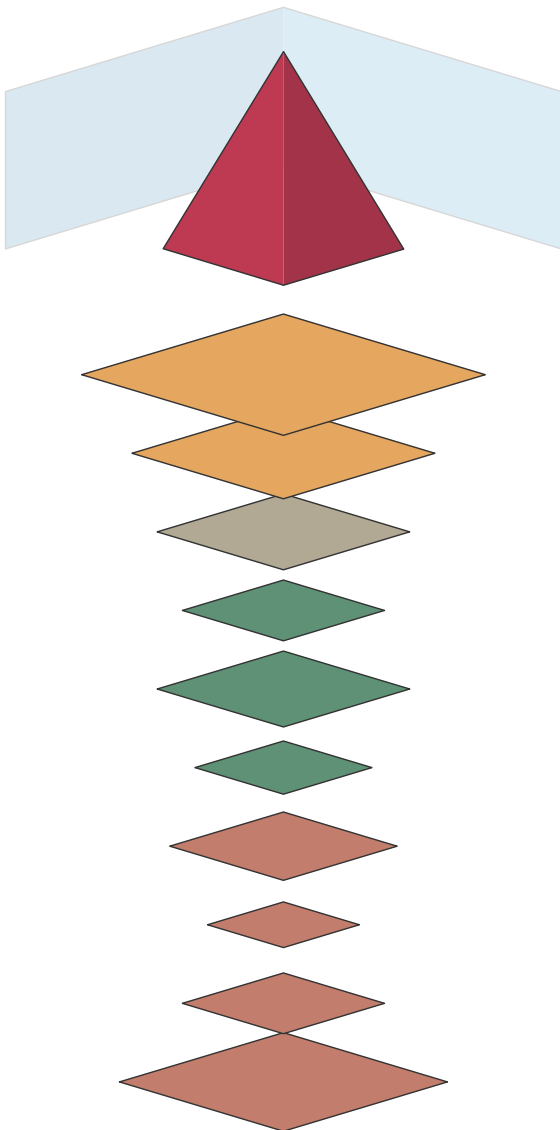


 **BANGLADESH**



 **4.98**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

89th of 193 countries
27th of 46 Asian countries
5th of 8 Southern Asian countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **4.95**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5.00
FLORA CRIMES	4.00
FAUNA CRIMES	5.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.50
HEROIN TRADE	4.50
COCAINE TRADE	3.00
CANNABIS TRADE	4.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.50

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **5.00**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	2.00

 **4.13**
RESILIENCE SCORE

126th of 193 countries
25th of 46 Asian countries
3rd of 8 Southern Asian countries

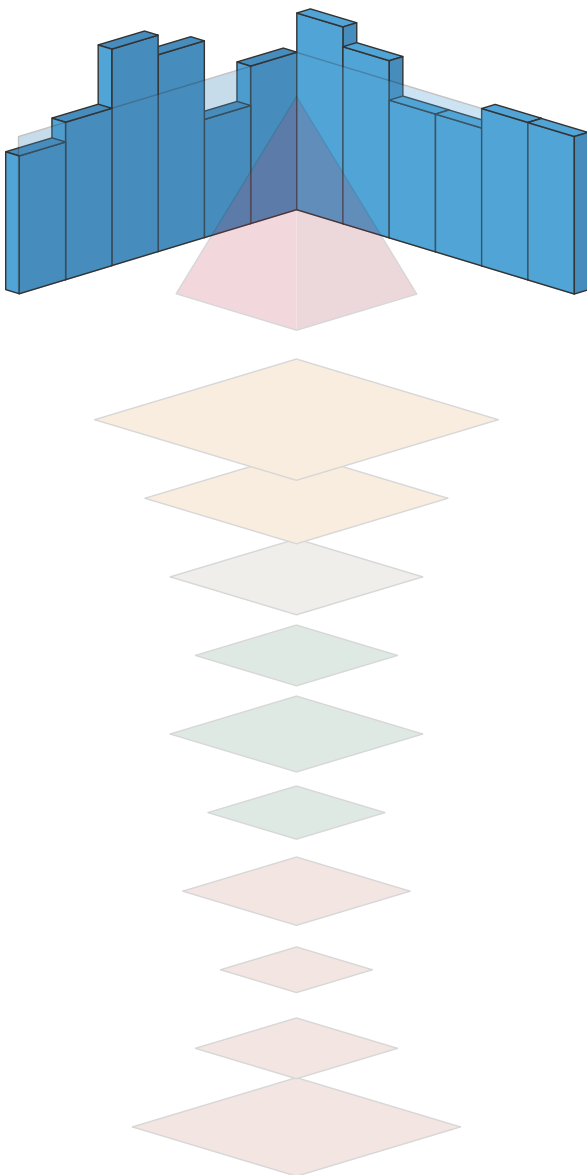


Funding provided by the United States Government.



ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

 **BANGLADESH**





4.13
RESILIENCE SCORE

126th of 193 countries
25th of 46 Asian countries
3rd of 8 Southern Asian countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	3.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	5.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	3.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	3.50
PREVENTION	4.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	4.00

4.98
CRIMINALITY SCORE

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 CRIMINAL MARKETS	4.95
 CRIMINAL ACTORS	5.00



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Bangladesh has a major human-trafficking market, domestically and internationally, generating enormous profit. Human trafficking is driven primarily by the exploitation of children for sexual purposes, domestic servitude and labour exploitation. Brothel owners use phantom debt schemes to tie victims into prostitution and maintain control over them. Complicit law-enforcement officials are paid to produce legitimate prostitution licences indicating the victim's willingness to engage in sex work. Victims are lured abroad with false promises of high-paying work, and are subsequently kidnapped, drugged and sold into prostitution. Besides sex and labour trafficking, organ trafficking is widespread in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's human smuggling market runs parallel to its human trafficking market, with significant numbers of Bangladeshi nationals moving within the region and to Gulf countries. The practice, which mainly targets women, children and vulnerable Rohingya refugees, is run by organized criminal groups and state-embedded actors. Rohingya refugees are particularly vulnerable due to lack of education, employment and resources. Organized criminal networks have been established between Bangladesh, Thailand and Myanmar, and there are highly efficient systems for smuggling people across the border into India using fraudulently obtained identity documents. Human smuggling leads to significant local violence, and mass grave sites have been found along the borders of Bangladesh and across South and South-eastern Asia. Corruption among local authorities and ruling-party leaders is significant in enabling the smuggling market to operate.

TRADE

Bangladesh is a transit country for illicit weapons, with its own domestic market. The market is particularly concentrated in Cox's Bazar, which is a strategic location for arms smugglers to reach India and Nepal. Numerous mafia-style groups in neighbouring countries utilize Bangladesh as a transit point for arms trafficking, and the trade is heavily linked with armed operations in India, Nepal and Myanmar. Left- and right-wing extremists, Islamist terrorist organizations and criminal organizations fuel significant market demand. Arms shipments in and out of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar are enabled by corruption in the form of payments to the Bangladeshi coastguard. The local trade caters for individuals looking for protection against mistrusted local authorities, with clandestine shops on Moheshkhali Island existing solely for this purpose. Local trade also serves

members of the political elite within mainstream parties to maintain their armed cadres.

ENVIRONMENT

It is difficult to measure the extent of the illicit flora market in Bangladesh, but it is thought to be heavily driven by local demand for resources. Categories of the major flora crimes present in Bangladesh include illegal felling, forestland encroachment and deliberate fire setting. Timber smuggling appears to be the most profitable illicit trade, with trees felled illegally in the forests near Khulna and Chittagong, and smuggled to India and Myanmar.

Bangladesh is increasingly functioning as a transit country for illegal fauna, especially from India's growing fauna-crimes market moving contraband through Bangladesh to richer economies, with criminal rackets near the border in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh dominating the trade. Bangladesh is also a transit country for exotic animals destined for China and Thailand. Tiger poaching is a concern, as Bangladesh is home to 2.7% of the global tiger population. Despite conflicting reports from forest officials and conservationists, tiger-poaching numbers appear to be low. Finally, Bangladesh hosts a significant fisheries-crime market, fuelled in part by the fear of imminent extinction of fish species that the poorest in Bangladesh rely on for their livelihoods. The fact that Bangladesh produces more than 2.8 million tonnes of fish annually raises concerns about the likelihood of illegal fishing, which seems to be significantly greater in Bangladesh than in neighbouring countries.

Although Bangladesh is known to poorly manage its non-renewable natural resources – including rich reserves of coal, gas, oil and minerals – there is little evidence to suggest an organized criminal market. However, illicit sand mining is widespread, especially at Tangail near the Dhaleswari River, where it has proved very difficult for local officials to disrupt this activity owing to the high-level contacts the miners rely on. The degradation of land, biodiversity, and especially natural gas, is concerning, especially as many poor rural Bangladeshis' livelihoods depend on natural resources.

DRUGS

Close to the Golden Crescent – where most of the world's heroin is produced – Bangladesh is a well-placed conduit for the heroin trade. India is the primary producer of the heroin transported through Bangladesh, with criminal networks cooperating across its porous border and Chittagong as the primary departure point for heroin on its way to key

markets in Southern Asia and the UK. The heroin trade is a large criminal market in Bangladesh and is facilitated by loose criminal and mafia-style groups, often taking advantage of poor children, who are used as drug dealers and runners. There is an alarming amount of sophistication in the heroin trade, as export companies transporting it appear to have legitimate licences and tax-identification numbers issued by Bangladeshi authorities. While the trade fuels conflict and violence, it stays primarily within rival crime gangs and networks.

The synthetic-drug trade is one of Bangladesh's largest criminal and local markets, with most profits being accrued domestically. The smuggling of precursor drugs and chemicals is primarily across the border from India, and Myanmar has increasingly been using Bangladesh as a transit and destination country, primarily smuggling yaba (a methamphetamine-based stimulant) through Teknaf, assisted by paid-off junior members of Border Guards Bangladesh. The displaced Rohingya refugees are increasingly recruited as drug mules, and despite the government's zero-tolerance policy towards yaba, the market has grown alarmingly, as evidenced by the monumental increase in seizures in recent years.

Bangladesh is believed to have the largest cannabis trade in Southern Asia after India, acting primarily as a transit route. Cannabis often enters the country from India at Comilla, though it is also widely cultivated across Bangladesh, with the railways being the favoured mode of domestic transport. Vulnerable children are often forced to become drug dealers due to their desperate financial circumstances. Demand stems primarily from foreign economies, and recreational cannabis use within Bangladesh remains low compared to neighbouring countries. Bangladesh is primarily a transit route for the larger regional cocaine trade, with international cartels seeing the country's ports as a 'safe route' for smuggling into Europe and South-eastern Asia,

due to Bangladesh's lack of detention facilities and outdated detection equipment.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

The mafia-style groups prevalent across Bangladesh are known as *mastan*, and are deeply embedded in the political and social infrastructure of the country, having authority over large areas and controlling public services and employment opportunities. They operate across numerous criminal markets, and often use street children as 'illicit labourers' to commit crime and violence. However, there are reports that the role of *mastan* groups is in decline, with gang activities falling under the control of the ruling party. Criminal networks in Bangladesh are large and ambiguous. While the *mastan* groups have created criminal networks of gangs to conduct their activities at local level, there are other gangs with international criminal linkages from Southern Asia and in Pacific countries. Alliances have also been formed between criminal networks and extremist groups, and there is widespread concern about youth involvement in gangs across Bangladesh due to lack of social infrastructure and opportunities. Poverty and a lack of employment opportunity, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, allows criminal gangs to flourish, in particular by recruiting young children to their ranks.

Corruption is widespread in Bangladesh, with poor levels of government transparency and accountability. Political actors collude with criminal actors. Criminal actors are known to influence democratic processes through state corruption, and some gangs are under the patronage of the two rival parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh National Party. However, aside from Rohingya refugees being coerced into participating in organized criminal activity, there is little evidence of foreign actors' involvement in Bangladeshi criminal markets.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Bangladeshi government is severely lacking in accountability and transparency, with politicians and law-enforcement officials being closely linked to criminal actors. Human rights violations remain at a high level, and the government has ignored pressure to legislate in this area, instead enacting legislation to prevent criticism of the government and restricting freedom of speech. Since the government announced a war on drugs in 2018, there have been allegations of extrajudicial killings, but security forces have remained protected from prosecution, claiming that these deaths were legitimate, resulting from crossfire.

Security forces also employ mass arrests in order to suppress public demonstrations, especially around demands for higher wages and safer working conditions, and bitter political divisions have created space for a re-emergence of jihadist activism.

Over the last decade, Bangladesh has established many anti-corruption laws that have called for greater government transparency, and in 2018 created very strict and punitive laws around the possession and selling of illegal drugs. The country has made great strides in protecting the rights of children, who are often recruited and exploited by

criminal gangs; however, it still lacks legislation regarding the prevention of forced child marriage and prostitution. There are other large legislative gaps in Bangladesh in areas such as flora and fauna crime, and non-renewable-resource crime, and although there is legislation against human trafficking it has been poorly enforced. However, due to threats of US sanctions, Dhaka has indicated that it will finally impose penalties against traffickers.

Bangladesh has acceded to a number of international treaties and conventions pertaining to organized crime, including UNTOC, and participates in several international forums for law-enforcement training, alongside regional wildlife protection schemes. Furthermore, it has extradition agreements in place across the world. However, there is little evidence suggesting compliance with international human-rights standards, or the appetite to do so.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Many of the laws that underpin the criminal justice system are antiquated, and the poor and vulnerable struggle to access justice. The prison system is overcrowded, suffers from delays in judicial proceedings and poor infrastructure, and falls well short of international prison standards. Despite widespread human trafficking in Bangladesh, the conviction rate for such crimes stands is extremely low. In 2020 Bangladesh established seven specialized anti-trafficking courts in order to process human-trafficking cases more efficiently and clear the backlog. Corruption is widespread, especially in lower courts, with court officials frequently demanding bribes or making rulings based on loyalty to patronage networks. Moreover, delays in the recruitment of judges have created a significant backlog in cases, and there is political interference and weak institutional capacity.

Corruption is also rampant among law-enforcement officials, often acting in accordance with political or criminal patronage. The military, its intelligence agency and police units have committed many human-rights abuses, such as carrying out extrajudicial killings, torture and unlawful detentions. However, Bangladesh commits considerable resources to participating in international forums and training aimed at equipping law-enforcement officers with measures to combat human smuggling and other crimes. Bangladesh also created programmes that have resulted in many more women joining law-enforcement teams, creating a more representative police force. While Bangladesh's borders are very difficult to monitor and police, increasing the country's vulnerability to many criminal markets such as human trafficking and migrant smuggling, its territorial integrity is good and criminal actors do not have sufficient strength or control enough territory to challenge the Bangladeshi military or its existence as a unified state.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Bangladesh is vulnerable to money-laundering practices, with alternative remittance and value-transfer systems commonly used to avoid taxes and customs duties. Reports also indicate the rising popularity of money exchange on the black market due to the limitations of Bangladesh's economy and currency. While the number of cases filed under the government's anti-money-laundering legislation remains very low, Bangladesh has recently given much more attention to the issue, and has developed a national strategy that has gained approval from international organizations set up to monitor money laundering.

The Bangladeshi economy continues to be among the fastest-growing in the world; however, due to insufficient investment and lack of regulatory predictability, the private sector remains weak. As corruption levels are so high in the Bangladeshi land administration, and confidence in property rights so low, many businesses expect to pay bribes to acquire construction permits and other extrajudicial means, often mediated by mastans. State ownership and interference in the financial sector is very high.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victims of crime in Bangladesh receive support primarily through non-governmental organizations (NGOs), mainly those helping victims of human trafficking; nevertheless, many NGOs offering victim and witness support do receive funding from the Bangladeshi government. Although small legislative steps have been taken to protect individual identities, witness protection is virtually non-existent in Bangladesh and is highly ineffective against organized crime. Prevention programmes designed to reduce participation in organized crime are severely lacking in Bangladesh, especially those focused on the recruitment of children by criminal groups. Prevention efforts are mainly informal, carried out by the community or police force rather than through any institutionalized effort.

Although NGO-led community-based education and health-awareness systems have had positive impacts on poverty eradication, literacy and public health outcomes, many civil-society organizations appear to have entered powerful patronage networks. Moreover, the restriction of free speech and criticism of the government renders it difficult for civil society organizations and NGOs to voice democratic values and human rights concerns. Journalists are also targets of violence and arbitrary arrests, and certain news websites have been blocked. Many civil society organizations and media outlets have thus adopted increasing levels of self-censorship to avoid the consequences of speaking out against widespread human rights violations and the abuse of democratic values.

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