

Looking Back at 2025: What Bangladesh Experienced and What It Exposed

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Source: Dhaka Tribune

The year 2025 was significant for Bangladesh's political, economic, and social landscape. This year was a litmus test for the country, its governance, and its citizens. It exposed how the country adapted to the post-uprising era. The July uprising pushed the country into a heightened state of vulnerability. It placed state institutions under intense public scrutiny. The operational weaknesses

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of these institutions revealed deep-rooted governance failures, economic uncertainty, and growing social disorder.

The year began with optimism but ended in uncertainty. The widening gap between political commitments and their implementation created a volatile environment. The situation raised fundamental questions about the trajectory of change: To what extent were the aspirations for a new Bangladesh, born out of the July uprising, actually realized? Did the uprising fundamentally reshape Bangladesh's political order, or did it merely recalibrate existing power structures?

Looking back, 2025 stands not only as a year of transition but also as a moment of reckoning. It exposed both the resilience and fragility of Bangladesh's institutions, the limits of political reform, and the unresolved tensions between popular expectations and state capacity. Throughout the year, national politics revolved around efforts to construct a new democratic order; drafting an ambitious July Charter of institutional reforms, planning a nationwide referendum on the Charter, and scheduling the first parliamentary elections since the uprising. Meanwhile, persistent economic headwinds, unresolved human rights legacies, and the protracted Rohingya crisis remained relevant. Ultimately, 2025 revealed that although the aspiration for transformation was politically powerful, the challenge of translating these aspirations into durable institutions and credible governance remains hard.

Reform Without Authority: Institutional Paralysis and the Collapse of Law and Order

At the start of 2025, Six state-appointed reform bodies submitted their reports and made them publicly available in January–February. These commissions had been tasked with recommending structural reforms across key state institutions following the regime change in late 2024². However, by mid-2025 it became evident that the recommendations were limited in the documents and did not translate into meaningful reform implementation. The interim government set the institutional reform as their primary objective. However, the tangible progress in executing the reform agendas are untraceable. Transparency International Bangladesh explicitly criticized the interim failing to

² UNB, "Full Reports of 6 Reform Commissions Made Public," *The Daily Star*, February 9, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/full-reports-6-reform-commissions-made-public-3819191>.

government for form an independent information commission despite the passage of significant time since the reports were submitted. This is a major governance failure³.



Source: BBC

The implementation gap reflected deeper institutional weaknesses and a constrained governance environment. The institutional capacity, political will and consensus are vastly lacking for bringing any reform. This disconnect between promised reforms and implementation shows that governance in Bangladesh during 2025 remained fragile. The idea that the July uprising reshaped the political landscape has become somewhat clichéd, as governance remains influenced by political parties and their agenda rather than sustained structural transformation.

Throughout 2025, Bangladesh's law and order situation remained deeply fragile. In many respects, deteriorated further. The institutional weakness and operational paralysis of its key law enforcement agencies exposed the governance's weakness to maintain basic order. The highly politicized police force struggled to regain effectiveness regardless many recommendations. As a result, a sharp rise in violent crime, murders of the political personnel, robberies, kidnappings, extortion, and other offenses were observed throughout the year. It created an environment of fear

³ "TIB Demands Immediate Formation of Independent Information Commission," *Prothom Alo*, September 27, 2025, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/s3o0yydvqw>.

and discomfort among citizens who voiced concerns for their safety and view the state as unable to protect them⁴.

This insecurity was amplified by attacks on police themselves. The organized mob assaults on stations and targeted violence against individual officers indicate the volatile law and order situation. The police force appears constrained by low morale, entrenched corruption in both recruitment and daily operations, and a fragmented command structure. Together these factors have severely undermined its capacity to function effectively⁵. The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) also remained entangled in structural problems, with ongoing debates over its reorganization and identity overshadowing substantive improvements in public security⁶. The cumulative effect of these developments was evident in rising mob violence and vigilantism, including lynching incidents and communal attacks, which took place in contexts where formal enforcement was sluggish or absent.

At a moment of political transition, the government's foremost responsibility should have been to restore law and order and strengthen the institutional capacity of the police and allied forces. Yet it failed to deliver on this basic governance mandate. The administration's populist posturing, delayed responses, and apparent tolerance of mob violence not only eroded deterrence but also raised serious questions about the government's capacity and even its commitment to restoring lawful authority. By the end of the year, Bangladesh faced a law enforcement environment increasingly unable to deter crime or uphold public order, further undermining public confidence and exposing a profound crisis of institutional governance.

The Rise of Far-Right Mobilization and Shrinking Civic Space

Throughout 2025, Bangladesh experienced an intensification of political polarization. The visible rise of far-right and hardline ideological currents have narrowed the country's democratic and civic space. The political vacuum created after the 2024 upheaval did not foster ideological pluralism;

⁴ Saqlain Rizve, "Crime Wave Sweeps Post-Hasina Bangladesh," *The Diplomat*, March 3, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/03/crime-wave-sweeps-post-hasina-bangladesh/>.

⁵ "Police Morale Low, Corruption Still Rife," *Daily Sun*, December 4, 2025, <https://www.daily-sun.com/5/843883>.

⁶ "RAB to Be Restructured," *Dhaka Tribune*, May 12, 2025, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/381036/adviser-jahangir-govt-to-restructure-rab>.

instead, it deepened zero-sum politics⁷. Ultra-nationalist, exclusionary, and religiously hardline narratives gained traction on the streets and online. The far-right Islamist groups and radical populist actors increasingly shaped public discourse. They strengthened their power to mobilize mass rallies, pressure the state on constitutional and cultural issues, and intimidate dissenting voices⁸. The selective state tolerance and weak enforcement mechanism reinforced this ideological shift which allowed hate speech, moral vigilantism, and mob mobilization to flourish with minimal consequence. This growing polarization had real consequences: attacks on minorities, journalists, artists, and political opponents increased as extremism became normalized and accountability weakened. Rather than acting as a neutral arbiter, the government appeared hesitant or unwilling to confront these forces decisively, often responding with silence or symbolic gestures. This failure to check far-right mobilization not only legitimized intolerance but also entrenched a politics of fear, where moderation was punished and extremism rewarded. In recent change, Bangladesh's political landscape had become increasingly fragmented and hostile.



Source: Reuters

⁷ Shai Davidai and Martino Ongis, "The Politics of Zero-Sum Thinking: The Relationship between Political Ideology and the Belief that Life Is a Zero-Sum Game," *Science Advances* **5**, no. **12** (2019): eaay3761, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32064320/>.

⁸ Mubashar Hasan, "Resurgence of Jamaat-e-Islami Shifts Bangladesh Politics to the Right," *The Diplomat*, August 8, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/08/resurgence-of-jamaat-e-islami-shifts-bangladesh-politics-to-the-right/>.

Geopolitical Reorientation

Just as Bangladesh's politics were redefining themselves in 2025, its international alignments has changed its dynamics too. The interim government in the interest of populist demand shifted Bangladesh's foreign policy away from its Hasina-era India-centric orientation. Yunus repeatedly stated he was reaching out to everybody, but in practice he has been most active with China, Pakistan and other non-Western partners. However, whether this shift endures remains uncertain and will ultimately depend on the priorities, legitimacy, and strategic orientation of the next elected government. The highlight was Yunus's first bilateral trip to China in March 2025. He flew to Beijing and met President Xi Jinping. Dhaka announced a large new package of cooperation: \$2.1 billion in Chinese investments, loans and grants for Bangladesh, directed at industrial zones, ports, and infrastructure⁹. Xi said he would consider lowering interest rates on Chinese loans to Bangladesh and reiterated support for Bangladesh's development under Yunus. In practical terms, Chinese companies pledged ~\$1 billion to the Bangladesh Economic Zone, and major loans were earmarked for Mongla port modernization and other projects. In short, China cemented its role as Dhaka's premier partner.



Source: The Business Standard

⁹ Ruma Paul, "Bangladesh Says Xi Jinping Would Consider Lowering Interest on Chinese Loans," *Reuters*, March 28, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/bangladesh-says-xi-jinping-would-consider-lowering-interest-chinese-loans-2025-03-28/>.

Under Hasina, India had been Bangladesh's closest ally on security and development; by contrast, China was Bangladesh's main arms supplier and trading partner. But CA Yunus's outreach to China has been unprecedented in scope. Under this government the country seems to be seeking to reduce reliance on Indian trade in favor of a new strategic alignment with Beijing and other partners. Simultaneously, CA Yunus has warmed to long-neglected Muslim neighbors. In December 2024 he made a historic visit to Pakistan, where he met Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. They agreed to restore direct shipping links across the Bay of Bengal, lift longstanding trade curbs, and even expand military-to-military ties. On another front, Bangladesh opened doors with Turkey: it invited Turkish defense investment and agreed to jointly manufacture arms on Bangladeshi soil. Turkish President Erdoğan's earlier solidarity with Pakistan had already distanced him from India; Bangladesh now is seeking a bilateral defense partnership with Ankara. By contrast, ties with India have cooled dramatically. New Delhi's uncritical support of Hasina's last term, its reaction to the 2024 protests, and its diplomatic response in post-uprising era are to blame for this tensed relations.

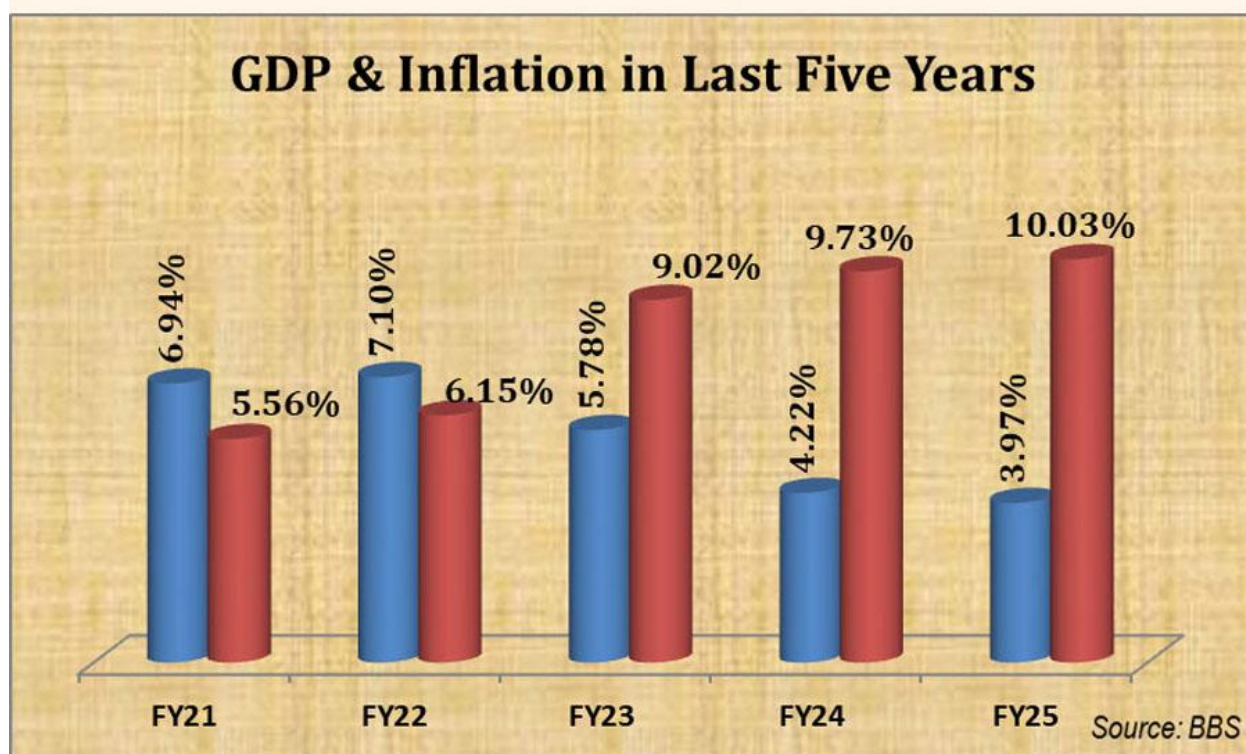
Economic Pressures and the Politics of Stagnation

Bangladesh entered 2025 with an economy weighed down by the 2024 turmoil and global shocks. Growth had already slowed in FY2024 and FY2025, and 2025 saw continued weak expansion. The central bank estimated GDP growth at only 3.97% for FY2025 – below the 6–7% needed to create jobs. By year's end indicators remained sluggish. Inflation, which had spiked after wartime energy and food prices, was easing but still high. In November 2025 headline inflation was about 8–8.3%, far above historical norms. Food inflation topped 8%, implying stagnating real incomes.

As a result, nearly 9 in 10 business leaders in one survey cited inflation as their top worry. Citizens felt the pinch: Dhaka Tribune warned the cost of living was significantly higher and could push about 3 million people back under the poverty line. Investment and credit contracted sharply in the political limbo. Private sector bank lending grew at only ~6–6.5% (compared to ~12% in normal years), as businesses and consumers held back. Imports of capital machinery fell by about 25% year-on-year. Foreign direct investment also plunged. Such indicators prompted one economist to

describe the economy as in a “waiting vortex” of stagnation. Even the IMF reportedly made its \$4.7 billion program contingent on the formation of a democratically elected government¹⁰.

In sum, by year-end the economy was on a slow-growth path, with lingering inflation and squeezed credit dampening momentum. Analysts in Dhaka warned that without political clarity – namely credible elections – neither domestic confidence nor foreign aid would recover. The outlook for 2026 hinged on the upcoming elections and any new reform government’s ability to attract investment and curb inflation.



Source: The Financial Express

Human Rights, Mob Justice, and the Failure of Legal Protection

In early 2025 the interim authorities promised justice: they invited UN human rights observers to investigate, and they amended the International Crimes Tribunal (originally created for 1971 war

¹⁰ “Bangladesh Economy in ‘Waiting Vortex’; Experts Urge Credible Elections,” *Dhaka Tribune*, November 15, 2025, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/396458/bangladesh-economy-in-%E2%80%98waiting-vortex%E2%80%99-experts-urge-credible-elections>.

crimes) so it could prosecute abuses of 2024. Indeed, in November 2025 the ICT convened a trial of Sheikh Hasina in absentia for crimes against humanity in the crackdown.

Beyond the tribunals, social unrest and lawlessness persisted throughout 2025, particularly in the run-up to the trials and elections. The use of false accusations of blasphemy as a trigger for collective violence against minorities created an alarming situation. In multiple incidents, mobs bypassed legal processes entirely, carrying out brutal attacks on individuals and communities most notably against religious minorities on the basis of unverified allegations. In late 2025, a garment factory worker was lynched following a false blasphemy accusation, while elsewhere mobs attacked media institutions and minority neighborhoods, including arson attacks on homes and temples. These incidents exposed the collapse of legal restraint in the face of mob justice, where the mere allegation of blasphemy often weaponized for personal, economic, or political motives became sufficient to incite violence.

The year also witnessed a profound assault on Bangladesh's cultural harmony and civic institutions. Across the country, concerts were disrupted by mob violence. At the same time, iconic cultural and media institutions such as Chhayanaut and Udichi Shilpi Goshthi were vandalised and set on fire, and the offices of major newspapers like *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star* were targeted, signaling a broader erosion of freedom of expression and creative space. These attacks are threats to independent media, artistic expression, and democratic participation which are the core pillars of Bangladesh's pluralistic identity¹¹.

While Bangladesh formally retains legal provisions governing religious offenses, the rule of law failed in practice. The mob acted as judge, jury, and executioner, openly disregarding legal procedures. The state's response was largely reactive and inadequate, failing to provide timely protection to accused individuals or vulnerable minority communities. Crucially, even if an allegation of blasphemy were to be substantiated, the accused is entitled under law to due process and a fair trial in a court of law. However, this fundamental principle was repeatedly violated. The

¹¹ "Attacks on Media, Culture: Impunity at the Core of Mob Violence," *The Daily Star*, December 24, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/attacks-media-culture-impunity-the-core-mob-violence-4065041>.

inability or unwillingness of the state to intervene decisively signaled a profound governance failure. It also undermined both minority protection and the most basic guarantees of justice.

Lesson Learned

Bangladesh's experience in 2025 offers critical lessons on governing in a post-uprising context. The year showed that political rupture alone does not ensure institutional renewal; without deliberate, sequenced, and accountable action, transitions risk deepening instability rather than resolving it. First, reform without implementation capacity is corrosive. While multiple reform commission reports and the July Charter signaled intent, the absence of clear roadmaps, timelines, and accountability mechanisms undermined credibility. Reform agendas must be backed by empowered implementation units, legal mandates, and political consensus, or they risk becoming performative exercises that erode public trust. Second, restoring law and order is the primary obligation of transitional governance. The deterioration of public security in 2025 revealed that state legitimacy rests on protecting citizens and maintaining basic order. Symbolic and populist measures failed to address structural weaknesses in policing, training, command cohesion, and oversight. Neglecting security reform normalized mob violence and weakened the state's monopoly over force. Third, political polarization and extremism flourish in governance vacuums. The rise of far-right and hardline actors demonstrated that selective enforcement and state hesitation embolden exclusionary ideologies. Silence is not neutrality; safeguarding civic space requires consistent law enforcement, minority protection, and firm political signaling against ideological violence. Fourth, economic recovery depends on political legitimacy. Sluggish growth, falling investment, and persistent inflation showed how uncertainty suppresses confidence. Remittances provided temporary relief, but credible elections, institutional predictability, and rule of law are economic policies in themselves. Fifth, foreign policy diversification requires coherence. Bangladesh's geopolitical reorientation reflected aspirations for autonomy, but rapid realignments exposed vulnerabilities. Effective diversification must be strategic, transparent, and grounded in domestic stability. Finally, transitional justice must be systemic. Without embedding human rights protections into policing, courts, and administration, justice initiatives risk losing moral authority. Overall, 2025 taught a central lesson: transformation is achieved not through declarations, but through sustained investment in institutional capacity, accountability, and political discipline.