

## **Official Statement on the US Visa Restriction Announcement:**

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The Government of Bangladesh has taken note of the announcement made by the US Secretary of State on a visa restriction policy pursuant to the so-called 3C provision under the US Immigration and Act. Bangladesh would like to view this announcement in the broader context of its government's unequivocal commitment to holding free and fair elections at all levels for upholding the country's democratic process. However, Bangladesh expects that such visa policy will not be applied arbitrarily in a non-objective manner.

Under Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's leadership, Bangladesh remains a democratic and politically stable nation with experience of holding a series of elections at national and local levels. Since the general elections in 2008, it is evident that the people of the country experienced unprecedented socio-economic development and empowerment due to continued political stability under the Awami League government. This resulted in the reduction of headcount poverty from 41.5% in 2006 to 18.7% in 2022, and of extreme poverty from 25.1% to 5.6% during the same period. Now an international role model for development, Bangladesh has become eligible for graduation from the UN Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2026. These have been achieved due to the Awami League government being elected to office for three consecutive terms over the last fourteen years.

The people of Bangladesh are very much conscious of their democratic and voting rights. There is no precedent for any government to continue in office having usurped people's mandate through vote rigging. The people's right to franchise is considered a State sanctity by the Awami League government that has a political legacy of unrelenting struggles and sacrifice for securing that right. The government attaches importance to freedom of assembly and association for all peaceful and legitimate democratic processes.

The electoral reform process in Bangladesh continues in a consultative manner involving all concerned stakeholders. As part of the process, photo-based voter ID cards were issued in response to the 10.23 million fraudulent voters enlisted by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led government. The use of transparent ballot boxes has also been made the norm to establish confidence among the electorate as well as the polling officials and agents.

The National Election Commission continues to be equipped with the wherewithal to carry out its functions in full independence, credibility and efficiency. The present government took the initiative for the first time to get the *Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Appointment Act, 2022* enacted by the National Parliament. Pursuant to this law, a new Election Commission has been constituted. As mandated by the Bangladesh Constitution and *Representation of the People Order, 1972*, the entire executive machinery will remain at the Election Commission's disposal to assist in the discharge of its responsibilities in a way as it may direct.

In keeping with that, the government apparatus will take necessary measures to prevent and address any unlawful practices or interference by any individual, group or entity to compromise the smooth and participatory conduct of the elections. The electoral process will remain under strict vigilance, including by international observers as accredited by the Election Commission. The government expects that the local undemocratic forces that resort to violence, arson and destruction would remain cautious and refrain from their misguided efforts to jeopardize the electoral process as mandated by the Constitution. It is entirely up to the people of Bangladesh to sustain the hard-earned democratic process, political stability and development gains in the country. The government appreciates that the international community including the US firmly stands by Hon'ble Prime Minister's sustained commitment to ensure free and fair elections.

