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3.2. Operational status following the power shift

After the fall of the former government many police officers abandoned their posts260 and went into hiding.261 They left behind a vacuum in law enforcement which opened up for a spike in crime.262 In the immediate aftermath, young citizens could be seen redirecting traffic in Dhaka, in the absence of traffic police.263 Netra News described the situation as a 'near collapse' of law enforcement.264 The military was granted magistracy powers to maintain law and order,265 which allows military officers holding the rank of captain or higher to, inter alia, arrest people. 266

Many police officers were attacked in the aftermath of the former government's fall, as the institution was perceived as having aided the former government in enforcing a repressive agenda267 and making use of excessive force during protests.268 Police stations were set on fire and police officers were beaten to death by mobs.269 According to TIB, 44 police were killed in various incidents during protests and in the early days after the former government's fall.270 After the former government fell, 30 % of police positions became vacant, and 450 out of 639 police stations were nonfunctional following attacks.271

The police have gradually returned to duty, and the immediate public unrest that followed the fall of the former government has stabilised.272 However, public trust in the police deteriorated further during the protests,273 and Dr. Tawohidul Haque, associate professor and crime analyst at the Institute of Social Welfare and Research, University of Dhaka, described an existing sentiment of perceiving the police as 'enemies of the people' due to their violent repression during protests, which has made 'officers hesitant to perform their duties'.274 Local media also reported on police officers being hesitant in interfering in incidents involving political or religious groups, or student bodies, 'fearing repercussions if the political winds shift after a change in government.'275 Local media also reported on continuing attacks against the police,276 including beatings of police officers apprehended alone.277 According to the Daily Star, 225 officers were assaulted in the period September 2024–February 2025.278

The interim government dismissed the national police chief,279 and there were also reshuffles and dismissals of other senior law enforcement staff.280 According to the Diplomat, many officers who had been sidelined for years under the former government were transferred to key positions. These officers have, however, been facing resistance from lower-ranking officers loyal to the former government.281 Police morale was reportedly poor,282 including due to a perceived inaction of the interim government to address police killings.283 As described by the United Nations Development Programme (UNPD) in November 2024, police were often 'trapped

in a cycle of violence and mistrust, operating in a high-pressure environment with insufficient resources, inadequate training, and excessive work hours – factors that have a detrimental impact on the overall effectiveness and morale of the force'.284 The capacity of the police has reportedly also been hampered by the loss of informants.285 According to Najmus Sakib, criminology assistant professor at Dhaka University, cited by Al Jazeera, new officers were not familiar with assigned areas and lacked a comprehensive crime-fighting strategy.286

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