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1.2. Overview of events in July–August 2024

On 1 July 2024, students started to protest the reinstatement of a quota system for civil service jobs[27] under the banner 'Anti-Discrimination Student Movement'.[28] The protests grew day by day,[29] and intensified after the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina referred to the students as razakars[30] (a 'highly offensive term'[31] referring to collaborators of Pakistani occupying forces during the 1971 war of independence[32]). The authorities' tolerance for the mobilisation decreased,[33] and the situation 'descended into violence'.[34] The protesters shifted from only addressing the need of a quota reform to also calling for democracy and to protesting against what they perceived as an autocratic rule under Hasina.[35] By mid-July 2024,[36] state authorities attempted to quell protests by force,[37] resulting in what some sources describe as 'mass killings'[38] or the 'July massacre'.[39] Security forces targeted peaceful protests,[40] made use of teargas, rubber bullets,[41] and lethal weapons.[42] Ruling party supporters also carried out attacks, sometimes side-by-side with the police.[43] Protesters were shot dead or injured,[44] which in turn ignited violence from the protesters' side.[45] The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) estimated that about 1 400 people may have been killed during the protests – the vast majority by military rifles and ammunition commonly used by security forces.[46] Thousands more were wounded, incapacitated, or disabled, including hundreds who lost their sight on one or both eyes[47] after being shot in the face.[48] Women protesters also faced physical violence, threats of rape, and sexual assaults by ruling party supporters.[49]

To curb protests, the government closed schools and universities,[50] introduced internet bans[51] as well as curfews[52] with 'shoot-on-sight' orders authorising security forces to shoot anyone breaching the curfews,[53] and arrested over 10 000 people.[54] In early August 2024, the protest movement became non-cooperative,[55] rejected Hasina's requests for dialogue,[56] and demanded her resignation.[57] Hasina lost the military's support, as it refused orders to open fire against civilians.[58] As crowds approached her official residence in Dhaka on 5 August 2024, Hasina boarded a military helicopter and escaped to India. Within a few hours the army chief announced that an interim government would lead Bangladesh.[59]

In response to the students' request, and after consultations with 'military chiefs, political parties, business leaders, and civil society members', the president appointed Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mohammad Yunus as interim prime minister.[60] The interim government took office on 8 August 2024 and soon announced several commissions,[61] tasked with bringing forward reform proposals[62] to restore democratic institutions.[63] The caretaker government is to lead

the country until the next election,64 which is foreseen to take place in April 2026.65 For a timeline of the protests in July–August 2024, see Annex 1: Timeline of the protests in July–August 2024.

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