

## Odhikar Press Release

***Ensure freedom of media, Stop torture***

- **Ensure freedom of media**

On January 24, 2008 the media cell of a national intelligence agency circulated an order among the private television channels restricting live talk shows. The Government banned two live 'political' talk shows of ETV, a private TV channel. It is also reported that the newspapers continued receiving 'advisories' over the phone from intelligence agencies regarding what to publish and what not to. Journalists, specifically those outside Dhaka, mentioned that they are threatened by law enforcers, who tell them that they will be put under section 16 of the Emergency Power Rules 2007 (of which one sub sections mentions circumstance for arrest without warrant by not only the police but also other law enforcement agencies) for writing anything against the Government. Odhikar expresses its deep concern regarding the imposition of the Emergency Power Rules 2007 which curtails the rights of the citizens.

- **Stop impunity of custodial deaths and torture**

On 29 January 2008 Advisor of the Ministry of Home Affairs cautioned law enforcement agencies against any custodial death. It is reported that in 2007 a total of 184 people were allegedly killed by law enforcement agencies while 69 people reportedly died in custody. There are allegations of compelling arrestees to testify against themselves by the law enforcement agencies, reportedly through torture, which sometimes leads to the death of the person.

Odhikar welcomes the Home Advisors caution against custodial deaths but points out that mere cautioning will not suffice. To effectively stop custodial and other extra-judicial killings, Odhikar urges the Advisor to take actions against those responsible for all such killings, since, bringing to book law men involved in illegal and criminal activities and offering adequate compensation and reparation to victims would end this culture of impunity.

- **Free detained workers and peasants**

Odhikar urges the Government to publish a detailed list of detained workers and peasants who have been arrested under the Emergency Power Rules 2007 and also urges the Government to release them and withdraw any cases against them.

- **Extrajudicial Killing:**

From 1-31 January 2008, 8 people were reportedly killed by law enforcement agencies, of which 3 people were killed in custody. Of the 8 people, 4 were reportedly killed by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), 1 was killed by Police, 1 was killed by the joint operation of RAB - Police, 1 was killed by BDR and 1 person was killed by coast guards.

**Circumstances of death**

It was reported that among the 8 people killed, 4 were killed in RAB crossfire/ encounter/ gunfight/ shootout<sup>1</sup>. 1 person was killed in crossfire/encounter/gunfight/shootout by RAB-police jointly and another 1 person was killed in crossfire/encounter/gunfight/shootout by the coast guards. During this time 1 person was allegedly tortured to death by police and another person was tortured to death by Bangladesh Rifles.

**Political allegiance of the victims**

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<sup>1</sup> Reports in the press have increasingly used more than one of the terms "crossfire", "encounter", "gunfight" and "shootout" in one article to describe the same incident. It is, therefore, no longer possible for Odhikar to determine which of these descriptions best describes an incident of extra-judicial killing. Odhikar has, therefore, grouped these incidents together.

It was reported that of the 8 people who were killed, 1 was a member of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (Jonojuddho), 1 was a member of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (Red Flag), 1 was a member of Maobadi Sangstha.

**Other characteristics of the victims**

It was reported that of the 8 people who were killed, 1 was a member of the alleged criminal group Kamal Bahini, 2 were alleged drug dealers, 1 was an alleged smuggler and another was a young man whose professional identity could not be known.

- **Death in Jail**

It was reported that 6 people died in jail custody due to illness since 1 to 31 January 2008.

- **Freedom of the Expression**

It was reported that in January 2008, 4 journalists were injured and 1 was arrested. During this time the Government circulated an order restricting live talk shows on private TV channels.

- **Rape**

Between 1 and 31 January 2008, 16 women and girls were reportedly the victims of rape. Of the victims, 7 were women and 9 were girls<sup>2</sup>. Of the 7 women, 3 were reportedly killed after being raped and 6 women were the victims of gang rape. Of the 9 girls who were raped, 1 was reportedly killed after being raped and 1 was the victim of gang rape.

- **Acid Violence**

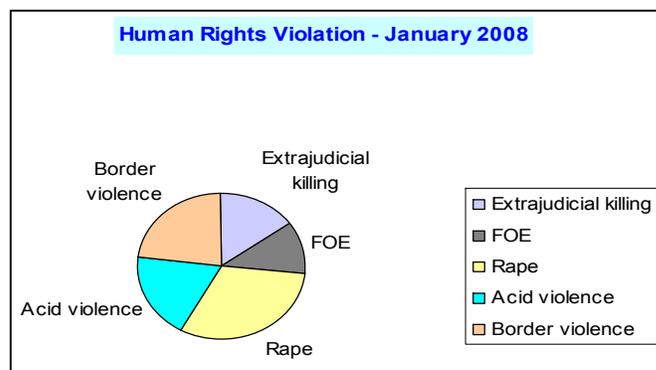
From 1 to 31 January 2008 a total of 10 people were victimised by acid throwing. Among them 6 were women, 3 children and one was a man.

- **India - Bangladesh border violence**

12 incidents of India-Bangladesh border violence had been recorded in January 2008. 4 Bangladeshi nationals were reportedly killed by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) during this month. During this time 6 Bangladeshis were reported injured and 2 were allegedly abducted by the BSF.

**Statistics of Human Rights violation  
January 2008**

Name of the violation	Number of violence
Extrajudicial killing	8
FOE	6
Rape	16
Acid violence	10
Border violence	12



**Odhikar Recommendations:**

1. Lift the State of Emergency immediately;

<sup>2</sup> As per the Children’s Act 1974, an adult is a person above the age of 16 years.

2. In order to facilitate an enabling environment: (a) release all political prisoners; if there are cases against any person, trials should be conducted respecting human rights and ensuring due process of the law, in an open and transparent manner to ensure justice (b) end intimidation of the media and (c) withdraw legal cases filed against workers and peasants for violating the State of Emergency.
3. Extra-judicial killings, torture and indiscriminate arrest should be stopped. Hold independent judicial inquiries into extra-judicial killings and prosecute all those suspected of involvement.

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**Notes:**

*\*Odhikar seeks to uphold the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the people of Bangladesh.*

*\*Odhikar documents and records violations of Bangladeshis' human rights by monitoring media reports in twelve national daily newspapers and receives information from its nationwide network of human rights defenders .*

*\*Odhikar conducts detailed fact-finding investigations into some of the most significant violations.*

*\*Odhikar is consistent in its human rights reporting and is committed to remain so.*