

Remand redecorated: Same torture, new curtains?



MIND THE GAP

Barrister Noshin Nawal
is an activist, feminist, and a columnist for 'The Daily Star. She can be reached at noshin.noshin@gmail.com.

NOSHIN NAWAL

So here we are, ladies and gentlemen, at the next episode of "Decorative Justice." After years of creative choreography between the state and your basic human rights, the government has finally decided to introduce a groundbreaking, revolutionary, earth-shattering change: you now have the right not to be tortured during arrest. Yes, the bar is that low, and yes, we are still applauding.

According to the law adviser himself, the interim government is preparing to amend the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) 1898—you know, that charming Victorian relic that still decides whether a man gets bail or a beating. The goal? A "rights-based approach" during arrests and interrogations. Apparently, someone in the interim government opened the constitution, possibly even read it, and remembered that torture is bad. Bless them. But let us not be cynical—yet. Let's first admire the PR.

In a Commonwealth-themed youth workshop (because nothing screams "youth empowerment" like legal jargon), Law Adviser Asif

Nazrul proudly announced the proposed amendment. Arrests and interrogations will now come with "strict safeguarding measures." Presumably, this means you'll be beaten with consent, or at the very least, someone will read you your rights while they plug in the electric wires.

To understand the significance of this "reform," we must travel back to *BLAST v Bangladesh* (2003), where the High Court essentially stated, "please stop chaining people like medieval prisoners." Then to the 2016 *BLAST v Bangladesh* case—truly a sequel worth watching—where the HC gave the police a list of dos and don'ts for arresting people under Section 54 of the CrPC and sending them to remand under Section 167. These weren't revolutionary demands: just small things, like not torturing people for confessions, informing families when someone is picked up, and recording reasons for arrest. Basically, the legal version of "don't kidnap and slap people for fun."

But like every blockbuster HC judgment in Bangladesh, this one

too was screened only for a limited audience—the judiciary. The police, prosecution, and parliament never seemed to buy a ticket. For years, Section 54 remained the legal equivalent of "vibe check failed." You could be arrested for suspicion of intent to commit a crime, which is just fancy talk for "you looked too political."

window dressing?

Because let's be clear: no law in Bangladesh is safe from abuse when power is unaccountable. Our track record speaks for itself. You can criminalise torture under The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act 2013, but then you can just make sure no one ever gets convicted under it. You can sign international treaties

guidelines. It said: record the arrest, notify family, ensure medical exams before and after remand, and let the arrestee speak to a lawyer. These aren't utopian demands—they're literally constitutional rights under Articles 31, 32, and 35 of the Bangladesh Constitution and Articles 7 and 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

lucky if the police wear uniforms at all. Arresting officers often arrive like paranormal entities—no badge, no warrant, just vibes and violence.

And yet, this amendment could be historic. If—and this is the size of a Supreme Court courtroom—it is implemented. Because if it's just another box ticked for the Commonwealth Charter conference brochure, then let's be honest: it's not reform. It's interior design.

Reform means making Section 54 compliant with constitutional guarantees. Reform means making confessions in remand inadmissible in court. Reform means prosecutors who prosecute independently, not prosecute on WhatsApp instructions from party offices. Reform means retraining the police in a rights-based investigation, not teaching them how to hit without leaving a mark.

Reform also means justice for past violations. If you don't address the countless custodial deaths and the disappeared who never returned, then your amendment is nothing but a band aid on a bullet wound. A glossy promise wrapped around a very bloody history.

So yes, dear citizens, soon you may be arrested in a slightly more polite manner. Perhaps someone will offer you water after your third slap. Maybe your mother will get a phone call before your mugshot ends up in the paper. We've entered the era of deluxe detention—same trauma, better packaging.

As for the rest of us, let's continue dreaming. Not just of better arrests, but of a country where your rights aren't subject to seasonal reforms and donor optics. Where justice isn't decorative. Where dignity is the default.

Until then, remember to carry a lawyer's number, a power bank, and a healthy distrust of "reform announcements." You never know when Section 54 might take a personal interest in you.



FILE ILLUSTRATION: BILOB CHAKROBORTY

And now, amid a post-uprising transitional government that is balancing on a tightrope, this amendment is being dangled before us like a golden carrot. But here's the thing—after decades of being fed with sticks, we're suspicious of carrots. And when a reform is announced by a government that is struggling to keep it all together, one must ask: is this actual reform or just reputational

like UNCAT, promising not to torture anyone, and then just do it anyway. After all, as we learned during the last regime, treaties are like wedding vows—they sound good under fairy lights but mean very little when the lights go off.

What we need, and have always needed, is not more laws but more enforcement. The Supreme Court in 2016 gave us gold standard

So why are we treating them like radical Gen Z demands from TikTok?

Even India—where the police are no strangers to baton choreography—had their moment of reckoning in *DK Basu v State of West Bengal* (1997). The Indian Supreme Court issued a checklist of rights during arrest, one of which was that the police must wear visible name tags. Here in Bangladesh, half the time, you're

Bangladesh's growth depends on women's economic empowerment



Dr Nawsheha Ahmed,
a retired UN official, is an economist and
urban planner. He is currently working as an
independent consultant and can be reached at
nawsheha@gmail.com.

NAWSHEHA AHMED

There are three major aspects of women's empowerment—social, political and economic—and all three are equally important. It is widely recognised that economically empowering women can help achieve developmental goals such as economic growth, increased productivity and the reduction of household poverty. To achieve economic empowerment, women must be given decision-making power and control over financial resources in the form of loans and grants, as well as other factors of production such as land, training, technological support, employment opportunities and market access.

It has been widely demonstrated that women's economic empowerment contributes to GDP growth and a more equitable society. Women's contributions to family income benefit children's health and education, thereby helping to build human capital and facilitate movement out of poverty.

in the same age group. A significant wage gap also exists between male and female workers.

According to World Bank data, about 21 percent of Bangladeshi women are engaged in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), compared to 43 percent in India, 41 percent in Sri Lanka, and 37 percent in Indonesia. As per the Global System for Mobile Communications Consumer Survey 2023, a gender gap of 20 percent exists in mobile ownership and a 40 percent gap in mobile internet adoption in Bangladesh—higher than

education and introduce various incentives to encourage women's participation in productive sectors. Although a similar trend is observed in Bangladesh, the pace of economic empowerment remains slower than expected due to the factors explained below.

The Bangladesh government allocates a substantial amount of resources for women in the annual budget. According to the Gender Budget Report 2024-2025, the government allocated Tk 271,818 crore—representing 34.11 percent of the total budget and 4.86 percent of GDP—towards women's empowerment and development, including social safety net programmes. However, many economists argue that the gender budget is not properly monitored, making it difficult to assess the impact of these expenditures on women each year. Particularly concerning is that the overall education and health budgets have consistently remained low over the years in Bangladesh—1.7 percent of GDP for education and 0.75 percent for health—thus failing to improve the quality of education and healthcare service delivery in the country. By contrast, the education budget in EU countries averages about 4.7 percent of GDP in 2025, with the highest allocations in Sweden (7.1 percent) and Denmark (6.4 percent). The average government expenditure on health in EU countries was 7.3 percent of GDP in 2023, rising to 12 percent in Germany and France, and over 10 percent in Austria, Belgium, Sweden and Portugal. These comparisons highlight the inadequacies of public spending on health and education in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, microfinance institutions (MFIs) play a significant role in economically and socially empowering women. By 2023, as many as 731 MFIs certified by the Microcredit Regulatory Authority had benefited over 40.86 million members, around 90 percent of whom are women. These MFIs disbursed a total of Tk 2,500 billion in soft loans to their members for undertaking small and medium enterprises. They also provide various services such as basic education, training, maternal health and technical support. According to World Bank estimates, microfinance

lifted about five million people out of poverty between 2000 and 2020.

In terms of quantitative estimates, the coverage of disadvantaged women under government and NGO programmes may appear impressive but remains insufficient. Various structural weaknesses persist in these programmes. One of the key areas where women continue to lag behind is in financial inclusion. There are gender gaps and exclusions in financial literacy and numeracy, access to finance, and digital financing, all of which prevent women from fully benefiting from available financial services in Bangladesh.

Data shows that around 65 percent of women remain unbanked, only 7 percent of registered small and medium sized borrowers are women, and the gender gap in mobile phone ownership is approximately 30 percent. These barriers limit women's access to adequate finance and hinder the achievement of true

economic empowerment. Although several banks now offer female-friendly financial products, these require greater promotion, trust-building, and improvements in women's financial literacy. However, this alone will not address the root challenge faced by poor women who lack assets and income and who are therefore likely to remain unbankable—reliant solely on small-scale NGO loans.

To expedite women's economic empowerment and ensure inclusive economic growth, certain practical steps are necessary. These include taking bold decisions to increase sustainable investment in health, education, and skills development to reach 10 percent of GDP, alongside establishing proper monitoring systems, gender-disaggregated databases, and evaluation mechanisms to ensure accountability; promoting women's employment in suitable service

and industrial enterprises such as leather, food processing, toy-making, sustainable energy solutions, and cottage industries; adopting stronger policy measures to expand access to soft loans for building women-friendly enterprises and providing inclusive financial literacy training; creating special industrial zones for female entrepreneurs and promoting both local and export market opportunities; prioritising women's access to industrial land, financial resources, and vocational training, as well as creating decent work opportunities; and last but not least, taking critical steps to reduce early marriage and early pregnancy in the country.

We need to accelerate efforts in these areas to enable the large and potentially productive population of working-age young women to participate meaningfully in the economy and help raise Bangladesh's stagnating growth rate.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Executive Engineer
District: Rangamati
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.8400.000.000.14.0025.25.706

Date: 07-07-2025

Invitation for Tenders (IFT for Works)
e-Tender Notice No. 01/2025-26

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of works as stated as below:

SL No.	Tender ID	Procurement method	Name of works with Package No.	Documents selling last date and time	Last date & time of tender security submission	Tender opening & closing date and time
1.	1130087	OTM	e-Tender/PEDP4/RMT/2024-25/W20.719 Repair Work of Internal Road and Supply of Furniture & Generator at Rangamati PTI.	30-Jul-2025 12:00	30-Jul-2025 14:00	30-Jul-2025 15:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Ahamad Shafi
 Executive Engineer
 LGED, Rangamati
xen.rangamati@lged.gov.bd