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Bangladesh: 4 Arrested for 'Insulting' Government

Misuse of Cyber Laws Repeats Former Administration's Abuse



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Social media apps on a mobile phone. © 2018 AP Photo

(London) – The arrest of at least four people in [Bangladesh](#) for posting social media content supposedly critical of the new government is an alarming continuation of the previous government's repressive practices, Human Rights Watch said today. Tarique Rahman's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government should live up to its promises on freedom of expression, end the misuse of existing laws to silence dissent, and amend or replace legislation to remove provisions that are open to abuse.

Prime Minister Rahman took office after a landslide election victory in February 2026, a year and a half after Sheikh Hasina was swept from office by a popular street movement. Hasina's government had used draconian laws to silence journalists and social media users. The interim government took some steps but did not go far enough to amend laws that violated rights.

"After Bangladeshis risked their lives to demand freedom and respect for human rights, the new government needs the political will to bring reform," said [Meenakshi Ganguly](#), deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "It is deeply troubling that within months of

taking office, the BNP government is arresting social media users for allegedly posting content it dislikes.”

The most recent arrest, on April 17, 2026, was of A.M. Hasan Nasim, for posting a cartoon that, media reports said, depicted a government lawmaker and quoted a jocular comment he had made in parliament. Nasim was detained from his home in the capital Dhaka on the evening of April 17 following a complaint to police by a ruling party activist. A case was later filed under a section of the 2025 [Cyber Security Ordinance](#), relating to online blackmail. In an [editorial](#) expressing dismay at the case, the *Daily Star* newspaper asked, “How can a joke made in a public forum, printed in newspapers, and a cartoon based on that joke constitute ‘blackmail’?” Nasim was [granted bail](#) on April 21.

On April 5, [Sawoda Sumi](#), a supporter of the opposition Jamaat-e-Islami party, was arrested under section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code in Bhola municipality, southern Bangladesh, for allegedly posting comments on Facebook that were deemed by police to be “anti-government.” The provision allows arrest without a warrant if authorities have “credible information” of a “cognizable offense,” and has been used in the past to enable arbitrary arrests. She was granted bail by a court two days later.

On March 31, [Azizul Haque](#), another Jamaat party supporter, was arrested in Muktagachha, northern Bangladesh, after ruling party supporters complained about a controversial depiction of the prime minister that was shared on his Facebook page. The police arrested him under section 54 and later applied the Cyber Security Ordinance and the Anti-Terrorism Act, saying, “We can arrest him immediately. He has been spreading misinformation about the Prime Minister.” On April 1, a magistrate upheld his detention.

On April 2, members of the ruling party’s youth wing, Jubo Dal, abducted [Shaon Mahmud](#) and handed him over to the police in Sreenagar, near Dhaka, for allegedly “insulting” the prime minister on Facebook. Mahmud was then arrested under the Anti-Terrorism Act, and the police said they are investigating multiple posts that could be “anti-state.”

After years of abuses against freedom of expression, the interim government had sought to reform legislation with the 2025 Cyber Security Ordinance. It includes some improvements, including a provision that only the person allegedly injured by online content or their representative can lodge a complaint. That provision seems to have been violated in some of these cases, Human Rights Watch said. It sets a chilling precedent under the new BNP government that Bangladeshi police continue to attempt to criminalize protected speech at the behest of ruling party supporters, Human Rights Watch said.

The Cyber Security Ordinance continues to include provisions that are open to abuse, including overly broad definitions of criminal conduct, and weak judicial oversight of investigatory powers and powers to block online content. The Cyber Security Ordinance and the Anti-Terrorism Act should be replaced with rights-respecting legislation following appropriate consultations, Human Rights Watch said. The Rahman government should also embark upon much needed police reform, including a robust and independent police commission, so that officers are not beholden to the government of the day.

Article 39 of the Bangladeshi [Constitution](#), as well as article 19 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), to which Bangladesh is a party, protects the right to freedom of expression, including political speech and criticism of public officials. The UN Human Rights Committee through General Comment No. 34, clarified that Article

19 applies to online expression and emphasized that restrictions must be clearly defined, accessible, and predictable. Vague terms that are broadly worded and fail to meet the proportionality and necessity standards under international human rights law [enable abuse](#) by authorities.

"These arrests show that security sector abuses have become entrenched, and the police have only switched loyalties to a new leadership," Ganguly said. "The prime minister needs to send a strong message to his supporters and to the police that everyone is free to express their views, and he needs to urgently reform institutions and the law to protect freedom of expression."

