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PREDATORS ON THE MOVE: ZERO FIR AS A REMISSION IN PERSPECTIVE OF BANGLADESH

Mafruz Sultana¹, Syeda Afroza Zerine² & Niamur Raquib³

I. ABSTRACT

Rising incidents of robbery, sexual harassment, trafficking, and other offences committed in public transport and during travel in Bangladesh expose persistent procedural barriers that obstruct victims' prompt access to justice. The registration of a First Information Report (FIR) is the foundational step in the criminal process; however, police stations frequently refuse to receive complaints on the ground of territorial jurisdiction, causing delay and increasing the risk of evidence loss and further victimization. This article examines whether the concept of Zero FIR, under which any police station may register information relating to a cognizable offence irrespective of where the offence occurred and subsequently transfer the case to the competent police station, can be incorporated into the Bangladeshi criminal justice system. The study aims to identify existing legal and institutional constraints and to evaluate the suitability of Zero FIR as a victim-centred procedural reform. Employing a normative-dogmatic juridical methodology, the research analyses the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, the Police Act, 1861, Police Regulations of Bengal, relevant case law, and comparative developments in India, where Zero FIR gained prominence following the Justice Verma Committee's recommendations and subsequent criminal law reforms. The findings demonstrate that Bangladeshi law already contains sufficient doctrinal foundations to support this mechanism. The paper recommends statutory recognition of Zero FIR, issuance of binding police directives, accountability measures for refusal to record complaints, specialized training, and nationwide public awareness initiatives to ensure faster and more accessible justice for victims.

¹ Assistant Professor & Chairperson at Department of Law, Uttara University, Bangladesh
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0242-5615>, Email: mafruz1716@gmail.com

² Professor & Dean at School of Arts and Social Sciences, Uttara University, Bangladesh
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8601-0310>, Email: syeda@uttara.ac.bd

³ Lecturer at Department of Law, Uttara University, Bangladesh, <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3522-2648>,
Email: niamur@uttara.ac.bd

II. KEYWORDS

Zero FIR; First Information Report (FIR); Access to Justice; Victim-Centered Criminal Justice; Bangladesh Criminal Procedure.

III. INTRODUCTION

Insecurity is a big issue for a woman when it comes to public transport. A woman can suffer from severe mental illness as a result of such harassment.⁴ Public spaces are meant to serve as safe where citizens can move freely without fear. However, in recent years, Bangladesh has witnessed a disturbing rise of crimes, including mugging, sexual harassment, physical assault, and murder, occurring in such places, especially on public transports. These crimes not only threaten the safety and dignity of individuals particularly women and marginalized groups but also erode public confidence in the rule of law.

The lack of prompt and effective legal response further exacerbates the situation, making citizens feel vulnerable and unprotected in their own country. The 'void' of justice, created by the intricacy of long old adapted legal structure, is encouraging those predators to be more monstrous in public transports and converting the daily life of a woman, who may be a student or jobholder or a mother of school going children, into a difficult shadow war against some demons who may look like ordinary human beings.

One of the most desperate issues in dealing with such crimes lies in the procedural barriers relating to filing a First Information Report (FIR hereinafter). In many cases, when victims approach a police station with a view to lodging a complaint, they are told that the incident falls outside of their territorial jurisdiction. Resulting, the victims are being redirected to another police station, delaying the initiation of legal proceeding. This procedural hurdle becomes a significant roadblock to justice, especially in cases where

⁴ '63.4% Young Women in Dhaka Face Harassment on Public Transport: Survey', *The Business Standard*, 3 June 2022, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/634-young-women-dhaka-face-harassment-public-transport-survey-432582>.

time-sensitive evidence and immediate investigation are critical. Moreover, such unnecessary delay also causes emotional and psychological distress to the victims, often deterring them from pursuing legal action altogether.

When rising, the sun doesn't carry any prophecy on the day although we expect for the best. However, the scenario may get altered at a sudden moment when unexpected event occurs. Crimes including robbery, dacoity, murder, rape, etc. puts a permanent emblem to the victims which make them threaten and unsafe for rest of their lives. And when such heinous events occur at open and public places, more particularly in public transport, living in a general course of life may get extraordinarily complex and unbearable.

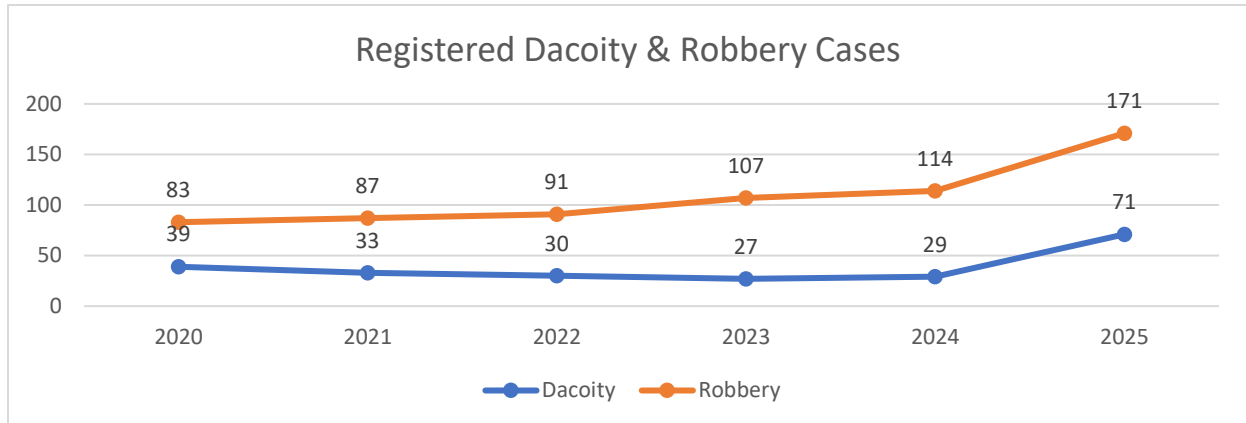
Recent data suggests that in Bangladesh, the rate of crimes occurring on roads and highways, particularly while traveling from one place to another by public transport is increasingly on the rise. According to the police headquarter of Bangladesh, only in February 2025, around 74 highway robbery cases were registered to the police, compared to 71 registered cases of same nature in January while in the first two months of 2024, a total of 62 cases were reported.⁵ Similarly registered robbery cases increased from 114 in

⁵ Nurul Amin, 'Highway Robberies Targeting Expatriates on the Rise', *Prothom Alo* (Dhaka), 19 April 2025, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/sf2vha68d4>.

January 2024 to 171 in the first month of this year.⁶ It is nothing surprising that more likely, many of the crimes remains unreported to the mainstream media nor to the Police.

Figure-1: Registered Dacoity and Robbery Cases 2020-25

Apart from crimes related to property or belongings, namely dacoity, robbery,



snitching, etc. sexual harassments including eve-teasing, physical abuses, sexual assault, even rape and other types of gender biased sexual monstrosity could be observed in public transports so often where the women are the primary victims. A study of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) shows that, the crime of Sexual harassment has been reported by 35.2% of female bus passengers nationwide; where city buses had higher rates of 42.6% comparing to inter-district buses of 31.3%. Among the victims, 64.3% were harassed by the driver's assistance, and 83.2% were harassed by other passengers.⁷ Recent report on Sexual Harassment (by Stalkers) from January to March of 2025 draws that, around 54 incidents occurred on female victims when 17 male suffered sexual harassment, resulting 2 case of suicide and 2 get killed after sexual harassment.⁸

⁶ Muntakim Saad and M. Jamil Khan, 'Crime Rate in Bangladesh 2025 | Crime Rates Spike', *The Daily Star*, 25 February 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/crime-rates-spike-3833016>.

⁷ Abir Hakim, *Sexual Harassment Plagues Bangladesh's Public Transports*, 8 March 2024, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/341294/sexual-harassment-plagues-bangladesh-s-public>.

⁸ *Violence Against Women – Sexual Harassment Jan-Mar 2025 | Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) (2025)*, <https://www.askbd.org/ask/violence-against-women-sexual-harassment-jan-mar-2025/>.

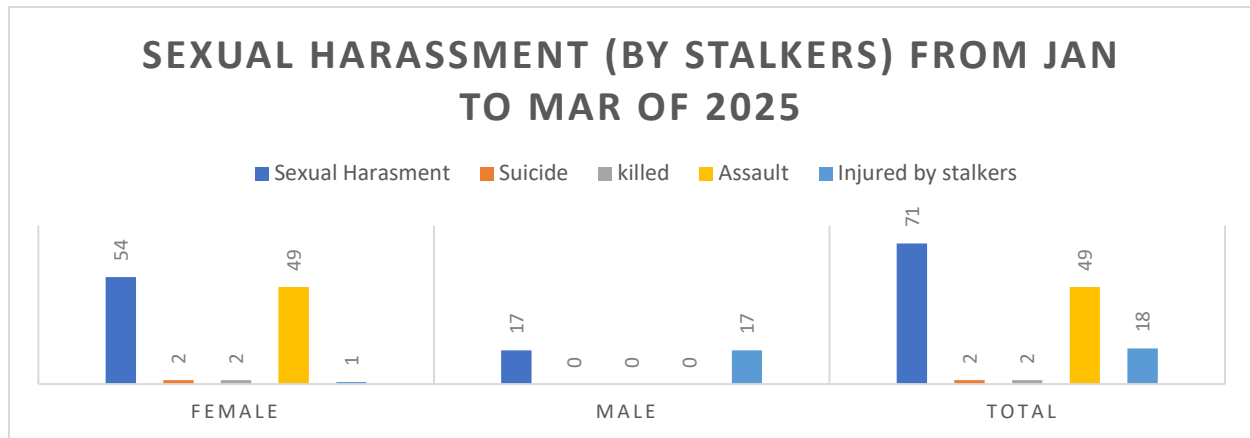


Figure-2: Sexual Harassment from January to March of 2025.

If we go back to a study from 2017 to 2018, as it was reported, within 13 months around 21 rape and gang rape occurred in public transport across the country.⁹ And another report of Jatri Kalyan Samiti, one of the largest platforms for the welfare of public transport passengers in Bangladesh, demonstrating that around 52 occurrences are reported of 59 women being raped and sexually assaulted occurred on public transportation in 2019. According to the study, up to 44 of the incidents occurred on roads, four in railways and four others on waterways and out of the 44 filed cases, 16 were rape cases, 12 were of gang rape, nine attempts to rape and 15 others of sexual harassments.¹⁰

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a Bangladeshi legal aid and human rights organization, reports that during the three years between 2018 and 2020, the number of rape cases increased by 122%.¹¹ As a result on October 12, 2020, the government of Bangladesh implemented the death sentence as the harshest penalty for rape crimes in a last-ditch effort to dissuade sexual attackers. Recent report of the same organization suggesting that around 181 rape and 64 gang rape, totaling 245 violent incidents occurred in between

⁹ '21 Incidents of Rape in Public Transport in 13 Months' The Financial Express (16 February 2018) accessed 27 April 2025.

¹⁰ '59 Raped, Assaulted on Public Transport in 2019: Report' The Business Standard (24 February 2020) accessed 27 April 2025.

¹¹ Fahad Imtiaz Rahman et al., 'The Growing Rape Incidences Seems an Epidemic Turn of Sexual Violence in Bangladesh: A Letter to the Editor', *Women's Health* 17 (November 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/17455065211063285>

January to March of 2025, when on 203 of the incidents were filed and rest remained unknown.¹²

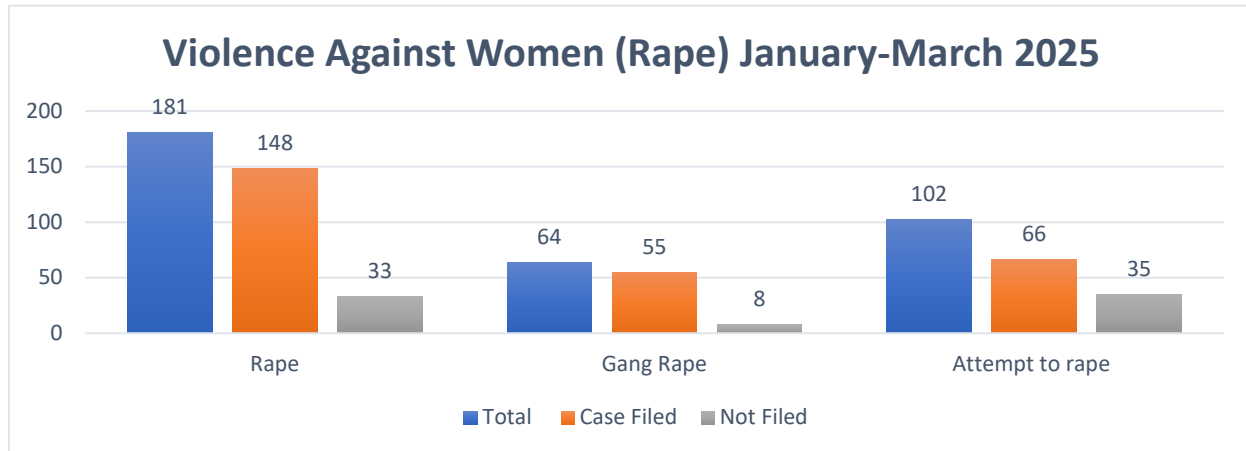


Figure-3: Violence Against Women (Rape) January-March 2025

Another survey under the title of "Harassment on Public Transportation in Dhaka City and its Effect on Women's Mental Health" conducted on 805 female individuals where it was observed that around 69.44% of the participants were dependent on public transport. It was concerning that around 63.4%, which is more than half of the public transport user participants are victims of gender biased harassment, of those, 46.5% were sexually harassed, 15.3% went through bullying, 15.2% confronted social inequality & discrimination, 14.9% gender inequality, and 8.2% faced body shaming.¹³

Issues arise when a victim of the said crimes approaches the law enforcement agency with a view to get justice, because deprivation of justice is another injustice. When such crime occurred in an unspecified location, due to the limitations of local jurisdiction of the law enforcement agencies, many of the crimes remain unrecorded. According to a survey conducted by Bangladesh Police, 73% of victims of different crimes only in 2018

¹² *Violence Against Women -Rape Jan-Mar 2025* (2025), <https://www.askbd.org/ask/violence-against-women-rape-jan-mar-2025/>.

¹³ '63.4% Young Women in Dhaka Face Harassment on Public Transport: Survey' *The Business Standard* (3 June 2022) accessed 28 April 2025.

went unreported.¹⁴ There is a common lament on police reluctance, delays and refusal to file complaints although there is no dedicated study or survey which may unveil the specific information on police refusal to file the same. For an example, the highlighting case of film actress Shamsun Nahar Smriti, also known as Pori Moni, alleged a businessman for assault and threatened to murder her at Uttara boat club, through a press conference, where she expressed that the police station refused to record her complaint. After such press conference, police took her complaint and arrested the accused businessmen.¹⁵

Similar scenario may be observed in missing case of Afsanul Haque Adnan, a religious preacher who is famous on social media as Abu Twaha Muhammad Adnan, where her wife alleged that the police stations are refusing to file complaint and one police station is directing them to take approach in other police stations. Meanwhile, the Amnesty International South Asia issued a statement and put out a call for the authorities concerned to carry out an expeditious and fair investigation to establish the whereabouts of the four people who went missing.¹⁶

After the change of political scenario in 5th August, the Home Ministry of Bangladesh instructed the Police Department to accept complaints without refusal or unnecessary delay.¹⁷ After such instruction, as it is reported, around 13,496 cases of criminal nature including rape, theft, murder, kidnapping, robbery, and mugging, etc. are filed since August 2024 to February 2025.¹⁸

¹⁴ Shariful Islam, '73pc Crimes Went Unreported in 2018', *The Daily Star*, 18 October 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/73-percent-crimes-go-unreported-3145246>.

¹⁵ Saiful Bari, 'Should You Hold a Press Conference If the Police Refuse to Take Your Case?', *The Business Standard*, 16 June 2021, <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/should-you-hold-press-conference-if-police-refuse-take-your-case-261619>.

¹⁶ 'Police Must Find Missing Islamic Instructor, Associates', *New Age*, 16 June 2021, <https://www.newagebd.net/article/140853/police-must-find-missing-islamic-instructor-associates>.

¹⁷ 'Police Stations Told to Promptly Accept Complaints', *Bdnews24.Com*, 23 August 2024, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/ce3fd3556c77>.

¹⁸ 'Mugging and Abduction Cases Surge', *Prothom Alo*, 23 March 2025, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/rgb0saujvv>.

However, recently a female biker vlogger named Swapna, lost an expensive bracelet of one-*vori* (11.664 gm) gold while crossing the Padma bridge on her motorbike. After such incident she posted about the loss on social media, a young man from Tala in Satkhira district claimed in the comment section that he had found the lost bracelet. At first Swapna reported the matter to the Padma South Police Station, where she was advised to complain at Tala Police Station. However, when she went there, the Officer-in-Charge refused to take her complaint, saying the incident fell under Padma South Police Station's jurisdiction. Frustrated by being denied assistance from both the police stations, on 08 August 2025, Swapna posted a recorded video of her conversation with the Tala Officer in Charge in social media which went viral.

In such scenario, even after having clear instruction of receiving complaint, if there is limitation on local jurisdiction of a police station, there has nothing to be done by the Police, who are bound to follow the law and remain within the inflexible boundary of professional instruction, subsequently the police station may refuse to file complaint or direct the victim to another police station as suitable to record such crime based on local jurisdiction, and such complexity resulting the victims deprived from getting the justice. Moreover, in context of Bangladesh scenario like where a woman travels one place to another, becoming a victim of any unwanted and unexpected occurrence, as it is so natural, she could be too scared to go to the meticulous and precise local police station to file such incident and instead choose to move somewhere faster.

In Bangladesh, where incidents of crimes on roads and highways are rising especially against women during travel it is often seen that victims, overwhelmed by fear and social stigma, hesitate to approach the local police station to report such occurrences. The trauma, coupled with a lack of trust in the responsiveness of local law enforcement, leads many to forgo filing a complaint altogether. In such a context, the need for more accessible and victim-centered legal mechanisms becomes evident. This is where the concept of Zero FIR emerges as a timely and pragmatic solution within the law-and-order framework.

While addressing a similar issue, India has introduced the concept of Zero FIR as part of its criminal law reforms. Under the new instruments relating to the criminal procedure, any police station is obligated to register a complaint regardless of the jurisdictional limitations. The FIR is later transferred to the appropriate police station for investigation, saving crucial time.

In perspective of Bangladesh, where justice delivery is often barred by the red tape of bureaucracy, reluctance of law enforcement and lack of public awareness, adopting the concept of Zero FIR within the legal framework may be transformative. It would ensure immediate legal protection for victims, modernize the investigative process and restore faith in the criminal justice system. In addition, implementing the mechanism of Zero FIR may play a critical role to align Bangladesh with the international standards of victim centric justice system upholding the core constitutional commitment of right to security and access to justice for all.

A. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the concept and legal foundations of Zero FIR within criminal procedure.
2. To analyse the evolution and implementation of Zero FIR in India.
3. To assess whether the existing legal framework in Bangladesh is capable of accommodating Zero FIR.
4. To propose legislative and policy reforms necessary for its effective adoption in Bangladesh.

B. Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the concept and legal basis of Zero FIR?
2. How has Zero FIR developed and been implemented in India?

3. Does the existing legal framework in Bangladesh permit the introduction of Zero FIR?
4. What legislative and policy measures are necessary for its effective adoption in Bangladesh?

C. Research Methodology

This paper is based on doctrinal legal research and adopts a qualitative methodology. It examines relevant statutory provisions, judicial decisions, police regulations, and secondary literature relating to the registration of First Information Reports in Bangladesh and India. The study used primary and secondary resources. Within primary resources, the study applies a statutory approach by examining the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898; the Police Act, 1861; the Police Regulations, Bengal (PRB) 1943; the Penal Code, 1860; Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023 and other relevant laws and case decisions in Bangladesh and India concerning FIR registration and police jurisdiction. Secondary sources focus on recent data regarding the rise in crimes in public transport and case studies where the police have not filed an FIR due to the excuse of territorial limits.

By adopting normative juridical research, the study enables the identification of procedural norms and institutional practices that restrict victims' access to lodge FIR without any territorial barrier. Furthermore, the study addressed the development and operation of the mechanism through a comparative lens, focusing on its implementation in India. As Bangladesh and India share a colonial origin of criminal procedure laws in both jurisdictions, the study assesses how India has interpreted and adopted the procedural norms to overcome jurisdictional barriers and what administrative lessons may be drawn for Bangladesh. The paper outlined Zero FIR steps and recommended introducing the mechanism to improve access to justice by reducing procedural delays.

IV. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

A. The Evolvement of the Concept of Zero FIR in Legal Jurisprudence

To understand the concept of Zero FIR, one must be familiar with the procedural mechanism of First Information Report (FIR hereinafter), through which a report on an occurrence may be filed with the primary law enforcement agency *i.e.* police.

1. First Information Report:

There is no distinctive definition of FIR in any legal instrument. However, FIR refers to the legal practice under Section 154¹⁹ of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 (CrPC hereinafter) where the officer in charge of a police station, or any other officer empowered by the same, may obtain information, in written or verbally, on a cognizable offence and record into a written form to set the initiates the criminal laws and denotes the beginning of the investigation.²⁰ It is important to note that although Section 154 does not explicitly use the term “FIR” in its text, this does not mean that the term is absent from the Criminal Procedure Code. In fact, the term is defined and acknowledged in the CrPC, albeit indirectly.

However, as CrPC of Bangladesh and India has emerged from the same origin, the British Legal System, the true reference to the FIR can be found in Section 207(ii) of the Indian CrPC, 1973.²¹ By reading the section, it becomes clear that the report recorded under Section 154 is indeed the FIR, even though it is not directly named as such in the Section itself. In other words, it is a formal process to lodge a complaint to the police to report a cognizable offense where the police have the authority to arrest a suspect without a

¹⁹ Section 154 of CrPC, 1973 states, “Every information relating to the commission of a cognizable offence if given orally to an officer in charge of a police-station, shall be reduced to writing by him or under his direction, and be read over to the informant; and every such information, whether given in writing or reduced to writing as aforesaid, shall be signed by the person giving it, and the substance thereof shall be entered in a book to be kept by such officer in such form as the Government may prescribe in this behalf.”

²⁰ ‘Define FIR – LAW Notes’, accessed 8 April 2025, <https://lawnotes.co/tag/define-fir/>.

²¹ In Section 207 (ii) of CrPC, 1973, it is stated that, “the first information report recorded under section 154”.

warrant and begin an investigation immediately without any direction or approval of the magistrate.²²

Therefore, despite Section 154 of the CrPC, 1898 does not use the term FIR, the document recorded under this section is, in effect, the FIR, which plays a pivotal role in ensuring that investigations are launched into cognizable offenses. The FIR acts as the starting point of the police investigation, setting the entire criminal justice system in motion to determine the truth of the matter. Therefore, it can be said that the process of investigation begins with the recording of the FIR and culminates with the filing of the charge sheet. While a regular FIR marks the inauguration of investigation within the limits of local jurisdiction of a police station, to ensure accessibility and prompt action in all circumstances, the concept of Zero FIR has emerged with a number of possibilities.

2. The incorporation of Concept of Zero FIR in India:

Zero FIR is an FIR that can be registered by any police station, irrespective of jurisdiction, when it receives a complaint regarding a cognizable offence.²³ In Zero FIR, a person may inform the police upon an occurred cognizable offence which is not in the jurisdiction of the said police station, the police have to make entry under number zero (00) and the report is being forwarded to respective police station having jurisdiction for remaining legal requirements including numbering on FIR also, which provides a convenient platform to the informant.²⁴

After receiving the Zero FIR, as forwarded by the police station which recorded the FIR to an appropriate police station, the relevant police station registers a fresh FIR and starts the 'investigation'.²⁵ In the concept of Zero FIR no regular FIR number is required to be

²² 'Differences Between GD and FIR in Bangladesh' (Advocacy Legal, 4 October 2024) accessed 8 April 2025.

²³ 'What Is Zero FIR? Concept & Difference Between FIR & Zero FIR', accessed 30 April 2025, <https://pinklegal.in/topics/police/zero-fir.html>.

²⁴ P.K. Pandey, 'Zero First Information Report: Indian Laws and Practices', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, ahead of print, Elsevier BV, 1 March 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.3567857>.

²⁵ Aishwarya Agrawal, 'Zero FIR: A Comprehensive Legal Overview', 5 September 2024, https://lawbhoomi.com/zero-fir-a-comprehensive-legal-overview/#Key_Features_of_Zero_FIR.

assigned at Zero stage and also the jurisdiction of the filing police station becomes irrelevant.

The primary difference between FIR and Zero FIR is that, a FIR may be filed as a complaint by the informant in cases where the incident took place in an area where the police station has the authority and jurisdiction to investigate, while a Zero FIR may be filed at any police station regardless of where the incident occurred.²⁶ The primary objective of Zero FIR is to ensure that no victim is turned away and that the legal process begins without delay, moreover safeguarding the rights of citizen and ensuring the accountability in law enforcement agencies.

Until the enactment of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, the concept of Zero FIR was not entered within legal realm. However, a few cases decision can be found, which directed towards insertion of the Zero FIR concept into the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) which replaced the previous Indian CrPC in 2023.

In several cases it had been mentioned the lack of territorial jurisdiction which resulted in failure of justice. In the year of 1993, the Supreme Court of India in the decision of State Of Andhra Pradesh vs Punati Ramulu & Others, held that-

“Any lack of territorial jurisdiction should not have prevented the constable from recording information about cognizable offence and forwarding the same to the police station having jurisdiction over the area in which the crime was said to have been committed.”²⁷

Thereafter in 1999, another decision reflected the similar view in Satvinder Kaur vs State (Govt. Of N.C.T. Of Delhi) And Anr. where the Supreme Court of India held that-

“Even after investigation is over, if the Investigating Officer arrives at the conclusion that the cause of action for lodging FIR has not arisen within his territorial jurisdiction, then he is required

²⁶ ‘Zero FIR: Meaning and Significance’, IPLeders, 26 January 2021, <https://blog.ipleders.in/zero-fir-meaning-significance/>.

²⁷ *State Of Andhra Pradesh vs Punati Ramulu and Others*, 19th February 1993

*to submit a report accordingly under Section 170 of the Criminal Procedure Code and to forward the case to the Magistrate is empowered to take cognizance of the offence.”*²⁸

Nevertheless, the concept of Zero FIR furnished in the legal system of India after and through the Nirbhaya case. On 16 December 2012, the heinous crime of gang rape occurred in New Delhi, with 23 years young Jyoti Singh, inside a moving bus while it was driven by all over the city.²⁹ Across India, the tragedy sparked several protests and demonstrations and also became a topic of discussion worldwide. A three-member committee led by Justice J.S. Verma, former Supreme Court Chief Justice was established on December 23, 2012, also known as Justice Verma Committee, to suggest changes to the Criminal Law that would give offenders accused of sexual assault against women a faster trial and harsher penalties.³⁰ Zero FIR was introduced as one of its main proposals, and it was later adopted into Legal Framework.³¹ The insertion of the Concept was sudden but developed through in the legal jurisprudence through case decisions, and most importantly the commission report.

Development of Zero FIR was evident shortly in 2014, in the decision of Lalita Kumari vs. Govt. of U.P. and Ors. where the supreme court decided that that the police must file FIR with immediate effect when they are informed of a cognizable offence under Section 154 of Indian CrPC.³² By guaranteeing that no victim is denied the access to justice because of jurisdictional difficulties, this ruling upheld the fundamentals of Zero FIR.

And more significantly, as a result of the well-furnished proposals of Justice Verma Committee, the legislators of India enacted The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013

²⁸ *Satvinder Kaur vs State (Govt. Of N.C.T. Of Delhi) And Anr* (5 October 1999), https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1841921/?trk=article-ssr-frontend-pulse_little-text-block.

²⁹ *What Is Nirbhaya Case? | What Is Nirbhaya Case Full Story? | India News - The Times of India*, 19 August 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/what-is-nirbhaya-case/articleshow/72868430.cms>.

³⁰ *Harsimran Kalra Report of the Committee on Amendments to Criminal Law, 2013* (2013), https://prsindia.org/files/policy/policy_committee_reports/1359132636--Justice%20Verma%20Committee%20Report%20Summary_0.pdf.

³¹ Agrawal, 'Zero FIR: A Comprehensive Legal Overview'.

³² *Lalita Kumari v. Govt. of U.P. and Ors.* (12 November 2013), https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3ec0490f1f4972d133619a60c30f3559e/documents/aor_notice_circular/31.pdf.

enabling the Police to register an FIR or a Zero FIR on receipt of the information of a cognizable offence.³³ And also the Act is incorporated with Section 166A (c)³⁴ of Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC), which specifies that failing to file a formal complaint in crimes involving women can result in a police officer being rigorously imprisoned for a duration ranging from six months to two years.³⁵

However, the IPC has repealed by the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. In the sub-section (c) of Section 199 of the said 2023's Act, the notion of Section 166A(c) of previous IPC has adopted with the following words - *"fails to record any information given to him under sub-section (1) of section 173 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 in relation to cognizable offence..... shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to two years, and shall also be liable to fine."*³⁶

Implementation of Zero FIR concept was major turning point in India's criminal justice system, which successfully attempted to solve the problems brought on by jurisdictional restrictions.³⁷ Section 173(1) of The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, contains provision stating, *"Every information relating to the commission of a cognizable offence, irrespective of the area where the offence is committed may be given orally or by electronic communication and if given to an officer in charge of a police station, (i) orally, it shall be reduced to writing by him or under his direction, and be read over to the informant; and every such information, whether given in writing or reduced to writing as aforesaid, shall be signed by the*

³³ 'Project Report on Crime Against Women: Investigation Techniques (Project No. 03/MM:07)' (2022) accessed 1 May 2025.

³⁴ According to the Section 166A (c) of IPC, *fails to record any information given to him under sub-section (1) of section 154 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, in relation to cognizable offence punishable under section 326A, section 326B, section 354, section 354B, section 370, section 370A, section 376, section 376A, section 376AB, section 376B, section 376C, section 376D, section 376DA, section 376DB, section 376E or section 509, shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to two years, and shall also be liable to fine.*

³⁵ Md. Imran Wahab, 'Zero FIR: Utility and Challenges', Legal Service India, accessed 1 May 2025, <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-15078-zero-fir-utility-and-challenges.html>.

³⁶ Section 199 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

³⁷ Wahab, 'Zero FIR: Utility and Challenges'.

*person giving it; (ii) by electronic communication, it shall be taken on record by him on being signed within three days by the person giving it...*³⁸

V. LEGAL BASIS AND FEASIBILITY OF INCORPORATION OF ZERO FIR IN BANGLADESH

Zero FIR is often seen as a recent reform, but its underlying principle is not new. The concept aligns with the existing provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, particularly Chapter XV, which deals with public inquiries and trials conducted by magistrates. While the CrPC, 1898 mainly uses the terms “inquiry” and “trial,” it is widely argued in legal circles that during the stage of inquiry, a magistrate possesses the authority to involve the police in investigations. This judicial interpretation affirms that the process of recording information about a cognizable offence is not strictly confined by jurisdictional boundaries,³⁹ echoing the essence of Zero FIR. Thus, what is presented today as Zero FIR rests on procedural foundations recognized in the CrPC, 1898, even if not named as such at the time.

Even though there is no certain use of the term ‘Zero FIR’ in any legislative framework of Bangladesh, the application of the concept can be justified within the existing legal structure. Where registration of an FIR is mandatory,⁴⁰ when information discloses the commission of a cognizable offence, the territorial jurisdiction should not be a barrier to sets in motion the probe and further actions by the police. The Police Regulations of Bengal (PRB), 1943, regulation no. 248 states that,

“When the report of a crimetriable exclusively by the Court of Sessions relates to an occurrence outside the jurisdiction of the officer to whom the report is made, he shall at once send information, by telegram whenever possible or by express letter, to the police-station in the

³⁸ Section 173 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023.

³⁹ Md. Mohidul Islam, ‘Inquiry in Complaint Cases in Bangladesh: Searching Falsehood and Truth’, *SSRN Electronic Journal*, ahead of print, Elsevier BV, 9 September 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.3586038>.

⁴⁰ *Lalita Kumari v. Govt. of U.P. and Ors.* (n 26).

jurisdiction of which the occurrence took place, and if the circumstances of the case warrant it, shall effect the apprehension of the accused.”⁴¹

So, if a crime is reported which is subjected to the Court of Session but the jurisdiction is beyond the reporting officer’s authority, as it is directed in the mentioned regulation, the officer is required to inform the police station where the crime has occurred without any reasonable delay. Although there is no mention of Zero FIR, the said regulation reflects the interpreted values of the Zero FIR concept.

Moreover, it is stated in clause (b) of the same regulation that,

“In cases where the officers of two or more police - stations have jurisdiction in respect of the same offence, and complaint is laid simultaneously at such stations, the police, officers concerned shall apply to the Superintendent for instructions before submission of the final report....”⁴²

Meaning, if two or more police stations have jurisdiction over the same offence and complaints are filed at both, the officers must seek instructions from the Superintendent before proceeding further. The said regulation is incorporated with the section 183 of Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, where it is stated that,

“An offence committed whilst the offender is in the course of performing a journey or voyage may be inquired into or tried by a Court through or into the local limits of whose jurisdiction the offender, or the person against whom, or the thing in respect of which, the offence was committed, passed in the course of that journey or voyage.”⁴³

Interpretation of the section provides that, if any offence is committed in a movement, such as journey or voyage, may be inquired into or tried by any Court within whose territorial jurisdiction the offender or the victim or the subject matter of the offence passes during the continuation of that movement.

Furthermore, Section 12 of the Police Act, 1861 empowers the IGP, stating-

⁴¹ Police Regulations, Bengal (PRB), 1943 s 248.

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898. s 183

*“The Inspector-General of Police may with the approval of the Government from time to time, frame such orders and rules as he shall deem expedient relative to the Organization, inter alia, the collecting and communicating by them of intelligence and information, and all such other orders and rules relative to the police force as the IGP shall from time to time deem expedient for preventing abuse or neglect of duty”.*⁴⁴

Meaning that, the IGP may make a rule enforcing Regulation 248 of the PRB or any other rule in order to lift the practice of territorial jurisdiction in registration of FIRs. Section 154 of the Code of Criminal Procedure only describes the process of registering an FIR makes no mention as to jurisdiction limits. So, even without amending any regulation of the CrPC, which requires a significant time and procedure, IGP can introduce and adopt the Zero FIR concept in applied practice.

Although the concept of Zero FIR may be described as an adaptable mechanism for social need to ensure justice, nevertheless, one may argue that the concept may also have some flaw backs. Primarily, there is a chance of filing false FIR as it can be filed without connecting the incident at best known of the police. However, the check and balance are already inbuilt in the Penal law. Complaining or filing a false FIR can lead to prosecution of the complainant under Section 203,⁴⁵ of the Penal Code, 1860 for misleading the police and may be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.⁴⁶ Furthermore, even if such false, fabricated, frivolous or vexatious information transform into a litigation, the CrPC, 1898 offers a relief in its Section 250.

It appears that, there are a large number of requirements of advancement within the institutional practices to improve and deal with the administrative and procedural

⁴⁴ The Police Act, 1861, § 12, accessed 1 May 2025, <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-12/section-3718.html>.

⁴⁵ According to Section 203 of the Penal Code, 1860, ‘Whoever, knowing or having reason to believe that an offence has been committed, gives any information respecting that offence which he knows or believes to be false, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.’

⁴⁶ ‘The Penal Code, 1860 | 203. Giving False Information Respecting an Offence Committed’, accessed 1 May 2025, <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-11/section-2972.html>.

challenges, Jurisdictional complications, Lack of Awareness and Training, Investigation Challenges, Legal and Procedural Uncertainties, Resource Constraints such as shortage of police stations, overburdens and proper trained manpower, etc. to adopt the concept of the Zero FIR.⁴⁷

A. Zero Fir Registration

With the enactment of the *Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)*, 2023, India has replaced the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, and significantly modernized the procedure for registering cognizable offences by shifting the relevant provision from section 154 of the CrPC to section 173 of the BNSS. The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) issued under this new framework outlines clear and citizen-friendly steps for the submission and processing of Zero FIRs, ensuring that a complaint can be registered at any police station irrespective of jurisdiction. Bangladesh, which continues to rely on the older procedural model, may consider adopting similar reforms so that victims, particularly those in vulnerable situations are not denied timely access to justice due to jurisdictional technicalities.

India's amendment demonstrates a progressive shift toward efficiency, victim-centric policing, and enhanced accountability, and Bangladesh could benefit from incorporating comparable procedural safeguards within its own criminal justice system.

⁴⁷ 'What Is Zero FIR Limitations? | Law4u', accessed 1 May 2025, <https://law4u.in/top-answer/29/what-is-zero-fir-limitations>.

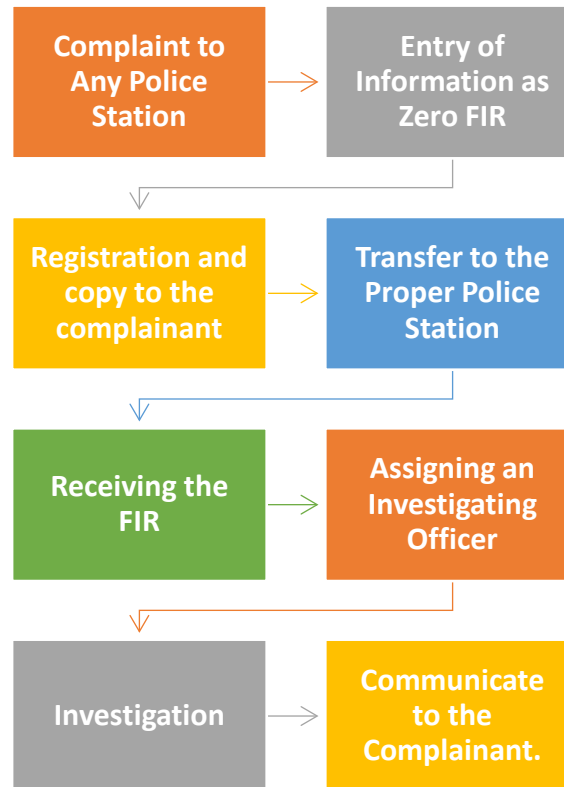


Figure-4: Model for Lodging a Zero FIR in Bangladesh

B. Model for Lodging a Zero FIR in Bangladesh

The model may be decorated with following steps for lodging Zero FIR in aspect of Bangladesh:

1. **Step 1: Complaint to Any Police Station:** A complainant may approach any police station, regardless of territorial jurisdiction, to report the commission of a cognizable offence. This exercise may be comparable to the practice under Section 173(1), BNSS, India.
2. **Step 2: Entry of Information as Zero FIR:** Upon receiving information about a cognizable offence committed outside its jurisdiction, the duty officer or Officer-in-Charge should record the complaint in a Zero FIR register and register the case as a Zero FIR/ 0' FIR, without raising jurisdictional objections. In Indian, this practice is being performed under Section 173(1) of BNSS.
3. **Step 3: Registration and copy to the complainant:** After receiving information about a cognizable offence, the officer should register the FIR even if the

incident did not occur within that police station's jurisdiction. The FIR number should be marked with "Zero" to indicate that it is a Zero FIR. A copy of the recorded information must be provided immediately and free of cost to the informant or victim. After registration, if required, the investigating officer of the same police station may carry out essential preliminary actions such as arranging the medical examination of a rape victim before transferring the case to the police station with proper jurisdiction.

4. **Step 4: Transfer to the Proper Police Station:** The officer forwards the Zero FIR to the police station having jurisdiction over the place of the incident.
5. **Step 5: Receiving the FIR:** The police station concerned receives the Zero FIR and registers it as a regular FIR in their records.
6. **Step 6: Assigning an Investigating Officer:** The Station House Officer (SHO) assigns the FIR to an investigating officer for further action.
7. **Step 7: Investigation:** The investigating officer proceeds with the investigation as per standard procedures under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898.
8. **Step 8: Communicate to the Complainant:** Regular updates on the investigation are provided to the complainant.

C. Step Towards Prompt Investigation to Ensure Criminal Justice

The concept of Zero FIR, widely recognized in jurisdictions with comparable social conditions, is designed to enable victims of serious offences particularly women and children to lodge complaints quickly and conveniently, without being compelled to travel from one police station to another. Numerous incidents in Bangladesh demonstrate that local police stations have, in several cases, refused to register FIRs on the pretext of jurisdictional limitations. The introduction of Zero FIR would therefore serve as a crucial mechanism for initiating investigations promptly and ensuring that victims can access the justice system without avoidable procedural barriers. It also prevents the loss or tampering of evidence and witnesses that often occurs due to delays in filing complaints.

Under a Zero FIR framework, the receiving police station would initially register the complaint and subsequently transfer it to the station with territorial jurisdiction over the offence. This mechanism is particularly important for crimes committed in transit such as incidents on buses, ride-sharing vehicles, and public streets where the exact location of the offence may be unknown or continuously changing. In cases of sexual violence, whether committed in private or public spaces, investigators must rapidly mobilize a range of fact-finding measures to gather evidence essential for uncovering the truth. Zero FIR facilitates this by ensuring that complaints are registered immediately, especially in situations requiring urgent intervention.

Although the concept of Zero FIR carries significant advantages, it is important to acknowledge that its implementation may face practical limitations and institutional resistance. Nevertheless, to enhance victim support and strengthen pathways to justice, it is imperative for Bangladesh to incorporate Zero FIR into its legal and policing framework. A key contribution of the model is the removal of jurisdictional barriers that currently hinder the registration of cognizable offences. By eliminating the unnecessary time lost in directing victims to the “correct” station, Zero FIR accelerates complaint registration and reduces opportunities for procedural delays.

Furthermore, Zero FIR promotes the safety and protection of victims and witnesses by ensuring that investigations begin without delay, thereby safeguarding their rights and preventing secondary victimization. Its adoption would encourage victims to come forward without fear, renewing public confidence in the criminal justice system. Most importantly, Zero FIR strengthens effective law enforcement by enabling the immediate activation of state investigative machinery, regardless of where the crime occurred, thus allowing authorities to begin inquiries without hesitation.

D. Constitutional Basis for Incorporation of Zero FIR

The proposal to incorporate Zero FIR is also firmly supported by the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972. Article 27 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of law, requiring that every victim of a cognizable offence receives equal

access to the criminal justice process irrespective of the place where the offence occurred. Article 31 secures the inalienable right of every person to the protection of law and to be treated in accordance with law, which necessarily includes the right to approach a police station and have information relating to a cognizable offence formally recorded without arbitrary refusal. Article 32 protects the right to life and personal liberty, a guarantee that has been interpreted to encompass human dignity and access to legal remedies where life, bodily integrity, or personal security is threatened.

In cases involving sexual violence, trafficking, abduction, and other serious offences, refusal to register a complaint may expose victims to continuing harm and effectively deny constitutional protection. Accordingly, Zero FIR gives practical effect to these constitutional guarantees by ensuring prompt access to state protection and by removing jurisdictional barriers that impede equal and effective justice.

Accordingly, the incorporation of Zero FIR would not be inconsistent with the existing statutory and constitutional framework; rather, it would clarify and strengthen a victim-oriented interpretation of the current law.

VI. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the foregoing analysis, the following measures are recommended to facilitate the effective adoption of Zero FIR in Bangladesh:

- 1. Statutory Amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898:** A new provision should be inserted after section 154 expressly stating that any officer in charge of a police station shall record information relating to a cognizable offence irrespective of territorial jurisdiction and shall promptly transfer the recorded FIR to the police station having competent jurisdiction.
- 2. Amendment to the Police Regulations of Bengal:** The Police Regulations should incorporate a mandatory procedure governing the registration, numbering, transfer, and follow-up of Zero FIRs, together with time limits for forwarding such reports to the appropriate police station.

3. **Inspector General of Police Circular:** The Inspector General of Police should issue binding administrative instructions directing all police officers to accept Zero FIRs and prescribing disciplinary consequences for refusal or unjustified delay in recording complaints.
4. **Capacity-Building and Training:** Regular training programmes should be conducted for police officers, prosecutors, and court personnel regarding the legal basis, procedural requirements, and victim-protection objectives of Zero FIR.
5. **Digital Registration and Monitoring:** A centralized digital platform should be introduced to track the registration and transfer of Zero FIRs and to ensure transparency and institutional accountability.
6. **Public Awareness Initiatives:** Government agencies, civil society organizations, and the media should undertake awareness campaigns to inform citizens of their right to lodge a complaint at any police station regardless of where the offence occurred.
7. **Periodic Oversight and Review:** The Ministry of Home Affairs should establish a monitoring mechanism to assess implementation, identify operational difficulties, and recommend further reforms where necessary.

VII. CONCLUSION

Public transport has been perceived as unsafe due to frequent occurrences in the past. Significant gender-based violence, including sexual assault, harassment, eve-teasing, and rape, is particularly prevalent in such settings. The lived experience of victims frequently reveals far more concerning reality than is reflected in police reports. Because of barriers to access to justice, fear of social stigma, and distrust towards law enforcement authorities when implementing legal mechanisms, many women who experience such violations refrain from seeking legal recourse. Hereby, integration of the concept of Zero FIR into operational practices of law enforcement agencies could be transformative for Bangladesh. For victims who are discouraged either by procedural complexities, jurisdictional obstacles, or the rigidity of existing legal frameworks, Zero FIR has the

potential to dismantle long-standing barriers to justice. Its adoption would open new avenues for a society that is still largely conservative, enabling victims of all genders and ages, women, men, children, and the elderly to access justice more easily. Ultimately, institutionalizing Zero FIR would represent a progressive step toward building a more responsive, victim-centric, and accountable criminal justice system. By facilitating prompt complaint registration and timely investigation, it can play a pivotal role in ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable and that the rights and dignity of victims are protected.

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