

## Bangladesh's Interim Government: Lessons from Transitional Governments Worldwide

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Source: Al Arabiya

### Introduction

Transitional governments have historically played pivotal roles in guiding nations through periods of upheaval, political crises, or systemic transformation. From South Africa's unity government post-apartheid to Tunisia's interim administration during the Arab Spring, these temporary bodies have served as bridges to more stable and democratic futures. Bangladesh, under its interim government led by Dr. Yunus, finds itself at a similar crossroads, with the challenges of restoring public trust, ensuring inclusive governance, and fostering socio-political harmony. Across the world, transitional governments have faced similar trials. These moments offer valuable lessons on how to guide a country through uncertain times. What can Bangladesh learn from these

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experiences? How can it strike a balance between making meaningful changes and avoiding the pitfalls of transitional governance? This commentary will be exploring these questions, drawing on lessons from global examples that could help shape Bangladesh's path forward.

## **Why Interim Governments Struggle to Govern Effectively**

Running an interim government is challenging as it is a temporary setup that often takes power during times of political or social unrest. These governments face pressure to stabilize the country, solve long-standing problems, and prepare for elections, all in a short time. They do not have the full support of the public, which can make it hard to enforce decisions and make changes. They also have to deal with resistance from political groups that don't want to give up power. Learning from other countries that have gone through similar transitions is important, as it helps avoid mistakes and provides strategies for balancing stability with reform, managing public expectations, and building trust. By studying other nations' experiences, interim governments can find better ways to handle crises and ensure a smooth transition to a more permanent government.

## **Lessons for Bangladesh's Interim Government**

### ***Case Study of Sri Lanka***

Sri Lanka's transitional periods, particularly following the civil war and the 2022 economic crisis, highlight several critical lessons that Bangladesh can draw upon to ensure a more effective and inclusive governance model under its interim government.<sup>2</sup> These lessons reveal the need for inclusivity, accountability, and robust crisis management.

**The Need for Political Inclusivity and Reconciliation:** In Sri Lanka, the exclusion of Tamil and other minority communities from key governance processes after the civil war exacerbated existing divisions and hindered national reconciliation efforts.<sup>3</sup> This exclusion perpetuated grievances and fueled distrust among marginalized groups. The interim government in Bangladesh

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<sup>2</sup>Parvez, Altaf. 2024. "Learning from the Aftermath of Sri Lanka's Uprising." Prothomalo. Prothom Alo English. August 27, 2024. <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/op-ed/vldm4kk4ud>.

<sup>3</sup>Mihlar, Farah. 2024. "Contending with Identity and Minority Rights in Transitional Justice: The Case Study of Sri Lanka." *The International Journal of Human Rights*, June, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2024.2355269>.

must prioritize inclusive governance by involving all stakeholders, including minority groups, political opposition, and civil society. Transparent and collaborative decision-making will foster trust and unity, essential for long-term stability. The government must take firm action against those responsible for the recent attacks on the residence of the Christian Tripura community.<sup>4</sup> Attacks on any minority group should be strongly condemned, as every individual, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, deserves to feel safe and included in our country. At the same time, it is crucial for everyone to remain vigilant against disinformation about attacks on minorities in Bangladesh. While addressing genuine incidents of violence, it is essential to approach these matters with care and awareness to ensure justice and harmony.



Source: United States Institute of Peace

**Combating Corruption and Restoring Trust in Governance:** Corruption and nepotism within Sri Lanka's political system were key drivers of public discontent, culminating in the ousting of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.<sup>5</sup> The transitional period was marked by a public demand for greater

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<sup>4</sup>“Attackers on Tripura Community Won’t Be Spared: CHT Affairs Adviser.” 2024. The Business Standard. December 26, 2024. <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/attackers-tripura-community-wont-be-spared-cht-affairs-adviser-1027991>.

<sup>5</sup>Ethirajan, Anbarasan. 2023. “Sri Lanka: The Fate of a Protest That Toppled a President.” *BBC News*, July 8, 2023, sec. Asia. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66129947>.

accountability and governance reform. To restore trust in governance, Dr. Yunus's administration must prioritize anti-corruption initiatives and institutional reforms. Independent watchdog bodies and transparent mechanisms for investigating corruption can demonstrate a commitment to good governance. In Bangladesh, corruption has been deeply rooted in politics, and past governments have been criticized for mismanagement and misuse of public funds, which has caused a loss of trust among citizens. Simply relying on the government to fix these problems is not enough; a change in the public mindset is needed. While meaningful change will take time, even small actions by the interim government to reduce corruption can help set the stage for future progress. Another challenge is rebuilding trust with the younger generation, especially Gen-Z, who are disillusioned by politics. The interim government must understand their views and engage with them in ways that are meaningful to them, as they are the future of the country. It is important to create approaches that build trust and promote inclusivity for a better political environment.

**Transitional Justice and Addressing Historical Grievances:** Sri Lanka's lack of meaningful progress in addressing wartime atrocities and reconciling with affected communities has hindered long-term peacebuilding. This oversight left deep scars in its social fabric and undermined trust in government efforts. In Bangladesh, the interim government must commit to transitional justice mechanisms to address historical injustices, particularly in areas like the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Establishing truth and reconciliation commissions or engaging with affected communities can help heal past wounds and promote national cohesion.

**The Risks of Repeating the Past:** In Sri Lanka, the political landscape has experienced a significant shift with the return of the Rajapaksa family to power. In August 2020, the Sri Lanka People's Front (SLPP), led by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, secured a parliamentary supermajority.<sup>6</sup> This victory marked the family's resurgence in Sri Lankan politics, consolidating their influence over both the executive and legislative branches. This development serves as a cautionary tale for Bangladesh. The return of a previous regime, particularly one linked to corruption and mismanagement, would severely undermine the progress made through the July revolution and render it meaningless. No matter

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<sup>6</sup>"Sri Lanka's Election Helps Cement the Rajapaksas' Return to Power." 2023. United States Institute of Peace. June 9, 2023. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/08/sri-lankas-election-helps-cement-rajapaksas-return-power>.

how much the former leaders may apologize or attempt to use threats, they must not be allowed to return under any circumstances. If they do, those who opposed them would face immense hardship, and the country would suffer. There are indications that the leaders of the Awami League are trying to regroup abroad. Sheikh Hasina, far from remaining passive in India or elsewhere, may seek to return with external support, particularly from India. However, it is crucial to ensure that such attempts are prevented for the well-being of the nation.

### *Case Study of Sudan*

In 2019, Sudan faced a turning point when massive protests broke out due to economic struggles and years of authoritarian rule. These protests led to the removal of President Omar al-Bashir. After his fall, a Transitional Military Council (TMC) took control, but people feared the military would hold onto power for too long.<sup>7</sup> This led to a power-sharing agreement between the military and civilian leaders, creating the Sovereign Council to guide the country toward democratic elections. While this gave people hope, the transition was not easy. Sudan faced big challenges like economic troubles, public distrust, and difficulty in keeping different political and social groups united.



Source: The New Arab

**Balance of Power and Collaboration:** Sudan’s transition shows how important it is to share power fairly among different groups involved in the process. For Dr. Yunus’s interim government, it will be crucial to make sure that no single group—whether political parties, the military, or

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<sup>7</sup>Hassan, Mai, and Ahmed Kodouda. 2019. “Sudan’s Uprising: The Fall of a Dictator.” *Journal of Democracy*. October 2019. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/sudans-uprising-the-fall-of-a-dictator/>.

civilian organizations—takes complete control. Instead, there should be open discussions and strong cooperation among all sides. This will help create a sense of unity and ensure that no group feels left out or ignored during this critical time of change.

**Focus on Economic Recovery:** One of Sudan’s greatest hurdles during its transition was economic instability. For Bangladesh, it will be very important to focus on fixing economic issues right away. This means taking immediate action to control inflation, which affects the cost of basic goods, ensuring that everyone has access to enough food, and creating job opportunities to reduce unemployment. These measures are essential not only for easing the financial burden on people but also for building trust and maintaining public confidence in the government’s ability to lead during this critical period. By focusing on economic stability, the interim government can lay a stronger foundation for the country’s future progress.

**Timelines and Commitment to Elections:** Sudan’s experience shows the importance of adhering to clear timelines for democratic elections. Delays in Sudan led to frustration and weakened confidence in the transition. Dr. Yunus should ensure that his government commits to realistic but firm deadlines to transition power to an elected body. But it is also important to remember that elections should not be rushed due to pressure from certain political groups. Before setting a timeline for the election, the law and order situation in Bangladesh must be stabilized. Crime rates have risen significantly, and under such conditions, it would be difficult to ensure a free and fair election.

### *Case Study of Tunisia*

Tunisia’s transition from dictatorship to democracy is one of the most significant and inspiring stories of the Arab Spring. In 2011, after widespread protests against President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia’s authoritarian regime was overthrown.<sup>8</sup> The country entered a period of political and social upheaval, with no clear path forward. In the aftermath, Tunisia’s interim government faced the challenging task of creating a new political system, drafting a democratic constitution, and preparing for free elections. The transition was marked by compromise and careful balancing

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<sup>8</sup>Siebert, Leo . 2021. “Where Does Tunisia’s Transition Stand 10 Years after Ben Ali?” United States Institute of Peace. January 14, 2021. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/01/where-does-tunisia-transition-stand-10-years-after-ben-ali>.



between diverse political views, making Tunisia an example of how dialogue and patience can lead to lasting democratic reforms.



Source: Carnegie India

**Building a New Constitutional Framework:** Tunisia’s constitutional reform process was slow, but it was careful and deliberate, ensuring that all groups had a say in the country’s future. Dr. Yunus’s interim government must ensure that constitutional reforms are inclusive and transparent, with broad public involvement. A new constitution can lay the groundwork for a democratic Bangladesh, but it is essential that this process is done with patience and thorough consultation, rather than rushing through it for political expediency.

**Balancing Secular and Religious Interests:** In Tunisia, one of the central issues was how to balance the interests of secular and Islamist groups. These tensions threatened the country’s progress, but through negotiation and compromise, Tunisia managed to avoid violence and create a unified political framework. In Bangladesh, where there is a significant debate between secularism and religious influences in politics, Dr. Yunus’s interim government will need to ensure that both secular and religious voices are heard and respected.

## Way Forward

While it is clear that Bangladesh can learn valuable lessons from other countries that have gone through similar transitions, we must remember that each country has its own unique context. The challenges Sudan, Tunisia, or other nations faced are different from the ones we face in Bangladesh. The political, social, and economic situations vary, and even the mindset of the people in those countries is not the same as that of Bangladeshis. While we can draw inspiration from their experiences, we need to adapt those lessons to fit our own reality. The key is to act wisely, understanding the present situation and the diverse expectations of the people. Only then will Bangladesh have a chance for a smooth and successful transition.



Source: The Daily Star

Bangladesh's interim government, under Dr. Yunus, should prioritize inclusive governance, ensuring representation and participation from minority groups, political opposition, and civil society to build trust and foster national unity. Drawing from Sri Lanka's experiences, it must take firm action against corruption, establish independent watchdog bodies, and engage meaningfully with the younger generation to restore public confidence. Inspired by Sudan, the government should balance power among key stakeholders, stabilize the economy through inflation control, job creation, and commit to a realistic timeline for democratic elections, prioritizing security and fairness over haste. Learning from Tunisia, constitutional reforms must be inclusive, transparent, and patient, balancing secular and religious interests to reflect the diversity of Bangladeshi society.



Besides, a clear and comprehensive roadmap must be established to eliminate any ambiguity. The government should ensure effective communication with the public to foster transparency, unity, and fiscal discipline in its operations. It is essential, however, to acknowledge that the government cannot address every issue simultaneously; instead, it must prioritize the completion of key functional reforms. Ultimately, the government must act thoughtfully, adapting these lessons to Bangladesh's scenario while addressing immediate challenges to pave the way for a stable and democratic future.