



BANGLADESH

HUMAN RIGHTS PRIORITIES AHEAD OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS

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Ahead of the elections slated to take place on 12 February 2026, Amnesty International calls on all contesting political parties to take the following key human rights concerns into account, and take concrete steps to prioritise these issues into their policy agenda should they be elected into office. These issues are not listed in a particular order but rather represent key issues which any incumbent government must take seriously as per their obligations under international human rights law. The protection and promotion of human rights must be a central pillar of the national agenda before, during and after the elections.



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01 FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OPINION



Despite the interim government undertaking to amend the draconian Cyber Security Act (CSA), the Act was used, on occasions, in contravention of international human rights law. For example, Nahid Hasan Knowledge, a human rights defender and writer, was charged under the CSA in March 2025 for 'hurting religious sentiment'.¹ Similarly, on 8 April 2025, charges were filed against *imam* (religious leader) Md Ebadul Islam, for insulting BNP Chairperson, Khaleda Zia.² Finally, in May 2025, the Cyber Security Ordinance (CSO) was introduced to amend the CSA. However, the Ordinance still contains vague, overbroad provisions, and grants regulatory authorities and law enforcement broad powers which may be abused.³

Other laws have also been used to target journalists, particularly those perceived to be supporters of the now banned Awami League. For instance, on 15 December, journalist Anis Alamgir was detained under the Anti-Terrorism Act for allegedly spreading propaganda in favour of the Awami League.⁴ Similarly, on 28 August, journalist Monjurul Alam Panna, was arrested under the ATA, for conspiring to overthrow the interim government.⁵ The day before his arrest, he was speaking at a roundtable discussion on the Liberation War and the constitution, which was disrupted after the speakers were accused of being a sympathiser of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Attacks by non-state actors were also recorded recently, for example, on 18 December 2025, following the death of Sharif Osman Hadi, a leading figure in the July revolution, the offices of media outlets, Daily Star and Prothom Alo were attacked and set alight by mobs and the editor of the New Age media outlet was harassed.⁶

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression and opinion and a free media is an essential cornerstone of a rule of law-based society. Any government that comes into power must ensure that the right to freedom of expression and opinion is not only safeguarded but promoted and fostered.

Any government which comes to power must:

- Amend the Cyber Security Ordinance in accordance with international human rights law and standards, including but not limited to the removal of provisions which criminalize defamation, and hurting religious sentiment. The new government must ratify the amended Ordinance within 30 days of the Parliament being constituted to ensure it has force of law.
- Repeal or amend laws that criminalize expression in line with international human rights law and standards.
- End the misuse of restrictive laws to target journalists, human rights defenders and activists.
- Conduct prompt, thorough, independent, impartial, transparent and effective investigations into acts of violence and killings related to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and opinion, with a view to holding suspected perpetrators accountable in fair trials and without recourse to the death penalty.

¹ Front Line Defenders, *Human rights defender Nahid Hasan Knowledge charged under Cyber Security Act for hurting religious sentiments*, www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-nahid-hasan-knowledge-charged-under-cyber-security-act-hurting-religious

² Dhaka Tribune, *Ashulia imam arrested over comments on Khaleda Zia*, 8 April 2025, www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/378153/imam-arrested-in-cyber-law-case-for-making

³ Article 19, *Bangladesh: ARTICLE 19 urges consultation on Draft Cyber Protection Ordinance*, 3 February 2025, www.article19.org/resources/bangladesh-draft-cyber-protection-ordinance/

⁴ Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: Journalist targeted with anti-terror legislation must be released*, 17 December 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/12/bangladesh-journalist-targeted-with-anti-terror-legislation-must-be-released/

⁵ Reporters Without Borders, *Journalist arrested after taking part in roundtable, in new use of Bangladesh's anti-terrorism law*, 28 October 2025, rsf.org/en/journalist-arrested-after-taking-part-roundtable-new-use-bangladesh-s-anti-terrorism-law

⁶ The Daily Star, *Attacks on media outlets, cultural orgs spark outrage*, 19 December 2025, www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/attacks-media-outlets-cultural-orgs-spark-outrage-4062256



Photo: © Getty Images

02 ACCOUNTABILITY



On 1 July 2024, fuelled by a struggling economy and lack of job opportunities, students at the University of Dhaka began protesting controversial reforms to the quota system for government jobs. The reforms, which reinstated a 30% quota for public offices reserved for descendants of independence war veterans was thought to favour supporters of the Awami League party, of which then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was leader. Protests were peaceful until 15 July, when members of the Bangladesh Chatra League (BCL) and Jubo League, youth groups of the Awami League party, backed by security forces, violently dispersed the protesters, using rods, sticks and some even carried revolvers. These protests were met with the deadliest violence since the country's independence, with authorities using teargas, rubber bullets, shotguns loaded with pellets, assault rifles loaded with lethal ammunition, and even driving armoured personnel carriers into crowds.⁷

Authorities imposed a "shoot-on-sight" order, nation-wide internet blackouts and mass arrests. On 4 August, protesters marched towards Sheikh Hasina's house, demanding her resignation. Finally, after the armed forces refused to intervene, on 5 August, Sheikh Hasina fled the country.

The OHCHR, in their report on the violence between 1 July and 15 August, estimates at least 1,400 people (of which they estimate 168-182 were children) were killed, and more than 11,700 arrested.⁸ A further 250, including police officers, were killed following Sheikh Hasina's resignation, in acts of retribution. Religious minorities, from the Hindu and Ahmadi communities, were also attacked after Sheikh Hasina's resignation. The OHCHR has concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe the former government, and authorities linked to the Awami League systematically engaged in serious human rights violations and abuses, with the knowledge of political leadership.

Bangladesh has faced historic challenges in ensuring lasting respect for human rights, amid a serious trust deficit in judicial systems systematically weakened and stripped of independence by consecutive governments.

International scrutiny of the human rights situation, for example, a UN Human Rights Council resolution, or a referral of the human rights violations carried out during the previous governments' tenure to the International Criminal Court can lend credence to Bangladesh's commitment for human rights and its steps towards reform and accountability.

⁷Amnesty International, Bangladesh: Further video and photographic analysis confirm police unlawfully used lethal and less-lethal weapons against protesters, 25 July 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/bangladesh-further-video-and-photographic-analysis-confirmed-police-unlawfully-used-lethal-and-less-lethal-weapons-against-protesters/

⁸ OHCHR, OHCHR Fact-Finding Report: Human Rights Violations and Abuses related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh, 12 February 2025, www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-fact-finding-report-human-rights-violations-and-abuses-related

Any government which comes to power must:

- Conduct prompt, thorough, independent, impartial, transparent and effective investigations into the allegations of human rights violations in the context of the protests with the view to ensuring all those suspected to be responsible are brought to justice in fair trials, including police and armed forces, who have perpetrated or failed to prevent such breaches of international human rights law and standards.
- Allegations of human rights violations, committed prior to 2010 must be thoroughly, independently, impartially, transparently and effectively investigated, and there must be truth, justice, accountability, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence for these violations. These violations include but are not limited to death in custody, torture, enforced disappearances and violence and attacks against minority communities and Indigenous Peoples.
- Adopt necessary measures to train law enforcement officials, during basic training and all subsequent training and refresher courses, in accordance with the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials as well as other basic international human rights standards applicable to law enforcement officials. These standards must be fully and effectively respected and should be reflected in national legislation and practice.
 - This would include the amendment of police laws regarding use of force to comply with international standards, including the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.
- Take seriously the UN recommendation to consider referring to the International Criminal Court all the incidents which took place between 1 July to 15 August in Bangladesh.
- Effectively implement other immediate and longer-term recommendations in the OHCHR report including guarantees of fair trial and due process in ongoing investigations, security and justice sector reform and repeal of draconian laws that restrict civic space, among others.
- Support the establishment of an independent international mechanism that can report, investigate, collect, store and analyse evidence, including for human rights violations prior to 2009, and can provide assistance to credible and independent national and international bodies towards justice and accountability for human rights violations
- Cooperate with the UN Special Procedures and agree to visit requests of the Special Rapporteurs on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, and on extrajudicial executions.
- Extend invitations to the Special Rapporteur on truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearance and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

03 INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES



Successive governments, including the interim government, failed to implement the Chittagong Hill Tract Peace Accord and Indigenous Peoples continue to face discrimination and marginalization in the face of militarization, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, land grabbing and violence from state and non-state actors, including Bengali settlers. On 7 April 2024, 142 indigenous Bawm people, including children, were arrested following a bank robbery and hostage taking by the armed Kuki-Chin National Front.⁹ The authorities appear to be targeting large numbers of indigenous people indiscriminately, which may amount to racial discrimination, and arbitrary arrest and detention.

Religious minorities, particularly Hindus, continue to face violence and discrimination. On 18 December 2025, a Hindu garment worker, Dipu Chandra Das, was lynched by a mob following accusations of blasphemy. At least 18 people have been arrested in connection with his murder.¹⁰ Additionally, over the span of five days from 19 December 2025, seven Hindu houses were attacked and burnt in three different areas of Raozan in Chattogram.¹¹

Indigenous people and religious minorities were woefully underrepresented in the reform processes undertaken by the interim government, including government appointed reform commissions. The lack of representation of indigenous people and religious minorities in the public service is a long-standing issue which requires urgent attention.

Any government which comes to power must:

- Fully implement all human rights provisions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord.
- End the discrimination, harassment and violence against the Bawm community by state and non-state actors.
- Take effective steps to ensure adequate, meaningful representation and quotas for public service positions, and in higher education scholarships.
- All Bawm detainees must be immediately released, unless sufficient admissible evidence of their involvement exists, in which case they should be promptly charged individuals with an internationally recognizable criminal offence.
- Carry out prompt, thorough, independent, impartial, transparent and effective investigations into attacks, harassment, intimidation and killings of indigenous people and religious minorities, with a view to holding suspected perpetrators accountable in fair trials and without recourse to the death penalty.



⁹ Amnesty International, Bangladesh: Further information: Indigenous detainees still jailed without trial: Bawm villagers, 12 December 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/0550/2025/en/

¹⁰ The Daily Star, 6 more held over Dipu killing, 25 December 2025, www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/6-more-held-over-dipu-killing-4066361

¹¹ The Business Standard, Serial arson attacks on Hindu homes in Raozan: 5 arrested, special security team to be formed, 24 December 2025, www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/serial-arson-attacks-hindu-homes-raozan-5-arrested-special-security-team-be-formed

04 WOMEN'S RIGHTS



Women face significant barriers to the full enjoyment of their human rights, including violence, discrimination and marginalization. According to the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, the legal minimum age of marriage for women is 18. Despite this safeguard, a government report released on 8 March 2025, states, in a 2023 government survey of women between 2024 years, 8.2% were married before their 15th birthday, and 41.6% were married before their 18th birthday.¹² The same government report goes on to state that according to a 2024 survey, 70% of married women over the age of 15 experienced domestic violence.¹³

A report by the government appointed Women's Affairs Reform Commission released in May 2025 which called for equal rights for women, the criminalization of marital rape, protection of women's right to inheritance, and the protection of sex workers, amongst other recommendations, was met with vehement opposition from religious groups. Despite the Commission being a government appointed body, the interim government did not voice support for the Commission and their recommendations in the face of attacks.¹⁴ Of the 423 recommendations made to the interim government by the Women's Affairs Reform Commission, only 71 were prioritized by the Women's and Children's Affairs Ministry.¹⁵

Ahead of elections, according to media reports, as of 6 January 2026, 30 out of 51 contesting parties, have not nominated a single woman candidate.¹⁶ While only 4.24% of nominees are women, no party has nominated over ten women. Previously, in 2024, 4.86% of candidates contesting elections were women, and similarly, in 2018, this figure was 3.67%.¹⁷ This exclusion of women from political life and decision-making processes will negatively impact the lives of women and the future of society.

Any government which comes to power must:

- Hold perpetrators of gender-based violence accountable in fair trials, without recourse to the death penalty.
- Take concrete and effective steps to end the practice of early and forced marriage and implement the existing legal safeguards in line with international human rights law and standards.
- Take meaningful and concrete steps to implement the recommendations of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission, which align with Bangladesh's obligations under international law.
- Take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and ensure women have equal rights to vote, stand for elections, participate in forming government policy, hold public office, and perform all public functions at the level of government.

¹² Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, *Women's and Girls' Rights, Equality, and Empowerment: The Real Picture*, 8 March 2025, [mowca.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/publications/20dd72ba_50aa_41db_9da3_942da9641407/Women%20%80%99s%20and%20Girls%20%80%99%20Rights,%20Equality,%20and%20Empowerment%20The%20Real%20Picture%20%20Booklet_IWD_2025%20\(1\).pdf](http://mowca.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/publications/20dd72ba_50aa_41db_9da3_942da9641407/Women%20%80%99s%20and%20Girls%20%80%99%20Rights,%20Equality,%20and%20Empowerment%20The%20Real%20Picture%20%20Booklet_IWD_2025%20(1).pdf)

¹³ Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, *Women's and Girls' Rights, Equality, and Empowerment: The Real Picture*, 8 March 2025, [mowca.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/publications/20dd72ba_50aa_41db_9da3_942da9641407/Women%20%80%99s%20and%20Girls%20%80%99%20Rights,%20Equality,%20and%20Empowerment%20The%20Real%20Picture%20%20Booklet_IWD_2025%20\(1\).pdf](http://mowca.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/publications/20dd72ba_50aa_41db_9da3_942da9641407/Women%20%80%99s%20and%20Girls%20%80%99%20Rights,%20Equality,%20and%20Empowerment%20The%20Real%20Picture%20%20Booklet_IWD_2025%20(1).pdf)

¹⁴ The Daily Star, 16 Days of activism: Will the dystopia for women ever end?, 9 December 2025, www.thedailystar.net/supplements/16-days-activism-2025/news/16-days-activism-will-the-dystopia-women-ever-end-4054816

¹⁵ The Daily Star, 16 Days of activism: Will the dystopia for women ever end?, 9 December 2025, www.thedailystar.net/supplements/16-days-activism-2025/news/16-days-activism-will-the-dystopia-women-ever-end-4054816

¹⁶ The Daily Star, No women on tickets of 30 parties, 5 January 2026, www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/elections/news/no-women-tickets-30-parties-4074281

¹⁷ Voice of America, *Women Still Underrepresented in Bangladesh Politics*, 5 January 2024, www.voanews.com/a/women-still-underrepresented-in-bangladesh-politics/7428384.html

05 ROHINGYA REFUGEES



Bangladesh is host to over one million Rohingya refugees, who fled extreme violence from neighbouring Myanmar. The conditions in refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar have become increasingly precarious, particularly with global aid cuts impacting refugees' access to health care, education and food.¹⁸ The security within camps has also deteriorated, with refugees reporting frequent abductions, and sexual violence.¹⁹

Any government which comes to power must:

- Protect the rights of Rohingya refugees, including allowing them access to education, livelihoods and ensuring they are not forcibly returned to Myanmar.
- Ensure the protection of refugees and swiftly and sufficiently investigate incidents of violence and other human rights abuses with a view to hold perpetrators accountable in free and fair trials in ordinary civilian courts, without recourse to the death penalty.

06 WORKERS' RIGHTS



The Bangladesh garment industry, like many others in South and South-East Asia, has long been challenged over human rights abuses in its supply chain and in its business model. There have been long-standing complaints of the denial of the right to decent work and a living wage, as well as the right to social protection.²⁰ Poverty pay, gender-based violence, harassment, overwork and poor working conditions, including lack of access to adequate health and safety at work, have been widely documented by rights groups, including Amnesty International, unions and international bodies, including the ILO.²¹

Any government which comes to power must:

- Urgently review and raise the current minimum wage for garment workers to ensure it provides a non-discriminatory, adequate living wage according to ILO law and standards. Wage levels should be reviewed periodically – ideally at least annually – and adjusted based on appropriate up-to-date data such as cost of living and inflation statistics.
- Strengthen laws on the elimination of all forms of gender-based discrimination, violence and harassment, including ratification of ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. This must also include requiring companies to publish and implement inclusion policies and take a zero-tolerance approach to workplace gender-based violence and harassment.
- Reduce the use of precarious work, agency work and the use of temporary workers in the garment sector, and ensure all workers, including agency, piece-rate and home workers are protected under labour laws.
- Effectively implement and enforce national labour legislation. Ensure that adequate resources are given to labour inspections and grievance mechanisms (including labour tribunals).

¹⁸ Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: International community must act to avoid devastating aid cuts for Rohingya refugees*, 13 March 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/03/bangladesh-international-community-must-act-to-avoid-devastating-aid-cuts-for-rohingya-refugees/

¹⁹ Amnesty International, *8 Years On: Accountability needed for Myanmar atrocities against Rohingya*, 22 August 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/08/8-years-on-accountability-needed-for-myanmar-atrocities-against-rohingya/

²⁰ Amnesty International, *South Asia: Stitched up: Denial of freedom of association for garment workers in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka*, 27 November 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa04/8929/2025/en/

²¹ Clean Clothes Campaign, *Bangladesh government proposes new poverty wage of 12,500 BDT (\$113) per month, ignoring the workers' desperate calls*, 2023, cleanclothes.org/news/2023/bangladesh-minimum-wage-announcement

Bangladesh Centre for Workers Solidarity, *BREAK THE SILENCE STOP THE VIOLENCE* Gender-based violence in the garment sector of Bangladesh: A study on cases, causes and cures, 2020, www.bcwbsd.org/uploads/GBV_Stop-Violence_Report_BCWS-FEMNET-2020.pdf

07 CLIMATE JUSTICE



Bangladesh is one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world. Bangladesh faces several human-induced climate change related, slow- and rapid-onset events, including drought, cyclones, floods and rising temperatures, all of which threaten access to water and food security.²² Up to 90 million people in Bangladesh are potentially affected by climate risks. While the climate-crisis impacts all communities, Amnesty International has documented how “low caste” groups, particularly Dalit sanitation workers, face disproportionate impacts. Amnesty International’s research found that Dalit women sanitation workers interviewed in Khulna and Satkhira do not have adequate supplies of safe drinking water and face barriers accessing water for personal and domestic use. During extreme weather events, made worse by human induced climate change’s access to affordable drinking water is further disrupted resulting in widespread illness. Furthermore, access to sanitation is similarly compromised: the toilets Dalit sanitation workers can afford offer no privacy, are difficult to access, and are not resilient to climate-change related extreme weather events. Building a basic latrine is often unaffordable and upgrades to make them flood resilient are unattainable. Families can be forced to choose between rebuilding their house or toilet after each cyclone.

Any government which comes to power must:

- Revise and align Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAP 2023–2050), and the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 to explicitly recognise Dalit sanitation workers as a vulnerable and at-risk group.
- Develop and integrate human rights and equity-based loss and damage mechanisms that recognise both economic and non-economic losses experienced by Dalits due to climate related disasters and include adequate compensation for destroyed homes and toilets, assets and income lost due to extreme weather events, and psychosocial harm linked to displacement in cyclone shelters and caste-based exclusion.
- Create decentralized and locally based climate adaptation funds with dedicated and targeted allocations for Dalit communities in high-risk areas such as Khulna and Satkhira and provide technical and material support for the construction of flood and cyclone-resistant homes in high-risk areas.
- Ensure active, free and meaningful participation of Dalits (particularly women) in decision making processes, at all levels of government, specifically with respect to water and sanitation planning and disaster planning and responses.



Photo: © Amnesty International

²² Amnesty International, Left behind in the storm: Dalit women sanitation workers and the fight for water and dignity, 16 October 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/0372/2025/en/

08 DEATH PENALTY



Bangladesh retains the death penalty for various offences and continues to impose it, including for offences that do not meet the threshold of the “most serious crimes” to which the use of this punishment must be restricted under international law and standards.²³ Amnesty International’s monitoring indicates that death sentences have been frequently imposed without the defendant being present (*in absentia*) and by special courts, including Speedy Trial Tribunals which have raised concern with regard to the fairness of the proceedings.²⁴ The most notable instance of one such judgments was that against deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was sentenced to death after being found guilty alongside other former officials for crimes against humanity on 17 November 2025.²⁵ The trial was carried out by the International Crimes Tribunal, whose processes, Hasina’s case included, has raised serious fair trial and due process concerns. Despite being a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Bangladesh has yet to sign the First and Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. According to Amnesty International’s figures, no executions were carried out in 2024,²⁶ signalling an opportunity for the government to impose an official moratorium on the death penalty, with the view to full abolition of the death penalty.

Any government which comes to power must:

- Abolish the death penalty and, in the interim, introduce an official moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty.
- Pending full abolition, commute all existing death sentences and bring national law in line with restrictions to the use of the death penalty set out under international law and standards, including narrowing the scope of the death penalty to the “most serious crimes”, interpreted by the UN Human Rights Committee as referring to offences involving intentional killing; and ensuring that proceedings in all capital cases meet international standards for a fair trial.
- Raise awareness around studies showing that there is no conclusive evidence that the death penalty acts as a unique deterrent on crime, and the human rights violations associated with the use of this punishment.

²³ Article 6(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Safeguard No.1 of the UN Safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty, adopted through UN Economic and Social Council resolution 1984/50; UN Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 36 (2018) on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, 30 October 2018, para.35; Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (2012), UN Doc. A/67/275, para.122.

²⁴ Amnesty International, Death sentences and executions in 2024 (ACT 50/8976/2025), April 2025, p.23. UN Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 36 Article 6: right to life, UN Doc.CCPR/C/GC/36,3 September 2019, para.45.

²⁵ Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: Justice for victims of 2024 massacre not served by death sentence against Sheikh Hasina*, 17 November 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/11/bangladesh-justice-for-victims-of-2024-massacre-not-served-by-death-sentence-against-sheikh-hasina/

²⁶ Amnesty International, *Death sentences and executions in 2024*, 8 April 2025, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/8976/2025/en/