

3.1.2. Involvement in human rights abuse

Sources reported that the former government allegedly used law enforcement as a tool for its own agenda,[212](#) to undermine the political opposition,[213](#) suppress dissent, and spread fear.[214](#) Human Rights Watch described enforced disappearances as a 'hallmark' of Hasina's rule.[215](#) Among those forcibly disappeared were leaders and supporters of opposition parties,[216](#) alleged Islamist militants,[217](#) and seemingly ordinary people.[218](#) Victims were sometimes abducted by men in plainclothes claiming to represent law enforcement agencies[219](#) and were commonly deprived of liberty repeated times, sometimes directly after being released from jail,[220](#) finding themselves in a continuous cycle of arrests.[221](#) State authorities put victims' family members under surveillance,[222](#) and threatened and harassed those seeking justice.[223](#)

Law enforcement engaged in enforced disappearances[224](#) and extrajudicial killings.[225](#) Multiple agencies were involved, including the ordinary police,[226](#) but sources indicated that the RAB, DB, and intelligence agencies were leading actors.[227](#) The inquiry commission on enforced disappearance, set up by the interim government, reported on a 'systematic practice' or enforced disappearance under the previous government. Security agencies used a 'coordinated strategy' to avoid detection, by attributing activities to each other and dividing responsibilities;[228](#) while one agency would abduct a victim, another agency would detain them, and a third one would either release or kill them.[229](#) According to the commission, this division led to situations where those involved 'often lacked knowledge of who they were eliminating or the broader context of the operation'.[230](#) The commission further stated that enforced disappearance was a practice taking place under a central command structure.[231](#) Other sources have also reported on enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings committed by the RAB, as deliberate, planned[232](#) and covered up.[233](#) Whistle-blowers told Deutsche Welle (DW) and Netra News that operations with a political target were explicitly sanctioned from above, 'at least from the Ministry of Home Affairs'.[234](#) Officers involved in enforced disappearance have also told Human Rights Watch that senior members of the former government, including the prime minister, knew about incommunicado detentions, and that some enforced disappearances and killings were carried out on the direct order of Hasina.[235](#)

In some cases, victims were forcibly disappeared before being extrajudicially killed.[236](#) Their bodies were commonly dumped in rivers.[237](#) People have also been killed in what the authorities falsely described as 'crossfire' or 'gunfights'.[238](#) According to local human rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), 1 926 persons were killed extrajudicially in such 'crossfire' and 'gunfight' incidents under the former government's 15 years in power.[239](#) As reported by Human Rights Watch, this practice became so institutionalised that members of parliament called for more 'crossfire killings'.[240](#) The commission of enquiry estimated that more than 3 500 individuals were subjected to enforced disappearance under the former government,[241](#) while local and regional human rights organisations have recorded about 2 600 extrajudicial killings.[242](#)

In the aftermath of the former government's fall, some victims of enforced disappearance resurfaced, disclosing that they had been kept in secret prisons (aynaghar) for years.[243](#) The inquiry commission has identified 16 secret detention facilities,[244](#) holding victims across the country,[245](#) including the 'notorious' Joint Interrogation Cell and Taskforce for Interrogation in Uttara.[246](#) However, 40–200 secret detention sites are believed to exist.[247](#) Security forces have reportedly attempted to destroy evidence at the sites.[248](#) According to the commission, security staff engaged in 'torture rituals', that were methodological and

‘profoundly brutal’.²⁴⁹ Other sources have also reported on torture at these sites.²⁵⁰

Torture and other forms of abuse were reportedly widespread practice within law enforcement in general; inter alia as a means to extract forced confessions,²⁵¹ but also to humiliate victims, and instill fear.²⁵² Victims of detention and subsequent torture included opposition members²⁵³ and other critics,²⁵⁴ alleged ‘militants’,²⁵⁵ and ordinary citizens.²⁵⁶ Law enforcement agencies reportedly enjoyed extensive impunity²⁵⁷ and harassed both victims and their relatives filing cases against law enforcement officers.²⁵⁸ As reported by Human Rights Watch in 2023, only one case of torture had led to a conviction under Bangladesh’s Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act since its adoption in 2013.²⁵⁹

For a timeline of the protests in July–August 2024, and information on violence of law enforcement, see [Annex 1: Timeline of the protests in July–August 2024](#).

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