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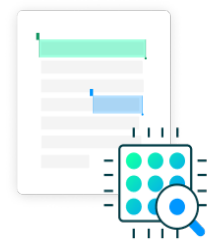
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CST303 POLICY BRIEF

1. Title

Securing Sovereignty, Enforcing Justice: Modernizing Bangladesh's Defence Forces for a Democratic Future

2. Sites of Unfairness: Brief Beginnings

Bangladesh's defence forces face unprecedented challenges stemming from systemic underfunding, governance failures, and inadequate modernization efforts. The interim government's decision to reduce the defence budget by Tk 1,316 crore in fiscal year 2025-26, bringing the total allocation to Tk 40,698 crore, represents the first decrease in defence spending in the country's history (Jagonews24, 2025). This reduction comes at a particularly concerning time, as regional security threats continue to escalate and the country faces mounting internal security challenges.

The tragic consequences of this neglect became starkly evident on July 21, 2025, when a Bangladesh Air Force F-7BGI fighter jet crashed into Milestone School and College in Dhaka's Uttara district during a routine training flight. The crash resulted in the deaths of at least 31 people, including 25 children and the pilot, Flight Lieutenant Towkir Islam Sagar, while injuring 172 others (BBC News, 2025; CNN, 2025). The aircraft, which experienced mechanical failure shortly after takeoff, represents a broader pattern of systemic failures within Bangladesh's ageing military infrastructure.

Beyond equipment failures, the defence sector suffers from pervasive corruption and governance issues. Defence procurement processes have been marred by political interference and lack of transparency, with experts noting that "corruption in any purchase usually begins at the political level" (Bonik Barta, 2024). Transparency International's Government Defence Integrity Index 2020 ranked Bangladesh in the high-risk category for defence corruption, scoring only 25 out of 100 and placing it in the lowest "E" category (Bonik Barta, 2024).

Simultaneously, border communities continue to face violence and instability, particularly along the India-Bangladesh frontier, where Border Security Force (BSF) actions have resulted in numerous civilian casualties. Between 2001 and 2010, the BSF killed approximately 1,000 Bangladeshis, with human rights activists documenting patterns of arbitrary and unjustified killings (Simple Wikipedia, 2025). Incidents in 2025 demonstrate escalating border tensions, as violence continues to impact civilians despite sustained diplomatic efforts.

These systemic failures violate fundamental constitutional guarantees, particularly Article 32, which protects the right to life and personal liberty, and Article 25, which commits the state to promoting international peace and security. In comparison, the combined allocation for health, education, and social welfare programs is significantly higher, collectively exceeding Tk 100,000 crore, while defense receives only Tk 40,698 crore. This stark difference demonstrates that the deprioritization of defense modernization simultaneously endangers lives, undermines national sovereignty, and contravenes constitutional obligations.

3. Target Audience

This policy brief primarily targets key decision-makers within Bangladesh's government structure, including the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Finance, and relevant Parliamentary committees responsible for defence oversight and budget allocation. These institutions possess the authority and mandate to reverse budget cuts, implement comprehensive military modernization programs, and establish effective oversight mechanisms.

Secondary audiences include civil society organizations, media outlets, and international partners who can contribute to accountability efforts and support democratic oversight of defence institutions. The engagement of these stakeholders is essential for ensuring implementation of reforms and maintaining public trust in military institutions.

4. Analysis of Injustice

The current state of Bangladesh's defence forces represents a profound injustice rooted in systemic neglect, poor governance, and misplaced priorities. The primary victims of this injustice are military personnel who risk their lives daily with inadequate equipment and insufficient training. The July 2025 Milestone School tragedy exemplifies how outdated equipment and poor

maintenance protocols not only endanger service members but also threaten innocent civilians. This was reported by BBC News and Al Jazeera (2025), mechanical failure and inadequate training were key factors.

Secondary victims include border communities living under constant threat due to inadequate border security arrangements and the broader civilian population whose safety depends on effective national defence capabilities. The families of victims, both military and civilian, suffer lasting trauma and loss due to preventable accidents and security failures.

The beneficiaries of this unjust status quo include corrupt officials and contractors who exploit weak oversight mechanisms to profit from defence procurement irregularities. Transparency International (2020) ranked Bangladesh as high risk, with a score of 25/100. Political actors who prioritize short-term gains over long-term security investments also benefit from maintaining the current system of political interference in military planning.

This situation represents a fundamental breakdown in the social contract between the state and its citizens. Citizens provide legitimacy and resources to the state with the expectation that it will ensure their security and protection. When defence institutions fail due to deliberate underfunding and mismanagement, the state violates this basic compact.

Following the July 2024 military deployment during student protests, estimates reported approximately 105 deaths, with some sources citing up to 174 fatalities (Le Monde, 2024; Dhaka Tribune, 2024). So when countrymen are paying taxes to fund government services and army personnel, instead of protection, the money is used to kill the citizens of their own country. Moreover detention centers like “Aynaghar” are set up for conducting secret detentions, torture, and disappearances attributed to state agencies, including military intelligence and elite units (Netra News, 2025). Corruption and recklessness in the forces have led them to point their guns against their own countrymen instead of being their shield to protect them. This is a clear injustice to the citizens whose safety was supposed to be ensured by them.

5. Legal and Constitutional Violations

The current defence crisis constitutes serious violations of Bangladesh's constitutional framework and fundamental legal principles. This is considered a crisis due to repeated accidents, loss of

civilian lives, and persistent governance failure that threaten both public safety and national defense readiness. :

Constitutional Violations:

- **Article 25:** This provision commits the state to promoting international peace, security, and solidarity, requiring Bangladesh to maintain credible defence capabilities to contribute to regional stability and protect national sovereignty.
- **Article 32:** The right to life and personal liberty is fundamentally threatened when the state fails to maintain adequate defence capabilities, as evidenced by preventable military accidents and inadequate border security leading to civilian casualties.

Fundamental Rights Violations:

- **Article 27:** Equal protection under law is compromised when certain communities, particularly those near borders, face disproportionate security risks due to inadequate defence arrangements.
- **Article 31:** The right to life encompasses not merely survival but living with dignity and security, which requires effective state protection mechanisms. Police handle daily law enforcement, while the military supports border security, emergencies, and national defense.

This is considered a crisis due to repeated accidents, loss of civilian lives, and persistent governance failure that threaten both public safety and national defense readiness.

Social Contract Breach:

The state's failure to adequately fund and oversee defence institutions represents a fundamental violation of the social contract. Citizens contribute taxes and grant legitimacy to the state with the understanding that it will provide security and protection in return. Transparency International's Government Defence Integrity Index (2020) scored Bangladesh 25/100, placing it in high-risk category for defense sector corruption. Systematic underfunding of defence capabilities while tolerating corruption violates this basic compact.

International Legal Implications:

Bangladesh's obligations under international law, including its commitments to UN peacekeeping operations and regional security cooperation, are compromised by inadequate military capabilities.

The country's reputation as a reliable international partner suffers when its forces lack modern equipment and proper training.

6. Policy Recommendations

The budget cuts, outdated equipment, and corruption in procurement represent an injustice to Bangladesh's armed forces personnel, who risk their lives daily while being denied adequate safety, resources, and accountability. Addressing this requires a strategic combination of immediate, medium-term, and long-term reforms.

Immediate Actions

Restore and Increase Defence Budget Allocation

The government must immediately reverse the Tk 1,316 crore budget cut and establish a minimum defence spending target of 2.5% of GDP, bringing Bangladesh's defence expenditure in line with regional standards and security requirements. This increase should be implemented transparently with clear allocations for equipment modernization, training enhancement, and safety improvements.

Emergency Safety and Maintenance Review

Conduct comprehensive safety audits of all aircraft, vehicles and weapons systems. Immediately ground equipment that fails to meet international safety standards. Introduce mandatory maintenance protocols and invest in modern diagnostic tools to prevent avoidable accidents.

Medium-term Reforms

Establish Parliamentary Defence Oversight Framework

Codify Forces Goal 2030 as enforceable legislation through Parliament, creating legal mandates for military modernization timelines and accountability measures. Establish a dedicated Parliamentary Defence Committee with regular reporting requirements and civilian oversight authority.

Create National Security Commission

Establish a multi-stakeholder oversight body including representatives from government, military,

civil society, and academia to provide transparent governance of defence planning and procurement. This commission should have authority to review major defence decisions and ensure alignment with constitutional principles.

Implement Comprehensive Procurement Reform

Overhaul defence procurement processes to eliminate corruption and political interference. Establish transparent bidding procedures, independent evaluation committees, and public reporting mechanisms for major defence acquisitions. Implement strict conflict of interest rules and whistleblower protection for procurement officials.

Long-term Transformation

Mandatory Human Rights and Constitutional Training

Institute comprehensive training programs for all military and paramilitary personnel on Articles 25, 27, 31, 32, and 44 of the Constitution. Include practical case studies on ethical decision-making, civilian protection, and lawful use of force. Extend this training to police, BGB, and RAB personnel to ensure consistent human rights standards across security forces.

Technology Transfer and Industrial Development

Build partnerships with allied nations and private sector firms to develop indigenous defence industries. Prioritize technology transfer agreements that strengthen local expertise and reduce reliance on outdated imports.

Enhanced Civil-Military Cooperation

Establish structured mechanisms for dialogue between defence institutions and civil society. This will strengthen democratic oversight, build public trust, and ensure military modernization aligns with national interests.

7. Existing Policy Framework and Implementation Gaps

The *Forces Goal 2030* program, originally launched in 2009 and revised in 2017, provides a comprehensive framework for military modernization across all three service branches (Wikipedia, 2025). The program aims to develop a three-dimensional force capable of conducting multi-platform warfare while also building indigenous defence manufacturing capabilities.

However, implementation has been severely hampered by several critical gaps:

Legal Enforceability Deficits

Forces Goal 2030 lacks parliamentary backing and legal enforceability, functioning more as an aspirational vision than a binding mandate. Without legislative support, the program remains vulnerable to political interference and budget fluctuations that undermine long-term planning.

Inconsistent Budget Allocation

Despite the program's ambitious goals, actual budget allocations have been inconsistent and often inadequate. The recent budget reduction demonstrates how easily strategic planning can be derailed by short-term fiscal considerations, preventing the systematic implementation required for effective modernization.

Weak Ethical and Human Rights Training

Current training modules inadequately address rule of law, fundamental rights, and restorative justice principles. This deficiency has contributed to documented human rights violations by military personnel during civil unrest, as highlighted in UN reports documenting extrajudicial killings and excessive force during the 2024 protests (South Asia Journal, 2025).

Insufficient Public Participation and Oversight

Defence planning, procurement decisions, and budget priorities are formulated with minimal input from citizens, civil society organizations, or independent experts. This lack of inclusive consultation weakens accountability mechanisms, undermines democratic governance, and reduces public trust in military institutions.

8. Conclusion

Bangladesh's defence crisis is no longer a distant risk—it is a present and urgent reality. The Milestone School tragedy, persistent border insecurity, and systemic corruption show that inadequate funding and weak oversight directly endanger lives and undermine national sovereignty. This is not only a question of military preparedness but of constitutional responsibility and public trust.

To safeguard citizens and secure the nation's future, Bangladesh must act decisively. Restoring adequate resources, enforcing transparency in procurement, and embedding strong parliamentary

and civil oversight are essential first steps. The policy measures outlined in this brief provide a practical and achievable roadmap for modernization.

Failure to act risks further tragedies and deeper erosion of public confidence. But with clear political commitment and accountable governance, Bangladesh can transform its defence institutions into forces that not only protect sovereignty but also uphold the principles of justice, safety, and dignity for all citizens.

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