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THE FUTURE OF MINORITY RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES IN THE POST-SHEIKH HASINA ERA

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I. ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the future of minority rights in Bangladesh in the aftermath of Sheikh Hasina's ouster from power on August 5, 2024, following unprecedented student-led protests. The study is framed in the context of a post-Sheikh Hasina era, where the turnover of political power is likely to bring new political and legal priorities. Specifically, the research seeks to provide an understanding of the challenges facing minority rights holders-Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and Indigenous peoples-within this transitional moment. Issues under consideration include communal violence, structural discrimination, and continued socio-economic marginalization. The study will inquire whether the existing legal and constitutional frameworks provide meaningful protection, noting that past assessments have found many of these protections to be aspirational, unenforced, or disconnected from prevailing political conditions. In analyzing this competing context, the research evaluates how minority rights were ostensibly secured under a Sheikh Hasina-dominated government that emphasized a secular framework, while also questioning whether the post-Hasina transition will sustain, reform, or dismantle these foundations. Additionally, the study will broaden its evaluation to include ongoing perpetrators of minority rights violations in the economic and societal spheres-such as land grabbing in Indigenous peoples' territories, exclusion from economic opportunities in both public and private sectors, and cultural erasure through attempts to redefine national identity in exclusionary terms. Ultimately, this research situates minority rights within Bangladesh's current political transition and assesses the potential pathways for legal and social protections in a post-conflict and post-authoritarian context.

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II. KEYWORDS

Minority Rights, Bangladesh Politics, Religious Minorities, Ethnic Minorities, Civil Society, Human Rights, Constitutional Protections, Post-Conflict Transition

III. INTRODUCTION

Sheikh Hasina's prime ministership was significant in the political context of Bangladesh, as she retained secularism and emphasized the rights of minorities. Under the government of Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League, religious and ethnic minorities-including Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and Indigenous peoples-experienced a relatively more stable and secured setting. Her government implemented various schemes and programs designed to ensure minority protection, promote secularism, and curb rising religious fundamentalism.² Nevertheless, her rule was also marked by persistent challenges: periodic eruptions of communal violence, discriminatory practices by majority sections of society, and the socio-economic exclusion of marginalized groups. While grassroots initiatives under her leadership received praise for attempting to protect minority rights, critics frequently questioned their effectiveness and sustainability.

Previous scholarly and policy analyses have highlighted the constitutional tension between secularism and the retention of Islam as the state religion, as well as recurring patterns of communal violence during electoral cycles. Reports by Minority Rights Group International, Amnesty International, and United Nations human rights mechanisms have consistently documented structural discrimination, land disputes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and enforcement deficits in minority protection laws. Building upon this body of work, the present study extends the analysis into the transitional dynamics following August 2024.

² Supriya Biswas, 'The Role of Islamist Politics in Post-Hasina Bangladesh: Minority Implications' *The Economist* (August 2024)

This long tenure lasting 15 years came to a dramatic conclusion on August 5, 2024, when Sheikh Hasina was forced to resign and leave office after weeks of mass student-led protests that began in July 2024 and intensified nationwide. The conclusion of her rule is thus no longer a matter of speculation but an accomplished reality. Shortly thereafter, on August 8, 2024, an interim government led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus assumed power, ushering Bangladesh into a new and uncertain phase of political transition. The complex issues surrounding this shift in governance raise critical questions about the sustainability of legal frameworks and policies implemented to protect minority rights.³

The possible drift in political power-whether through the resurgence of opposition parties like the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the growing dominance of Islamist groups, or the policies of the Yunus-led interim administration-may inject newer challenges into the protection of minorities and reshape the political, legal, and social fabric of the nation. Rising religious conservatism and growing communal tensions further deepen the crisis, suggesting that the rights and security of minority communities remain highly vulnerable in a post-Hasina era. The rationale for studying minority rights in the context of Bangladesh's current transition is threefold.

First, religious and ethnic minorities are acutely exposed to reversals, neglect, or violence during periods of political upheaval. Second, while existing scholarship has examined constitutional secularism, the Fifteenth Amendment, and communal violence patterns in Bangladesh, limited academic attention has been directed toward analysing minority rights within the specific context of the 2024 post-Hasina political transition. This study addresses the emerging research gap by situating contemporary developments within historical and constitutional trajectories. Third, the significance of this inquiry extends beyond Bangladesh's borders, contributing to broader discussions of democratic resilience, secular governance, and compliance with international human rights obligations.

³ United Nations, Universal Periodic Review: Bangladesh – Focus on Minority Rights (UN Human Rights Council Report, 2021)

This paper proceeds in five parts. Following the introduction, it examines the key constitutional and policy measures affecting minority rights during Sheikh Hasina's tenure. It then analyses contemporary challenges faced by religious and ethnic minorities, including communal violence, land dispossession, and political exclusion. The subsequent section evaluates the evolving post-Hasina political landscape and its implications for minority protections. The paper further assesses the role of civil society and international human rights mechanisms before concluding with policy recommendations aimed at strengthening legal and institutional safeguards.

A. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the status and future trajectory of minority rights in Bangladesh in the aftermath of Sheikh Hasina's resignation on 5 August 2024. The study seeks to assess whether the legal and constitutional safeguards developed during her tenure are resilient enough to withstand political transition. It further aims to evaluate the structural, institutional, and socio-political challenges confronting religious and ethnic minorities in the emerging post-transition governance framework. Additionally, the research intends to analyse the role of domestic institutions, civil society, and international human rights mechanisms in shaping minority protection during this transitional period.

B. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent did the Sheikh Hasina administration provide effective legal and institutional protection to religious and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh?
2. Are existing constitutional and statutory frameworks adequate to safeguard minority rights during periods of political transition?
3. What emerging political dynamics in the post-Hasina era pose potential risks or opportunities for minority communities?
4. How can domestic and international mechanisms contribute to strengthening minority rights protection in Bangladesh?

C. Research Hypotheses

The study proceeds on the following hypotheses:

1. The constitutional and statutory protections for minorities in Bangladesh, though formally robust, suffer from significant enforcement deficits.
2. Political transitions in Bangladesh historically correlate with increased vulnerability of minority communities.
3. Without institutional reform and stronger accountability mechanisms, minority rights protections are likely to weaken in the post-Hasina period.
4. Enhanced engagement of civil society and international human rights bodies can positively influence minority rights outcomes.

D. Research Methodology

This research adopts a doctrinal and analytical methodology. Primary sources include the Constitution of Bangladesh, statutory provisions, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord (1997), and relevant judicial and policy materials. Secondary sources comprise reports of international human rights organizations, civil society documentation, academic commentaries, and policy analyses.

The study relies on qualitative analysis of legal texts, government measures, and documented incidents of communal violence between August 2024 and mid-2025. Comparative reference is made to previous political transitions in Bangladesh to contextualize patterns of minority vulnerability. The research is descriptive, analytical, and evaluative in nature, without empirical fieldwork.

E. Literature Review

Scholarly literature on minority rights in Bangladesh reflects a persistent tension between constitutional secularism and political accommodation of religious identity. Studies examining the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution highlight the symbolic restoration of secularism alongside the retention of Islam as the state religion, creating normative ambiguity.

Human rights reports by organizations such as Amnesty International, Minority Rights Group International, and the United Nations Human Rights Office consistently document patterns of communal violence, land dispossession in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and weak enforcement of protective legislation. Academic discourse further emphasizes the politicization of minority issues during electoral cycles and transitional periods.

However, limited scholarship has examined minority rights specifically in the context of the post-Sheikh Hasina transition of 2024–2025. This study seeks to fill that gap by situating recent developments within broader constitutional and political trajectories.

IV. KEY POLICIES AND LEGAL PROTECTIONS IMPLEMENTED DURING SHEIKH HASINA'S LEADERSHIP

Following her return to power in 2009, the government significantly strengthened constitutional and policy frameworks aimed at reinforcing secularism and enhancing protections for religious and ethnic minorities. A significant constitutional development during this period was the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment in 2011, which reinstated secularism as a fundamental principle of state policy. This amendment sought to reverse earlier constitutional changes that had diluted the secular character of the 1972 Constitution.

However, the simultaneous retention of Islam as the state religion under Article 2A created a structural paradox within the constitutional framework. While secularism was restored as a guiding principle, the continued symbolic privileging of a particular religion generated normative ambiguity regarding the scope and depth of equal protection for minority communities. This dual constitutional identity has remained a subject of sustained scholarly and judicial debate concerning the substantive meaning of secularism in Bangladesh.⁴ Sheikh Hasina government has also ensured strengthening legal frameworks to protect religious and ethnic minorities. The reforms instituted by

⁴ European Union External Action, *Human Rights in Bangladesh: A Focus on Religious and Ethnic Minorities* (EU Human Rights Strategy Report, 2021)

her administration were numerous and intended to ensure the rights of the rights of minorities to practice religious beliefs, to take part in public life, and attain justice in any situation where discrimination or violence resulted against them. Despite these legal provisions, significant challenges persist in effective implementation and enforcement, particularly in addressing localized communal violence that often coincides with periods of political instability.

Among the most significant measures associated with Sheikh Hasina's political legacy is the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord of 1997, signed during her first term in office (1996–2001). The Accord aimed to resolve longstanding conflict between the State and indigenous communities in the CHT by providing for regional autonomy arrangements, land dispute resolution mechanisms, and demilitarization commitments. Although the Accord predates her 2009–2024 tenure, its incomplete implementation has continued to shape state–indigenous relations and remains central to assessing minority protections in contemporary Bangladesh.⁵

V. CURRENT CHALLENGES FACED BY MINORITIES

A. Discrimination, Communal Violence, and Forced Displacement

Religious and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh have historically faced discrimination in various forms, ranging from social exclusion to economic marginalization. In the absence of strong leadership advocating for secularism, discriminatory practices may become more entrenched in public institutions, and access to justice for minorities could diminish.⁶ Communal violence, which often flares up during political transitions, is another significant threat in the post-Hasina context. With Islamist groups potentially gaining influence, religious tensions could escalate, resulting in violent attacks on minority communities, particularly Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians.

⁵ Partha Chatterjee, 'Minorities, Minority Rights, and Political Change in Bangladesh: Understanding the Role of Secularism in Bangladeshi Politics' (2021) 32(2) *Journal of South Asian Studies* 211

⁶ Abul Barkat, *Political Economy of Sectarianism in Bangladesh: Impacts on Minority Rights and Social Harmony* (Dhaka University Press 2016)

Such incidents have already occurred in the past, where minorities were often scapegoated during electoral cycles or political unrest. Additionally, forced displacement-driven by both communal violence and socio-economic pressures-has been a persistent issue, particularly in conflict-prone areas like the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). As political dynamics shift, the displacement of indigenous communities and other marginalized groups could intensify, especially if land disputes and territorial encroachments remain unresolved. Recent reports indicate a significant escalation in communal violence during the transitional period.

According to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC), between 4 August and 20 August 2024, at least 2,010 incidents of violence including vandalism of temples, arson, and attacks on homes and businesses were documented nationwide. The organization further reported 2,442 incidents over the subsequent 330 days, involving killings, sexual assaults, looting, and other forms of targeted violence, and recorded 258 additional attacks in early 2025. These reported developments reflect rising communal tensions and highlight concerns regarding the security environment under interim administration.⁷

B. Land Rights and Political Representation Issues

Land rights remain one of the most contentious issues for both religious minorities and indigenous groups.⁸ For the indigenous populations in the CHT, land dispossession and encroachments by settlers have been ongoing problems. With the potential rollback of policies that offered limited protection during Sheikh Hasina's tenure, these communities face the risk of further displacement, loss of traditional lands, and erosion of their cultural heritage. The incomplete implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord of 1997 has significantly weakened legal safeguards for indigenous communities. Key provisions such as the effective functioning of the Land Dispute

⁷ Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC), *Annual Report on Communal Violence against Minorities* (BHBCUC 2025) <https://bhbcuc.org/reports/2025-annual-report> accessed 7 August 2025.

⁸ Md Shahidul Islam, 'Communal Violence and Political Transition: The Case of Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh' (2023) 41(2) *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 319

Resolution Commission, meaningful devolution of authority to the Regional Council, rehabilitation of internally displaced persons, and phased demilitarization of temporary military camps remain only partially fulfilled. The delayed operationalization of the Land Commission in particular has impeded adjudication of longstanding land disputes, thereby facilitating continued encroachments and dispossession. In terms of political representation, minorities in Bangladesh have historically struggled to have a significant voice in the national political arena. The political vacuum left by her departure could allow more conservative and Islamist factions to rise to power, groups that may not prioritize or actively undermine minority representation. This lack of political inclusion further limits minorities' ability to influence policies that directly affect their livelihoods and security.⁹

C. Analysis of Recent Incidents Involving Minority Communities

Recent incidents of violence and discrimination against minority communities illustrate the precarious situation they face. For instance, attacks on Hindu temples, homes, and businesses have occurred sporadically, often coinciding with political unrest or religious festivals. In 2024, during the Durga Puja festival, widespread violence against Hindus erupted across Bangladesh, with temples desecrated and homes destroyed. The response of law enforcement was criticized as inadequate, reflecting the challenges minorities face in receiving protection from state institutions.¹⁰ Similarly, indigenous communities in the CHT have experienced renewed tensions, with reports of land seizures and violent clashes between settlers and indigenous groups. The failure to fully implement the peace accord and the lack of effective dispute resolution mechanisms have left these communities vulnerable.

⁹Shakil Hossain, 'Bangladesh's Hindu Minority Faces Threats as Communal Violence Rises' *The Diplomat* (October 2021) <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/bangladeshs-hindu-minority-faces-threats-as-communal-violence-rises/>

¹⁰Arup Biswas, 'Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples: The Unresolved Crisis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts' *Al Jazeera* (September 2024) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/09/land-rights-of-indigenous-peoples-chittagong-hill-tracts>

D. Post-Sheikh Hasina Political Landscape

The political landscape in post-Hasina Bangladesh is characterized by uncertainty and potential volatility. Human rights policies, particularly for the minority groups, have much at stake during a political transition, especially when a phase marked by so long tension between secularism and religious nationalism is now coming to an end. The exit of Hasina, who could be termed as a custodian of sorts of secular governance, may result in directional changes that might either extend or undo the existing protection for the religious and ethnic minorities. Previous transitions, such as in the 1990-1991 and 2006-2007 changes of government, have been marked by a rising tide of political Islam, often in tandem with a growing sense of tensions and violence directed against minority communities.¹¹

Trends analogous to those seen during previous transitions, perhaps on a worse scale, might be anticipated in the post-Hasina period, particularly if hardline factions with a more Islamist agenda gain control of power. In addition, such transitions may undo gains made by minorities as new leaders may, in their self-interest, make inclusiveness secondary to their survival as politicians.¹² There is a risk that legislative and policy shifts during the transition may weaken existing protections for minorities or fail to adequately address violence and systemic discrimination against them

VI. EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL ACTORS AND GROUPS WITH VARYING APPROACHES TO MINORITY RIGHTS

The post-Sheikh Hasina political landscape will develop with different streams of politics having a segment of new-generation politicians, thinkers, and activists with varying conceptions of minority rights towards Bangladesh's future for the minority

¹¹ Zillur Hossain, *The Politics of Bangladesh: From Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Sheikh Hasina* (Oxford University Press 2022)

¹² Parvez Islam, *Political Transition and the Rights of Minorities in Bangladesh* BBC News (August 2024) <https://www.bbc.com/>

groups.¹³ Islamist political parties have emerged strongly in the post-government rule of Sheikh Hasina, so the politics in the days to come may depict Islamist parties much more adeptly. Groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami, that demand a political order based on the principles of Islam, are likely to exploit this political vacuum, thus increasing marginalization and violence against minority groups.

Secular and progressive political movements may also try to stage a comeback and reclaim the political space in a bid to conquer rights for minorities and push back against religious extremism. Such movements may move to work with civil society organizations and international human rights defenders for more expansive policies and protection of the rights of minorities. For these groups, ultimate success shall lie in how best they can muster public support and play a prudent game of change within the polity. An even more important consideration in this context is the presence of regional parties and indigenous movements.

Rights groups for indigenous populations, such as those in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, could finally take stronger positions and make greater demands for their rights in the political sphere. The development of these kinds of players could intensify competition from traditional political parties and force more inclusive policy-making that pays attention to the needs and rights of marginalized people.

VII. EXISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND GAPS IN SAFEGUARDING MINORITY RIGHTS

Some protection for minority rights is ensured through legal instruments within Bangladesh-mainly provided by constitutional provisions, statutory laws, and international commitments. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972 (as amended), guarantees several fundamental rights relevant to minority protection. Article 27 ensures equality before the law and equal protection of the law, while Article 28 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or

¹³ Mostafa Rahman, 'Political Uncertainty in Bangladesh: A Threat to Minority Rights?' Dhaka Tribune (August 2024)

place of birth. Article 41 guarantees freedom of religion, including the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion, subject to law, public order, and morality. Additionally, Articles 11 and 12 affirm democracy and secularism as guiding constitutional principles.

Despite this normative framework, enforcement deficits and inconsistent institutional responses have limited the practical realization of these guarantees for minority communities. In practice, enforcement of these rights is substantially inadequately done and is restrained from offering justice for minorities.¹⁴ Bangladesh does not currently have a comprehensive standalone “Minority Rights Act.” Protection for minorities is instead derived from constitutional guarantees, provisions of the Penal Code addressing hate speech and violence, and sector-specific legislation. The absence of a consolidated statutory framework specifically addressing minority rights has contributed to fragmented enforcement and limited accountability mechanisms.

For instance, though there are pieces of legislation that intends to protect religious minorities against discrimination and violence, the weak mechanism of implementation is responsible for the inability of the law enforcing agencies-notably from bureaucratic apathy and corruption-to uphold minority rights.¹⁵

VIII. CHANCES OF LEGAL REFORMS BY NEXT GOVERNMENT

The strength of the minority rights in Bangladesh's law reform will depend on how trends of politics change following Sheikh Hasina. If there is an election of a pro-human-rights and pro-inclusive governance government, then it may be possible to amend the existing laws as well as institute some new legislative mechanisms that can focus more specifically on better protection of minority rights. Other reforms may be more specifically related legislation aimed at the particular problem of a given particular minority community. An independent and impartial judiciary can ensure

¹⁴ United Nations, Universal Periodic Review: Bangladesh 2022 – Focus on Legal Frameworks and Minority Rights (UN Human Rights Council, 2022)

¹⁵ United Nations, Universal Periodic Review: Bangladesh 2022 – Focus on Legal Frameworks and Minority Rights (UN Human Rights Council, 2022)

protection under the constitution as well as legal remedies when their rights are violated.¹⁶

A. Role of Civil Society and International Community

Organizations of civil society in Bangladesh have played an important role in the advocacy of rights to minorities and raising awareness about issues faced by excluded groups, such as NGOs and human rights organizations working on communal violence, discrimination, land rights, and preservation of cultural heritage for religious and ethnic minorities. Watchdogs are the third common role for CSOs-monitoring government actions and checking violations of human rights against authorities. Other advocacy activities include lobbying for reforms in policies, legal aid to discriminated or violent individuals, and awareness campaigns toward minority rights.

For example, organizations like the Bangladesh Minority Rights Forum and the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council are pretty much involved with the campaign of defending the interests of their respective minority communities by documenting cases of human rights violation and carrying on lobbying for legislation. In addition to that, civil societies also engage in dialogues between the minority groups and governmental structures that often bridge the understanding and form a more inclusive political setting.

Their service is indispensable in rallying the public opinion for minority rights issues, especially at such transitions. However, political repression and curbing of freedom of speech and intimidation of the state and non-state actors always question the Bangladesh civil society organizations. In this respect, importance is in enabling civil society to strengthen its structures through networking with international human rights organizations, using online platforms so as to have wider coverage of their message.

¹⁶ Parvez Islam, 'Legal Gaps and Minority Rights in Bangladesh: The Need for Reform' BBC News (June 2023).

B. International Pressure and Obligations under International Human Rights Treaties

The international community is also crucial for expanding minority rights in Bangladesh. The international actors, by using diplomatic channels, multilateral organizations, and global human rights frameworks, can put pressure on the Bangladeshi government to comply with its obligations toward human rights and guarantee protection of the minority groups. Bangladesh is a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Article 2(1) of the ICCPR obligates States to respect and ensure rights without distinction of religion or other status, while Article 18 protects freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

Article 27 of the ICCPR specifically safeguards the cultural, religious, and linguistic rights of minorities. Under CEDAW, Articles 2 and 7 require States to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life obligations that are particularly relevant for women belonging to minority communities who experience intersectional discrimination. Despite these treaty commitments, domestic incorporation and enforcement remain uneven. International pressure can come in the form of public statements, reports issued by the human rights organizations, or assessments from the United Nations to prompt the Bangladeshi government to live up to its international obligations.

International engagement by entities such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the United Nations also makes it much easier to bring to light violations of human rights against the minority community as well by calling for accountability and reform. The pressure is particularly effective during political transitions when governments anxious about gaining legitimacy at an international level are likely to respond more readily.

IX. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening minority rights in Bangladesh requires targeted legal and institutional reforms rather than broad normative commitments alone. The following measures are proposed:

1. Enactment of a Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Statute

A consolidated Anti-Discrimination Act should be introduced to operationalize Articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution. Such legislation should:

- Provide a clear statutory definition of direct and indirect discrimination.
- Criminalize hate-motivated violence and incitement with enhanced penalties.
- Establish civil remedies including compensation, restitution, and injunctions.
- Create an independent Equality Commission with investigative and enforcement powers.

2. Reform of Penal and Procedural Laws: Relevant provisions of the Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure should be amended to include explicit hate-crime enhancements and mandatory recording of communal motives in FIRs. Special evidentiary guidelines may be introduced to address patterns of collective violence.

3. Effective Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord: Parliamentary oversight mechanisms should be established to monitor compliance with the 1997 Accord, particularly concerning:

- Full operationalization of the Land Dispute Resolution Commission.
- Time-bound resolution of pending land claims.
- Gradual demilitarization consistent with the Accord's framework.

4. Specialized Minority Rights Benches or Tribunals: Rather than creating entirely new parallel courts, designated benches within existing High Court Divisions may be constituted to hear cases involving communal violence, land dispossession, and discrimination claims. These benches should:

- Possess subject-matter jurisdiction over minority rights violations.
- Include judges trained in constitutional and human rights law.
- Operate under expedited procedural timelines to prevent prolonged victimization.

5. Strengthening Political Representation: Consideration may be given to proportional representation mechanisms or reserved consultative advisory councils at national and local levels to ensure minority participation in legislative deliberations.

6. International Compliance and Reporting: The Government should institutionalize a treaty-implementation cell within the Ministry of Law to monitor compliance with obligations under the ICCPR (particularly Article 27) and CEDAW, and to ensure systematic follow-up to UN treaty body recommendations.

X. CONCLUSION

The future of minority rights in Bangladesh is uncertain and heavily dependent on political, social, and legal developments in the post-Sheikh Hasina era. Opportunities exist for positive change, but challenges remain sizeable: If reform-minded leadership puts human rights and protection of minorities first, then minority communities could increase their voice and influence in governance. Nationalistic or religiously conservative factions gaining a hold would marginalize and discriminate more against minority communities. Civil society would play a significant role in advocating minority rights and holding the government accountable.

International engagement will play a significant role in compelling the Bangladeshi government to live up to its human rights obligations. Independent judiciary with unshakeable commitment to minority rights will go a long way in the future legal landscape. Ultimately, the course of minority rights will depend on how serious all stakeholders-governing authority, civil society, judiciary, and international actors-are in promoting inclusiveness and equality. There will be a greater need for dialogue and

cooperation and for the militancy needed to protect the rights of all citizens, especially the historically disadvantaged groups.

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