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Bangladesh

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I. Introduction and methodology

Introduction

1. As a constitutional democracy, Bangladesh continues to remain fully committed to protecting human rights for all. Under the leadership of the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has been adopting progressive policies to realize a better society for all where fundamental human rights, the rule of law, equality, and justice prevails.

2. Bangladesh considers all human rights to be universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing. Since the 3rd cycle of Universal Periodic Review, the Government of Bangladesh (government) continued to adopt legislative and policy reforms, enhance democratic institutions and accountability mechanisms to realize the aspiration of “a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality, and justice, political, economic and social, will be secured for all citizens” as pledged by the Constitution.

Methodology

3. This report reflects the implementation status of the 178 recommendations accepted by Bangladesh during the 3rd cycle of UPR in 2018 and other key developments since 2018. In accordance with the Plan of Implementation of the accepted recommendations, four Inter-Ministerial Meetings were held to track progress and collect input on the implementation status. Keeping Bangladesh’s candidature to the Human Rights Council (2023-25) in view, the implementation process was further expedited. Two more Inter-Ministerial meetings and a Civil Society Consultation were held in 2023 to gather inputs, views, and latest developments for the preparation of the National Report.¹ In addition, the Government, represented by the state minister for Foreign Affairs, attended the interactive dialogue/consultation arranged by Human Rights Forum of Bangladesh, a forum representing twenty human rights organizations, and took stock of inputs from all stakeholders including the UNRC Office in Dhaka. The consultation elaborately discussed the draft summary of Stakeholder’s Submission. A National Consultant was appointed by the UNDP for facilitating the drafting of the National Report. Incorporating all the feedback, the National Report was finalized with intragovernmental concurrence. During the drafting process, the guidelines contained in decision 17/119 of the HRC were duly observed.

II. Cooperation with international human right mechanisms

UN bodies and mechanisms²

4. Bangladesh is working in close coordination with UN Human Rights Mechanisms, specially the Human Rights Council (HRC) and its mechanisms as well as treaty body mechanisms. Bangladesh’s contribution to the HRC is manifested by her five times membership in the Council. Also, through its deliberations, tabling resolutions, and participating in different mechanisms as rapporteur Bangladesh has presented itself as a very active delegation to the HRC. Bangladesh submitted the Initial Report on CAT in 2019. The government engaged in interactive dialogue with the Committee against Torture in the same year, and with the Committee on CRPD in 2022.

5. Since the 3rd cycle of UPR, Bangladesh has hosted ten visits by seven Special Procedures mandate holders, the highest among all UN Member States. Bangladesh facilitated the visit of the Special Rapporteur (SR) on Human Rights Situation in Myanmar four times (2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021), the SR on human rights and climate change in September 2022, the SR on trafficking in persons, especially women and children in October 2022, the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of Human Rights by Older Persons in November 2022, the SR on the human rights of migrants in January 2023, the SR on discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members in February

2023, and the SR on extreme poverty and human rights in May 2023. Bangladesh also hosted 5 visits of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar which was established by the HRC in 2018 to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyze evidence of the most serious international crimes and violations in Myanmar.

6. Upon the invitation of the government, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (HCHR) visited Bangladesh in 2022. It was the first official visit by a UN Human Rights Chief. During the visit, the HCHR had constructive dialogues with honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, honourable Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs and Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs, National Human Rights Commissioner, as well as representatives of Diplomatic Community, Civil Society, Youth, Media, Academia and Think tank. Besides, the Government remained intensely engaged in Geneva through several calls-on with the HCHR by the Law Minister, and the State Minister for Foreign Affairs, as well as through regular meetings between Bangladesh Permanent Mission and the Special Procedure Mechanisms including, inter alia, the WGEID. The Government had several consultations with the OHCHR at Ministerial level on Digital Security Act (DSA) to consider its recommendations thereon. Bangladesh also cooperated with the Human Rights Council, both as a member and non-member, through substantially contributing to the debates, interactive dialogues, panel discussions, and informals as well as through steering resolutions on Climate Change, Protection of Family, and human rights situation of Rohingya and other minorities in Myanmar.

International cooperation³

7. Besides the UN and its treaty bodies, Bangladesh is engaged with other development partners, bilaterally and multilaterally to have open discussion on any human rights issues of concern. For example, EU's human rights and security expert, Director (German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Good Governance and Public Policy) visited Bangladesh twice to have candid discussion on the DSA with the key Ministers and dignitaries of Bangladesh. This cooperation extends through dialogues, consultations, exchange of ideas and experience as well as projects to address human rights implementation.

III. Institutional and normative reforms

8. Since the 3rd cycle of UPR, Bangladesh has taken various administrative, legislative, and policy measures to strengthen its institutional framework to provide transparent, citizen-friendly services that uphold and promote the rule of law, access to justice, and human rights.

Institutional measures⁴

The Parliament

9. The 11th parliamentary election was held on 30 December 2018 in accordance with the Constitution and applicable electoral laws. In the 2018 elections, Awami League, the ruling political party won the majority seats of the Parliament and formed a government. About 80.20 percent of the voters cast their votes in the election. Among the 350 elected members, 73 were women (including 50 reserved seats).

The Supreme Court of Bangladesh⁵

10. The Supreme Court of Bangladesh (SC) consisting of the High Court Division (HCD) and the Appellate Division (AD) is the apex court of the country. During 2018-2022, 36 judges were appointed to the HCD, and 9 judges were elevated to the AD. Between 2017-2021, 321,450 cases were disposed of by the SC.⁶

The National Human Rights Commission⁷

11. Bangladesh is committed to strengthening the effectiveness and independence of the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh (NHRCB). The NHRCB is a "B" status

institution recognized by the GANHRI, and also, an Associate-Member of the Asia Pacific Forum and member of Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions. Since 2018, the government allocation of funds to NHRCB has increased by 99% and the manpower of NHRCB has almost doubled to 88. After a series of discussions with stakeholders including the media and civil society organizations, NHRC has adopted its third Five Year Strategic Plan (2022-2026) focusing on 8 human rights priority areas. Between 2018-2022, NHRCB resolved 3,666 human rights complaints while 364 complaints were ongoing at the end of 2022.⁸ In investigating allegations against police/RAB, NHRCB narrowed the interpretation of the 'procedure in cases of disciplined force' in section 18 of the NHRC Act-2009.

The Election Commission⁹

12. Delimitation of Constituencies Act-2021, the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners Appointment Act-2022 and Parliament Election (Electronic Voting Machine) Rules-2018 were enacted and Conduct Rules for Political Parties and Candidates-2008 and Election Conduct Rules-2008 were amended since 2018 to make elections more fair, inclusive, and credible. These changes now allow candidates to submit nomination papers online. It saves time and makes it easier for candidates to run for an office without resistance. Amendment of the laws also allows the third-gender (hijra) population to participate in elections both as a voter and a candidate with their own gender-identity.

13. The Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners Appointment Act-2022 ensures an impartial and capable EC and is the first ever law of this kind in the country as well as in the subcontinent. The Representation of People Order-1972 provides Election Commission's (EC) full control over all executives of the state during election time. Due to this, EC's full independence in delegating its duties during election time is ensured. In case of any individual's failure to comply with the order of EC, they are liable to be punished under the 'Election Officials (Special Provision) Act-1991.

14. Since 2018, 6,842 national and local elections have been organized.¹⁰ During the national elections, 46 complaints were accepted and relevant instructions were given to returning officers, electoral inquiry committees, and law enforcement agencies to take necessary action. At the same time, 216 complaints were received but later disposed of as disallowed for invalidity or lack of evidence.

The Anti-Corruption Commission¹¹

15. The Anti-Corruption Commission Rules 2007 was amended in 2019. The amendment allows ACC-BD to file corruption cases in its own district offices without filing them through police stations, enhancing ACC-BD's autonomy.

16. Between 2018-2022, 3,334 corruption cases were filed and 996 public officials were convicted. Since 2019, properties worth around BDT 64,171 billion have been confiscated in connection to corruption so far. The ACC-BD has launched a toll-free hotline (106) to receive allegations of corruption. Since 2019, 307,571 calls have been received resulting in 9,302 registered complaints. Besides traditional means, 188 corruption complaints have been taken through email and social media and 1,522 complaints have been taken from print and electronic media.¹² Since 2016, 6,246 'Honesty stores', unmanned stores have been set up in educational institutions to promote honesty and integrity among the youth.¹³

The National Legal Aid Services Organization¹⁴

17. National legal aid services organization (NLASO) provides free legal advice, mediation services, and litigation aid especially to those who are incapable of seeking justice due to various socioeconomic barriers. During the period 2018-2022, 490,458 persons have received aid and mediation from NLASO which is 3.5 times higher than the 138,542 beneficiaries during 2013-2017 reported in the last UPR cycle.¹⁵

18. The code of civil procedure was amended in 2017 empowering courts to refer cases for mediation to NLASO and facilitating mediation through legal aid officers of NLASO.

Law Commission(LC) Bangladesh

19. The LC is a statutory body that recommends changes to laws to reduce court backlogs and re-examine the legal aspect of the fundamental rights and values of society. Since 2018, the LC has submitted 18 reports to the government recommending enactment, amendment, or repealing of laws and reform of the judicial system. Currently, LC is conducting research work on various issues including medical negligence, protection of marginalized groups, and reservation to CEDAW.

Normative measures

Legislations¹⁶

20. During 2018-2022, the following laws were enacted to protect and promote aspects of human rights:

- Narcotics-Control Act-2018;
- Groundwater-Management-in-Agricultural-Activities Act-2018;
- Bangladesh Ship Recycling Act-2018;
- Dowry Prohibition Act-2018;
- Wage-Earners'-Welfare-Board Act-2018;
- National-Skills-Development-Authority Act-2018;
- Mental-Health Act-2018;
- Digital-Security Act-2018;
- Bangladesh-Rehabilitation-Council Act-2018;
- Contagious-Disease-(Prevention, Control & Eradication) Act-2018;
- Bangladesh-EPZ Labour Act-2019;
- Use-of-Information-Communication-Technology-by-Court Act-2020;
- Child-Daycare-Center Act-2021;
- Universal-Pension-Management Act-2023.

21. Additionally, in order to supplement various laws, a number of rules were formulated including, inter alia, the following:

- Parliament-Election-(Electronic Voting Machine) Rules-2018;
- Child-marriage-Restraint-Rules-2018;
- Deoxyribonucleic-Acid-(DNA) Rules-2018;
- The-Overseas-Employment-and-Migrants-(Recruiting Agents' License and Conduct) Rules-2019;
- EPZ-Labour-rules-2022;
- Digital-Security-Rules, 2020;
- The-Hazardous-Waste- (e-waste)-Management-Rules, 2021;
- Wage-Earners'-Welfare-Board, Rules, 2023.

22. To ensure legal rights for its citizens across the board, the government examined age-old laws, such as the Evidence Act 1972, the Prevention of Suppression Against Women and Children Act 2000, the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, the Code of Civil Procedure 1908 and amended them to meet the demands of modern society. The Evidence Act was a significant legislative amendment that aimed to eliminate unjust and unfair treatment experienced by victims of rape. The Use of Information Technology by Courts Act 2020 was a pioneering enactment to face the standstill situation posed by the Covid-19 in the dispensation of justice.

The Representation of the People's Order 1972 the cornerstone law for free and fair election was also amended for further strengthening the election process.

Policies¹⁷

23. During 2018-2022, the following policies were adopted to guide government plans and actions upholding human rights:

- National-ICT-Policy-2018;
- Beggar-Rehabilitation-and-Alternative-Employment-Policy-2018;
- National-School-Meal-Policy-2019;
- Urban-Social-Development-Activities-Implementation-Policy-2019;
- Integrated-Special-Education-Policy-on-Disability-2019;
- Disabled-persons'-data-usage-policy-2019;
- National-Food-and-Nutrition-Security-Policy-2020;
- Post-COVID-19-National-Roadmap-2021;
- National-Mental-Health-Policy-2022;
- National-Action-Plan-to-End-Child-Marriage-(2018-2030);
- Policy-on-Expenditure-on-Transportation-of-Bodies-of-Irregular, -Undocumented, -Destitute-and-Destitute-Bangladeshi-Migrant-Workers-2022.

IV. Promotion and protection of human rights

Rights of specific persons or groups¹⁸

24. Bangladesh continues to protect and promote the rights of women, children, minorities and marginalized groups keeping focus on the principle of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in the constitution. The Anti-Discrimination Bill, 2022 was placed before the parliament in 2022 and is now with the parliamentary standing committee of the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs for further examination focusing on remaining discrimination and disparity.

Women's rights, empowerment and non-discrimination¹⁹

25. Bangladesh considers women's empowerment and gender equality as prerequisites for long term sustainable development of the country. According to Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Bangladesh is one of the only two countries in the world where women held the highest political positions for longer than men. According to the same report, Bangladesh ranks 7th in the world in terms of political empowerment of women and remains the top South Asian country in terms of achieving gender equality.

Women's advancement²⁰

26. Bangladesh is committed to ensuring the advancement of women in all sectors including their representation in the decision-making process from the highest to the root level.

27. Currently, 404,591 women are serving in the public services and 39,139 women are in grade 9 or higher. The number of women being recruited through BCS, the flagship public services recruitment exam of the country, is increasing. 1,961 women were recruited through the 42nd BCS representing 49.02% of recruited cadres as compared to 323 women recruited in the 37th BCS representing 24.6% of the recruited cadres.²¹

28. Bangladesh continues to train women personnel of the armed forces and the Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) with a view to contributing a higher percentage of female

participants in future UN peace missions. In line with UN Security Council resolution 1325, Bangladesh has achieved the 15% target of female participation for UN Military Experts on Missions. In addition, Bangladesh has deployed 4 community female engagement teams with infantry battalions in different UN missions. So far, 962 Bangladeshi women have participated in UN Peace Missions and 415 women are currently deployed.²²

Violence against women and children²³

29. Bangladesh has adopted the National-Action-Plan-to-Prevent-Violence-Against-Women-and-Children 2018-2030. Cases of violence against women are being disposed of through speedy tribunals ensuring timely administration of justice. Evidence Act was amended to disallow character evidence against rape victims. The highest punishment for violence against women has been enhanced to the death penalty, keeping with the demand of the people. In 2018, the SC in a Writ petition (No. 10663 of 2013) banned the derogatory two-finger-test on rape survivors. Service desks attended by trained female officers are being launched in all police stations, ensuring a safe and friendly environment where women can file their case without any fear. 14 one stop crisis centers and 67 one stop crisis cells have been established to serve the victims. Moreover, 9 trauma counseling centers have been established in different regions to provide long term counseling services to traumatized women and children. NLASO also plays an active role by providing free legal counseling to victims.

30. Between 2018- April 2023, 96,278 cases have been filed under 'The Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Act'. 75,321 women and children received services from one stop crisis centers and one stop crisis cells. Additionally, 8,968 women and children received multiple counseling sessions from Trauma Counseling Centers. In the same period, 4,795,836 women and children have received service from helpline '109' [ANNEX-XVI].

31. Police Cyber Support for Women (PCSW), an all-women cyber support service, was introduced in 2020. PCSW provides necessary legal and technological support to female victims of cyber-crime while ensuring confidentiality of victim's information.

Rights specific to children²⁴

32. In 2018, the Children Act-2013 was amended to provide better protection to children. The role of family is recognized as fundamental to the development of a child. As such, all employers have a statutory obligation to provide a minimum 4-months of paid maternity leave. The government is currently in the process of drafting a law to protect the rights of abandoned children.

Preventing child marriage²⁵

33. National-Action-Plan-to-End-Child-Marriage 2018-2030 was adopted to completely eliminate child marriage by 2041. Child marriage Restraint Rules-2018 has been adopted clarifying the procedures to apply the special provisions of Child marriage restraint act-2017 and avoid its misuse. An IT system has been launched to check the age of bride and groom using birth certificate, NID, SSC, or HSC certificates to prevent child marriage. Between 2017-2022, the licenses of 40 marriage registrars and 3 notary public were terminated for involvement in child marriage. 15 million girl students are receiving stipends to prevent child marriage. Between 2012-April 2023, 10,024 child marriages have been stopped through calls received in helpline '109'.

Birth registration

34. Bangladesh maintains mandatory online birth registration through The Birth and Death Registration Information System (BDRIS) for its population, compliant with article 7 of the UNCRC. By the end of 2022, a total of 214,149,966 online births and 2,699,466 deaths have been registered.

Violence against children and exploitation²⁶

35. Bangladesh is committed to preventing violence against children in all settings. Corporal punishment in educational institutions has been banned. In addition, abuse, neglect, desertion, exploitation of children has been criminalized through the Children Act-2013. Since 2018, 13,998 cases have been filed for crimes against children.

36. In 2020, the government has taken initiative to establish woman, child, elderly and disabled friendly Service Desks staffed by trained female personnel in every police station to provide victims with a safe and friendly environment to file their cases. Between 2020-April 2023, 645,547 beneficiaries have visited these Service Desks to receive different types of services.

Rights specific to persons with disability²⁷

37. National-Action-Plan-for-the-Development-of-Persons-with-Disabilities has been adopted. Additionally, an information system has been established to maintain up-to-date and accurate statistics on individuals with disabilities and the specificity of their disabilities to address their distinct requirements and over 3 million have been identified [ANNEX-XXI].

38. The government runs 5 schools for children with visual disabilities, 8 schools for persons with speech-and-hearing impairments, and 74 special schools for children with intellectual and other disabilities. For skill-development of teachers in special education, bachelor's and master's programs on Special education are being offered. The government is running a program through selected schools in 64 districts to provide integrated education to disabled students alongside non-disabled students. Students with Autism and NDDs receive extra 30 minutes during public exams and if necessary, parents or teachers can be with them. Besides, braille textbooks and other needed aids are provided for free to all disabled students.

39. The government provides free therapeutic services to disabled people through 103 disability service and help centres and 40 mobile therapy vans are used to reach remote areas. Bangla Sign-Language training module has been developed to train health professionals. Disabled accessibility has been incorporated in Bangladesh National Building Code-2020 (BNBC) and ramps are being constructed in city corporation areas.

Housing and employment of disabled persons

40. The government has a 28-seat Cerebral Palsy (CP) Children's Disability Home to host homeless disabled children. 32-seat male and female hostels have been set up to empower job seekers with disabilities. So far, the number of beneficiaries is 400. 'Emporia' software was developed and launched for skill development and employment of persons with disabilities. Employment fairs are organized every year for persons with disabilities and 2450 people have found jobs through them so far.

Rights of ethnic minorities and CHT Peace Accord²⁸

41. Bangladesh has formulated legislative and policy measures for the protection of minorities and harmonious coexistence in the society. The number of ethnic minorities in Bangladesh is about 18 lacs, about 1% of the total population.

42. A 25% provision is allocated for ethnic minority students for admission at Rangamati medical college and a 5% quota is reserved at undergraduate-level of other government universities. Moreover, pre-primary education in the mother tongue of some ethnic minorities (Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo, and Sadri) has been introduced and students receive free textbooks in their respective mother languages.

43. Ethnic minorities have a 5% quota in government, semi-government, and autonomous body job recruitment (grade 11-20). They also enjoy 3 optional holidays for their traditional Boisabi festivals, occurring before and after 'PahelaBaishakh' (Bengali New Year). There are 10 academic and cultural institutions established by the government to preserve and promote the culture of ethnic minorities [ANNEX-XVIII].

44. A committee has been formed to review the implementation status of the CHT Peace Accord. To date, 65 out of the 72 clauses of the Accord have been implemented, 3 have been partially implemented and 4 remain under the implementation process. Out of 33 transferable subjects/departments, 30 have been transferred to Rangamati Hill District Council (HDC), 29 have been transferred to Khagrachari HDC and 28 have been transferred to Bandarban HDC. Consultations with the concerned Ministry for transferring of the remaining subjects/departments to respective HDCs are ongoing. However, the presence of a few armed groups and their activity related to illegal arms trafficking, toll collection and criminal activities in the region remains a concern for the LEAs. Some difficult issues like settlement of land disputes or holding HDC and CHTRC elections may take some more time.

45. The Chairman of the HDCs and two-thirds of the members can only be elected from minority ethnic communities, ensuring the majority representation of ethnic minorities in the Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) region.

46. The government is committed to protecting the right over land by ethnic minorities in the CHT region. As per section 64 of the CHT Regional Council Act, no land in the 3 hill districts can be leased out, settled with, sold out, purchased, or transferred without the prior approval of the HDC. Chittagong Hill District Land Dispute Resolution Commission has been reconstituted. The finalization of the rules and regulations to resolve the disputes is in process.

47. The government is continuously working on various types of socio-economic development in the CHT. Solar power project has been adopted for the remote areas of the three hilly areas where it isn't possible to provide electricity through the national grid. 600 destitute ethnic minority families have been rehabilitated in specially designed 'machang' houses under the 'Ashrayan-2' project. 1,036 km of border road is being constructed to improve connectivity of the region with the rest of the country. 4,800 neighbourhood centers have been constructed to ensure sustainable social service delivery. 221 village common forests have been developed benefitting 38,314 people. Cultivation of various crops including spices, coffee, cashews and fruits are being supported, elevating 9600 poor farmer families [ANNEX-XVIII].

Rights of religious minorities and freedom of religion²⁹

48. Bangladesh is committed to upholding a "zero-tolerance" policy against any violence against religious minorities, irrespective of the pretext. To foster religious diversity and encourage inter-faith harmony, the government promotes the principle of "Each unto his or her religion, Festivals are for All." In the International Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief-2022, Bangladesh pledged to renovate/restore 2,300 Hindu temples, 65 Christian churches, construct 564 model mosques, and fund a Buddhist monastery at Gautam Buddha's birthplace. Law enforcement agencies (LEAs) ensure the safety and security of religious minority communities not only during their religious festivals but also at other times.

49. In 2023, a court sentenced a man to 16 months imprisonment for placing a Quran in a temple in 2021 which disturbed communal harmony and caused desecration of place of worship by angry mobs. In that incident, 142 total criminal cases, including some DSA cases, were filed for the attacks, spreading confusion and publishing false information in social media to incite communal violence and legal proceedings are ongoing to prosecute all perpetrators. A series of steps and actions have been taken by the government to rehabilitate the victims, ensure security and boost the confidence of the minority community. Due to a boost in morale, puja festival venues in the country have been steadily increasing, reaching 31,137 in 2021 from 21,913 in 2009 [ANNEX-XX].

50. The government is implementing the "Increasing-Religious-Harmony-and-Awareness" project to promote a correct and peaceful understanding of religion among the people by increasing awareness, discouraging militancy and promoting tolerance. Social harmony committees in 142 sub districts and Institutions such as Islamic Foundation, Hindu-Welfare-Trust, Buddhist-Religious-Welfare-Trust and Christian-Religious-Welfare-Trust are organizing various programmes such as meetings, seminars, interfaith dialogues, trainings, workshops and other activities with community and faith leaders, students, parents

and various sections of society to promote religious harmony and ethical values. Interfaith dialogues, community engagement, and strict actions against hate speech and religious extremism have played a significant role in promoting harmony and safeguarding the rights of religious minorities.

Rights of socially marginalized and vulnerable groups

51. Bangladesh recognizes the rights of various marginalized and vulnerable groups and maintains appropriate measures to empower them.

Migrant workers³⁰

52. Bangladesh continues to ensure and uphold the rights of migrant workers through the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment and 30 labour welfare wings in Bangladesh missions around the world. The 8th Five-year plan (2020-2025) contains a 10-point 'Paradigm Shift Agenda' to improve overseas employment and the well-being of migrant workers. The Overseas Employment and Migrants (Recruiting Agents' License and Conduct) Rules-2019 has been enacted to regulate recruiting agents. Policy on Health-Examination of Bangladeshi Workers Going Abroad was amended. The government is working to formulate policy on the reintegration of migrants and diaspora. 'PrabasBandhu call centre' has been launched for resolving problems and complaints of migrant workers, especially female migrant workers. 'Amiprobashi' app has been launched to help migrant workers with information services.

53. 23-member Vigilance Task Forces have been formed at the sub-district level to conduct field level surveillance and monitoring against unsafe immigration, human trafficking and illegal immigration. Special focus has been given towards the safety of women workers by forming "Women Workers Protection Cell". Measures are being taken to ensure that women migrant workers can maintain means including cell phones at their workplace to communicate with Bangladesh mission if necessary.

54. To ensure transparency in the recruitment process, agencies are only allowed to recruit from the BMET database. Migration clearance is issued only after the employer and the recruited worker sign an employment contract, which must include provisions on wages, accommodation facilities, duration of employment, compensation amount in the event of death or injury, and the cost of migration.

55. During Covid-19, various measures were adopted including providing airport assistance, extending loans and social security benefits to repatriated workers, grants for families of migrant workers who died due to covid, distribution of relief, health protection materials and awareness activities home and abroad. In addition, covid tests, priority vaccination and vaccine certificates were ensured for migrant workers.

56. Bangladesh is working with development partners such as IOM and ILO regarding migrant workers' rights. Bangladesh is also working bilaterally to ensure rights and prevent the exploitation of migrant workers. Zero cost migration has been ensured in 1 destination while the cost is fixed for 16 destinations.

Refugees³¹

57. Despite not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Bangladesh has been hosting Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs), also known as Rohingyas, for decades. Since 2017, nearly a million of FDMNs have crossed the border. Out of humanitarian consideration, the Bangladesh Government rendered safe temporary shelter to FDMNs at Cox's Bazar. The overcrowded and unplanned dwellings of FDMNs in Cox's Bazar have been posing a threat to their standard of living as well as the environment and internal security.

58. The government is implementing a project at Bhasan Char to provide temporary shelter with education, medical, and entertainment facilities for FDMNs through Eco-friendly and Sustainable Development. For livelihood on the island, agriculture, fish cultivation, livestock farming, and handicrafts are done along with other income-generating

activities. After the successful implementation of the project, the standard of living of 32,565 of the FDMNs have improved.

59. The government has been ensuring education for Rohingya children with the support of international organizations. A one stop crisis cell and a regional trauma counselling centre have been established in Cox's Bazar and 142,837 Rohingya women and children received counselling services from trauma centres and mental health service centers so far [ANNEX-XVI]. Currently, the government is working with UNICEF to introduce standardized education in Myanmar curriculum to the Rohingya children.

60. Bangladesh remains committed to the FDMNs right to safe, dignified and voluntary return to their homes in Myanmar. Though Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a repatriation deal and formed a Joint Working Group (JWG) on 23 November 2021, Myanmar has not yet taken any initiative to take its citizens back. Rigid attitude of the Myanmar regime towards the crisis hinders the resolution thereof through peaceful talks. Tripartite meetings between Bangladesh, Myanmar and China didn't bear fruit due to the attitude of the Myanmar regime. In 2022, the Myanmar military government expressed their willingness to take back 700 listed FDMNs in a letter to Bangladesh. Bangladesh wants to return 1,100 Rohingyas based on their family ties.

61. There have been repeated complaints by local people regarding rampant drug dealings in Rohingya camps. Some FDMNs are engaging in drug dealings to earn quick money in an effort to migrate abroad.

Bede, dalits, harijans, tea plantation workers and third-gender persons

62. Bedes is an underprivileged riverine nomadic community with an estimated population of 75,000. The government has taken various measures to increase their quality of life, access to government services and integration into mainstream society. These initiatives include elderly allowance, education stipend, livelihood development training, financial assistance for livelihood development etc benefitting 9,564 persons in 2022 [ANNEX-XVII].

63. Socioeconomically and educationally underprivileged populations such as dalits, harijans, tea plantation workers and hijras receive similar government assistance including allowance, education incentives and livelihood development assistance. As of 2022, 134,882 people benefit from these programs annually as opposed to 58,582 beneficiaries in 2018 [ANNEX-XVII]. In 2021, Nazrul Islam Ritu was the country's first hijra person to be elected as the chairman of a Union Parishad.

Civil and political rights³²

Access to justice and impunity³³

64. Bangladesh is committed to strengthening the judicial system to ensure justice for all and prevent impunity of any perpetrator. The evidence act was amended to allow the use and examination of digital and electronic evidence.

65. Toll-free number '999' has been introduced by the government to deliver prompt services in emergency situations. Between 2018-2022, 999,600 emergency services have been delivered through the calls received [ANNEX-VII].

66. To ensure basic access to justice during the COVID lockdowns, virtual courts were established through the 'Use of Information Communication Technology by Court Act-2020'. Between May 2020- August 2022, 314,842 bail petitions were heard through virtual courts and bail was granted to 158,507 individuals. Various digital solutions such as SMS notification to witnesses, online cause list, judicial monitoring dashboard, and the My Court mobile app have been introduced to enhance the judicial process.

67. Since 2019, new positions have been created for 381 court and tribunal judges, 56 magistrates, and 529 court staff to strengthen the administration of justice. Additionally, 2,261 Judicial officials attended various training, workshops and other capacity-building programs at home and abroad [ANNEX-XV]. These included specialized training on ADR,

money-laundering, cybercrime, and terrorism financing etc. Some of the training was conducted with international partnerships.

Accelerating trial process³⁴

68. The ever-growing backlog of cases fuelled by a lack of funding and manpower has been a major challenge for Bangladesh to ensure access to justice for all. Various measures were taken to accelerate the delivery of justice. ADR services rendered through courts, NLASO, and other governmental and non-governmental bodies have played a significant role in reducing the backlog of cases. Between 2018-2022, 81,617 cases have been resolved through mediation by legal aid officers realizing BDT 949.5 million in compensation [ANNEX-XIV]. In order to improve the backlog of cases, since June 2022, a comprehensive suite of digital solutions has been implemented nationwide to streamline and enhance the delivery of judicial services and information within the subordinate courts of the country. These transformative measures include the introduction of the Online Cause List, Judicial Monitoring Dashboard, and the MyCourt mobile app. The case disposal rate has greatly increased now standing at 95% on a national average. The government is working towards implementing a technology driven e-judiciary.

69. Village courts have also played a role in reducing the backlog of cases and providing speedy resolution of disputes. Till June 2021, 199,291 disputes have been resolved out of 236,868 disputes filed in village courts. 1669 disputes have been sent to village courts from District courts for resolution.

International crimes tribunal³⁵

70. International Crimes Tribunal, Bangladesh (ICT-BD) was established in 2010 to conduct trials of genocide, crimes against humanity and other international crimes committed during the liberation war of 1971. Between 2018-2022, 20 cases have been disposed of by the tribunal and 33 cases and 8 miscellaneous cases are ongoing. The rules and procedures of the tribunal are fully compliant with the rights of the accused enshrined in Article 14 of ICCPR. The judgments of the tribunal are regularly uploaded to the tribunal's own website as well as the Legal Tools Database of the International Criminal Court.

Safeguarding the rights to life and liberty of persons

Human trafficking³⁶

71. The-Prevention-and-Suppression-of-Human-Trafficking-Act (PSHTA) criminalizes all forms of human trafficking. It ensures the protection of human trafficking victims and their rights and ensures safe migration. 3,340 cases have been filed under PSHTA against 14,774 human traffickers from 2018 to March 2023. National-Plan-of-Action on preventing human trafficking in the country-2018-22 has been adopted and steps have been taken to run the NPA through 2025.

72. Counter Trafficking Committees (CTC) have been formed in District, Upozilla and Union levels comprising representation from different government agencies, local government bodies and non-government organizations.

73. A total number of 4,790 people were victims of human trafficking during the period of 2018 to 2023 and around 90% of these victims were rescued.

Countering terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking³⁷

74. Bangladesh continues to maintain a 'zero-tolerance' policy against all forms of terrorism and extremism. The specialized units of Bangladesh Police i.e, Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU), Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police follow international norms and standards in combating terrorism.

75. Bangladesh employs the most effective and up to date strategies and standards in dealing with terrorism. A combination of 'hard' approach and 'soft' deradicalization

programs are utilized effectively to curb any form of terrorism, extremism and any sympathy towards them.

76. Under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009 seven militants were sentenced to death in 2019 for their involvement in the 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attack. Courts convicted two members of the banned terrorist organization Jamaat-ul Mujahideen for attacks on the Shia community in 2015. Law enforcement agencies conduct physical and virtual surveillance of known terrorists and suspects, share information between agencies home and abroad and conduct raids in terrorist hideouts to prevent attacks before they can happen.

77. As part of the deradicalization, family, community and other social units as well as local culture and spirituality are given priority to ensure a sound support structure for those who are at risk of accepting terrorist or extremist ideologies. Seminars, workshops and other events are also being held regularly to build awareness and trust in anti-terrorism efforts. The government has kept the opportunities for the extremists to return to normal life. 462 extremists have been rehabilitated under a 2019 surrender program. Another 315 extremists have surrendered in 2023 and would also go through the rehabilitation process. By adopting all these pragmatic approaches, Bangladesh has emerged as a role model for other countries in combating terrorism and extremism in a successful manner. Bangladesh stands at 43rd in Global terrorism index 2022 as opposed to 30th in 2017 which is a significant achievement.

78. While the aforementioned targeted interventions started yielding positive impact in curbing terrorism and violent extremism, transnational crimes like human and drug trafficking, and societal violence including violence against women, the US sanction on RAB on the other hand transmitted a favorable signal to the criminals, terrorists and drug/human traffickers to redouble their strength to continue their illegal activities, which may eventually hamper regional peace, security and stability.

Drug trafficking

79. Bangladesh maintains a zero-tolerance policy against illicit drugs and narcotics. The Narcotics Control Act-2018 has been enacted keeping stringent punishment for anyone involved in producing, smuggling, distributing or using illicit drugs. The government is working through national and international cooperation to eliminate drug trafficking, addressing both the supply and the demand.

80. LEAs are working tirelessly to prevent the spread of illicit drugs and narcotics in the society. During January 2018-April 2023, 485,729 cases were filed against 647,052 persons under the Narcotics Control Act-2018. Since 2018, 27,605 discussions, meetings and seminars have been held to increase awareness against narcotics of which 683 were held in prisons. In addition, 31,109 lectures were held in educational institutions and mentors were selected to spread the anti-narcotics message. 3,176 TVC and TV scroll campaigns, 312 print media campaigns and 89 aired talk shows were also used to increase public support and engagement in anti-narcotics efforts [ANNEX-VIII].

81. There are 7 publicly funded addiction treatment and rehabilitation centers while 8 more are in the process of being established. In addition, 40 private addiction treatment centers receive government grants.

LEAs and human rights³⁸

82. Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) in Bangladesh are highly sensitized to human rights. The importance and duty of honouring human rights and the consequences of violations is an important aspect of LEA training. Besides the training, workshops and other formal and informal meetings also promote the need to uphold the law including the constitutional rights of the citizens. During the 2018-2022 period, 87,300 LEA personnel were trained by 873 courses on human rights issues.

Enforced disappearance³⁹

83. Offences related to all forms of kidnapping or abduction are covered under sections 363 to 369 of the Penal Code. These penal provisions are equally applicable to members of LEA as much as any other perpetrator.

84. If any LEA personnel breaks the law or is found to have unlawfully exercised force or authority, they invariably face appropriate punishment, including departmental and criminal charges. Since 2015, 1,692 criminal cases have been filed against LEA personnel. In the same time, major departmental punishments were given to 8,488 police personnel and minor punishments to 108,833 personnel [ANNEX-IX]. In 2017, 25 RAB officials including 3 top officials, were convicted (including death penalty for 14) for their involvement in the abduction and murder of seven individuals in Narayanganj. In 2022, a Cox's Bazar court sentenced seven DB personnel to 12 years imprisonment in a case over kidnapping a businessman and extorting ransom from him. In another case in 2021, five people, including three police personnel, were arrested for allegedly abducting a man and his mother from Dinajpur and demanding ransom for their release. In January 2022 a court handed down death sentences to two police officers and life imprisonment to six officers for killing Rashed Khan Sinha at a check-post. The SC in response to a Writ Petition (No.2833/2017) directed the Inspector-General of Police to take necessary action against 03 police officers of Satkhira district for their negligence in dealing with a missing person incident in 2016.

85. The present government remains engaged constructively with the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance (WGEID), as a list of 76 persons purporting to be victims of enforced disappearance was transmitted by WGEID. Two meetings were held in 2022 and 2023 with WGEID. Some of the accusations were very old, reaching up to 27 years. Among those on the list, whereabouts of 9 persons was found and communicated to WGEID, 2 are foreign nationals (about whom no judicial or police records were found regarding the said missing incident), 28 persons have criminal cases including murder cases against them and are absconding to avoid justice. There were 10 cases that the relatives didn't cooperate with LEAs providing information/feedback as was required for investigation, and the remaining 27 cases are under investigation.

86. Between 2018-2021, a total of 130,222 persons were reported as missing and 125,159 of them were recovered by LEAs [ANNEX-IX]. Miscreants' using the name and disguise of LEAs to carry out abductions and kidnappings has emerged as a worrying trend. In 2022, 6 persons were arrested for kidnapping a man disguised as LEA personnel and the victim was rescued. In 2018, an abduction attempt with a microbus by 4 persons disguised as LEA detectives was foiled by the witnesses. Numerous abduction allegations against LEAs were proven to be false [ANNEX-IX]. Due to the government's effort in rescuing missing persons, punishing deviant LEAs, criminals disguised as LEAs and exposing false accusations, the number of allegations against LEAs have come down to nearly zero in recent years.

Torture and inhumane treatment⁴⁰

87. To date, 24 cases have been filed under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act-2013. Section 11 of the act allows the complainant to seek protection and empowers courts to take appropriate measures to grant it. In 2020, a court in Dhaka sentenced three police officers to life imprisonment for killing a person in their custody through torture in 2014. Each of the convicts were also ordered to pay 2 lakhs in compensation to the victim's family. In 2021, the supreme court issued a suo-motu rule against 2 subordinate judges for failing to comply with SC guideline on remand.

Death penalty

88. Bangladesh continues to consider the death sentence to be appropriate for the most heinous crimes. However, Bangladesh is gradually reducing the applicability of the death penalty with other punishments such as life-imprisonment. Of all the laws enacted between 2018-2023, only the Narcotics-Control-Act-2018 and the amended Prevention-of-Violence-Against-Women-and-Children-Act contain the death penalty. However, those are reenactment or enhancement of existing law and not any newly introduced offense. The SC held in *Anowar Hossain Vs. State* 74 DLR (AD) 55 that where the period spent in the condemned cell is not due to any fault of the convict and where the period spent there is inordinately long, it may be considered as an extenuating ground sufficient for commutation of sentence of death.

Freedom of speech, press and the journalists⁴¹

89. The Constitution of Bangladesh fully guarantees freedom of expression and speech under Article 39. For Print and electronic Media, there is no censorship system by the government in Bangladesh. The vague section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act-2006 was repealed and replaced by more specific provisions in the DSA-2018. Before formulating any law or policy relating to the media, the government arranges inter-ministerial meetings, stakeholders' meeting and review all relevant international standards. Data protection bill was drafted and revised as per stakeholder consultation and suggestions and currently uploaded online the revised draft for further opinions.

90. DSA was enacted to combat cybercrimes, not to hamper freedom of speech or to harass press. On the contrary, freedom of speech and protection for the press are established rights grounded under article 39 of the constitution.

91. The government observed the misuse of some provisions of DSA, and hence in 2021, a committee was formed to review the DSA. The committee held numerous meetings including a meeting with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and examined similar provisions in cyber laws of other countries. After scrutinizing the proposed amendments, the Government initially planned to amend the DSA by September 2023. On 7 August 2023, the Cabinet made the decision to change some of the provisions of the DSA to enact the new Cyber Security Act' 2023. The new law will reflect necessary changes particularly with regard to curb misuse of the law, and to ensure freedom of journalists in the cyber space. The government is working to develop a digital database for journalists to ensure the rights of journalists in line with international standards.

92. The government is committed to ensure a safe working environment for journalists and prevent intimidation, harassment and violence against journalists. In February 2021 a tribunal sentenced five terrorists for the murder of blogger-writer Avijit Roy in 2015. In February 2021, a court sentenced eight terrorists to death in connection with the murder of publisher Faysal Arefin Dipon in 2015. In March 2022, a tribunal in Sylhet had sentenced four terrorists to death for the murder of blogger and writer Ananta Bijoy Das in 2015. In October 2022 a Sylhet court sentenced six people to life imprisonment for their involvement in murder of journalist Foteh Usmani.

Civil society, social media and human rights defenders⁴²

93. Effective measures have been taken to ensure freedom of expression both online and offline. For instance, the DSA protects the freedom of expression of women, minorities, journalists and activists from online targeted harassment and abuse. National Institute of Mass Communication, Bangladesh Press Institute, Information Commission and Bangladesh Journalist Welfare Trust arrange training, workshops, and dialogue programmes for the journalists. Bangladesh Journalist Trust welfare works for the welfare of the journalists by providing them with financial support and scholarships.

94. The government is committed to ensure that human right activists and civil society are able to carry out their activities without fear of safety. In August 2021, the Dhaka Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal sentenced to death six terrorists for the murder of LGBT campaigner Xulhaz Mannan and his theatre activist friend Khandaker Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy in 2016.

Economic, social and cultural rights

Right to economic and social development and SDG⁴³

95. The 8th five-year plan (2020-2025) reflects Bangladesh's commitment to the implementation of the SDGs. According to the Sustainable Development Report 2022, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in implementing SDGs, ranking 104th compared to ranking 119th in 2019. It was one of the highest progress of all countries. In recognition of Bangladesh's steady progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was conferred with the SDG Progress Award in 2021 by the UN Sustainable Development Solution Network (SDSN).

96. Bangladesh has adopted a Whole-of-the-Society approach for implementing SDGs, involving all government bodies, NGOs, CSOs, development partners, private sector, academia and other stakeholders. Committees have been formed from central government to grassroots level. Government ministries/divisions have been assigned lead, co-lead or associate obligation for implementing each SDG target.

97. The government has undertaken the ‘My Village, My Town’ Initiative in order to extend modern urban facilities to villages focusing on sustainability such as renewable energy. A realistic action plan (framework) has been formulated for the transformation of 87,230 villages in line with SDGs and Vision 2041.

*Elimination of poverty*⁴⁴

98. Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in the past 5 years in terms of elimination of extreme poverty. Despite the challenges faced by the economy due to COVID-19, the poverty rate has been reduced to 18.7% in 2022 compared to 24.3% in 2016. At the same time, the extreme poverty rate has been reduced to 5.6% in 2022 compared to 12.9% in 2016. The per capita income has grown from \$1610 in 2016 to \$2,882 in 2022. ‘My House My Farm’ project has been launched to establish family farms in households living in poverty through cooperatives, encourage savings habits and provide lending facilities.

99. Bangladesh has expanded financial services across the country, introducing Mobile Financial Services (MFS) and special accounts and allowing people to open accounts with as little as \$0.1. Over 60 million people are using MFS. Formal financial services have been extended to around 50% of the population as opposed to 31% in 2014. The Bangladesh Bank of the Government invited applications for Digital Banking License as part of her financial inclusion policy.

Right to work and favourable work conditions⁴⁵

100. Bangladesh has adopted Bangladesh EPZ Labour Act-2019, EPZ Labour rules-2022 and the National-Action-Plan-on-the-Labour-Sector-of-Bangladesh, 2021-2026 (NAPLSB). In 2021, Bangladesh submitted a roadmap to ILO for addressing outstanding labor issues. In 2022, Bangladesh ratified the ILO Convention 138 on minimum age and the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention (P029). Bangladesh Labour Act and Bangladesh labour rules were amended in 2018 and 2022 respectively reducing the membership requirement for forming trade unions to 20% from 30% workers of the establishment and repealing provision to employ children below 12 years in light work. A Tripartite Working Group is working on further amendment of the labour act as per ILO observation. Registration process has been simplified and license is provided within 55 days following the SOPs on “Trade Union Registration” adopted in May 2017. The rate of valid application for successful registration of trade unions has increased from 60% in 2013 to 90% in 2022. The online trade union registration has been fully functional since October 2022. Currently no application is being accepted manually.

101. Bangladesh EPZ Labour Act-2019 gives workers the right to form Workers’ Welfare Association (WWA), right to strike and protection from anti-union practices. As of May 2022, 237 WWAs have been formed and registered and 611 charter of demands have been negotiated in EPZs. BEPZA Helpline ‘16128’ has been adopted to strengthen the existing grievance redressal system for workers. Modalities of DIFE inspection have been adopted through the EPZ labour rules.

102. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the unemployment rate has come down from 4.3 in 2018 to 3.2 in 2022 despite the challenges of COVID-19. Women’s maternity leave and benefits are monitored among other things during labour inspections to ensure favourable work conditions and equality for women in the workplace. Between 2018-2022, maternity welfare benefits have been ensured for 58,122 female workers, 6,430 child daycare centers were set up in factories and institutions and 7,313 cases have been filed through 216,533 labour inspections [ANNEX-X].

103. The overall manpower of the Department of Inspection for Factory and Establishment (DIFE) has been increased by four folds from 314 in 2013 to 1156 in 2023. The number of

inspectors was increased by 5 times from 131 in 2023 to 711 in 2023. To ensure workplace safety, an Industrial Safety Unit was formed with the DIFE in 2022.

Entrepreneurship and innovation programs⁴⁶

104. The government believes that the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship is essential to generate jobs, ensure better work conditions, and improve the standard of living. Multiple initiatives including the idea projects and Bangabandhu Innovation Grant are being run to create an accelerator and accompanying ecosystem of entrepreneurs, investors, mentors and advisors to promote Bangladesh as a global hub for tech entrepreneurship. Tech entrepreneurs are getting access to resources, grants, funding, networking and workspace. Additionally, SME entrepreneurs, especially in the cottage and agriculture industry, are getting access to training, resources, and funding for their businesses.

105. Over 33,564 people have been provided various kinds of IT training and skill development through various government programs since 2018. Additionally, over 27,405 people have been trained on mobile application and game development. Over 9,000 micro-entrepreneurs are being empowered through community level digital centers.

106. Over 10,500 women have received 4 categories of IT training through the She-Power Project [ANNEX-XIX]. Additionally, 5,300 women entrepreneurs have been trained on IT and supported with resources. The government is moving forward to train an additional 25,125 women.

Social security measures and standard of living⁴⁷

107. The National Social Security Strategy, 2nd Perspective Plan (2021-2041) and 8th Five Year Plan ensures a safety net for disadvantaged and marginalized people to supplement their standard of living. Social security programs in Bangladesh have been greatly expanded since the 3rd cycle of UPR. Elderly allowance recipients have increased from 3.5 million in 2018 to 5.7 million in 2022. Widow-and-destitute-women allowance recipients have increased from 1.27 million in 2018 to 2.48 million in 2022. In 2022, 2.01 million disabled persons received allowance compared to 0.825 million in 2018. Between 2018-2022, BDT 4.967 billion was spent on social security measures for Bede, Dalits, Harijans, Tea Plantation Workers, transgender persons and other disadvantaged groups. The 'Universal Pension Management Act, 2023' has been passed by the Parliament to roll out the scheme from FY2023-24. Under the proposed scheme, a beneficiary can enjoy pension benefits. The expatriate Bangladeshi will be able to participate in this scheme. If the pensioner dies before attaining the age of 75 years while on pension, the nominee of the pensioner will be entitled to the pension for the remaining period of the pensioner's completion of 75 years. Introduction of Universal Pension System is a very significant initiative for the inclusive development strategy of Hon'ble Prime Minister.

108. Sathi, a women agent network has been launched to empower rural and marginalized groups through financial literacy.

109. The government operates 85 government ShishuParibar (orphanage), 6 ChhotamoniNibas (infant orphanage), 3 Distressed Child Training and Rehabilitation Center, 6 technical training centres, 6 safe homes for women and children and 6 government shelters. 8 old-age homes are currently being set up. In addition, grants are given to private orphanages and old-age homes.

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation⁴⁸

110. The National Strategy for water supply and Sanitation was revised and updated in 2021 to adapt to emerging challenges. The improved sanitation coverage is 88.8% compared to 73.3% in 2016 and 99% of the population has access to safe drinking water. To increase access to clean water in rural areas, 614,196 sources have been established and 2,979 km of pipeline constructed between 2018-2022. Moreover, 119,648 sanitary latrines and 5,556 public/community toilets were built in rural areas between 2018-2022 to increase sanitation coverage [ANNEX-XI]. The government is focusing on increasing the use of surface water and rainwater and reducing the dependence on groundwater.

111. The government is keeping a watchful eye on the rising salinity in coastal areas and acute shortage of drinking water in remote hilly areas. Necessary measures to conserve rainwater by hand pumps, tube wells, and deep tube wells have been taken in public places such as markets. Solar Powered Desalination units and Gravity Field System (GFS) are being set up to supply desalinated freshwater and conserve spring water in hill districts respectively.

*Access to food*⁴⁹

112. Bangladesh is working towards ensuring food security for its population through the National-Food-and-Nutrition-Security-Policy-Action-Plan (2021-2030). The SDG2 milestone for 2025 regarding reducing the prevalence of undernourishment to 12% has already been achieved as the prevalence of undernourishment in Bangladesh has fallen from 15.1% in 2017 to 11.4% in 2022.

113. The government provides subsidies on staple food items such as rice, flour, cooking oil, sugar, lentils, chickpea and onions through various programmes to ensure food security to low-income communities. Moreover, free or highly subsidized food items are provided to marginalized groups and people in extreme poverty. Between 2018-2022, a total of 13.3 million metric tonnes of food items were distributed for free or through subsidies [Annex-XII]. Cooking oils are mandated to be fortified with vitamin A and table salt is mandated to be iodized to eliminate micronutrient malnutrition. The government is distributing iron folic supplementation for women and girls and vitamin A supplementation for children.

114. To combat the effects of COVID-19 on food security, BDT 8.18 billion of cash subsidy was distributed among 679,771 farmers. Additionally, 11,030 pieces of agricultural machinery worth BDT 9.26 billion were distributed among poor farmers.

Access to adequate housing⁵⁰

115. Bangladesh is implementing the Ashrayan project with its own funding to implement a unique approach towards inclusive development, also dubbed as the ‘Sheikh Hasina model’. This project is based on the motto that “Not a single person in Bangladesh will be left homeless”. Under this project, landless-homeless populations are receiving free housing along with access to other social security schemes, training, loan facilities and land for cultivation. A total of 555,432 families have been rehabilitated since its inception. In celebration of the 100th birthday anniversary and the legacy of the Father of the Nation, the government has provided 238,666 free sustainable housing to landless-homeless families since 2020 under Ashrayan-2.

116. Besides the Ashrayan project, other government initiatives include rehabilitating 10,000 slum dwellers, ensuring 100,000 affordable apartments and providing affordable housing loans to low-income housing.

Access to healthcare⁵¹

117. Bangladesh has adopted the National Strategy for Maternal Health 2019-2035 to improve the quality of maternal and neonatal healthcare. In *Syed Saifuddin Kamal v Bangladesh* 13 SCOB [2020] HCD 85, the SC gave directions to the government to enact a law to ensure emergency medical services to critically injured persons and provide legal protection to good samaritans pursuant to article 31 and 32 of the Constitution. This led to the formulation of 'EMS for Road-Accident Victims and Protection of Good Samaritans Guidelines'.

118. To ensure the health care services to rural people, the Upazila health complexes were established in all upazilas. Around 14,500 community clinics have been established at ward level to ensure free primary health care and free essential medicines including insulin to the rural population. In recognition of this flagship project by the Hon. Prime Minister, the UNGA last year adopted a resolution to term it as ‘Sheikh Hasina initiative’. Around 26 million school children have been brought under the National deworming campaign.

*Maternal and neonatal healthcare*⁵²

119. As per BBS, the infant mortality (per 1000 live births) in Bangladesh was 22 in 2021 compared to 29 reported during the 3rd cycle of UPR. The neonatal mortality (per 1000 live births) was 16 compared to 24 reported during the 3rd cycle of UPR. The maternal mortality (per 100,000 live births) has come down to 156 in 2022 compared to 170 reported during the 3rd cycle of UPR. Births attended by skilled health personnel increased from 53% in 2017-18 to 70% in 2021-22. Immunization programs, diarrhea control, Vitamin-A supplementation, improved access to healthcare and improvement in female education, income are the main factors in child & maternal mortality decline.

COVID-19 and response

120. Since the last cycle of UPR, COVID-19 has emerged as a formidable challenge to Bangladesh as well as the global healthcare system. Bangladesh was among the top 5 countries in successfully handling COVID-19 due to its prompt COVID response and healthcare capacity development in partnership with the private sector and global development partners.⁵³ Despite the high population density the death toll was only 29,462. So far, 150,799,700 people have been vaccinated and 3 doses have been ensured.

*Mental health*⁵⁴

121. Bangladesh has enacted the Mental Health Act-2018, replacing the outdated 'Indian Lunacy Act-1912' and adopted the 'National Mental Health Policy 2022'. Bangladesh has been included in the WHO's Special Initiative for Mental Health and is running in 4 pilot districts. The Pabna mental health hospital is being upgraded to international standards, while eight divisional-level hospitals are being modernized with dedicated mental health units. Mental health support is being given to special needs children through Shishu Bikash Kendra. These efforts aim to provide comprehensive, inclusive and accessible mental health care.

Right to education⁵⁵

122. Bangladesh continues to strive to achieve free and compulsory education guaranteed by the Constitution primarily through the Compulsory Primary Education Act. In 2018, Bangladesh launched the Fourth Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP4) in partnership with various development partners.

123. To ensure high enrollment and low dropout, the government provides free textbooks to all students. Between 2018-2022, 1.75 billion free textbooks were distributed among students. Additionally, 1.1 million free textbooks were provided to 5 ethnic minorities in their mother tongue and 41,016 braille textbooks were distributed among visually challenged students [ANNEX-XIII]. Moreover, 14 million students are benefiting from stipends. Under National School Meal Policy-2019, 3 million children in poverty-prone areas are receiving nutrition-dense cooked-meals and micronutrient-fortified biscuits at school on alternate days to increase participation, concentration and productivity.

124. According to the BANBEIS Report 2021, the number of students enrolled in primary schools was 20,100,972. The net enrollment rate was 97.42% with girls surpassing 97.44%. Primary cycle drop-out rate decreased to 14.15% in 2021 from 18.6% in 2018, with girls experiencing a drop to 13.25% from 15.69% in the same period.

125. In order to improve access to and quality of education, 130,293 additional classrooms, 64,315 sources of safe drinking water, and 45,000 gender-segregated and disabled-friendly Wash Blocks are being constructed in educational institutions. 288,995 teachers were trained in subject-based training to deliver quality lessons.

126. Every school has been provided with a laptop, multimedia projector, and internet connections to establish multimedia classrooms. 4,176 Sheikh Russel Digital Labs have been established in educational Institutions around the Country. 105,755 teachers were trained in ICT and 100,000 teachers were trained on conducting online classes during COVID-19. The government has launched 'Muktopaath' platform to facilitate ICT-enabled education for the youth.

127. The Bureau of Non-Formal Education has been set up to implement Non-Formal Education Act-2014. So far 2,054,763 people, aged 15-45, from deprived communities, have been taught to read and write. Additionally, 565,987 unenrolled and dropout children between the ages of 8-14 are receiving primary education.

Human rights and climate change⁵⁶

128. For the purpose of combating Climate Change and its negative impacts, Bangladesh has formulated Bangladesh-Climate-Change-Strategy-and-Action-Plan (BCCSAP), National Adaptation Plan 2023-2050, Bangladesh Delta Plan-2100, Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan 2022-2041 and Renewable energy policy. Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCT) has been established as a national financing mechanism for implementing BCCSAP. In 2020, honourable prime minister Sheikh Hasina took over the Chair of Climate Vulnerable Forum.

129. In 2021, Bangladesh submitted its updated Nationally Determined Contribution where 6.73% unconditional and additional 15.12% conditional quantified emission reduction was committed by 2030.

130. The government has introduced Saline-tolerant and Drought-Tolerant crop varieties to mitigate crop yield reduction and protect food security against climate change. The Government has also brought resilience to the vulnerable communities through climate resilient infrastructure such as cyclone shelter, embankments, climate resilient house, water purification solar plant, drainage system, rubber dam etc.

131. More than 6 million solar home systems (SHSs), 4.5 million Improved Cook Stoves (ICS) and 2,226 solar irrigation systems have been distributed and installed across the country. SHSs in off-grid areas have benefitted more than 18 million people while reducing emissions by replacing non-renewable, unsustainable alternatives. Apart from reducing GHG emissions, ICS have contributed to reduce indoor air-pollution and solar-irrigation systems have provided farmers with cheaper irrigation services compared to diesel-based pumps.

V. Future pledges

132. In pursuance to its commitment to the UPR process, Bangladesh will continue to:

- Update policies and legislations to implement its international human rights obligations.
- Make efforts to enforce different Acts aiming at the promotion and protection of human rights to make the violators of human rights accountable.
- Further strengthen national institutions that promote human rights, rule of law, democracy and good governance.
- Involve NGOs, CSOs and other stakeholders in human rights promotion at all levels.
- Promote a “culture of peace” and support collective measures against racism, sexism, xenophobia, and protect the victims against such crimes.
- Pursue its pro-people development agenda with focus on women, children, minorities, persons with disabilities, vulnerable sections of the society, climate change and sustainability.
- Engage with the UN, its treaty bodies and other human rights mechanisms of the UN as well as international partners for improvement of human rights in Bangladesh as well as promotion of human rights worldwide.

VI. Challenges and concluding remarks

133. The unprecedented challenge of COVID-19, reallocation of resources and lack of movement towards its combat and its impact on global economy have posed great hindrance to Bangladesh’ human rights measures, specially in remote places, during the last cycle of

UPR. Other challenges faced include lack of awareness, capacity constraint, manpower issues and lack of resources in some institutions. Nevertheless, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress towards reaching SDG targets and furtherance of human rights.

134. A stronger cooperation and support from the external partners including developed countries, countries from the Global South, UN agencies and entities, international financial institutions and other international organizations may play a complementary role in Bangladesh's continued efforts to promote and protect human rights of its citizens.

135. As a nation built on the sacrifices of martyrs and the struggle of freedom fighters to achieve the rights of its people, Bangladesh continues to maintain its unwavering commitment to human rights obligations. As such, Bangladesh would continue to strengthen its institutions and measures to promote and protect human rights.

Notes

- ¹ See Annex-II.
- ² Recommendation No: 147.1 and 147.2.
- ³ Recommendation No: 147.34.
- ⁴ Recommendation No: 147.3, 147.44.
- ⁵ Recommendation No: 147.82.
- ⁶ See Annex-XV.
- ⁷ Recommendation No: 147.15, 147.16, 147.17, 147.18, 147.19, 147.20, 148.6; Some CSOs have criticized NHRCB for not investigating allegations against LEAs. However, NHRCB has interpreted section 18 of NHRC act narrowly and investigated LEAs.
- ⁸ See Annex-III.
- ⁹ Recommendation No: 147.79.
- ¹⁰ See Annex-IV.
- ¹¹ Recommendation No: 147.88.
- ¹² See Annex-V.
- ¹³ See Annex-V.
- ¹⁴ Recommendation No: 147.87.
- ¹⁵ See Annex-XIV.
- ¹⁶ Recommendation No: 147.4, 147.5, 147.6.
- ¹⁷ Recommendation No: 147.6, 147.25, 147.27, 147.36.
- ¹⁸ Recommendation No: 147.26, 147.30.
- ¹⁹ Recommendation No: 147.30, 147.119, 147.120, 147.121, 147.139, 147.140, 147.142, 147.143, 147.144, 147.145, 147.146, 147.147, 148.19.
- ²⁰ Recommendation No: 147.24, 147.140.
- ²¹ See Annex-VI.
- ²² See Annex-VI.
- ²³ Recommendation No: 147.53, 147.141, 147.142, 147.145, 147.146, 147.147, 147.150, 147.152, 147.153, 148.19.
- ²⁴ Recommendation No: 147.14, 147.45, 147.46, 147.47, 147.48, 147.49, 147.50, 147.55, 147.56, 147.90, 147.142, 147.145, 147.148, 147.149, 148.2.
- ²⁵ Recommendation No: 147.53.
- ²⁶ Recommendation No: 147.45.
- ²⁷ Recommendation No: 147.152, 147.153, 147.154.
- ²⁸ Recommendation No: 147.9, 147.10, 147.11, 147.12, 147.28, 147.32, 147.155, 147.157, 148.4.
- ²⁹ Recommendation No: 147.28, 147.32, 147.63, 147.64, 147.67, 147.74, 147.156, 147.157, 148.4; some CSOs have claimed that religious minorities are vulnerable to misuse of DSA. However, they are one of the primary beneficiaries of DSA. Only 5% of the accused under DSA cases in 2022 were religious minorities despite them representing 12% of the population.
- ³⁰ Recommendation No: 147.151, 147.158, 147.159, 147.160, 147.161, 147.162, 147.163.
- ³¹ Recommendation No: 147.164, 147.165, 147.166, 147.167, 148.22.
- ³² Recommendation No: 147.44.
- ³³ Recommendation No: 147.84, 147.86, 147.88, 147.89, 147.156.
- ³⁴ Recommendation No: 147.82, 147.84, 147.85.
- ³⁵ Recommendation No: 147.83.
- ³⁶ Recommendation No: 147.39, 147.57, 147.58, 147.59, 147.60, 147.61, 147.62.
- ³⁷ Recommendation No: 147.22, 147.39, 147.40, 147.41, 147.42, 147.64.
- ³⁸ Recommendation No: 147.23.

- ³⁹ Recommendation No: 147.8, 147.54, 147.80, 148.12.
- ⁴⁰ Recommendation No: 147.8, 147.80, 148.12; CSOs have expressed concern about lack of victim protection law. However, it is already addressed in The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act-2013.
- ⁴¹ Recommendation No: 147.7, 147.23, 147.65, 147.68, 147.69, 147.70, 147.71, 147.73, 147.77, 148.3, 148.13, 148.14, 148.15.
- ⁴² Recommendation No: 147.7, 147.23, 147.66, 147.74, 147.75, 147.76, 147.77, 147.78.
- ⁴³ Recommendation No: 147.21, 147.33, 147.35, 147.91, 147.96, 147.102, 147.103; CSOs have raised concern that rural areas are under-resourced compared to urban areas. However, government projects are addressing the rural-urban divide in development through the measures mentioned in this section.
- ⁴⁴ Recommendation No: 147.88, 147.101, 147.102, 147.103, 147.104, 147.105.
- ⁴⁵ Recommendation No: 147.43, 147.92, 147.51, 147.102, 147.109, 147.110, 147.111, 147.112, 147.113, 147.114, 147.115, 147.116, 147.117, 147.118, 147.119, 147.120, 147.121, 147.150, 148.18.
- ⁴⁶ Recommendation No: 147.72, 147.132.
- ⁴⁷ Recommendation No: 147.13, 147.99, 147.100.
- ⁴⁸ Recommendation No: 147.106, 147.107, 147.108.
- ⁴⁹ Recommendation No: 147.97.
- ⁵⁰ Recommendation No: 147.98.
- ⁵¹ Recommendation No: 147.92, 147.93, 147.94, 147.95, 147.122, 147.123, 147.124, 147.153.
- ⁵² Recommendation No: 147.123.
- ⁵³ <https://www.thedailystar.net/health/disease/coronavirus/news/covid-recovery-index-bangladesh-tops-south-asia-5th-world-3018306>
- ⁵⁴ Recommendation No: 147.31, 147.124.
- ⁵⁵ Recommendation No: 147.29, 147.51, 147.52, 147.125, 147.126, 147.127, 147.128, 147.129, 147.130, 147.131, 147.132, 147.133, 147.134, 147.135, 147.136, 147.137, 147.138.
- ⁵⁶ Recommendation No: 147.37, 147.38.
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