

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER TRENDS

Political tensions persisted between the government and main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), setting the stage for a potentially violent electoral contest in January 2024. The Chittagong Hill Tracts in the country’s southeast remain restive, despite a ceasefire reportedly reached in July. Violence in the Rohingya refugee camps continued as the government pursued repatriation.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

1 A high-stakes and potentially violent election in January 2024

The ruling Awami League is expected to ignore calls for it to step down and hand power to a caretaker government that would oversee the election, and instead continue crackdown on BNP members.

Rival supporters could clash in street battles or attack party offices or candidates. Islamist groups could become more active in opposing the government.

Facing the prospect of a rigged poll, the opposition will probably boycott the election and could become radicalised, adopting more violent tactics.

The military might intervene should the election’s aftermath become chaotic.

TO WATCH Violence could surge in the lead-up to or after voting in **January 2024**.

Potential Consequences

A rigged or disputed election could trigger fierce anti-government protests. It could also cause the government to increase its dependence on India and China, as the U.S. (and potentially other Western countries) will probably respond with sanctions, such as visa bans on top officials.

2 Flickers of insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) could be reignited

The status of a government ceasefire with the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) is uncertain; the group will probably continue clashing with rival armed forces.

Military operations to neutralise a new Islamist group, Jama’atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya, that has allegedly based itself in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, could increase, aggravating tensions and fuelling a backlash.

Armed groups in Myanmar (eg, Arakan Army) may increase their support for insurgents in the CHT; others may support Bangladesh military operations against insurgents.

Stalled 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts peace accord implementation and influx of Rohingya refugees could drive conflict.

TO WATCH Election-related activities, such as campaigning and voting, could become flashpoints for violent attacks; spillover could also increase from restive states in India’s north east.

Potential Consequences

The reactivation of dormant insurgencies in the region could lead to an upsurge in violent competition between ethnic armed groups,

while civilians could be targeted or caught in the crossfire.

Instability in tri-border area could encourage greater collaboration between armed groups in Bangladesh, Myanmar and India.

3 Insecurity could worsen in Rohingya camps amid deteriorating conditions

A turf war between criminal and armed groups, especially Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and rival Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, could intensify in and around camps in Cox’s Bazar District, trapping civilians in the crossfire, including camps 8E and 8W.

Donor fatigue could compound food insecurity and joblessness facing refugees.

Some Rohingya armed groups, particularly ARSA, will probably oppose repatriation with violence, while security forces might collude with other groups to coerce refugees into repatriating.

TO WATCH Further shortfalls in aid funding could force the UN to cut rations and services; the government hopes to repatriate thousands of Rohingya by late 2023, but safe, voluntary and dignified repatriation is not possible at present.

Potential Consequences

A lack of hope, insecurity and poverty threaten to create a vicious cycle in which desperate Rohingya – particularly young men – join criminal gangs and armed groups out of necessity, further fuelling the violence.



Flashpoint

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On the Horizon offers a snapshot into emergent conflicts and crises in the next three to six months in a clear, accessible format, identifying triggers, key dates to watch and potential behaviour of conflict actors, to support global conflict prevention efforts.



Methodology: The information provided above relies on our monthly global conflict tracker, CrisisWatch, and qualitative assessments provided by Crisis Group’s analysts based in or near conflict areas. The selection is not exhaustive, and should be read in conjunction with country/regional reports and other early warning products, all available at crisisgroup.org.