Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
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**Bangladesh – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 20 September 2010**

**Information on the Rapid Reaction Battalion (BAT) in Bangladesh.**

In a section titled "Political Rights and Civil Liberties" the 2010 *Freedom House* report on Bangladesh states:

> "Many abuses are perpetrated by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), a paramilitary unit composed of some 4,500 military and police personnel that was formed in 2004 to combat widespread lawlessness. Although initially popular, the RAB and other units engaged in anticrime campaigns have been criticized for excesses like extrajudicial executions." (Freedom House (3 May 2010) *Freedom in the World 2010 – Bangladesh*)

A *BBC News* report on the RAB states:

> "Human rights lawyers in Bangladesh say they are becoming increasingly concerned about the number of suspects dying in the custody of the elite anti-crime force, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). They say 190 people have been killed in less than two years. The government admits to a figure of around 150. The RAB was set up in April 2004 amid concerns about rising crime. It draws its personnel from the police and the military." (BBC News (13 December 2005) *Bangladesh's feared elite police*)

A *New Age* article states:

> "According to the available statistics, the RAB has killed as many as 536 people in the last four years, in circumstances euphemistically known as 'encounters' or 'crossfire'. The over 8000-strong RAB members are drawn from the army, navy, air force and police department and is being supervised by the home ministry. Although the number of so-called 'crossfire' incidents decreased in the initial period of the assumption of power by the army-backed interim administration of Fakhruddin Ahmed in January last year, the recent trend shows that the number of extrajudicial killings is rising." (New Age (15 July 2008) *RAB's extrajudicial killings under US microscope*)

In a section titled "Introduction and Overview" a *Human Rights Watch* report states:

> "The Rapid Action Battalion, commonly known as RAB, is Bangladesh's elite anti-crime and anti-terrorism force. Since its creation in March 2004 this special unit has been implicated in the unlawful killings of at least 350 people in custody, and the alleged torture of hundreds more." (Human Rights Watch (14 December 2006) *Judge, Jury, and Executioner: Torture and Extrajudicial Killings by Bangladesh's Elite Security Force*)

This section of the report also states:

> "Many of the deaths for which RAB is responsible resulted from summary executions. Others came after extreme physical abuse. RAB's torture methods include beatings

with batons on the soles of the feet and other parts of the body, boring holes with electric drills, and applying electric shock. The government in power until October 27, 2006, defended the killings by saying the victims – people it called ‘wanted criminals’ or ‘top terrors’ – died when they resisted arrest or when they were caught in the crossfire during an armed clash between RAB and a criminal group (‘crossfire’ killings). But witnesses, family members, and journalists frequently reported that the victims died in RAB custody, either in the station or outside where an extrajudicial execution took place. The cases documented in this report support those claims. Even Bangladesh government officials recognize that RAB is killing detainees. In private conversations some admit the government gave RAB a mandate to kill as a way to combat the country's endemic crime. One top official told Human Rights Watch that the government drafted a list of most-wanted criminals for RAB to kill. An October 2006 article in the Bangladeshi press, citing a RAB document and RAB officials, claimed the force compiles profiles of criminals with recommendations of punishment, including death by ‘crossfire.’” (ibid)

In a section titled “Formation of RAB” this report states:

“On June 2, 2003, the Cabinet Committee on Law and Order decided to replace RAT with RAB – the Rapid Action Battalion.23 Eight months later, in March 2004, the government formally created RAB, although the force did not begin full operations until June of that year.

The government presented RAB as a composite force comprising elite members from the military (army, air force and navy), the police, and members of Bangladesh's various law enforcement groups.24 Members were seconded from their parent organizations, to which they returned after serving time with the new force.

RAB's operations are based on the Armed Police Battalions (Amendment) Act 2003, passed by parliament in July 2003, amending the Armed Police Battalions Ordinance, 1979. The new law placed RAB under the command of the inspector general of the police and, by extension, the minister of home affairs. The law requires RAB to be commanded by an officer not below the rank of deputy inspector general of the police or someone of the equivalent rank from the army, navy, air force, or other ‘disciplined force.’ The main tasks of the RAB, according to the law, are to:

Provide internal security

Conduct intelligence into criminal activity

Recover illegal arms

Arrest criminals and members of armed gangs

Assist other law enforcement agencies

Investigate any offense as ordered by the government.” (ibid)

A *Human Rights Watch* report on killings allegedly committed by members of RAB states:

> "The military-backed interim government should take prompt action to end a wave of unlawful killings by Bangladesh's elite crime-fighting force, Human Rights Watch said today. Since June 1, 2008, officials from the elite Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and the police have killed at least 50 individuals under suspect circumstances. 'Despite overwhelming evidence of RAB and police responsibility for unlawful killings, the interim Bangladeshi government seems unwilling to address the problem,' said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. 'Instead, Bangladesh's security forces continue to get away with murder.' After strong national and international criticism of the Rapid Action Battalion for its poor human rights record, RAB killings decreased in 2007 and early 2008. However, this trend has been abruptly broken in recent months and the number of killings has surged, Human Rights Watch said." (Human Rights Watch (11 August 2008) *Bangladesh: End Wave of Killings by Elite Forces*)

See also *Human Rights Watch* report which states:

> "The RAB announced on April 10, 2009, that it had arrested Nasiruddin Suman, an alleged criminal, on April 9 and claimed that in the middle of the night he was taken to recover hidden arms in Dhaka's Dakkhin Keraniganj district. There, the RAB claimed, he was killed in a shootout between the anti-crime unit and his accomplices. 'RAB's own announcement makes it clear that this case fits the pattern of execution-style killings that the unit has carried out since its inception,' said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. 'This is a challenge to the government's promise to end these killings, and the government needs to make clear they will not be tolerated.' Since RAB was established in mid-2004, its members have killed more than 550 people in what it usually refers to as 'crossfire' or 'encounter' killings or 'shootouts.'" (Human Rights Watch (15 April 2009) *Bangladesh: Investigate Killing by Anti-Crime Unit*)

In a section titled "Impunity since Independence" a *Human Rights Watch* report states:

> "The longstanding problem of killings in custody assumed endemic proportions after the creation of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), a paramilitary law enforcement agency, in 2004. RAB started the trend of so called 'crossfire killings'—apparent extrajudicial killings that officials purport were legitimate or accidental killings where the victims (people RAB called 'wanted criminals' or 'top terrors') died when they resisted arrest or when they were caught in the crossfire during an armed clash between RAB and a criminal group. But the police also adopted these methods soon after. Since June 2004, well over 1,000 people have been killed by the police, RAB, and other security forces. It is widely believed that the vast majority of these killings in reality are thinly-disguised executions, often preceded by torture." (Human Rights Watch (18 May 2009) *Ignoring Executions and Torture: Impunity for Bangladesh's Security Forces*, p.13)

A *Human Rights Watch* report refers to the response of the Bangladeshi government to accusations of extrajudicial executions as follows:

> "Since the Awami League-led government came to power in January 2009, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and several other government officials have repeatedly stated their commitment to put an end to extrajudicial executions by the security forces and have said that those responsible for such killings will be held to account.

> However, in recent months there has been a dramatic increase in alleged 'crossfire' killings and there are no indications that the government is moving toward holding anyone to account for them." (Human Rights Watch (23 October 2009) *Bangladesh: Bring Paramilitary Unit Torturers to Justice*)

In a section titled "Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life" the 2010 *US Department of State* country report for Bangladesh states:

> "According to media reports, local and international human rights organizations, and the government, the RAB killed 41 persons during the year, from 68 the year before, a nearly 40 percent drop. The average number of such deaths dropped from six per month in 2008 to three per month during the year. Combined security units consisting of RAB members and police, however, killed 25 persons during the year. The deaths, some under unusual circumstances, occurred during raids, arrests, and other law enforcement operations, or in some cases while the accused were in custody. The government often described these deaths as 'crossfire killings,' 'gunfights,' or 'encounter killings,' terms it used to characterize exchanges of gunfire between the RAB or police and criminal gangs." (US Department of State (11 March 2010) *2009 Human Rights Report: Bangladesh*)

This section of the report also states:

> "According to media reports, local and international human rights organizations, and the government, law enforcement officials were responsible for 154 deaths, 129 of which were attributed to crossfire. According to reported figures, this total represented a 3 percent increase from the previous year. The RAB accounted for 38 crossfire killings; members of the police were responsible for 63; combined security units consisting of the RAB and police were responsible for 25; and the army committed three crossfire killings. Since 2004 when the minister for law, justice, and parliamentary affairs stated crossfire deaths under RAB or police custody could not be considered custodial death, the government has not disclosed publicly any prosecution of a RAB officer for a killing." (ibid)

In a section titled "Role of the Police and Security Apparatus" this report states:

> "The RAB received human rights training sponsored by foreign governments, the UN Development Program, and a local NGO, the Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR). Although the RAB continued to commit serious human rights violations, the number of incidents involving the RAB dropped from the previous year." (ibid)

In a section titled "Ongoing extra-judicial killings and impunity" a report published by the *Asian Human Rights Commission* states:

> "The Home Minister's claim on November 17 that 'no "crossfire" killing [has] occurred since her party has assumed office' came two and a half months after the chief of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) admitted that his force conducts 'crossfire' killings in the country. The Director General of the RAB, Mr. Hassan Mahmud Khandker admitted in a press briefing on September 3, 2009 that 577 persons were killed in 'crossfire' in 472 incidents until August 2009, since the inception of the RAB on 26 March 2004." (Asian Human Rights Commission (December 2009) *The State of Human Rights in Bangladesh 2009*)

In a section titled “Extra-judicial Killings and Impunity” a report published by the Bangladeshi human rights NGO *Odhikar* states:

> “During the year 2009, 154 people have reportedly been killed extra-judicially by law enforcement agencies. It is alleged that of these people, 41 were reportedly killed by RAB, 75 by police, 25 jointly by the RAB-Police, 3 by Army, 2 by Ansar, 1 by Jail Police and 1 by Forest Guards, 5 were under the custody of BDR and 1 was a coast guard. Of the 154 killed, 35 were killed while they were in custody of the law enforcement agencies.” (Odhikar (1 January 2010) *Human Rights Report 2009: Odhikar Report on Bangladesh*, p.19)

An *Inter Press Service* article states:

> “Extrajudicial killings in Bangladesh became rampant after the formation of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), an elite police force, in 2004. Such killings have been mainly blamed on RAB. The battalion was formed as a special anti-crime unit comprising members of the army, navy, air force and police to combat crimes. Local human rights groups claim that none of the responsible cops, either from the regular police forces or the RAB, have been charged for the extrajudicial killings. At a recent press conference at the RAB headquarters in Dhaka, the battalion's director general, Hasan Mahmud Khandaker, defended the killings, which he said were ‘lawful’ and that the battalion members were compelled to open fire in self-defence. In 2008, a total of 83 people were killed in ‘gunfights’ with the battalion members, he said. Of the 60 incidents of killings recorded in 2009, 57 also died in ‘gunfights’ and similar incidents.” (Inter Press Service (21 January 2010) *Bangladesh: No End in Sight for Extrajudicial Killings*)

An *Amnesty International* report states:

> “Bangladeshi security forces used excessive force during a raid on the house of a senior opposition politician on 27 June, Amnesty International said today. The Bangladesh Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) carried out a violent attack on those gathered peacefully inside the house of Mirza Abbas, a leading Bangladesh National Party (BNP) politician and former mayor of Dhaka, according to testimony given to Amnesty International. Victims of the raid described sustained and unprovoked beatings of activists and Mirza Abbas’ family members, denial of medical treatment after arrests, and the eliciting of signatures on blank forms as a condition of release, which Amnesty International suspects are for the purpose of falsifying confessions.” (Amnesty International (1 July 2010) *Bangladesh: Security forces used excessive force during raid*)

In a section titled “Repression of human rights defenders and NGOs denouncing violations committed by security forces” the 2010 *World Organisation Against Torture* report for Bangladesh states:

> “Torture at the hands of law-enforcement agencies in Bangladesh is nothing new and continued unabated as an endemic problem, including against human rights defenders, who remained particularly targeted when denouncing human rights violations committed by security forces. On October 22, 2009, Mr. F. M. Masum, a journalist at the New Age newspaper, was arrested and allegedly tortured by officers of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB, the elite crime-fighting force) [6]. They took Mr. Masum to the headquarters of the RAB-10, where he was detained for around ten hours and was brutally tortured. As a result of the torture, Mr. Masum sustained serious wounds, into which the RAB personnel rubbed salt. They also told him he

> would be killed in 'crossfire'. Only after the intervention of Home Minister, Ms. Sahara Khatun, and several high officials of the Government was Mr. Masum released." (World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) / International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) (13 September 2010) *Steadfast in Protest – Annual Report 2010: Bangladesh*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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