

ISSUE BRIEF-01

JUNE, 2023



PARTNERS IN CRIME

THE SHEIKH HASINA REGIME AND THE BANGLADESH POLICE



Partners in Crime - The Sheikh Hasina Regime & The Bangladesh Police

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Executive Summary

- ▶ This Issue Brief highlights the role of Bangladesh Police in the current authoritarian Awami League regime (2009-present). The ruling regime has been sustaining itself through several coercive measures, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killing, repression, and torture. The regime has been using the Police, an essential organ of the Bangladeshi Republic, as a partisan force to violently repress the opposition and muzzle the critical voices.
- ▶ According to the media, human rights organization, and independent researchers, the Bangladesh Police has been involved in extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, custodial deaths and torture, extortion, corruption, harassment, filing fake and gayebi cases (phantom cases) against the opposition, overt allegiance to the ruling party, and vote rigging, which are the key factors behind the democratic backsliding and current autocracy in Bangladesh.
- ▶ Although the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) is frequently referenced in connection with extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances and termed as the "death squad," the role of the Bangladesh Police has been often unnoticed. This Issue Brief demonstrates the police are involved in more cases of crimes against humanity than the RAB.
- ▶ Moreover, the Bangladesh Police is the most corrupt service sector in Bangladesh. They are engaged in a variety of irregularities, ranging from collecting bribes by torturing or threatening to torture to delaying or showing negligence in preparing a general diary or taking a statement. Besides, in the previous five years, most 'gayebi cases' (cases filed even though no incident occurred in reality) filed by Police have been against leaders and activists of the opposition political party, especially against the activists and leaders of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).
- ▶ Despite being employees of the Republic, senior police officers publicly show their allegiance to the ruling party and in many instances, actively participated in the ruling party's politics. They make obscene and dehumanizing statements about opposition parties, leaders, and dissidents. Under the current Sheikh Hasina regime, the distinction between the state and ruling party has been blurred as police became tools of ruling party's repression mechanisms.
- ▶ Thus, as this Issue Brief shows, the Bangladesh Police has become a key actor for sustaining the current authoritarian regime through their widespread involvement in serious human rights violations, corruption, and suppressing democratic protests and movements. Even the members of the police forces were rewarded for their contribution in extrajudicial killings. The police forces were actively participated in undermining democracy and election process by ballot box stuffing and vote rigging in 2018 national election. All the current police activities indicate that police will be continuing to undermine the democracy and process of conducting a fair election unless international community takes punitive and strict measures against the members of the police force involved in human rights violations and repression on the opposition.

- ▶ The United States Department of State announced a new visa restriction policy on May 24, 2023, targeting to restrict the issuance of visas for any Bangladeshi individual, believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh.
- ▶ Bangladesh police became a bastion of corruption and human rights abuses. One official, Pradeep Kumar, alone killed around 200 people in one area and never faced the music until the sensational killing of an ex-military official. Pradeep was merely a pawn of officials like Benazir Ahmed, Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, and Harun-or-Rashid, who have driven the force from the front and made a system of patronization for the people who violate human rights within the organization that is facilitating the culture of the murder of civilians inside the country.

In this Issue Brief, profiles of some of these individuals have been added to provide an understanding of their crooked behavior and why it is unthinkable to have a fair election with these people in a place of power. Under the Sheikh Hasina regime, hundreds of police officers have committed crimes as grave as extrajudicial killings, torture in custody, political persecution against opposition party supporters, and extortion. Due to the authoritarian regime's muzzle on press freedom, the media revealed only a few incidents. The nine cases described in this Issue Brief are based on the available information in the press, which is only a partial glimpse of their massive crime network.



Introduction

For the last decade, Bangladesh has witnessed a journey towards authoritarianism under the Awami League regime, where the ruling party has created a ‘culture of fear’ through repression, torture, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, fake cases, and suppressing freedom of expression.¹ The Sweden-based independent research institute V-Dem Institute in 2021 categorized Bangladesh as an ‘electoral autocracy.’²

The German-based research organization Bertelsmann Foundation rated Bangladesh to be an autocracy in their Transformation Index (BTI) in the years 2018 to 2022.³ For a long time, researchers and observers have been observing Bangladesh’s journey toward autocracy and classified it as a ‘hybrid regime,’ characterized by flawed or even suspended elections, government pressure on opposition parties and candidates, the weak rule of law and civil society, widespread corruption, curbs on the independence of the judiciary, restriction on the freedom of expression.⁴

The role of law enforcement agencies in creating this culture of fear in Bangladesh has been widely discussed at home and abroad. For a long time, allegations of human rights violations have been made against all law enforcement agencies in

Bangladesh. The United States sanctioned the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and six of its officials in December 2021 for their involvement in serious human rights violations.⁵ Although there has been significant talk about RAB’s participation in human rights violations, there has been far less discussion about Bangladesh Police’s involvement in the human rights violation and severe attacks on opposition in Bangladesh. In 2019, UN Committee against Torture described the Bangladesh police as a “state within a state,” indicating that police and other law enforcement agencies were able to operate with impunity and zero accountability.⁶

This issue-brief will shed light on Bangladesh Police’s involvement in various crimes, including serious human rights violations, corruption, and vote rigging, which paved the way for the Awami League regime to undermine the democratic system and establish an autocracy.

This Issue Brief has two sections: the first section shows how nine police officers of the Bangladesh Police have been involved in grave crimes such as extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture under custody, extortion, and corruption. The second section presents general trends and patterns of crimes by Bangladesh Police under the Sheikh Hasina regime.



Bangladesh police became a bastion of corruption and human rights abuses mostly because of a number of officials who carried out extrajudicial killings, torture in custody, political persecution against opposition party supporters, and extortion. One official, Pradeep Kumar, alone killed around 200 people in one area and never faced the music until the sensational killing of an ex-military official. Pradeep was merely a pawn of officials like Benazir Ahmed, Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, and Harun-or-Rashid, who have driven the force from the front and made a system of patronization for the people who violate human rights within the organization that is facilitating the culture of the murder of civilians inside the country.

In this section, profiles of some of these individuals have been added to provide an understanding of their crooked behavior and why it is unthinkable to have a fair election with these people in a place of power. Under the Sheikh Hasina regime, hundreds of police officers have committed crimes as grave as extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture under custody, extortion, and corruption. Due to the authoritarian regime's control of press freedom, the media revealed only a few incidents. The following nine cases are based on the available information in the press, which is only a partial glimpse of their crime network.



1

Harun-or-Rashid

Chief of Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police

Home town: Kishoreganj



Violation of political rights

On 6 July 2011, opposition party BNP's chief whip Zainul Abdin Farroque came under police attack in front of the Parliament building when he was leading a procession of twenty-five other opposition members of parliament on the first day of the two-day strike. Video footage showed Harun-or-Rashid, the then Additional DC of Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Tejgaon zone, led the assault on Mr Farroque at Manik Mia Avenue, in front of the parliament building.⁷ Harun chased the chief whip down and punched and kicked him mercilessly.⁸

Negligence in duty leading to death

Harun-or-Rashid was promoted later as a DC for the Lalbagh zone. In this capacity, he was in charge of maintaining law and order in the Lalbagh area. On 9 December 2012, Bishwajit Das, a tailor from Dhaka's old town's Lalbagh area was killed by Awami League's student group Bangladesh Chhatra League (Students' League), in the daylight, during an opposition protest as the killers suspected him as an opposition activist. DC of Lalbagh zeon, Harun-or-Rashid was also present at the place when Bishwajit Das was hacked to death by the activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League, but he did not try to save him but just looked on with his team standing beside him.⁹

In a more recent incident, his office (DB of Dhaka Metropolitan Police) summoned Alal Uddin in the name of interrogation in June 2023. Uddin was detained and tortured at the DB office. Harun's

forces tortured Alal Uddin so severely that he died.¹⁰

Extortion

On May 3, 2016, SP Harun-or-Rashid called Amber Denim store manager Iahia Babu and demanded BDT 5 crore (USD 609,756) in extortion. He threatened to arrest and harass Amber Group officials and destroy the industries if his demand was not met. After the incident, Amber Group Chairman Showkat Aziz Rasel sent a written complaint to the president, prime minister, home ministry, different government offices and the chairman of different business organisations.¹¹

The letter read:

'Harun-or-Rashid, who was the former superintendent of Gazipur police and withdrew following an election commission directive, demanded BDT 5 crore from me. At first, Sub Inspector Azharul Islam called Amber Denim Manager Babu and said SP Harun sir told him to call on Amber Group officials. SP sir needs money. He told me to send BDT 5 crore soon.'

Earlier, SP Harun called on me at Lamda Hall of Gulshan Club and Gulshan Kabab Factory Restaurant and demanded BDT 5 crore. He also told me to send the money in dollars to his address in the United States. He also threatened to destroy my company. I refused to pay the money, and within 24 hours, SP Harun ordered his subordinate colleagues to arrest 45 labours and officers of the group late at night showing false cases against them.'

After the incident, on October 31, Harun's team of police from Narayanganj took an SUV owned by Amber Group Chairman Showkat Aziz Russell from Dhaka Club to Narayanganj, along with its driver. The following night, his wife Farah Russell, 40, and son Anab Aziz, 17, were picked up from their Gulshan residence by Narayanganj district police and were also taken to Narayanganj.

Although the two incidents took place in different spots at different times, Narayanganj superintendent of police (SP) Harun-or-Rashid, at a press conference on November 2, claimed that police recovered bullets and liquor from the SUV and detained three people, Farah, Anaf, and their driver, Sumon.¹²

But the story took a U-turn after the footage from the Gulshan residence of Russell, son of Partex Group chairman MA Hashem and president of Gulshan Club, was released a day after the press conference, which showed police arresting the family members of the businessman from their residence in Gulshan.

After the incident, because of his proven misconduct, he was removed from his position.¹³

Rewards

Despite having dismal records in his career, Harun was rewarded time and again. After beating the opposition leaders on the street, Harun was rewarded with the prestigious President Police Medal in 2013. The then Home Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir proudly claimed that Harun was rewarded for beating the opposition party chief whip.¹⁴

More interestingly, despite the allegations of extortion and corruption, Harun has been given a series of plum postings, ultimately being appointed to the very sensitive position of the Chief of the Detective Branch of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police.¹⁵



2

Benazir Ahmed

Former Inspector General of Police, Bangladesh

Home town: Gopalganj



Gross human rights violation

Benazir Ahmed was named director-general of RAB in 2015. Extrajudicial killings in Bangladesh intensified following his tenure. The killing of Akramul Haque, a local lawmaker from Cox's Bazar region, is the case that has received the most attention, though.¹⁶

RAB Director-General Benazir Ahmed declared during a press conference on May 14 that a "stronger stance" will be taken against drug misuse. Police cases going through the courts "would be less encouraged... due to backlog," according to Ahmed, since the processing of these matters typically takes a long time.¹⁷

Akramul Haque was murdered by RAB 7 officials on 27 May 2018. Audio clips of his last phone call confirmed the involvement of RAB. A Deutsche Welle report has revealed that the murder was ordered by director general Benazir Ahmed.¹⁸ Besides, insiders have revealed that RAB was instructed to abduct politicians when he was the chief.

Apart from ordering extrajudicial deaths, he defended them as well in multiple interviews.¹⁹

On 10 December 2021, the U.S. Treasury imposed sanctions on Benazir Ahmed, along with other 6 individuals who served in the RAB and committed serious violations of human rights.²⁰

Ordering firing on the crowd

Benazir Ahmed has a grim record of undermining political rights and human rights. On 7 April 2021, during the COVID-19 lockdown, when people were protesting the mistreatment of government officials who were misappropriating relief and police excess, he personally ordered the use of 'more powerful' weapons to suppress the protests.²¹

In a virtual meeting with senior police officials, he said: 'Police could use more powerful weapons if the firing of rubber bullets seemed ineffective in bringing situations under control.'

Within a few days, at least five people were killed and dozens injured in Bangladesh after police opened fire on a crowd of workers protesting to demand unpaid wages and a pay rise in Chattagram.²²

Crime connections and money laundering

Benazir Ahmed was closely connected with the criminals. Several newspapers reported his connections with Arav Khan, a Dubai-based gold businessman. With Benazir Ahmed's help, Arav Khan fled the country by changing his name and making a fake passport. Khan is a fugitive accused in several cases, including one filed over the murder of Special Branch Inspector Md Mamun Emran Khan in 2018. After the murder, Benazir Ahmed helped Khan to flee to Dubai. With Benazir Ahmed's laundered money, Khan started a gold

jewelry business in the United Arab Emirates. At the inauguration of Arav Jewellers, a gold hawk, representing the company's logo, was shown to the customers. The hawk was made of 60 kilograms of gold, costing Tk 450 million. This is only a glimpse of the massive amount of money Benazir Ahmed laundered in only four years.

Rewards

Because of his role in suppressing opposition party men and killing numerous individuals during the Sheikh Hasina declared 'War on Drugs' he was appointed as the IGP of Bangladesh police.²³ But most interestingly, in an unprecedented manner, after his retirement from the force, he was provided with special police protection for life. The government published a gazette to ensure that.²⁴



3

Biplob Kumar Sarkar

Joint Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police

Home town: Kishoreganj



Enforced disappearance

Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital's intern doctor Shamim Khan Topu fell victim to enforced disappearance on 1 January 2016. He was found unconscious in front of Dhaka's Detective Branch office on 3 January 2016 after more than 30 hours after his abduction.²⁵

Later, on 14 December 2017, the Deputy Commissioner for the Tejgaon zone of DMP, Biplob Kumar Sarker proudly admitted to being complicit in abducting the intern doctor from Dhaka's Mohammadpur area that day.²⁶

Violating civil rights

Biplob Kumar was in charge of the Tejgaon zone when his immediate junior official Apurba Hasan raided the house of the enforced disappearance victim and founder of the rights group Mayer Daak on 31 October 2021 during a prayer session, foiled the programme and arrested dozens of people who came to pray for the safe return of the abducted individuals.²⁷

Violating political rights

Along with Harun-or-Rashid, Biplob Kumar attacked the opposition party BNP's chief whip Zainul Abdin Farroque on 6 July 2011. Farroque was beaten and kicked by Harun-or-Rashid and Biplob Kumar so mercilessly that he was severely injured. Farroque needed 11 stitches in his head and got hurt in his backbone.²⁸

Biplab Kumar Sarkar led the attack on the BNP

head office on 7 December 2022,²⁹ where one activist of the party was killed inside the party office as police shot him from point-blank range.³⁰ After the attack, he declared the opposition party's headquarter a 'crime zone' in front of the media.

Before that, in 2017, he ordered the arrest of 25 Jamaat activists for running a website that published critical views on the misrule of the government.³¹

Rewards

After the Awami League took office in 2009, Biplob Kumar Sarker, a former head of the student organisation Chhatra League, advanced through the ranks very fast.

He was an ASP of Mohammadpur Zone when the attack on BNP's chief whip took place in 2011. He was soon appointed Tejgaon Zone's Deputy Commissioner of Police (DC) on April 6, 2013.

He was demoted from Superintendent of Police (SP) of Rangpur District on June 13, 2019. He was later reappointed as the DC of the Tejgaon Zone of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police on October 18, 2021. He was appointed as the Bangladesh Police Dhaka Range's Additional Deputy Inspector General (Additional DIG) on June 2, 2022. At present, he is working as Joint Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

As a kind of state honour, he was awarded the BPM medal in 2014 and the PPM medal in 2016. In 2019, he received a second BPM medal.

4

Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun

Inspector General of Police, Bangladesh

Home town: Sunamganj



Ordering extrajudicial deaths

Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun was appointed as the Director-General of RAB on April 15, 2020, continued in this role till September 2022.³² In 2020, RAB killed 61 people in either extrajudicial shootouts or by torturing them in custody.³³ RAB's spree of persecution continued in 2021 as well, and no less than 30 people died that year.³⁴ Deutsche Welle's report on RAB has statements coming from the insider that the order to kill people comes from the highest level which includes the DG of RAB.³⁵ Hence Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun holds the responsibility for killing 91 people in two years.

Interestingly, after the U.S. Department of Treasury sanctioned him for his role in extrajudicial deaths,³⁶ the killing spree almost stopped which means further proves that the claims made in the DW documentary are true.³⁷

Rewards

Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, after completing his tenure in RAB, despite having the U.S. sanctions for his dismal records, was promoted to the IGP for Bangladesh Police. His retirement was due in January 2023, but the government extended his tenure as an officer on contract till 2024, a new record in Bangladesh Police.³⁸



5

Pradeep Kumar Das

Former Officer-in-Charge of Teknaf Police

Home town: Chattagram



Gross human rights violation

The case of Pradeep Kumar Das is a prime illustration of how the police in Bangladesh routinely carry out extrajudicial killings with no repercussions. On July 31, 2020, police shot and killed Sinha Mohammad Rashed Khan, a retired major from the Bangladeshi Army, near Marine Drive in the city. According to the initial press accounts, he was killed by the local police when their automobile stopped without cause. He was coming back after filming a documentary nearby with three of his friends. The reports made it clear that it was murder and an instance of extrajudicial police killing. Following the incident, the neighbourhood police reported Sinha Rashed for allegedly "preventing them [police] from searching him and his car" and "drew his pistol," which compelled the officer at the checkpoint to shoot him. A municipal court in Cox's Bazar, a coastal town in southeast Bangladesh, convicted Liakat Ali, a suspended police inspector, and Pradeep Kumar

Das, the former Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Teknaf Police Station, to death for the murder of Sinha on January 31, 2022. The judge noted in the judgment that it was a "premeditated murder."

Since the so-called "war on drugs" started in mid-May 2018, the murder of Sinha sparked indignation and a national conversation about extrajudicial murders. Later charges and a trial were brought against Pradeep and his companions. Pradeep received the highest honour given to a police officer for "extrajudicial killing," it should be mentioned. The fact that Sinha was the 205th victim of Pradeep Das' extrajudicial killings is one of the court's key observations in the verdict. Additionally, the public prosecutor gave authentic and reliable information during the prosecution, including the names and addresses of 104 victims. It should be noted that Pradeep was tried for the 'murder of Sinha' and not for the extrajudicial execution of all the victims.³⁹



6

Syed Nurul Islam

Deputy Inspector General of Police, Dhaka Range
Home town: Chapainawabganj



Political affiliation and partisan behaviour

Syed Nurul Islam serves as deputy inspector general of police of the Dhaka range. He is accused of working directly for the ruling party and participating in ruling party politics. Despite being a senior official of Bangladesh Police, he became influential in the politics of the Awami League in Chapainawabganj, where his group was named 'The SP League.' He got involved in the politics of the Shibganj upazila unit Awami League in 2014 when he was the superintendent of Narayanganj police (SP). Later, his group became known as SP League. Many essential positions in the district and upazila Awami League and affiliated fronts were

now held by the men of his camp. With his influence as a senior police officer, he made his two brothers chairmen of the Upazila and Poursava (municipality). He also admitted his allegiance to the ruling party by claiming, "Who will save the party (AL) if no one protects it?" There are allegations of attacks on rallies of various political parties.⁴⁰

Syed Nurul Islam served Mymensingh, Narayanganj, and Cumilla as Superintendents of Police (SP), and before the new posting, he was the Additional Commissioner (Logistics) of the DMP.



7

Monirul Islam

Additional Inspector General of Bangladesh Police,
Chief of Special Branch (SB)

Home town: Gopalganj



Leading extrajudicial killings

Monirul Islam, in his capacity as the Chief of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of the police, led some controversial anti-militancy operations where scores of suspected 'militants' were killed extrajudicially.

On July 25, 2016, nine suspected militants were killed and another was captured alive in an operation in Kalyanpur, led by Monirul Islam.⁴¹ Led by Monirul, a team of police killed three suspected militants in Narayanganj on 26 August 2016.⁴² Another three alleged militants were killed on 1 April 2017 during a police operation in Bangladesh's northeast Borohat of Moulavibazar in an operation supervised by Monirul Islam.⁴³

Rewards

Monirul Islam was awarded the Bangladesh Police Medal and President's Police Medal five times.⁴⁴ Hailing from Gopalganj, the birthplace of Sheikh Hasina, during Awami League rule he was appointed as the Deputy Commissioner and later Joint Commissioner of the Detective Branch and was later promoted to the additional inspector general of police (IGP) of grade-2 in January 2022.⁴⁵



8

Alep Uddin

Additional Superintendent of Police

Home town: Kurigram



Involvement in extrajudicial deaths

On 29 October 2016 Delwar Hossain, a resident of Siddhirganj, was killed in an alleged gunfight with members of the Rapid Action Battalion. Alep Uddin, who was a RAB-11 ASP then, was involved in the killing.⁴⁶

Alep Uddin of RAB-11 was also involved in the death of Raj Mahal Rikhon, 36, while discharging his duties in Narayanganj, in March 2018.⁴⁷ In December 2018, during the “War on Drugs” Alep Uddin led a team of RAB-11 that murdered 38-year-old Rabiul Hassan for his alleged involvement in drug peddling.⁴⁸

Rewards

Alep Uddin, who joined as an Assistant Superintendent of Police in 2013, got promoted to Additional Superintendent of Police in 2019, and quite unprecedentedly his transfer order from RAB to the mother organization was cancelled.⁴⁹

the few police officials who received the highest gallantry award President's Police Medal twice in a few years, first in 2017 and again in 2020.⁵⁰



9

Krishna Pada Roy

Commissioner of Chattogram Metropolitan Police

Home town: Habiganj



Involvement in extrajudicial deaths

Nuruzzaman Jony, secretary of pro-BNP students' wing Chhatra Dal's Khilgaon unit, was shot dead by a team led by Krishna Pada Roy, who was then the deputy commissioner of DB (South), on January 20, 2015.⁵¹

After killing Jony, Krishna Pada Roy defended the murder saying: 'Jony had been directly involved in the attack on a police bus that left five policemen injured in Matsya Bhaban area on January 17'. However, Jony was never named in the case.⁵²

Ordering mass arrest

Krishna Pada Roy, as the commissioner of Chattogram Metropolitan Police, ordered the mass arrest of opposition BNP activists ahead of a mass rally in October 2022.⁵³ On his order, Police conducted raids at the houses of Didarul Ferrdous, vice president of city unit Juba Dal, and two other BNP leaders, Habibur Rahman and Aziz Chowdhury in the Pahartoli area.⁵⁴

Rewards

Krishna Pada Roy received President's Police Medal for playing an "effective role" to "resist" the BNP-led opposition parties' movement centring the January 5 national election, in 2015.⁵⁵



Extrajudicial killings became hallmarks of the current AL authoritarian regime in Bangladesh. Between 2008 and 2021 (until September), almost 2757 persons were killed in extrajudicial killings, according to Odhikar, a human rights organization. While the RAB's involvement in the killings has been extensively discussed, data reveal that the Bangladesh Police Force is responsible for more casualties. Between 2008 and 2021, there were 1,496 incidences of extrajudicial shoot-outs in which Bangladesh Police was involved, while RAB was involved in 781 occurrences.⁵⁶

Odhikar's account was echoed by all the major human rights organizations working in Bangladesh. According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a legal aid and human rights organization in Bangladesh, Police were engaged in the most extrajudicial killings that occurred between 2017

and 2022. The Police committed 703 killings, while RAB committed 369 killings during that period.⁵⁷

Research by the Center for Governance Studies (CGS) shows that, between 2019 and 2021, the Police and DB Police, were involved in most of the cases. Out of 591 extrajudicial killings, Police and DB Police were involved in 235 incidents, and RAB was involved in 156 incidents.⁵⁸ Needless to say, a large number of the victims of the extrajudicial killings were opposition activists.

In its World Report 2022, Human Rights Watch stated that the current regime made clear it has no intention of addressing a pattern of grave abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances by its security forces.⁵⁹

Incidents of Extrajudicial Killings *between 2008-2021*

Police	RAB
1496	781

Nuruzzaman Jonny was the general secretary of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) section in Khilgaon Thana. On January 19, 2015, he was arrested in connection with an arson investigation. When his wife, Munia Parveen Monisha, who was seven months pregnant, discovered all four of his cell phones turned off, the family members searched everywhere for him. The Khilgaon police and the Detective Branch of the police denied that he was arrested. Jonny was found dead, shot in the chest and abdomen ten times. The police version of the 'gunfight' contained the same storyline: "confession in interrogation, attempting to recover arms and ammunition, attack from associates on the way, and then police compelled to shoot." Jonny's family informed the police killed him because of his political belief and then made up the 'shootout' story to cover up the murder.

Custodial Deaths and Torture

On the night of October 10, 2020, **Rayhan Ahmed** was arrested from the Kastghar Super Colony area of Sylhet and taken to the Bandarbarazar police outpost at night. The next day, he died at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital while undergoing treatment. Initially, the police claimed that it was a mugging, but later it was found that no such incident was seen on any CCTV camera in the area. Rayhan's family alleged that he was killed by police torture in custody. Investigators said that two autopsies found injuries on his body. According to the autopsy report, his body had 111 marks of injury. Of these, 14 were severe. Two nails were pulled out. He was tortured for two to four hours until his death. In addition, nearly two liters of blood were found under the skin.⁶⁰ In another

instance, a lawyer named Abu Hossain Rajon was picked up by the police on January 22, 2023. A few weeks later, he was brought to court. He said that he had been subjected to horrific torture by the police in custody.⁶¹

The Bangladesh police, under the current Hasina regime, made torture commonplace. Torture became a routine job for the police and other law enforcement agencies to collect bribes or confessions. According to Odhikar, between 2004-2019, there were 646 incidents of torture by various law enforcement agencies. Of these incidents, the police were involved in 486 and RAB in 84 incidents. Of the 486 incidents involving the police, 286 people survived, and 200 died.⁶²

Incidence of Torture *from 2004-2019*

Tortured by RAB			Tortured by Police		
Alive	Dead	Total	Alive	Dead	Total
49	35	84	286	200	486

On April 29, 2021, **Sanaul Haque Biswas (44)**, the son of the late Murshed Biswas of Chanshikari village in Bholahat upazila, was allegedly tortured to death while in the custody of the District Detective Police (DB) at Bholahat in Chapainawabganj. Sanaul's family said the DB police demanded 10 lakh taka after apprehending him. The police threatened him to give them 2 lakh taka at one point, and Sanaul refused. As a result, he was tortured, his family claims. Sanaul's brother, Masud Rana, stated that his brother went out to buy eggs around 8:30 p.m. on April 29, 2021, after breaking his fast. On his way to a nearby shop, a team of detectives apprehended him. They began to beat him there. The family additionally reported that despite his brother's repeated requests for drinking water following the brutal thrashing, the police did not let him drink. He was afterward taken to the nearby mango orchard and thrashed even more severely. According to his brother, this made Sanaul fatally injured. He was taken to the Bholahat Upazila Health Complex at that point by the police. His injury was so severe that the doctors there refused to admit him, fearing legal and police-related consequences. Severely injured, thirsty, and bloody, he died. The Officer-in-Charge (OC) of the Bholahat police station invited several local Awami League leaders to "settle this problem.". The ruling party leaders pressured the family members to be silent and accept the dead body without protest.

Attacking Freedom of Assembly

Notwithstanding age, physical disability, political ideology, and religious identity, any kind of protests against the current regime have been brutally suppressed by the current regime in Bangladesh. The opposition and critical voices were the main targets, but other political groups were also attacked, tortured, injured, and killed. During the "road safety movement," school-going children were brutally beaten by police. On June 4, 2023, a group of physically-challenged people

rallied in front of the National Museum in Shahbag in Dhaka, demanding an increase in allowances and other demands in this year's proposed financial budget. The police mercilessly attacked the wheelchair-ridden protesters.

This is horrific that these attacks are often not limited to physical assaults. Police often kill opposition activists and protesters just for their participation in the protests.

Here are some recent examples:

Abdur Rahim, a farmer

Rahim was shot dead by the police during an anti-corruption protest rally in Bhola on July 31, 2022.



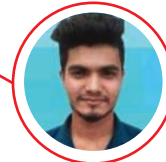
Noor-e-Alam, a student leader

On July 31, 2022, he was injured in police firing during an anti-corruption protest rally in Bhola, a southern district of Bangladesh. On August 3, 2022, at 3:10 PM, he died under life support at Comfort Hospital, Green Road, Dhaka.



Shaon Prodhan, a welder

On September 1, 2022, he was killed by police firing during the BNP's foundation anniversary procession.



Shahidul Islam Shaon, a rickshaw puller

On September 22, 2022, he was killed by police firing at a BNP rally.



Nayan Mia, a factory worker

On November 19, 2022, he was killed by police while distributing leaflets on the occasion of BNP's Cumilla divisional mass rally.



Maqbul Hosain, a tailor

On Wednesday, December 7, 2022, at noon, he was killed in front of the BNP headquarters in Nayapaltan by police firing.



Abdur Rashid Arefin, a BNP leader

On December 24, 2022, at noon, he was shot dead by the police in Panchagarh.



2022

Rewards for Killings and Suppression of Dissent

The police force, hostile to democracy and the rule of law, also receives state recognition for contributing to the repression. Even the members of the police forces were rewarded for their contribution to extrajudicial killings. Among the tasks considered for awarding police members for their professional performance each year are extrajudicial killings, attacks on gatherings, and suppression of protests. For example, in 2019, the famous photographer Shahidul Alam, who was interviewed on Al-Jazeera during the Road Safety Movement, and Rashed Khan, a student leader of Dhaka University's Quota Reform Movement, were arrested. Nineteen Police officers in Dhaka

were awarded for arresting them. In explaining why they deserved medals, those 19 officers in Dhaka mentioned their role in suppressing the Safe Road Movement and the Quota Reform Movement. The Detective Branch's Additional Deputy Police Commissioner, Kazi Shafiqul Alam, was awarded for arresting Shahidul Alam.⁶³

Similarly, Teknaf Police Station's Officer in Charge, Pradeep Kumar Das, received the highest police medal 'Bangladesh Police Medal' or BPM, in 2019. He was awarded for his contributions related to "extrajudicial killings".⁶⁴

...Teknaf Police Station's Officer in Charge, **Pradeep Kumar Das**, received the highest police medal '**Bangladesh Police Medal**' or BPM, in 2019. He was awarded for his contributions related to "**extrajudicial killings**".



Fear is a Lucrative Business

On the night of July 21, 2022, a leader of the opposition BNP's youth wing, Zakir Hossain Josim, was picked up by police from Navana Tower at the Kakrail Mor in Dhaka. After the arrest, the police demanded a ransom of Tk 5 million from Josim's family over the phone; otherwise, the police threatened to kill Josim by crossfire (arranged gunfight, a euphemism for extrajudicial killing).⁶⁵

The same kind of complaint was received from Sujit Kumar, an accused in a drug case in Lalmonirhat. He complained that on September 6, 2019, Sub-Inspector Selim Reza, who was on duty at Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station, demanded Tk 1.89 million from him in two installments by

up. At one point, a few more people came to discover what happened. A police member inserted a packet of Yaba tablets (a drug) in his pocket and also claimed that there was a terrorism case against Mir. Then he was taken to the police station and threatened with crossfire. Later, the police released him after taking Tk 300,000.⁶⁷

Not everyone was as lucky as Sohel Mir. Oman expatriate Md. Jafar returned to the country in March 2020. On July 31, he was killed in a "gunfight" with police in the Chakoria area of Cox's Bazar. His family alleged that several members of the police repeatedly demanded Tk 50 lakh over the phone. The police killed Jafar when they failed to pay.⁶⁸

Not everyone was as lucky as Sohel Mir. Oman expatriate **Md. Jafar** returned to the country in March 2020. On **July 31**, he was killed in a **"gunfight" with police** in the Chakoria area of Cox's Bazar. His family alleged that several members of the police repeatedly **demanding Tk 50 lakh** over the phone. The **police killed Jafar when they failed to pay.**

threatening to kill him in the crossfire. He said, "I have a business of fish...out of fear for my life, I gave SI Selim the money."⁶⁶

In another instance, Sohel Mir, a businessman from Keraniganj, was allegedly robbed by police. On the way to his daughter's house, several police members surrounded Mir and took all the money they found in his pocket after searching. When he asked for the money back, they started beating him

These instances demonstrate that the police force collects enormous sums of ransom by showing fear of crossfire. Opposition activists and critical voices are the common victims of extortions by the police. Extortion is accomplished through threats of filing false cases, inserting names in the already filed cases, and drug and terrorism cases. There were some cases when police extorted a huge amount of ransom from the crossfire victims right before their death.⁶⁹

Corruption

According to a 2021 report by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), an anti-corruption organization, the police are the most corrupt among all the service sectors in Bangladesh.⁷⁰

Nearly 74.4% of participants in the survey have been victims of some form of corruption while receiving services from law enforcement agencies.

at the police station, providing false information in verification reports etc. Various investigations by Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) have also found allegations of corruption against police officers. Recently, ACC's preliminary investigation found disproportionate income and assets against 12 police couples in Chittagong. In 2019, ACC

In a **2017** survey, that figure was **72.5%**.
By organization, it is seen that the highest incidence of corruption has occurred by the **traffic police (92%)**, followed by **highway police (89.1%)**, **police stations (67.4%)**, and **particular branches (17.3%)**.

In a 2017 survey, that figure was 72.5%. By organization, it is seen that the highest incidence of corruption has occurred by the traffic police (92%), followed by highway police (89.1%), police stations (67.4%), and particular branches (17.3%).

The main categories of corruption are - collecting money or bribes through coercion or intimidation, misconduct, intimidation, false cases, delaying or showing negligence in preparing a general diary or making a statement, not taking action or not giving clearance based on complaints, extortion, torture

conducted a preliminary investigation against 12 police officers in Chittagong for specific irregularities and corruption allegations. Nine of them were working as OCs in the city and district. Three were traffic inspectors. They were accused of acquiring billions of assets in their anonymous names. ACC also verifies the assets of 12 officers and their wives. After a lengthy investigation, ACC informs that evidence of corruption has been found against everyone.⁷¹

Gayebi Cases (Phantom Cases)

The Bangladesh Awami League government's biggest weapon for suppressing and harassing the political opposition is the Gayebi Cases (phantom cases). The issue of filing cases against several dozen people, named and unnamed, has taken on an epidemic proportion, which affected the main political party BNP mostly. Generally, it is seen that the rate of ghost cases increases during the election period and before any rally or protest of the BNP. Sometimes cases are filed against people who are not involved in the incident, and sometimes cases are filed where the incident mentioned in the case did not actually happen. In other words, the cases are fabricated for political purposes. It sounds unbelievable, but no one, alive or dead, is spared from this kind of case. For example, in October 2018, the police filed cases against Jahangir Alam, Mansur Ali, and Zillur Rahman in Kadamtali and Gendaria police stations in the capital. They were accused of vehicle theft and anti-state conspiracy. However, Jahangir Alam died almost a year and a half before the case was filed, Mansur Ali died a year before, and Zillur Rahman also died six months before.⁷²

On September 23, 2018, former Vice Chairman of Bangladesh Bar Council Khandaker Mahbub Hossain, former Minister Nitai Roy Chowdhury, and BNP's Law Editor Sanullah Mia filed a writ petition in the High Court Division. The writ petition states that from January 1 to September 20, 2018, law enforcement agencies filed 3,736 ghost cases against opposition political leaders and activists, including BNP across the country. A total of 313,130 people have been accused in these cases. And several thousand were accused anonymously.⁷³ The extent of ghost cases can be understood from another piece of information: BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru has been charged with 92 cases in the last ten years.⁷⁴ No accurate account of how many ghost cases have been filed across the country can be found. However, its extent can be estimated from a piece of information from 2018. In November 2018, BNP submitted a list of nearly one and a half lakh accused in two phases in 2,048 phantom cases to the Prime Minister's Office. In all those cases, almost 400,000 people were accused anonymously. In September alone, information on 578 phantom cases was found in the capital.⁷⁵ Among the accused in ghost cases are some who are disabled, some who are elderly, and some who have poor eyesight. There are plenty of ordinary farmers, day laborers, and small traders. Bangladesh Police usually file the most ghost cases.



Enforced Disappearances

Like crossfire, enforced disappearance is also an epidemic in Bangladesh. Since 2010, the spread and prevalence of enforced disappearances have surpassed any previous time. It is one of the weapons the Awami League government used to suppress political opposition, suppress dissent, and create a culture of fear. According to Odhikar, 522 people have disappeared between 2009 and 2018. Law enforcement agencies RAB and police are equally involved in forced disappearance incidents. Research by the Center for Governance (CGS) Studies shows that between 2019-2021, law enforcement agencies were accused of being involved in 52 of the 71 disappearance incidents. Of these, DB police or the police intelligence department were involved in 16 incidents, and the police were involved in 6 incidents.⁷⁶ In other words, various departments of the police were involved in a total of 22 incidents; during this time RAB was involved in 21 incidents. In addition,

there have been allegations of police harassment for not filing disappearance cases. CGS research also states that law enforcement agencies not only deny their involvement but often harass the families of victims for making allegations. In most cases, until there is no news in the local police station newspaper, even a GD for a missing person is refused.

Not just in cases of disappearance but also in other cases, there have been allegations of not filing cases and harassment against the police force. A TIB report raised the issue of negligence and procrastination in accepting cases. A report on impunity for rape states, "As a reason for impunity for rape, victims and women's rights workers repeatedly bring up the issue of police negligence. From filing a case at the police station to dealing with the victim, investigating and arresting the perpetrator, there are allegations against the police at every stage."⁷⁷

Involvement of Police and RAB in Enforced Disappearances (2019-2021)

Police and DB Police	RAB
22	21

Mohammad Noman, a merchant; Mohammad Nasim, a madrasa student; and Shahidul Islam, a mosque imam, went missing on June 2, 2021, after being picked up by a group of persons in plain clothes who identified themselves as police officers. Noman, the victim, owns a clothes store in Banti Bazar in Araihaazar, according to Noman's father, Sarwar Hossain. Noman left their home on June 2 to visit the store first thing in the morning. According to Sarwar, his son arrived at the bazaar at 11:00 am. He was then taken up in a microbus by seven to eight individuals who identified themselves as DB police. At that time, Nasim and Shahidul were

also picked up from the same location. The attackers, according to Sarwar, were concealed by facemasks to prevent identification. Following the incidents, family members of the victims went to Araihaazar Police Station and the district police chief's office; however, the police denied making any arrests. Later, they visited the DB office and other law enforcement agencies' offices, but none of them acknowledged apprehending the trio. The family members of the victims organized a news conference on June 27, 2021, to voice their grievances and seek the release of their nearer ones. They are still missing.

Allegiance to the Ruling Party

Although the Bangladesh Police is an Institution of the republic, it has emerged as a partisan institution of the Awami League regime.

Besides repressing opposition parties and dissidents, senior police officers publicly express their loyalty to the ruling party and make derogatory and obscene remarks about opposition party leaders. Moreover, despite being state employees, police officers are involved in the politics of the ruling Awami League. For example, Syed Nurul Islam, Joint Commissioner (Traffic Division, South) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, was involved in the politics of Awami League's Shibganj Upazila while serving as SP in Narayanganj in 2014. His group was known as the 'SP League'. Even though many local leaders of the Awami League expressed their anger about this, Syed Nurul Islam admitted, "If no one supports, who will save the party (Awami League)?"⁷⁸

Senior police officers regularly make offensive remarks about opposition parties and leaders. At a function organized by the Police Service Association at Rajarbagh Police Auditorium on March 26, 2022, DMP Commissioner Md. Shafiqul Islam referred to BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia and said, "A very senior leader of a party has started saying that their leader is a number one freedom fighter. It's more ridiculous than that... The one whose husband had rejected her and said what she was doing with Pakistan... And now she is a big freedom fighter. I won't say anything else."⁷⁹ Such a remark by a police officer to an opposition leader is not only inappropriate but also a violation of the objectivity expected of state law enforcement agencies.



Vote Rigging

During the Awami League regime (2009-present), almost every opposition party has accused the police of actively participating in vote rigging in every election. In the 2018 election, the incumbent Awami League government rigged the vote unprecedentedly. The ruling party, with active support from the administration and law enforcement agencies, implemented a “grand plan” to rig the vote across the country. The ruling party established a favorable environment for vote rigging by creating fear through extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, neutering the candidates, disqualifying opposition candidates, limiting the presence of election observers, and controlling the media. According to a claim by Dhaka-based civil society organization Sujon, most cases against opposition candidates at that time were 'politically motivated.' Even in some places, local Awami League members attacked and filed cases against opposition parties, especially BNP workers.⁸⁰ It is now a widely known fact that police and AL men stuffed the ballot boxes in almost every constituency on the night before the 30th December 2018 election. Pictures of ballot boxes being filled before voting began were published in the media. Although people arrested Awami League workers involved in vote rigging at several places and handed them over to the police, the police released them. Opposition candidates did not receive assistance from the administration even when they sought it to stop vote rigging. Vote rigging took place at various centers (voting booths) under police protection. A BBC report on the 2018 election states, "The activeness of the police stationed outside the centers for security was eye-catching... police officers were not allowing anyone to enter by closing the main door of the center. And inside the center, ballot papers are being stamped in favor of the government-backed candidate - such allegations were made all day."⁸¹

According to the eyewitnesses, ruling party supporters, with the active support of the Police, stuffed the ballot boxes. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) stated in their report that voters were prevented from entering the polling stations and voting preferred candidates. Also, agents of opposition candidates were prevented from entering the polling stations. Agents of opposition candidates were prevented from entering.⁸² At one polling station in Sylhet, when a voter wanted to go inside to cast his vote, the police in charge blocked his way and said, 'No need to vote anymore, the vote is over.' At the same time, that police officer also told his companions, 'No voter should be allowed to enter anymore.'⁸³

Not only in the national election held on 30 December 2018 but also in local and city corporation elections, such partisan behavior of the police was observed. There have been repeated allegations against the police for picking up essential supporters or candidates of opposition parties before the election, harassing opposition candidates, and paying no heed to the election irregularities or actively participating. The Election Commissioner Mahub Talukdar admitted that the ruling party committed these irregularities and crimes. Criticizing the role of police during the 2018 City Corporation election, he said, "In some cases, opposition candidates have been harassed unnecessarily by the police. Again, in cases where government party candidates have violated conduct rules, the police have been seen playing a passive role. Not only that, there are also allegations of unwarranted police intervention in opposition candidates' campaigns."⁸⁴

Conclusion

The Bangladesh Police has become a key actor in sustaining the current authoritarian regime through their widespread involvement in serious human rights violations, corruption, and suppression of democratic protests and movements. Even the members of the police forces were rewarded for their contribution to extrajudicial killings. The police forces actively participated in undermining democracy and the election process by ballot box stuffing and vote rigging in the 2018 national election. All the current police activities indicate that the Police will continue to undermine the democracy and process of conducting a fair election unless the international community takes punitive and strict measures against the members of the police force involved in human rights violations and repression of the opposition.

Bangladesh police became a bastion of corruption and human rights abuses. One official, Pradeep Kumar, alone killed around 200 people in one area and never faced the music until the sensational killing of an ex-military official. Pradeep was merely a pawn of officials like Benazir Ahmed, Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, and Harun-or-Rashid, who have driven the force from the front and made a system of patronization for

the people who violate human rights within the organization that is facilitating the culture of the murder of civilians inside the country.

This Issue Brief has portrayed crimes committed by nine police officers to provide an understanding of their crooked behavior and why it is unthinkable to have a fair election with these people in a place of power. Under the Sheikh Hasina regime, hundreds of police officers have committed crimes as grave as extrajudicial killings, torture in custody, political persecution against opposition party supporters, and extortion. Due to the authoritarian regime's muzzle on press freedom, the media revealed only a few incidents. The nine cases described in this Issue Brief are based on the available information in the press, which is only a partial glimpse of their massive crime network. The ruling regime has been sustaining itself by using this criminal police network, which undertakes several coercive measures, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killing, repression, and torture, to suppress resistance and create a culture of fear. The Sheikh Hasina regime has been using the Police, an essential organ of the Bangladeshi Republic, as a partisan force to repress the opposition and muzzle critical voices violently.



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