election Commission²⁶ through a search committee established under a condemned AL-era law²⁷, and reconstituted the Public Service²⁸ and Anti-Corruption Commissions²⁹ with its own nominees. The revised Human Rights Commission law has been criticized for enhancing governmental control rather than independence.³⁰ Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) condemned the government for disregarding key recommendations of its own Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Reform Commission to establish "Selection and Review Commission" for the ACC which aimed at ensuring political neutrality and accountability in the ACC's activities. TIB chair Mr Iftekharuzzaman, who was also a member of the government's National Consensus Commission labelled the government's approach "anti-reform and self-contradictory."³¹

²⁰ The Pioneer, 'Bangladesh Chief Justice forced to resign' 11 August 2024 <<https://www.dailypioneer.com/2024/page1/bangladesh-chief-justice-forced-to-resign.html>> accessed 19 November 2025.

²¹ TBS Report, 'CJ sends 12 judges appointed under AL govt on leave amid protests' The Business Standard (16 October 2024) <<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/chief-justice-extends-tea-invitation-12-judges-appointed-during-al-govt-968211>> accessed 22 November 2025.

²² RTV News, '23 New Judges Appointed to the High Court Division' 9 October 2024 <<https://www.rtvonline.com/english/bangladesh/17031>> accessed 22 November 2025.

²³ The Business Standard, '22 additional judges appointed as permanent High Court judges' Dhaka, 11 November 2025 <<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/court/22-additional-judges-appointed-permanent-high-court-judges-1283296>> accessed 01 December 2025.

²⁴ BdNews24.com, 'Justice Khizir Hayat dismissed from High Court Division' (Dhaka: 20 March 2025) <<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2e5f4e4cddcf>> accessed on 22 November 2025; BdNews24, 'Justice Khurshid Alam Sarkar dismissed from High Court Division' 5 November 2025 <<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/ea9135684c89>> accessed 1 December 2025.

²⁵ SM Masum Billah, 'Justice: Sunset or dawn?', Bdnews24.com, 30 May 2025 <<https://bdnews24.com/opinion/8d0204fa4937>> accessed 21 November 2025.

²⁶ Mohiuddin Alamgir, 'Who are the EC search committee members? Let's find out' The Daily Star (31 October 2024) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/elections/news/who-are-the-ec-search-committee-members-lets-find-out-3741731>> accessed 18 December 2024.

²⁷ Mohiuddin Alamgir, 'Who are the EC search committee members? Let's find out' The Daily Star (31 October 2024) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/elections/news/who-are-the-ec-search-committee-members-lets-find-out-3741731>> accessed 18 December 2024.

²⁸ TBS Report, 'PSC Chairman and 12 members resign' The Business Standard (08 October 2024) <<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/public-service-commission-chairman-resigns-961716>> accessed 18 December 2024.

²⁹ Dipan Nandi and Md Abbas, 'ACC chairman, 2 commissioners quit their jobs' The Daily Star (30 October 2024) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/acc-chairman-2-commissioners-quit-their-jobs-3739556>> accessed 18 December 2024.

³⁰ Md Abdul Halim, 'Why the proposed NHRC amendment risks ineffectiveness' The Daily Star, Dhaka 30 October 2025 <<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/why-the-proposed-nhrc-amendment-risks-ineffectiveness-4022331>> accessed 11 November 2025.

³¹ The Business Standard, 'TIB slams govt for dropping key ACC oversight proposal in final ordinance.' Dhaka, 29 November 2025 <<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/tib-slams-govt-dropping-key-acc-oversight-proposal-final-ordinance-1297231>> accessed 30 November 2025.

Although the Supreme Court initially reinstated the Thirteenth Amendment, which provides for a non-partisan caretaker government and which was scrapped by Awami League in 2011, the interim government appealed the decision. The Appellate Division ultimately ruled that the caretaker system would apply only to the fourteenth parliamentary election, meaning that the thirteenth parliamentary election to be conducted under the interim government will not be under a neutral caretaker government, exclude the Awami League and its allies – nearly fifty percent of the electorate. This outcome has created further uncertainty regarding how future caretaker arrangements will be structured, particularly given the ongoing controversy surrounding constitutional reform processes suggested by the National Consensus Commission under the July Charter.

In the domain of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the interim government—now eighteen months in office—has presided over a marked deterioration in governance. Reports indicate a surge in Islamic radicalism, minority repression, and intolerance to cultural and democratic pluralism.³² This instability has been compounded by widespread mob violence, arson, and looting of factories and businesses of the “sympathizers of the previous regime”, alongside extrajudicial reprisals against political opponents and dissenting voices.³³ Sectarian violence and targeted attacks on marginalized religious groups³⁴ have also intensified. Repealing the previous government’s controversial Cyber Security Act in August 2024, the government introduced its own Cyber Safety Ordinance 2025, which has drawn criticism for retaining repressive provisions, including warrantless arrests.³⁵ In addition, amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act have extended its extraterritorial reach³⁶, granting the state authority to prohibit and prosecute any form of publication, media campaign, or assembly—both domestic and international—under Sections 9 and 18(1). These provisions effectively criminalize expressions of political support for opposition groups.³⁷ The government’s decision to revoke accreditation for approximately sixty journalists³⁸ has further provoked condemnation from international press freedom organizations, underscoring growing concerns over democratic backsliding and rights violations.

The independence of the lower judiciary in Bangladesh remains deeply compromised by entrenched political patronage. Successive governments have routinely politicized judicial appointments, using state agencies—including the judiciary—as instruments for consolidating

³² Iftexharul Bashar, ‘Bangladesh’s Evolving Security Crisis: The Rise of Religious Extremism Amid Political Transition’ (2025) 17(4) Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses 23–28.

³³ Dr. Milton Hasnat, *Bangladesh in Collapse: Lawlessness, Fear, and the Failure of Muhammad Yunus*’ Global Center for Democratic Governance, August 2025 <<https://globalcdg.org/bangladesh-in-collapse-lawlessness-fear-and-the-failure-of-muhammad-yunus/>> accessed 26 October 2025.

³⁴ Dhaka Tribune, ‘4 dead, scores injured as Ijtema grounds clash turns violent’ 18 December 2024 <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/368528/4-dead-scores-injured-as-ijtema-grounds-clash>> accessed 18 December 2024.

³⁵ Daily Prothom Alo, ‘Govt issues gazette of Cyber Security Ordinance’ Dhaka: 22 May 2025, 09: 22 <<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/government/5gj5obvmuw> > accessed 20 October 2025; Bdnews24.com, ‘Bangladesh scraps controversial Cyber Security Act, introduces new AI-focused Cyber Safety Ordinance’ Dhaka: 22 May 2025 <<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/a275a547a07a>> accessed on 20 October 2025.

³⁶ The Daily Star, Law and Our Rights, ‘Reflecting on the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009’ 3 December 2019 <<http://thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/reflecting-the-anti-terrorism-act-2009-1835092>> accessed 16 October 2025.

³⁷ The Anti-Terrorism Act 2009 (Bangladesh) <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/document/papers/AntiTerrorism_Act2009.pdf> accessed 16 October 2025 (Please see Section 9 at the page number 5).

³⁸ CPJ, ‘CPJ Raises Concerns Over Bangladesh’s Revocation of Journalists’ Press Accreditation’ 7 November 2024 <<https://www.newsonair.gov.in/cpj-raises-concerns-over-bangladeshs-revocation-of-journalists-press-accreditation/>> accessed 18 December 2024.

power. Reports indicate that, despite the absence of credible evidence from law enforcement, individuals detained by the interim administration have been systematically denied bail and remanded for interrogation by courts at all levels, including magistrates, district courts, and the High Court Division.³⁹ This pattern of mechanical adjudication has disproportionately targeted Awami League supporters⁴⁰, lawyers⁴¹, academics⁴², journalists⁴³, civil society actors⁴⁴, and even former senior public officials such as the former Chief Election Commissioners⁴⁵, judges of the Appellate Division⁴⁶ and the former Chief Justice of Bangladesh⁴⁷. In an open letter to the current Chief Justice, a senior advocate described the arrest of a former Chief Justice as “a blot on the judicial culture of the country,” signalling a profound erosion of judicial independence.⁴⁸

The most notable instance of legal abuse has been the trial of Sheikh Hasina before the International Crimes Tribunal, culminating in a death sentence rendered without legal representation. While calls for accountability regarding the July–August 2024 protest killings may be justified, the Tribunal’s composition—dominated by individuals linked to Jamaat-e-Islami and other political adversaries of Hasina⁴⁹—raises serious concerns of partisan bias. The retributive approach in Hasina and other trials has been termed as a “political retribution

³⁹ Bdnews24.com, ‘Why are journalists being harassed with murder charges? Farzana Rupa asks court’ 17 February 2025 <<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/1d2c75ac7052>> accessed 21 November 2025.

⁴⁰ Bangladesh Snagbad Sangstha 13 May 2025 9 AL men including ex-MP Momtaz arrested in city <<https://www.bssnews.net/others/272456>> accessed 22 November 2025.

⁴¹ Bdnews24.com, ‘A smiling Tureen Afroz shown arrested in murder case, 18 June 2025 <<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/4639043c14d3>> accessed 21 November 2025.

⁴² The Shillong Times, ‘Bangladesh: Teachers declared ‘unwanted’ for supporting Awami League, barred from taking classes’ 19 March 2025 <<https://theshillongtimes.com/2025/03/19/bangladesh-teachers-declared-unwanted-for-supporting-awami-league-barrd-from-taking-classes/>> accessed 7 November 2025; The daily Observer, ‘Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural Univ suspends 12 AL teachers’ Dhaka 19 February 2025 <<https://www.observerbd.com/news/512932>> accessed 7 November 2025. Bddigest.com, ‘HRFB Expresses Deep Concern Over Imprisonment of Freedom Fighter Professor Anwara’ 2 June 2025 <<https://en.bddigest.com/hrfb-expresses-deep-concern-over-imprisonment-of-freedom-fighter-professor-anwara/>> accessed 7 November 2025. The Daily Star, ‘Accusations unacceptable’, Dhaka, 18 August 2025 <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/rights/news/accusations-unacceptable-3964801>> accessed 7 November 2025

⁴³ The Daily Prothom Alo, ‘Mass filing of lawsuits against journalists contrary to independent journalism: Mahfuz Anam’ 5 May 2025 <<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/i4br6o8a2d>> accessed 6 November 2025.

⁴⁴ The Daily Star, ‘Ex-secy Abu Alam Shahid Khan arrested’ 9 September 2025 <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/ex-secy-abu-alam-shahid-khan-arrested-3980846>> accessed 7 November 2025. The Daily Observer, ‘Nusraat Faria denied bail, sent to jail; Home adviser defends arrest, cultural adviser terms ‘embarrassing’, 20 May 2025 <<https://www.observerbd.com/news/526307>> accessed 22 November 2025

⁴⁵ The Daily Observer, ‘Ex-CEC Nurul Huda remanded for four days’ 24 June 2025 <<https://www.observerbd.com/news/530989>> accessed 19 November 2025. Dean Herald, ‘Bangladesh’s former election chief Habibul Awal arrested’ 25 June 2025 <<https://www.deccanherald.com/world/bangladeshs-former-election-chief-habibul-awal-arrested-3602403>> accessed 19 November 2025. The Daily Prothom Alo, ‘Former CEC Habibul Awal placed on 3-day remand’ 26 June 2025 <<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/h5b0ycg9mv>> accessed 19 November 2025

⁴⁶ Serajul Islam, ‘Former justice Manik admitted to ICU in critical condition, He was assaulted at Sylhet court’ (Dhaka Tribune, 25 August 2024) <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/355994/former-justice-manik-admitted-to-icu-in-critical>> accessed 15 December 2024.

⁴⁷ The Business Standard, Dhaka ‘Ex-chief justice Khairul Haque denied bail in murder case’ 31 July 2025 <<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/ex-chief-justice-khairul-haque-denied-bail-murder-case-1201266>> accessed on 19 November 2025.

⁴⁸ The Business Standard, Dhaka, ‘ZI Panna condemns ex-CJ Khairul’s arrest in open letter to CJ Syed Reefat’ 4 August 2025 <<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/zi-panna-condemns-ex-cj-khairuls-arrest-open-letter-cj-syed-reefat-1204326>> accessed 22 November 2025.

⁴⁹ Kallol Bhattacharjee, ‘Justice vs judgment’ The Hindu, 16 November 2025 <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/justice-vs-judgment-on-international-crimes-tribunal/article70285036.ece>> accessed 22 November 2025.

disguised as criminal justice”⁵⁰, a view echoed by Human Rights Watch, which expressed “grave human rights concerns”⁵¹. Notably, while the interim government has pursued prosecutions against former Awami League officials, it has exempted perpetrators of violence during the post-regime upheaval—including the killing of police officers and widespread arson—justifying these acts as expressions of “public anger” and “self-defence”⁵². Such selective accountability underscores the politicization of transitional justice mechanisms and the growing evidence that the interim government is leveraging judicial processes to advance political objectives.⁵³

Although Professor Yunus’s interim government initially inspired widespread confidence as a vehicle for democratic reform, its failure has revived bitter memories of Bangladesh’s previous aborted democratic transitions and constitutional moments.⁵⁴ Developments under the interim administration raise fundamental questions about its professed commitment to democratic consolidation, the rule of law, and inclusive governance. The interim government’s July Charter, its implementation order and the subsequent referendum on it (12 February 2026) – all remained deeply controversial and questionable. The scale of controversy is such that the newly elected government on 12 February 2026 election refused to take oath as a Constitution Reform Council, as required by the interim government’s July Charter implementation order and the whole reform process got stuck in limbo.⁵⁵

These dynamics underscore the urgent need for sustained civic engagement and rigorous scholarly inquiry into the roots, persistence, and consequences of Bangladesh’s democratic crisis, as well as potential pathways for reform.

3. Scope of the Conference and Selected Papers

This two-day hybrid Conference proposes to investigate the problems and prospects of democracy and state-building in Bangladesh after the fall of the country’s long-time ruler Sheikh Hasina on 5 August 2024. The Conference speaks directly to one of the UKRI’s International Science Partnership Fund (ISPF) and its designated Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) objectives - the promotion of “sustainable development meaning lasting benefit for the people” in developing countries. Bangladesh is a leading beneficiary of the UK Government’s robust ODA activities involving financial, logistic, human capital development and democracy-building support. Bangladesh’s transition from one-party authoritarianism towards an inclusive, equal, and sustainable democratic system is of direct interest to the British government and the people.

⁵⁰ David Bbergman, ‘Justice v Justice,’ JusticeInfo.Net 22 April 2025 <<https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/144479-bangladesh-justice-vs-justice.html>> accessed 22 November 2025.

⁵¹ The Human Rights Watch, ‘Bangladesh: Hasina Found Guilty of Crimes Against Humanity Fair Trial Concerns Over Proceedings in Absentia, Death Penalty’, 21 November 2025 <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/11/17/bangladesh-hasina-found-guilty-of-crimes-against-humanity>> accessed 21 November 2025.

⁵² RFI, ‘Bangladesh immunity order sparks fear of justice denied’ 10 October 2024 <<https://www.rfi.fr/en/international-news/20241028-bangladesh-immunity-order-sparks-fears-of-justice-denied>> accessed 22 June 2025.

⁵³ Tasmiah Ahmed, ‘Bangladesh: Are human rights eroding under Muhammad Yunus?’ *Deutsche Welle* 30 December 2024 <<https://www.dw.com/en/bangladesh-are-human-rights-eroding-under-muhammad-yunus/a-71185927>> accessed 22 November 2025.

⁵⁴ M Jashim Ali Chowdury, ‘Fifty Years of Bangladesh Parliament: A Critical Evaluation (Brill Nijhoff 2025) 200-230.

⁵⁵ BDNews24.com, ‘BNP’s refusal to take Reform Council oath casts uncertainty over July Charter’, Dhaka, 23 February 2026 <<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/a976377822be>> accessed 25 Feb. 26.

Apart from raising awareness of Bangladesh's reform agenda and future direction among the Bangladeshi diaspora, the University of Hull Conference titled, '*Democracy and State Building in Bangladesh after the Breakdown of One-Party Dominance*', held on 26–27 March 2025 aimed at facilitating the British policymakers and think tanks better understanding the prospects and pitfalls of the UK Government's ODA policies and programs regarding Bangladesh. The conference was organised in eight plenary and parallel sessions considering papers, presentations, and discussion around the trajectories, prospects, and problems of the country's ongoing efforts on Constitutional Reform, Reform of the Oversight Bodies, Political Party Reform, Rule of Law and Human Rights, Gender Equality, Minority Rights and National Security. It engaged extensively with the Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK, Canada, Australia, USA, France, Bangladesh and around the world. The following three papers of this volume are selected from those presented in the Conference. The papers were further reviewed after the Conference, and the authors were invited to revise the papers as per the comments. We hope these papers will mark thought provoking contributions to Bangladesh's ongoing reform processes.