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3.3. Impact on actors and their conduct

Law enforcement in Bangladesh is based on laws drafted during the colonial period, when law enforcement was used as a tool for state control rather than serving the public.287 The legal framework grants security forces wide powers and opens up for widespread impunity.288 As reported by Human Rights Watch, security forces have been operating in a 'deeply ingrained culture of impunity'.289 No reforms were initiated in the security structures within the reference period of this report,290 including in abusive security and intelligence entities,291 although the UN OHCHR292 and Human Rights Watch293 as well as the national enquiry commission for enforced disappearances, have specifically called for disbanding the RAB.294 RAB is reportedly planning to change its name, logo and uniform, and a new law is being drafted to regulate its operation.295

Some security agencies are under military command and include army officers, which might make their reform difficult according to International Crisis Group, given the interim government's dependence on the military for support. RAB, for example, includes military, paramilitary staff force, in addition to police personnel. Other paramilitary forces involved in alleged abuse include the BGB, Ansar, as well as the military intelligence (DGFI).296

There has been some reshuffling within the security structures.297 The head of the police has been replaced,298 as well as heads of specialised units including RAB, DGFI,299 DB,300 National Security Intelligence,301 National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre,302 and the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime.303 Senior law enforcement staff have been forced into retirement,304 or transferred to new positions.305 Some have also been arrested.306 According to police sources, as reported by Bdnews24.com in April 2024, a total of 119 law enforcement officers had been reassigned to new positions, 82 had become 'officers on special duty' (i.e. being stripped off relevant official duties, or transferred to remote or insignificant posts307), and 30 had been forced into retirement. Meanwhile, 57 were absent from their posts.308 TIB reported on 369 sub-inspectors undergoing training at the Police Academy in Sarda being 'controversially discharged on allegations of indiscipline', and further reported on an ongoing process of 'verifying the political affiliation of police officers appointed during the Awami League era'.309 Nevertheless, there were still staff members loyal to the former regime within the security structures.310

There were also reshuffles and dismissals at the highest level of the army,311 and the heads of 50 police stations were dismissed, according to Al Jazeera, allegedly for being politically affiliated with the Awami League.312

Sources reported on security forces replicating patterns of abuses that took place under the former government, for example repeated arrest and remand, and arrests of political figures (now targeting the Awami League) and journalists perceived as affiliated with the party.313 There were continuing reports of extrajudicial killings occurring during operations of various forces,314 as well as instances of custodial deaths315 and torture.316 Netra News suggested that the army's magistracy powers have emboldened soldiers to resort to abusive methods, reminiscent of practices under the former government.317 For example, in January 2025, soldiers detained the local leader of Jubo Dal, BNP's youth party in Cumilla and tortured him to death.318 On 7 January 2025, the first formal complaint against security officials for incidents taking place after the fall of the former government was publicly confirmed, involving 33 defendants, including a ranking officer and eight army personnel accused of custodial torture causing two deaths.319

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