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6.1. Public order, crime and mob violence

The fall of the former government in August 2024 was followed by nationwide lawlessness[408] and 'a wave of violent mob attacks'.[409] Mobs sought revenge and targeted perceived Awami League supporters, as well as their businesses and homes. Members of the Hindu minority also experienced some of these attacks, as well as police staff, being perceived as having aided the former government in enforcing its repressive agenda.[410] Mobs set police stations on fire and beat police officers to death.[411] According to TIB, 44 police were killed in 'various violent incidents'.[412] Fearing reprisals, police officers abandoned their posts,[413] and went into hiding.[414] They left behind a vacuum in law enforcement which opened up for a spike in crime,[415] for example 21 people were reportedly lynched in 11 August–19 September 2024.[416] In order to maintain law and order, the military was granted magistracy powers,[417] which was extended throughout the reference period.[418] This means that military officers holding the rank of captain or higher may, inter alia, conduct arrests and place individuals in custody.[419]

Police officers gradually returned to work, and the public unrest following the fall of the previous government had stabilised by November 2024.[420] Sources, however, reported on a remaining disruption in law enforcement in 2025,[421] and some elements of society taking advantage of this gap.[422] This has led to a general deterioration of law and order in the country compared to previous years.[423] There was a spike in violent crime and rape in the months following the power shift,[424] with the highest rates of mugging and robbery in six years according to police data, as reported by media sources, as well as a sharp increase in abductions. For example, in January 2025, the police received reports of 294 murders (in contrast to 231 during the same month in 2024), 171 robberies (in contrast to 114 in January 2024) and the number of abductions had reportedly more than doubled[425] from 51 in January 2024 to 104 in January 2025.[426] TIB reported in November 2024 that 600 people had been killed and 10 000 injured since the fall of the previous government, that incidents of theft, robbery, snatching had increased, and noted that vandalism of houses, vehicles, and businesses, including arson and looting, still occurred. TIB further reported on violent unrest in nine prisons across the country, including escapes, protests, casualties, and violence, as well as agitations at some industries leading to the death and disappearance of workers.[427]

According to the publication The Diplomat, reporting in March 2025, '[m]ajor cities and towns have become hotspots for crime, with incidents escalating daily'. The Diplomat also quoted the Inspector General of Prisons Brigadier explaining that the rise in crime inter alia was an effect of the release of 2 200 prisoners during protests in July–August 2024 uprising, with 700 remaining at large as of March 2025, including 70 'high-risk criminals'. He further stated that 174 prisoners had been released on bail and were 'operating without any restrictions' due to the lack of surveillance and legal oversight, 'making their presence felt again'.[428] Other sources also reported on infamous

criminals being released and resuming criminal activities[429] and on criminals obtaining weapons through looting during the protests, which has fuelled violent crime.[430] The crime rates have reportedly instilled fear among parts of the public,[431] and many were reportedly afraid of going outdoors.[432]

To tackle the crime wave, the interim government launched the joint military and police operation 'Operation Devil Hunt' on 8 February 2025.[433] Thousands were arrested,[434] but crime has reportedly continued 'unabated'.[435] Following a wave of muggings in Dhaka causing 'panic',[436] and student protests calling for his resignation,[437] the Home Affairs Adviser held an emergency conference on 24 February 2025. He addressed the deteriorating law-and-order situation, blamed Awami League supporters for trying to destabilise the country, and pledged to increase police presence.[438]

Women have been attacked by groups of men in public spaces, and violence against women and girls in general is reportedly on the rise,[439] including gang rape.[440] Cases drawing national attention[441] included the robbery and sexual harassment of women on a moving bus on 24 February 2025.[442] A witness told local media that a Hindu woman was raped in front of her family, and many other female passengers were bitten in 'their sensitive areas'.[443] In another case, which sparked nationwide protests,[444] an eight-year-old girl was raped by her sister's in-laws in Magura in early March 2025 and later died in hospital.[445] The houses of the accused were set on fire by a mob.[446] The police violently dispersed one of the subsequent protests against rape in Dhaka.[447] On 16 March 2025, Save the Children and four other NGOs held a joint press conference to address the increased violence against girls and the 'recent wave of sexual violence, abuse, rape, murder, and attempted murder in the country'.[448]

Mob violence has continued to break out,[449] often targeting individuals suspected of crime.[450] People have, however, been targeted by mobs also for various other reasons, such as political retribution, land disputes, and personal conflicts,[451] and in some instances for seemingly minor acts, for example a woman was beaten to death for 'behaving unusually',[452] a taxi driver involved in a traffic incident was beaten to death, as well as a man asking two youths to stop smoking in public.[453] In April 2025, a human rights activist explained that the perpetrators of mob beatings are not possible to identify, and are not being caught.[454]

Local human rights organisations, Manabadhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF),[455] ASK and Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) recorded increased levels of mob beatings. Both ASK and HRSS documented the highest rates of deaths due to mob beatings in a decade.[456] Both MSF and ASK provided monthly data indicating a sharp increase in mob-related deaths in August 2024, and remaining on higher levels throughout the rest of the year (an average of 19 deaths per month). In contrast, during the first seven months of 2024, MSF and ASK recorded an average of 6 and 5 deaths per month, respectively.[457] The higher levels of recorded deaths continued in the first months of 2025, with cases peaking anew in March 2025.[458] MSF recorded 56 deaths this month and referred to it as an 'alarming increase' in mob beatings,[459] while ASK recorded 20 deaths.[460] The data on the 2024 annual total also differ as HRSS recorded 173 deaths,[461] MSF 146,[462] and ASK 128.[463]

Some protests also turned violent in 2025.[464] On the night of 5 February 2025, a mob demolished the house of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman[465] (independent Bangladesh's first president and Hasina's late father).[466] As Rahman has been viewed as an 'independence icon',[467] his house was reportedly an important place for Awami League supporters.[468] The event was triggered by an online speech delivered by Hasina on the same day, from exile in India, in which she discredited the protest movement that caused her downfall and called upon her supporters to stand up against the interim government.[469] Agitated protesters stormed Rahman's house, armed with sticks,

hammers and other tools, looted the property, set it on fire, and demolished it with a crane and an excavator.[470] The house was almost levelled to the ground.[471] Netra News reported on the interim government not making any statement or attempt to calm the situation and described the police presence as ‘minimal’ and ‘largely disengaged’.[472] The interim government later referred to the event as ‘undesirable’, but also emphasised that it was triggered by Hasina’s speech.[473] Hasina’s former residence Sudha Sadan was also set on fire and vandalised on the same night,[474] as well as homes of other exiled party leaders.[475] Over the following two days, similar attacks continued in various locations.[476] According to Prothom Alo, at least 33 properties of Awami League leaders were attacked, as well as eight party offices and 50 murals of the Sheikh family,[477] in 19 cities.[478]

On 7 April 2025, widespread protests against Israel’s military campaign in Gaza turned violent in Cox’s Bazar, Chattogram, Sylhet, Gazipur, Bogura and Cumilla,[479] where mobs vandalised brands perceived as associated with Israel, such as Bata, KFC and Pizza Hut.[480]

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