



# Quarterly Human Rights Monitoring Report on Bangladesh

**Reporting Period: April - June 2019**

**Prepared by Odhikar**

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## Foreword

In order to promote and protect the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of Bangladeshi citizens, Odhikar has been monitoring the human rights situation in Bangladesh since 1994. Odhikar does not believe that the human rights movement merely endeavours to protect the 'individual' from violations perpetrated by the state; rather, it believes that the movement to establish the rights and dignity of every individual is part of the struggle to constitute Bangladesh as a democratic state. Odhikar has always been active in raising mass awareness of the various human rights violations committed by the state. The Organisation unconditionally stands by the victims of oppression and maintains no prejudice with regard to political leanings or ideological orientation, race, religion or sex.

Since 2013, Odhikar has been facing persecution and continuous harassment and threats to its existence by the incumbent government due to its human rights activism. Despite this, Odhikar continues to work; and has prepared the second quarter (April-June) report of 2019 on the human rights situation of Bangladesh, based on reports gathered by grassroots human rights defenders associated with Odhikar and data collected from the national dailies.

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## Executive Summary

1. This report highlights the overall human rights situation of the second quarter of 2019 from April to June. It highlights the demolition of democracy and freedom of speech and expression and matters related to the denial of the right to life.
2. The culture of impunity within the government has become even stronger due to its assumption of power<sup>1</sup> without the people's vote. The deterioration of the human rights situation in the country over last three months was alarming. During this period, enforced disappearance, extrajudicial killings and torture continued.
3. Freedom of speech and expression are rights that are severely violated. At least 22 persons were arrested under the Digital Security Act, 2018.<sup>2</sup> In addition, many people have been sued for defamation and sedition. These cases are basically being filed against dissenting voices, leaders and activists of the opposition political parties and ordinary citizens, who have criticized any high-level person in the government or their family members in social media. Meanwhile, the Postal and Telecommunications Minister, Mostafa Jabbar, said that the government would gain access to social media on Facebook and YouTube from September 2019. He said that although many websites were under the control of the government, social media was not one of them. From September, the government's ability to intervene will also be created. Thus, no one will be able to publish or upload what they want on Facebook or YouTube freely, with no fear of persecution. There was no specific explanation about what can or cannot be published. As a result, there is also a scope of the misuse of the repressive laws, including the Digital Security Act. Apart from this, the government continued to pressurize the media. As a result, in most cases, journalists are forced to apply self-censorship. Furthermore, journalists have been attacked by government party supporters and pro-government miscreants during this period, while performing their professional duties.
4. Apart from curtailing the freedom of expression, the right to freedom of assembly and organising peaceful rally have also been curtailed or prevented, by using the police, RAB and ruling party leaders-activists to stop such gatherings. After the farcical elections in December 2018, the rights to freedom of assembly and association have become more difficult to practice. In addition to the BNP, rallies and processions by other opposition political parties and protesting organisations, that had various demands from the government, were also barred and attacked.

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<sup>1</sup> The ever most farcical national parliamentary elections in the history of Bangladesh were held on 30 December 2018. In this election, incidents of stuffing ballot boxes in the night before polling day, casting fake votes, voters being forced to vote openly for the ruling party candidates, 'capturing' polling centres, arrests and forcibly ousting of polling agents of the opposition party-nominated candidates and intimidation of voters, including other incidents of irregularities took place which was unprecedented. For details, see TIB report available at: <https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/beta3/index.php/en/highlights/5749-2019-01-15-07-24-53>

<sup>2</sup> Digital Security Act has been effective from 8 October 2018. [http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/bangla\\_all\\_sections.php?id=1261](http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/bangla_all_sections.php?id=1261)

5. The country's prisons are in an inhumane situation due to there being more prisoners than prison capacity. There are allegations that some of the detainees died due to lack of doctors and proper medical care in prisons as well as due to the negligence of the prison authority.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court has issued a Rule asking the government for the number of detention facilities, detainees and doctors.<sup>4</sup> The country's first woman Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has been kept in solitary confinement for 16 months. It has been alleged by the BNP that Khaleda Zia is being deprived from proper medical treatment.<sup>5</sup>
6. The provision of the death penalty remains in force in Bangladesh and the lower courts tend to use that sentence for convictions even if there are alternative punishments that could apply. As a result, death row inmates are being imprisoned in the condemned cell for years.<sup>6</sup>
7. The criminalisation of the ruling party leaders and activists continued for the last three months and is nothing new. Criminal activities of the Awami League-backed Chhatra League<sup>7</sup> and Jubo League<sup>8</sup> leaders and activists have increased with the government's support. Although they were openly involved in various types of criminal acts, using various lethal weapons, the law enforcement agencies did not take action against them.
8. Incidents of deaths due to public lynching continue to occur as a result of a weak criminal justice system, impunity of law enforcement agencies, and the lack of people's confidence in the institutions due to corruption, have increased the tendency of taking the law into one's own hands.
9. Violence against women continued in the last three months. During this period, many women and girls were victims of rape, sexual harassment, dowry and acid violence. Child rape became almost an epidemic between April and June. During this period, the incidents of rape of minors increased to about three times than that of adult women.
10. Labour rights have been violated during the period from April to June. The law enforcing agencies attacked workers and cases were filed against them when workers engaged in various sectors, were in protest demanding payment of their arrears.
11. Acts of Indian interference in the economic, political and cultural issues of Bangladesh continue. Incidents of various human rights abuses, including the killing and torture of Bangladeshis by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) were reported.
12. The International Criminal Court (ICC) formed a panel consisting of three judges after receiving an application from the Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda to start a full investigation into the allegations of crimes against humanity in the situation of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people fleeing Myanmar.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 2 April 2019

<sup>4</sup> The Daily Ittefaq, 24 June 2019; <https://www.ittefaq.com.bd/print-edition/other/64695>

<sup>5</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 4 April 2019; <https://www.prothomalo.com/opinion/article/1586942>

<sup>6</sup> The daily Jugantor, 5 April 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/163442/>

<sup>7</sup> Student wing of Bangladesh Awami League (AL)

<sup>8</sup> Youth wing of Bangladesh Awami League (AL)

<sup>9</sup> The daily Naya Diganta, 27 June 2019; [www.dailynayadiganta.com/first-page/420785](http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/first-page/420785)

While this is happening at the international level, in Bangladesh, the Rohingya refugee students are being expelled from schools near the refugee camps in south-eastern region of the country. As a result, these Rohingya children are being deprived from their right to education.<sup>10</sup>

13. In continuation of the government's repression on Odhikar, that started in 2013, harassment on Odhikar also took place before the farcical Parliamentary elections of 30 December 2018. In 2014, Odhikar applied to the NGO Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office for the renewal of its registration, but the registration has not still been renewed till the publication of this report. On 13 May 2019, Odhikar filed a Writ Petition (numbered 5402/2019) to the High Court Division of the Supreme Court; the court issued a Rule upon the NGO Affairs Bureau. A human rights defender associated with Odhikar was sued and arrested under the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018. Furthermore, a human chain programme organised by human rights defenders associated with Odhikar in Sirajganj, to commemorate the victims of enforced disappearance during the International Week of the Disappeared, was stopped by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB).

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<sup>10</sup> Bangladesh: Rohingya Refugee Students Expelled, April 1, 2019; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/01/bangladesh-rohingya-refugee-students-expelled>

## Statistics of Human Rights Violations: January–June 2019

Statistics: January-June 2019*									
Type of Human Rights Violation			January	February	March	April	May	June	Total
Extrajudicial killings	Crossfire		26	28	32	31	47	38	<b>202</b>
	Beaten to death		1	0	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
	Shot to death		0	4	0	0	0	0	<b>4</b>
	Torture to death		0	0	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
	<b>Total</b>		<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>208</b>
Enforced Disappearances			3	2	2	4	4	4	<b>19</b>
Death in Jail			4	3	7	10	5	9	<b>38</b>
Human rights violations by Indian BSF	Bangladeshis Killed		5	1	1	4	3	4	<b>18</b>
	Bangladeshis Injured		0	1	1	3	2	3	<b>10</b>
	Bangladeshis Abducted		0	1	0	0	7	1	<b>9</b>
	<b>Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>37</b>
Attack on journalists	Injured		4	8	2	2	19	0	<b>35</b>
	Assaulted		0	0	0	2	1	0	<b>3</b>
	Threatened		1	1	0	0	1	1	<b>4</b>
	<b>Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>42</b>
Political violence**	Killed		6	6	22	7	8	3	<b>52</b>
	Injured		339	199	584	161	200	297	<b>1780</b>
Dowry related violence against women			5	5	9	20	7	10	<b>56</b>
Rape	Girl under the age of 18		62	37	39	105	70	61	<b>374</b>
	Women		30	12	23	35	20	35	<b>155</b>
	Age could not be determined		0	0	1	0	0	6	<b>7</b>
	<b>Total</b>		<b>92</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>536</b>
Sexual harassment/Stalking of females			4	8	6	25	20	9	<b>72</b>
Acid violence			3	2	3	3	1	0	<b>12</b>
Public lynching			3	9	3	9	6	3	<b>33</b>
Situation of workers	RMG workers	Killed	1	0	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
		Injured	175	0	53	10	10	0	<b>248</b>
	Workers in other sectors (Informal)	Killed	2	4	6	1	4	3	<b>20</b>
		Injured	0	5	19	0	0	2	<b>26</b>
Arrest under Digital Security Act 2018			8	3	3	1	6	3	<b>24</b>

\* Statistics of some issues have been updated.

\*\* In March, 15 persons were killed and 434 were injured due to electoral violence centring around the Upazila Elections which has been added in the Political Violence table.

## State Repression and Impunity

### *Extrajudicial killings*

14. Extrajudicial killings continue in Bangladesh. Such killings continue to occur due to lack of accountability and rule of law, a weak criminal justice system, and the impunity given to the guilty persons. Apart from this, extrajudicial killings have become horrific when the government started nationwide anti-drugs operations in the name of 'war on drugs' from May 2018. 64 persons were extra judicially killed during anti-drugs drives from April to June. Regarding the death of all those involved in the operation, law enforcement agencies claimed that they were all drug dealers. However, many relatives of the deceased informed that they were not involved in the drug peddling; rather they were killed in a planned manner. At the beginning of the operation, on 26 May 2018, Teknaf Municipality Councilor Ekramul Huq became victim of an extrajudicial killing.<sup>11</sup> In order to submit a final report to the case filed by RAB against Ekramul Huq, police sought permission to do so from the 'higher authority' in the first week of April in 2019. The investigating officer Dipankar Karmakar said that in the FIR, RAB stated that Ekramul was killed in the firing between Yaba traders. However, no such information was found in the investigation.<sup>12</sup> After receiving such information from the police investigation, it is clear that incidents of 'gunfights' are probably orchestrated and the deceased were victims of extrajudicial killings. Despite repeated demands for the trial of the accused, the government denies the extrajudicial killings.
15. **A total of 117 persons were reportedly killed extra-judicially between April and June 2019. Of them, 57 persons were killed by police, 40 by RAB, 17 by BGB, two by DB Police and one by Joint Force. Among the 117 persons extra judicially killed, 116 were killed in 'crossfire/ encounters/ gunfights'. Furthermore, among the deceased, one person was allegedly tortured to death by police.**

### *Torture and lack of accountability of law enforcement agencies*

16. There were numerous allegations of torture, killing, arbitrary detention, seeking bribes, assault, harassment and extortion against members of law enforcement agencies and the security forces during this reporting period.
17. Allegations were found against Sub Inspector (SI) Mostaq Ahmed of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police for taking money from a businessman named Sohel Mia after he was arrested, under fear of torture and threats of death in

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<sup>11</sup> According to statement of the RAB officials, Ekramul's body was found after a 'gunfight' between Yaba traders in Noakhaliapara area of Teknaf Sadar Union of Cox's Bazar district in the midnight of 26 May 2018. However, Ekramul's wife Ayesha Akhter organised a press conference in Cox's Bazar Press Club alleging that a group of men from an intelligence agency and a team of RAB-7 killed her husband after called taking him out of their house. In the press conference, she presented the audio of the incident that was recorded in the mobile phone during the murder of her husband so that the whole incident of killing came up. Ekram's wife demanded judicial inquiry. The daily Prothom Alo, 1 June 2018; <https://earchive.prothomalo.com/view/dhaka/2018-06-01/1>

<sup>12</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 26 May 2019; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=3&edcode=71&pagedate=2019-5-26>

'crossfire' in Narshingdi. On 2 June 2019, Sohel's mother Tahmina Begum said at a press conference that SI Mostak had called her son and told him to go and see Narsingdi Superintendent of Police Mizar Uddin. Later, police demanded five hundred thousand taka bribe to release Sohel. When she refused to pay the money, her son was given electric shocks. After that, in the Madanganj Police Line area, SI Mostak's colleague Constable Shamsul demanded one hundred thousand Taka from Sohel's wife, with threats of death in crossfire if the money was not paid. In order to save Sohel's life they gave one hundred thousand taka to the police who then released him.<sup>13</sup>



*Sohel's mother Tahmina Begum in the press conference. Photo: The daily Jugantor, 2 June 2019*

18. On 12 June 2019, on the complaint of his wife, a person named Asadul Islam, was arrested by ASI Hafeez and taken to the Ananta Kandi Primary School ground instead of the police station. Hearing this news, Asadul's father, day-labourer Saidul Islam went there. ASI Hafeez demanded twenty thousand taka from him. When Saidul Islam expressed his inability to pay the money, ASI Hafeez verbally abused him and fractured his leg after beating him with a stick.<sup>14</sup>
19. On 14 March 2019, Zaher Ali (70), a resident of Rupganj Upazila in Narayanganj District filed a case in the Court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Debabrata Bishwas, mentioning that the Additional DIG Gazi Mozammel Haque had forcibly taken his land with registered documents, after detaining Zaher Ali and his family members in the police headquarters and torturing them. The case is numbered 394/19.<sup>15</sup> Later, the case was transferred to the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Zahidul Kabir. The court ordered the Metropolitan Magistrate Debabrata Bishwas to investigate this matter. The case is still under investigation and statements of four witnesses had been recorded till the publication of the report.<sup>16</sup> It is stated in the FIR that on 10 July 2018, the Officer-in-Charge of Rupganj Police Station, Moniruzzaman, called Zaher Ali and his family members to the police station. After that, they were taken to the Police Headquarters. On the day of the

<sup>13</sup> The daily Jugantor, 2 June 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/184434/>

<sup>14</sup> The daily Jugantor, 13 June 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/187186>

<sup>15</sup> The daily Jugantor, 1 July 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/193889>

<sup>16</sup> Information gathered by Odhikar

incident, their cell phones were found switched off from the evening. When they did not return, other members of the family went to the local police station to file a General Diary (GD), police did not accept their GD and instead threatened to throw them in the river after killing them all. Zaher Ali said that police of Rupganj Police Station took them to Additional DIG Gazi Mozammel Haque's room at the Police Headquarters in Dhaka. Everyone was handcuffed there and they were then taken to the Detective Branch (DB) office at Minto Road in blindfolds. There, DB Inspector Dipak Kumar Das threatened to kill them in crossfire. They were beaten every day while detained in the DB office for 13 days. In the face of intimidation and persecution, they were forced to hand over 62 Bigha (2049.58 decimals) of land (market value of about 600 million taka) to Additional DIG Gazi Mozammel and his wife Farzana Mozammel. After that, 13 cases were filed in Shahbagh, Demra and Rupganj Police Stations against them and they were detained for one year in prison. On 26 May 2019, they were released on bail.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Enforced disappearances***

20. Incidents of enforced disappearance in Bangladesh have become prominent after the Awami League-led Alliance government came to power in 2009. Most of the victims of enforced disappearance are leaders-activists of the opposition and dissidents. There are allegations of involvement of state security forces in each incident of enforced disappearance and in some cases evidence has been found.<sup>18</sup> However, issues relating to enforced disappearance are being repeatedly denied by the government.
21. Every year, in the last week of May, the organisations formed by the family members of the disappeared persons, commemorate International Week of the Disappeared<sup>19</sup> in various countries of the world. On 25 May 2019, the family members and relatives of those who disappeared in Bangladesh organised a human chain programme in front of the National Press Club in Dhaka, demanding that the disappeared persons be returned before Eid<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> The daily Jugantor, 1 July 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/193889>

<sup>18</sup> On 2 March 2017, disappeared victim Mokhlesur Rahman Jony's wife Jasmine Nahar Reshma filed a writ petition (No. 2833/2017) before the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. Based on this petition, on 16 May 2017 a High Court Division Bench consisting of Justice Kazi Reza-ul Huq and Justice Mohammad Ullah asked the Chief Judicial Magistrate of Satkhira to submit an inquiry report to the High Court Division by 3 July 2017 regarding the disappearance of homeopathy physician Mokhlesur Rahman Jony of Kukhrali Village in Satkhira, after he was detained for three days at Satkhira Police Station. A Senior Judicial Magistrate of Satkhira, Habibullah Mahmud, submitted an inquiry report to the High Court Division on 4 July 2017 that found the involvement of three higher police officials in the arrest of Sheikh Mokhlesur Rahman Jony and his subsequent disappearance. According to the probe report, Satkhira Superintendent of Police Mohammad Altaf Hossain and former Satkhira Sadar Police Station officer-in-charge Emdadul Huq Sheikh, former Sub-Inspector Himel Hossain, were involved with the arrest and disappearance. It was mentioned in the probe report that the OC Emdadul Huq Sheikh, SI Himel Hossain, were directly involved. (<http://www.newagebd.net/article/19321/>) In another case, Narayanganj District and Sessions Judge Syed Enayet Hossain on 16 January 2017 gave a verdict on the killing of seven persons subsequent their disappearance. 26 accused, including 16 RAB officers and commanding officer RAB-11, Lt. Col. (Retrd) Tareq Sayeed were sentenced to death. (<https://www.jugantor.com/news-archive/first-page/2017/01/17/93821/>)

<sup>19</sup> The International Week of the Disappeared was first initiated by the Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared-Detainees (FEDEFAM) in 1981. Since then it was adopted by families of the disappeared and the week has been observed all across the world. In many Latin American countries, several people were disappeared during the dictatorship. At that time the commemoration was also meant to gear up the campaign against enforced disappearances.

<sup>20</sup> Eid-ul-Fitr was celebrated on 16 June 2019



*On 25 May 2019, the family members and relatives of those who disappeared organised a human chain programme in front of the National Press Club in Dhaka. Photo: Odhikar*

22. In most of the cases, people who were disappeared have been released after being detained for a long time and then handed over to the police station, or produced before the court after being falsely accused in criminal charges. The resurfaced victims of enforced disappearance or their family members do not want to speak about their experience, out of fear of further disappearance and threats. It is to be noted that on 14 July 2016, Bangladeshi-born British citizen Yasin Mohammad Abdus Samad Talukdar (37) was taken into a microbus from in front of the Banani Railway Station in Dhaka. On behalf of his family, it was alleged that members of law enforcement agencies picked him up. However, after three years, Detective Branch of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) said Yasin was arrested on 17 May 2019 from in front of Gausul Azam mosque at Banani. He was presented in the court of Dhaka Chief

Metropolitan Magistrate on the day. He was shown as arrested in a case filed with Gulshan Police Station in 2013 under the Anti-Terrorism Act.<sup>21</sup>

23. In the night of 2 May 2019, members of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB-6) allegedly picked up SM Hafizur Rahman Sagar (43) along with four people, from the house of Nazrul Islam in front of a mosque in East Baniyakhamar of Khulna Metropolitan City. On 3 May, RAB said, in a statement, that three of the detainees were arrested from the house mentioned. Sagar's wife Hosnara Tania and sister Rupshi Nishi told Odhikar that at around 2:30 am on 2 May, a team of RAB-6 raided Nazrul Islam's house and SM Hafizur Rahman Sagar and his business partners Mohammad Habibur Rahman (24), Md Rafiur Rahman Rajib (30) and Mohammad Abdul Mannan (50) were arrested and taken with them. After getting this news, they contacted RAB-6 office on 4 May and the RAB Director (CO) Lt. Colonel Syed Mohammad Nurus Salehin Yusuf and Special Company Commander Mohammad Shamim Shikder admitted the detention of three others but denied the arrest of Sagar. After interacting with RAB members several times, the family members were told not to meddle any more. Later Sagar's family went to Khulna Sadar Police Station to file a General Diary (GD), while the Officer-in-Charge (OC) Humayun Kabir refused to accept it.<sup>22</sup>
24. **A total of 12 persons were allegedly disappeared<sup>23</sup> after being picked up by members of law enforcement agencies, between April and June 2019. Among them, three were shown arrested after a few days of disappearance, three surfaced alive, and the whereabouts of six persons remain unknown.**

## ***Condition in Prisons***

25. There are 13 Central Jails and 55 District Jails in Bangladesh and the total capacity of prisons across the country is 36,714, but there were 88,211 inmates as of 13 May 2019.<sup>24</sup> Many prisoners become ill as a result of the overcrowding and unhygienic conditions. There has to be a total of 141 doctors in the country's jails, but in actuality there are only 10 doctors providing medical services in the prisons all over the country. About half of the prisoners suffer from different diseases, including tuberculosis, typhoid, kidney and liver problems and diabetes. The Health Ministry has appointed doctors in different jails, but they are not joining work. There are about 11,000 prisoners in Dhaka Central Jail located in Keraniganj. 17 doctors were appointed to this jail but no one has commenced duties there.<sup>25</sup> There are allegations that no action is being taken against them, as a section of the doctors is associated with the government. Furthermore, inmates allegedly die in jail due to the lack of proper treatment facilities and negligence by prison authorities. A prisoner detained inside the prison was reported killed

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<sup>21</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 21 May 2019; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1595072>

<sup>22</sup> Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar in Khulna

<sup>23</sup> Odhikar only documents allegation of enforced disappearance where the family members or witnesses claim that the victim was taken away by people in law enforcement uniform or by those who said they were from law enforcement agencies.

<sup>24</sup> Prison Directorate, <https://www.prison.gov.bd/profile/prison-directorate>

<sup>25</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 2 April 2019; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1586549/>

by contract killer.<sup>26</sup> Among the dead in prison in the last three months, is a leader of the opposition political party and a dissident lawyer.

26. The country's first woman Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has been kept in solitary confinement for the last 16 months. BNP alleged that Khaleda Zia is being deprived from proper treatment. In May 2015, the UN General Assembly declared solitary confinement as torture. The Mandela Rules are known for ensuring human dignity of the prisoners, provision of medical care and the implementation of the policy of jail personnel for the prisoners, including the abolition of solitary confinement. Solitary confinement is defined in the policy of the UN Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoners. According to that definition, if someone is deprived from meaningful human communication for more than 22 hours, then it will be considered as a solitary imprisonment.<sup>27</sup>
27. On 11 April 2019, Kushtia District unit BNP Joint General Secretary MA Shamim Arzu, who was detained in Kushtia District Jail, died in Kushtia General Hospital. On 26 March 2019, Independence Day, police arrested 12 BNP leaders and activists, including Arzu while returning from a memorial service at the collectorate premises and a case of sabotage was filed against them. Since then, MA Shamim Arzu had been detained in Kushtia District Jail. His family claimed that Arzu died due to lack of treatment in jail.<sup>28</sup>
28. On 30 April 2019, Advocate Palash Kumar Roy, a prisoner in Panchagarh District Jail, died at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Kohinoor Chemical Company had filed a case against Palash. On 25 March, Palash had been accused of giving a speech against the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her administration and the police, during a human chain formed with his family members demanding that the case filed by Kohinoor Chemical Company be withdrawn. In retaliation, the local ruling party activists beat him and handed him over to police. Later, a local man named Rajib Rana filed a case with Sadar Police Station against Palash on the allegation that he made derogatory comments against the Prime Minister. On 26 April, Palash Kumar was scheduled to be sent from Panchagarh District Jail to Dhaka Central Jail. However, in the morning, Palash ran out of the prison toilets on fire. He was admitted to Rangpur Hospital in a critical condition, and later he was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for better treatment. Palash Kumar Roy's mother Mira Rani blamed the jail authorities for the incident.<sup>29</sup> On 8 May, a High Court Division Bench of the Supreme Court comprising of Justice Sheikh Hassan Arif and Justice Rajik Al Jalil, issued a Rule on why the failure to provide proper security of the prisoners will not be declared illegal and ordered a judicial inquiry into the incident of the death of Palash Kumar Roy.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The daily Jugantor, 1 June 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/183774/>

<sup>27</sup> The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules); Rule 44, Page 14; [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/GA-RESOLUTION/E\\_ebook.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/GA-RESOLUTION/E_ebook.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> The daily Jugantor, 12 April 2019 <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/166189/>

<sup>29</sup> The daily Jugantor, 6 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/174375/>

<sup>30</sup> The daily Jugantor, 9 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/175500/>

29. From April and June 2019, 24 persons died in jail. Among them, it was reported that 22 died due to 'illnesses', one was killed and one died by fire.

## Political repression and hindrance to freedom of assembly

30. The government is using the law-enforcing agencies and its loyal student and youth activists to obstruct any opposition meetings and rallies. They also attack and persecute dissenters by curtailing freedom of expression.
31. On 20 May 2019, Jahangirnagar University unit Chhatra Dal<sup>31</sup> organised a discussion meeting in the campus on the occasion of BNP founder and former President Ziaur Rahman's 38th death anniversary and for demanding the release of former Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia. However, the Proctor of the University did not allow them to hold the programme at the university premises. Chhatra Dal took the programme to Dillir Darbar restaurant in New Market located in Savar. The programme was stopped by the Awami League-backed Chhatra League activists and police.<sup>32</sup>
32. On 26 May 2019, Bangladesh Sadharon Chhatra Odhikar Songrakkhon Parishad<sup>33</sup> organised an *Iftar Mahfil* (Iftar gathering) at the auditorium of the public library in Bogura town. The organizers said that, at 2:00 pm Inspector Mostafiz Hasan of the Stadium Police Outpost, came to the venue and asked them to stop the programme.<sup>34</sup> In the afternoon, the Chief guest of the Iftar Mahfil and Dhaka University Central Student's Union (DUCSU) Vice-President, Nurul Haque, came to the venue. At that time, Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leaders-activists led by Bogura District unit Chhatra League President, Naimur Razzak and Bogura Azizul Haque College unit Chhatra League President, Abdur Rauf attacked them. In the BCL attack, 15 to 20 members of the General Student Rights Protection Council, including Nurul Haque were injured. Nurul Haque was first admitted to Bogura's Mohammad Ali Hospital. Afterwards, he was sent to Dhaka by Ambulance for his safety.<sup>35</sup>
33. On 28 May 2019, on the occasion of the International Week of the Disappeared,<sup>36</sup> human rights defenders associated with Odhikar in Sirajganj and the relatives of the disappeared persons belonging to the network 'Mayer Dak', organised a human chain programme in the Station Market, to honour the victims of enforced disappearance. The programme was stopped by the members of RAB-12.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Student wing of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

<sup>32</sup> The daily Naya Dignata, 23 May 2019 [www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/412378/](http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/412378/)

<sup>33</sup> Bangladesh General Student Rights Protection Council

<sup>34</sup> The daily Jugantor, 27 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/181988>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> The International Week of the Disappeared was first initiated by the Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared-Detainees (FEDEFAM) in 1981. Since then it was adopted by families of the disappeared and the week has been observed all across the world. In many Latin American countries, several people were disappeared during the dictatorship. At that time the commemoration was also meant to gear up the campaign against enforced disappearances.

<sup>37</sup> Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar, from Sirajganj

34. On 9 June 2019, doctors brought out a protest rally demanding the cancellation of doctor's recruitment test at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University. When the rally reached in front of the office of the Vice Chancellor, police stopped it and at one stage baton charged protestors.<sup>38</sup>



*Police baton charged at protestors at BSMMU. Photo: Manabzamin, 9 June 2019.*

### ***Criminalisation of ruling party***

35. **18 persons were killed and 658 persons were injured in political violence between April and June 2019. Furthermore, 43 incidents of internal violence in the Awami League were recorded during this period. Eight persons were killed and 565 were injured in internal conflicts within the Awami League.**
36. The controversial elections of 30 December 2018 have plagued the country and plunged the nation into deep crisis, making the path to democracy difficult. After taking power through such an unacceptable and farcical election, violence has increased due to the involvement of a large number of Bangladesh Awami League (AL) leaders and activists in various types of criminal activities, by abusing political power. Apart from this, members of the AL were involved in clashes due to their vested interest and they were seen using firearms and other lethal weapons against each other, as seen earlier in the year.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, criminals under the shelter of the ruling party now have the audacity to kill people publicly on the street.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The daily Manabzamin, 10 June 2019; <http://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=176096&cat=3>

<sup>39</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 9 February 2019; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2019-2-9&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

<sup>40</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 30 June 2019; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1601860/>



*Criminals attacked Rifat while his wife Ayesha tried to save him. Photo: Prothom Alo 30 June 2019*

37. On 14 May 2019, the supporters of Chhatak Municipality Mayor and Sunamganj District unit Awami League Joint Secretary, Abul Kalam Chowdhury and supporters of his brother and District unit Awami League's Information and Research Affairs Secretary, Shamim Ahmed Chowdhury took part in a gunfight over local supremacy in Chhatak Upazila under Sunamganj District. In this incident a Sramik League<sup>41</sup> member Shahabuddin was killed and 50 others, including policemen, were injured.<sup>42</sup>
38. On 26 June 2019, a person named Rifat Sharif (25) was hacked to death publicly by a group of criminals, including Sabbir Hossain Nayan, Rifat Farazi and his brother Rishan Farazi in the college area in Barguna town. At that time, the wife of the deceased tried to save her husband and failed. Rifat Farazi and Rishan Farazi were the close relatives of Zila Parisahd Chairman and Awami League leader Delwar Hossain and Shabbir Hossain Nayan was known to be close associate of the district unit Awami League's Science and Technology Affairs Secretary Sunam Debnath. It is to be mentioned that Sunam Debnath is the son of Awami League MP Dharendra Debnath Shambhu.<sup>43</sup>

## Freedom of Expression and Repressive Laws

39. The government intervened heavily on the people's freedom of expression during the period between April and June 2019; and it filed numerous cases and arrested many people under repressive laws.

<sup>41</sup> Labour wing of Awami League

<sup>42</sup> The daily Jugantor, 15 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/177706/>

<sup>43</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 30 June 2019; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1601860/>

## ***Sedition cases***

40. If any citizen has a critical comment against the government, the government in retaliation accuses him or them as "seditious", which undermines the freedom of thought and conscience.
41. On 17 April 2019, Awami League's Religious Affairs Committee member and President of Joy Bangla Muktijoddha Projanma League's Central Executive Committee, Akram Hossain Badal filed a sedition case under Section 124 (a) of the Penal Code with the Court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Muhammad Abdun Noor in Kishoreganj, against BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir; Trustee of Gonoshastha Kendra Dr. Zafrullah Chowdhury; Advisor to BNP Chairperson, Mizanur Rahman Minu; and the Registrar of Gono University. It has been mentioned in the case that the accused are hampering the development work of the state by creating instability through conspiracy against the present government, at different places and different times. The court directed the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Pakundia Police Station to investigate the incident.<sup>44</sup>

## ***Imposition of the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018***

42. Cases are being filed against journalists, opposition political activists, dissidents, and even ordinary citizens and arrests are made by applying the repressive Digital Security Act<sup>45</sup> 2018, for publishing anything that criticizes the government and ruling party leaders or their family members.
43. **Between April and June 2019, 10 persons were arrested under the Digital Security Act, 2018.**
44. On 16 May 2019, police arrested Mohammad Shahadat Hossain, director of a coaching (tutoring) center, from Chawkbazar area of Chittagong Metropolitan City for posting a caricature of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Facebook on 30 September 2013. He has been sued under the Digital Security Act.<sup>46</sup>
45. Police arrested auto-rickshaw driver Mohammad Anwar Hossain from Uttar Kawnnara area of Saturia Sadar Union under Manikganj District, on allegations of posting a derogatory comment against the Prime Minister and the Minister for Road Transport and Bridges Obaidul Quader on Facebook. A case was filed against him under the Digital Security Act.<sup>47</sup>
46. On 11 May 2019, police arrested Gazipur District correspondent of the daily Prothom Bor, Mohammad Mozahid when Sreepur Upazila unit Awami League-backed BCL President Zakirul Islam Ziku filed a complaint with Sreepur Police Station on charges of defamatory remarks and propaganda

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<sup>44</sup> The daily Manabzamin, 20 April 2019; <http://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=168911&cat=6>

<sup>45</sup> The contents of section 57 of the notorious Information and Communication Technology Act has been divided and included in four sections (25, 28, 29 and 31) of the DSA, making the law more stringent. Such repressive laws are being used to violate freedoms of opinion and expression enshrined in Article 39(2) of the Constitution and guaranteed as fundamental rights. The most controversial section of the DSA, section 32 is contrary to the Right to Information Act 2009. Section 43 of this Act says that if a police officer believes that the crime has been committed under this law or committed at a particular place or there is a possibility of such crime or the evidence is likely to be lost, then the police can search anywhere. Furthermore, if any person is suspected of committing an offense under this Act, then the police can arrest the person without a warrant.

<sup>46</sup> The daily Manabzamin, 19 May 2019; <http://www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=173062&cat=9/>

<sup>47</sup> The daily Jugantor, 18 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/178658/>

against the Prime Minister. A case has been filed against him under the Digital Security Act.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Speedy Trial Act extended for another 5 years***

47. On 27 May 2019, the Cabinet approved the draft of the “Law and Order Disruption (Speedy Trial) (Amendment) Act, 2019”, bringing amendments to the five-year extension of this controversial law. The Speedy Trial Act was first promulgated in 2002 for a period of two years, when the BNP-led Alliance government was in power. The law was enacted to speed trials up in some serious offences, like disrupting transportation services, vandalism of vehicles, extortion, destroying immovable property, creating terror or creating anarchy, mugging, intimidation and creating fear among the people etc. Since then, the law has survived through extensions despite changes in the government. At the time of adopting the law, the then Opposition party Awami League opposed it. They called this law ‘the Awami League suppression law’.<sup>49</sup> However, after coming to power, the Awami League increased the tenure of the law in a few phases. In addition, in 2018 the current government extended the period of punishment under this Act from 5 years to 7 years. With the expiry of this law in April, the government proposed to increase its effectiveness by another five years, up to 2024.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Draft of the Volunteer Social Welfare Organisations Act 2019***

48. Recently the Ministry of Social Welfare drafted a new law “the Volunteer Social Welfare Organisations (Registration and Control) Act 2019” aimed at registration and control of various non-governmental volunteers and social welfare organisations. According to sub-section 11 (1 and 2) of the draft law, there is a provision for all registered organisations to be re-registered every five years; and if any organisation fails to make the renewal on time or its renewal is rejected, it will be dissolved. Sub-section 17 (1, 2, 3) has a provision for cancellation of registration of an organisation based on report of “show-cause”, and dissolving the organisation from the date of cancellation of registration. Section 3 of the draft Act, says the law will get preference over any other relevant laws, unless there is anything, which is different from any other law for the time being in force.<sup>51</sup>

49. After reviewing the draft law, we see that a number of sections and sub-sections will create serious obstacles in the activities of the organisations. At the same time, there is scope of misuse in the interpretation of sub-sections and words of the law. Apart from the NGO Affairs Bureau, the Ministry of Social Welfare will control the organisations that operate with foreign

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<sup>48</sup> Manabdhikar Khabor, June 2019; <http://manabdhikarkhabar.com/epaper/index.php?id=28-5-2019-44>

<sup>49</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 28 May 2019; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=5&edcode=71&pagedate=2019-5-28>

<sup>50</sup> The Daily Star, 27 May 2019; <https://www.thedailystar.net/politics/speedy-trial-act-in-bangladesh-extended-for-another-5yrs-1749637>

<sup>51</sup> The daily Dhaka Tribune, 30 June 2019; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/law-rights/2019/06/30/ngos-decry-proposed-social-welfare-law>

donations, which will increase the dual governance and bureaucratic complexes; as a result the activities of non-governmental organisations will remain ineffective or they will remain as government controlled organisations.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Freedom of the media***

50. The government is controlling most of the media, especially electronic media, by putting pressure on the media in different ways to impede neutral reporting. Almost all electronic media and most of the print media are owned by people who are loyal to the government party. On the other hand, the government has closed down the pro-opposition electronic and print media-Diganta TV, Islamic TV and Amar Desh since 2013. In this repressive situation, journalists and reporters who boldly published accurate news, have been attacked by the ruling party leaders and activists.
51. On 21 May 2019 at around 5:00 pm, Awami League leader Rafiqul Haider Pathan's brother and Chairman of Charmona Union Parishad, Shafiq Pathan, beat Tobarok Hossain, Raipur Upazila correspondent of the daily Jugantor in front of Raipur Police Station and threatened to kill him. It is to be noted that on 10 March, a news titled "Fish cultivation of Awami League leaders by grabbing Raipura Dakatia River" was published in the daily Jugantor mentioning the name of Rafiqul Haider Pathan.<sup>53</sup>
52. On 29 May 2019, criminals attacked the Satkhira Press Club with iron rods, hockey sticks and beat journalists, after breaking the CCTV camera connections. Police of Satkhira Sadar Police Station did not come to the spot when journalists sought help from the police station, located just 100 yards away. 10 journalists, including Satkhira Press Club President Abu Ahmed, were injured in the attack. They were admitted to Satkhira Sadar Hospital. At that time, Mir Hassan Lucky and Mahi Alam, brothers of the local Member of Parliament from Satkhira Sadar constituency Mir Mostaq Ahmed Robi, were seen with a large number of criminals outside the press club. It is to be noted that on 20 March 2019, Satkhira Press Club declared Mir Mostaq Ahmed unwelcome/unacceptable. Two and a half months after the incident, on 20 May, the Satkhira Press Club withdrew the decision. After a few hours, criminals attacked the press club.<sup>54</sup>
53. **From April to June 2019, 21 journalists were injured, three were assaulted and two were threatened.**

### **Public Lynching**

54. People are losing their confidence and faith in the state institutions, including the law enforcement and the Judiciary, due to a dysfunctional criminal justice system, impunity of law enforcement agencies and corruption; and thus the

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<sup>52</sup> The Prothom Alo, 28 May 2019; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=5&edcode=71&pagedate=2019-5-28>

<sup>53</sup> The daily Jugantor, 25 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/181548/>

<sup>54</sup> The daily Manabzamin, 31 May 2019; <http://www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=174999&cat=9/>

ordinary citizens resort to the tendency of taking the law into their own hands. As a result, incidents of death due to public lynching continue.

55. **At least 18 persons were killed in public acts of lynching between April and June 2019.**

## The Death Penalty

56. The provision of the death penalty remains in force in various existing criminal laws of Bangladesh. A large number of accused are being sentenced to death each year in the lower courts. In order to execute the death sentence given by the judicial court it requires an approval from the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. This is called Death Reference. The death reference cases are being regularly submitted from different districts of the country to the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. The settlement rate is very low, compared to the submitted death references. As a result, over 1500 convicted prisoners across the country are waiting for death in the condemned cells for years.<sup>55</sup>
57. **As per Odhikar record, 66 persons have been sentenced to death during the period from April to June 2019.**

## Election Commission and the fifth phase of Upazila Polls

58. All elections conducted under the current Election Commission have been controversial and farcical since the 5 January 2014 controversial elections to 2019. Although the Election Commission is a constitutional institution, the activities of the Election Commission have created a great debate. Under the present Commission led by KM Nurul Huda, we have reported acts such as ballot boxes being stuffed with stamped ballot papers the night before voting, with the help of the ruling Awami League nominated candidates, law enforcement agencies, local administration and election officials in the eleventh parliamentary elections. On Election Day, the ruling party leaders and activists 'captured' polling centres, cast fake votes and beat and ousted the polling agents of the candidate nominated by the opposition party from almost all the polling stations.<sup>56</sup> Law enforcement agencies and local administration assisted them in this work. In this election, 100 percent votes were cast in 213 polling stations and 90 percent of the votes were cast in 7689 polling stations, which is unprecedented.<sup>57</sup> The Awami League-led Alliance

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<sup>55</sup> The daily Jugantor, 5 April 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/163442/>

<sup>56</sup> Information sent by local human rights defenders associated with Odhikar; the daily Naya Diganta, Prothm Alo, 31 December 2018; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/376801>; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/last-page/376825/>; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=7&edcode=71&pagedate=2018-12-31>; TIB's primary election report, 15 January 2019; [https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/beta3/images/2019/report/EPT/EPT\\_First\\_Report\\_2018.pdf](https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/beta3/images/2019/report/EPT/EPT_First_Report_2018.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> The daily New Age, 30 June 2019; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/77035/100pc-votes-in-213-centres>; Election Commission, [http://www.ecs.gov.bd/bec/public/files/1/11th%20nation\\_result\\_1\\_100.xlsx](http://www.ecs.gov.bd/bec/public/files/1/11th%20nation_result_1_100.xlsx), [http://www.ecs.gov.bd/bec/public/files/1/national\\_election%20101-199.xlsx](http://www.ecs.gov.bd/bec/public/files/1/national_election%20101-199.xlsx), [http://www.ecs.gov.bd/bec/public/files/1/national\\_199\\_300.xlsx](http://www.ecs.gov.bd/bec/public/files/1/national_199_300.xlsx)

came to power after taking away the voting rights of the people through such a fraudulent elections. Irregularities and vote riggings in the national elections have been reflected in the local government elections held afterwards. As a result, people have lost confidence in this electoral system and BNP and the Left Alliance, including other opposition have boycotted these elections.<sup>58</sup> Voter presence was almost nil in the local government elections. The main reason behind the retreat of the voting public is not only the occupation of the ruling party, but the inefficiency of the Election Commission and political biasness. However, the Commission has been conducting various types of 'experiments' without addressing the main reasons for this public retreat and a huge amount of money is being spent from the state treasury to conduct these experiments. One of them is the decision to build a 'model polling center' to increase voter attraction in the elections. For the fifth phase of the Upazila Parishad elections, on 18 June 2019, the Election Commission decided to construct model polling centers experimentally in six centers of six Upazilas. For this, the cost of each model polling center was increased from three thousand to 50 thousand taka. The Election Commission Secretary, Helaluddin, said that this initiative was taken to make the voters come and cast their vote.<sup>59</sup>

59. In the fifth phase of the upazila polls, elections were held on 18 June in 16 Upazilas and in the remaining 5 Upazilas, where voting had been suspended before.<sup>60</sup> The ruling Awami League and its allies participated in the election through nominating candidates as the main opposition BNP and other political parties, including the Left Alliance boycotted this election. In most Upazilas Awami League nominated candidates and Awami League's rebel candidates contested as independent candidates.<sup>61</sup> The voters showed no interest in this election. Even in some areas, the voters were urged to be at the polling centres by people using the megaphones of the mosques, which did not work. The total number of voters was 2,175 in Zafar Imam Model High School polling center (Female Center) in Chagolnaiya Upazila under Feni District, but only four voters cast their votes.<sup>62</sup> On 19 June, Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar expressed his fear with regard to people refraining from voting in the Upazila elections. He said that the people's retreat on the elections is dragging the country into a deep crisis and that Bangladesh was moving towards the uncertain destination of an authoritarian rule.<sup>63</sup> It is to be noted that Mahbub Talukder is the only Election Commissioner, who has been stating the realities and is thus different from other members of the Commission.

60. Elections were held in an almost voter less condition in the fifth phase of the Upazila polls, but in many places attacks by supporters of the ruling party,

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<sup>58</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 2 March 2019; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2019-3-2&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

<sup>59</sup> The daily Jugantor, 29 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/182754/>

<sup>60</sup> The daily Manabzamin, 19 June 2019; <http://www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=177454&cat=3/>

<sup>61</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 27 March 2019; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1585543/>

<sup>62</sup> The daily Jugantor, 19 June 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/189371/>

<sup>63</sup> The daily Manabzamin, 20 June 2019; <http://www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=177609&cat=3/>

casting fake votes and vandalism of EVMs and violence took place.<sup>64</sup> Leaders and activists of the Awami League and its affiliated organisations 'captured' all the polling centers in Feni's Chhagolnaiya Upazila elections in favour of the post of vice-chairman for election symbols 'Lock' and 'Pitcher'. Leaders and activists of the ruling party were seen stamping ballot papers publicly in the presence of journalists at Joypur Sarojani High School polling center of Shubhapur union.<sup>65</sup> Five persons were injured when clashes took place between supporters of the Awami League candidate and of the independent candidate over the occupation of Chhoubari Islamia High School polling center in Kamarkhand Upazila under Sirajganj District.<sup>66</sup>

## **Allegations of money laundering and corruption and the Anti Corruption Commission**

61. Though the ruling party tried to show an image to the people and the international community of a country that is going through rapid development, however, in the name of development, there are allegations of widespread looting and plundering of resources against the leaders-activists of the ruling party and persons in different professions who are government supporters. During this Awami League regime, allegations of huge amount of money being laundered abroad were found. The amount of money deposited by Bangladeshis in different banks in Switzerland (Swiss National Banks) is increasing every year, it seems. In 2009, the amount deposited in Swiss banks was 149 million Swiss franc, it stood 617.7 million franc in 2018, which is Tk 53.73 billion in Bangladeshi currency.<sup>67</sup> In this regard, former caretaker government adviser Mirza Azizul Islam said that corruption is the main reason behind money laundering from Bangladesh.<sup>68</sup>
62. According to Section 5 (1) of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act of 1947, no one can send money abroad without the approval of the Bangladesh Bank. No one has been given permission to deposit money abroad by the Bangladesh Bank so far.<sup>69</sup>
63. The Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) is unable to take any effective action, despite there being widespread allegations of corruption in the country. Moreover, allegations of corruption, including taking bribes, against ACC officials have also been reported. Recently, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police, Mizanur Rahman Mizan, who has been accused of corruption, including acquiring illegal assets, alleged that the ACC Director Khandaker Enamul Baser had taken bribe from him.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 19 June 2019; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2019-6-19&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

<sup>65</sup> The daily Naya Diganta, 19 June 2019; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/418596/>

<sup>66</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 19 June 2019; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2019-6-19&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

<sup>67</sup> One Swiss franc is equivalent to 87 Bangladeshi taka.

<sup>68</sup> The daily Jugantor, 28 June 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/192760>

<sup>69</sup> The daily Jugantor, 29 June 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/editorial/193145>

<sup>70</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 10 June 2019; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1598404>

## Violence against Women

64. In the last three months, between April and June 2019, women have been subjected to various forms of violence, including rape, sexual harassment and dowry related violence. During this period, incidents of rape have taken a terrible turn. Violence against women is increasing due to lack of justice for various types of offences against women and children. Social discipline has collapsed due to this culture of injustice and impunity of the accused.

### Rape

65. In the last three months, rape was persistent in the country. There was also an incident of rape and murder on a running bus during this period. On 16 April 2019, the High Court Division bench of the Supreme Court comprising of Justice FRM Nazmul Ahsan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader, expressed concern about the widespread incidents of violence against women and rape.<sup>71</sup> In the cases of widespread rape across the country, there are allegations that members of the ruling party and law enforcement agencies are involved in the incidents; in such cases, victims and their family members live in insecurity after filing complaints.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, allegations against the police for filing case of theft against the accused persons of rape and not taking rape cases and demanding money from the plaintiff are common.<sup>73</sup>
66. On 18 April 2019, a woman got into an auto-rickshaw from her father's house in Bogura Sadar Police Station to go to her husband's house in Dargahat. Auto rickshaw driver Nazmul took the woman to his relative's house at Shikarpur instead of taking her to her husband's house in Dargahat and raped her there. Later, the woman's husband, Al Amin, along with his relatives rescued her. On 23 April, accused Nazmul was handed over to Sub Inspector Khorshed of Bogura Sadar Police Station with the help of the Auto-rickshaw Owners Association Secretary Ershad and the raped victim went to the police station for filing a complaint. However, the police interrogated the rape victim and told her that the case cannot be taken. The Officer-in-Charge of the police station, Badiuzzaman said that such an incident could not have happened and that the girl had 'problems'. The husband of the victim, Al Amin complained that they were told to give money to the police for taking their case.<sup>74</sup>
67. In the morning of 30 April 2019, a housewife was heading to her relative's house in Charshreepur under Magura District. On her way one Rabiul and his associate Anis from Barisat Village took her to a crematorium, snatched her gold jewelry and cell phone and raped her there at gun point. The rape was filmed. The rapists escaped when the local residents approached hearing the screams of the woman. Later Mutasim Billah, Chairman of Sreekol Union Parishad, arrested the accused and informed the police. However, the police

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<sup>71</sup> The daily Jugantor, 17 April 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/167639/>

<sup>72</sup> Victim of rape and her family members fled from the area over threats by the accused due to filing a rape case in Kabirhat under Noakhali District. The accused are the leaders and activists of the ruling party. The daily Prothom Alo, 26 April 2019; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=5&edcode=71&pagedate=2019-4-26>

<sup>73</sup> The daily Jugantor, 15 June 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/177591/>

<sup>74</sup> The daily Manabzamin, 24 April 2019; <http://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=169444&cat=10>

filed a theft case against the accused without taking a rape case against them.<sup>75</sup>

68. On 6 May 2019, Shahinur Akhter Tania (23), a senior staff nurse of Ibn Sina Medical College and Hospital in Dhaka, got into a bus of Swornolata Transport Company from the Airport area to go to her village home under Kotiadi Upazila in Kishoreganj District. At around 10:00 pm, the bus was supposed to reach the last stop in Kotiadi Bus stand. However, the driver did not take the bus to Katiadi Bus Stand and went to Pirizpur Bus Stand under Bazitpur Upazila and where the bus driver Nuruzzaman and his assistant Lalon raped and killed her. Police arrested the bus driver, helper and three other suspects named Rafiq, Bakul and Khokan.<sup>76</sup>
69. On 21 May 2019 at night, a group of criminals, led by Awami League leader Harun and Jubo League leader Mahbubur Rahman Babu, attacked a house at Chhoyani Union under Begumganj Upazila in Noakhali District with firearms and local weapons and beat the residents and gang-raped a housewife in that house. The housewife was admitted to Noakhali General Hospital and the police arrested seven accused persons in this incident.<sup>77</sup>
70. **Between April and June 2019, a total of 332 females had been raped. Among them, 90 were women, 236 were minors (below the age of 18 years) and six person's age could not be determined. Of the women, 43 were victims of gang rape and three were killed after being raped. Out of the 236 minors, 31 were victims of gang rape, five were killed after being raped and three committed suicide. 57 females were also victims of attempted rape.**

## ***Sexual harassment***

71. **From April to June 2019, a reported total of 54 women and minors were victims of sexual harassment. Among them, five committed suicide, three were killed, seven were injured, 16 were assaulted, one was abducted and 22 were harassed in various ways.**
72. On 27 March 2019, Shirin Akhter, the mother of Nasrat Jahan Rafi, filed a case against Siraj-ud-Daulah, Principal of Sonagazi Islamia Senior Fazil Madrasa of Feni District for sexually harassing her daughter Nusrat. She did not withdraw the case even after intimidation. On 6 April, Nusrat went to the Madrassa to appear for her Alim exam, which is equivalent to Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination. At that time, the followers of the principal called Nusrat to the roof of the Madrassa's cyclone shelter and set her on fire after pouring kerosene on her. On 8 April, Nusrat's elder brother Mahmudul Hasan Noman filed a case with the Sonagazi Model Police Station, mentioning the names of eight people, including Principal Siraj ud Daulah. Nusrat died on 10 April, when she was admitted to the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition. The court gave the Order to the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) to investigate the case. Madrassa Principal Siraj-ud Daulah, Sonagazi Islamia Senior Fazil Madrasa unit Chhatra League President Shahadat Hossain Shamim, Sonagazi Islamia

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<sup>75</sup> The daily Jugantor, 15 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/177591/>

<sup>76</sup> The daily New Age, 8 May 2019; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/71772/nurse-killed-after-rape-in-moving-bus>

<sup>77</sup> The daily Jugantor, 26 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/181745/>

Senior Fazil Madrasa unit Chhatra Dal President Nur Uddin, including 12 people who were arrested under this case, admitted responsibility for the killing of Nusrat. The PBI submitted a charge sheet in the court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Zakir Hossain on 29 May, accusing 16 people, including, Sonagazi Upazila unit Awami League President Ruhul Amin, Municipal unit Awami League Joint Secretary and Municipal councilor Maksud Alam, Lecturers of English Department of the madrassa Absar Uddin and Mohammad Shamim. Earlier, on 27 March, when Nusrat went to file a case with Sonagazi Police Station in connection with sexual harassment on her by Siraj ud Daulah, the former Sonagazi Police Station OC Moazzem Hossain took her video and spread it through social media. Advocate Sayedul Haque Sumon filed a case against the accused OC Moazzem Hossain under the Digital Security Act for taking the video and uploading it on social media, violating her personal security. On the court's order, the PBI submitted a charge sheet on 27 May, and the court issued an arrest warrant against OC Moazzem on the same date. On 16 June, OC Moazzem was arrested although it was apparent that the law enforcement were dragging their feet in this regard.<sup>78</sup>

### ***Dowry related violence***

73. **From April to June 2019, a reported total of 37 women were subjected to dowry violence. Among them, 18 were allegedly killed and 19 were physically abused due to dowry demands.**
74. On 25 April 2019, Gafur Sardar, father of Tamanna Begum, committed suicide after consuming poison after he was unable to give two hundred thousand taka dowry demanded by Tawhid Hawladar, the husband of Tamanna Begum (18) in Gournadi Upazila under Barisal District.<sup>79</sup>
75. On 13 May 2019, a victim of child marriage, Farzana (15) was strangled to death by her husband Rocky Hossain, who left her body in a bamboo grove beside the house, for a dowry demand of taka 25,000 in Nandi Village under Bogura District.<sup>80</sup>

### ***Acid violence***

76. **Between April and June 2019, it was reported that four persons became victims of acid violence. Of them, three were women and one was a minor girl.**
77. On 27 April 2019, local criminals Sagor, Hridoy and Fahim threw acid on Higher School Certificate (HSC) examinee Shila when she was returning home after her exams in Kapasia under Gazipur District. Shila was admitted to Gazipur Shahid Tajuddin Ahmed Medical College Hospital. Police arrested one accused in this incident.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Feni.

<sup>79</sup> The daily Jugantor, 26 April 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/171252>

<sup>80</sup> The daily Naya Diganta, 15 May 2019; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/bangla-diganta/410097/>

<sup>81</sup> The daily Jugantor, 28 April 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/171735/>

## Labour Rights

78. Human rights of workers were violated during the last three months from April to June 2019.
79. **From April to June 2019, 20 readymade garment (RMG) factory workers were injured by the police when they were in protest for various demands, including overdue wages and allowances. Furthermore, eight workers from other sectors (informal sector) were killed and two were injured.**

### ***Condition of RMG factory workers***

80. There were incidents of labour unrest in the readymade garment industry over the closing down of factories without notice, termination of workers and for not paying wages on time.
81. On 12 May 2019, workers of the Workfiled Garments factory were demonstrating in protest of workers' layoff and demanding payment of overdue wages and other allowances for three months in Mirzapur Masterbari Road at Bhimbazar area of Gazipur District. During the protest, a violent altercation took place between workers and police. Police threw tear gas shells and baton charged on workers.<sup>82</sup>

### ***Demonstration of jute mill workers***

82. Jute mill workers across the country stopped working at mills and observed blockade programme from 5 May for their 9-point demand, including the allocation of adequate budget in the jute industry, payment of arrears, revision of national wage and an implementation of the recommendation of the productivity commission, payment of provident funds and gratuity of retired workers, reinstatement of terminated workers, recruitment of employees against vacant posts etc. As a part of the blockade programme, the workers brought out partial processions in the Demra area of Dhaka. On 7 May, police baton charged and threw rubber bullets at workers during their demonstration.<sup>83</sup>

## Bangladeshi citizens missing in the Mediterranean Sea

83. In the night of 9 May 2019, a big boat with 75 migrants left for Italy from the coast of Libya. Later the passengers were shifted to a smaller boat in the deep sea. The boat sank in a few moments and many passengers drowned, out of which 39 were Bangladeshi citizens.<sup>84</sup> They left the country in December and January after giving 8 hundred thousand to 1 million taka to the brokers (human traffickers) with hopes of earning incomes while working in Europe.<sup>85</sup>
84. The efforts of Bangladeshi nationals to migrate on risky seas is worrisome. Although the government claims that the economic growth (GDP) rate of the

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<sup>82</sup> The daily New Age, 13 May 2019; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/72269/rmg-workers-protest-at-factory-closure>

<sup>83</sup> The daily Jugantor, 9 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/175494/>

<sup>84</sup> The daily Jugantor, 12 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/176554/>

<sup>85</sup> The daily Prothom Alo, 29 May 2019; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1596613/>

country has increased, there is now a huge disparity between the rich and the poor. As a result, due to the acute crisis of livelihood, the unemployed youth belonging to poor and marginalised sectors are crossing the border with enormous risk, after falling into the trap of the brokers.

## **Neighbouring States: India and Myanmar**

### ***India's interference on Bangladesh***

85. In addition to India's political and economic intervention on Bangladesh, members of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) killed, tortured, arrested and abducted Bangladeshi citizens during the period from April to June 2019.
86. On 27 April 2019, BSF members arrested a Bangladeshi cowherd named Azim Uddin (28) at the Sappahar border under Naogaon District and tortured him severely. Members of the BSF pulled out 10 fingernails of the young man and tortured him in different ways.<sup>86</sup>
87. On 10 May 2019, BSF left the body of a Bangladeshi youth named Kabirul Islam (32) at Chhoyghoria area of Kushkhali boarder in Bangladesh. He was allegedly detained by BSF members and tortured to death by being forced to drink petrol.<sup>87</sup>
88. On 20 June 2019, a Bangladeshi man named Manarul Islam (27) was shot dead by BSF when a group of Bangladeshi cattle traders were returning to Bangladesh through Shibganj border in Chapainawabganj District. At that time BSF members of India's Daulatpur camp opened fire at them and as a result, Manarul died.<sup>88</sup>
89. **Between April and June 2019, 11 Bangladeshis were shot dead by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). Among them, 10 were gunned down and one was tortured to death. Furthermore, eight Bangladeshis were either shot or injured. Of them, four were shot and wounded and four were tortured. Eight Bangladeshis were also abducted by the BSF. It is to be noted that, not a single incident of BSF killing has been prosecuted till date.**<sup>89</sup>

### ***Genocide against the Rohingya population***

90. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has moved ahead on the investigation into allegations of crimes against humanity, in the wake of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya victims who fled genocide in Myanmar and took refuge in Bangladesh. In a statement on 26 June 2019, the ICC stated that after receiving an application from the Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, a three-member panel of judges was formed. They will give their decision regarding the application from the Prosecutor. In a statement, Prosecutor Bensouda said that she will seek permission from the judges for a complete investigation, highlighting the argument that Bangladesh is a party to the ICC.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The daily Jugantor, 28 April 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/171750/>

<sup>87</sup> The daily Jugantor, 11 May 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/176253/>

<sup>88</sup> The daily Jugantor, 21 June 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/190231/>

<sup>89</sup> Odhikar, Annual Human Rights Report 2017; <http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Annual-HR-Report-2017-English.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> The daily Naya Diganta, 27 June 2019; [www.dailynayadiganta.com/first-page/420785](http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/first-page/420785)

91. Right to Education with no discrimination for all has been ensured in Article 26<sup>91</sup> of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the Bangladesh Government is expelling Rohingya students from schools instead of ensuring their right to education. Human Rights Watch said in a report that the Bangladesh government has expelled Rohingya refugee students, who lack Bangladeshi citizenship, from schools near the refugee settlement in southeast of Bangladesh since January 2019. The expelled students were born in Bangladesh after their parents fled Myanmar as refugees in the early 1990s. They were not allowed to enroll in Bangladeshi schools. After finishing non-formal primary schools in the refugee camps, they were admitted in the Secondary Schools outside the refugee settlements. Human Rights Watch's senior child rights researcher Bill Van Esveld said, "the Bangladeshi government's policy of tracking down and expelling Rohingya refugee students, instead of ensuring their right to education is misguided, tragic, and unlawful".<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

<sup>92</sup> Bangladesh: Rohingya Refugee Students Expelled, April 1, 2019; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/01/bangladesh-rohingya-refugee-students-expelled>

## Hindrance to Human Rights Activities

92. In the continuation of the government's repression on Odhikar that started in 2013, harassment against Odhikar took place before the farcical Parliamentary elections of 30 December 2018.<sup>93</sup> In 2014, Odhikar applied to the NGO Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office for the renewal of its registration, but registration has not been renewed to date. On 13 May 2019, Odhikar filed a Writ Petition (numbered 5402/2019) to the High Court Division of the Supreme Court; the court issued a Rule upon the NGO Affairs Bureau as to why the inaction of the Respondent to grant renewal of registration, pursuant to application made by the Petitioner dated 25.09.2014, shall not be declared to be without lawful authority and of no legal effect; and why the Respondent shall not be directed to renew registration of the Petitioner from 2015 onwards in accordance with law. The Rule was made returnable within 2 (two) weeks. The NGO Affairs Bureau has not taken any step regarding renewal of Odhikar's registration. Furthermore, the NGO Affairs Bureau has stopped fund clearance for all projects for five years and completely barred any approval of new projects, in order to halt all human rights activities of Odhikar. The Standard Chartered Bank also suspended Odhikar's Bank Accounts as part of the government persecution and surveillance by intelligence agencies and government pressure on Odhikar continues. In addition, human rights defenders associated with Odhikar were being harassed, hindered in conducting programmes, sued and arrested for being vocal against human rights violations in their respective districts. On 28 May 2019, a human chain programme organised by human rights defenders affiliated with Odhikar in Sirajganj, to commemorate the occasion of International Week of the Disappeared, was stopped by RAB. A human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Mymensingh and journalist of Bdpress24.com, Abdul Kaium, was arrested on 11 May 2019 by members of the Detective branch (DB) of Police under the influence of a local influential person, Mohammad Idris Khan (who is a close relative of a MP of the ruling party). Later he was tortured in DB Police custody. He was beaten with belts, hit by a chair and punched.<sup>94</sup> He was sued under the Section 23, 25 and 29 of the Digital Security Act, 2018 and Section 385 and 386 of the Penal Code. Although Kaium was arrested on 11 May, he was produced before the court on 13 May in violation of criminal Procedure, which states that an accused has to be produced in the court within 24 hours of arrest as also contained in Article 33(2)<sup>95</sup> of the Constitution. On 14 May, Kaium's bail petition was

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<sup>93</sup> During this reporting period, surveillance and questioning of Odhikar by the intelligence agencies increased. Furthermore, the pro-government media published false and ill-motivated reports against Odhikar. The Election Commission abruptly cancelled the registration of Odhikar as an 'election observer' without any notice, on 6 November 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Joint Statement by AHRC and CIVICUS, "BANGLADESH: HRD tortured while in arbitrary detention must be released and charges be dropped", <https://civicus.org/index.php/fr/component/tags/tag/bangladesh>

<sup>95</sup> Every person who is arrested and detained in custody shall be produced before the nearest magistrate within a period of twenty four hours of such arrest, excluding the time necessary for the journey from the place of arrest to the Court of the magistrate, and no such person shall be detained in custody beyond the said period without the authority of a magistrate.

rejected in the Magistrate Court and on 16 May, his bail application was rejected in the District and Sessions Judge Court of Mymensingh.

## Recommendations

1. The election system of Bangladesh should be reconstructed by removing persons subservient to the government from the Election Commission, to make it truly independent and neutral; and democracy must be ensured by establishing a democratic government through free, fair and creditable elections under a neutral caretaker government or under the direct supervision of the United Nations if necessary, since we are clearly unable to hold them by ourselves.
2. The government must stop extrajudicial killings. Incidents of extrajudicial killings and torture by law enforcement agencies must be investigated and the perpetrators must be brought to effective justice.
3. The government must accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture; and effectively implement the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013, and the High Court and Appellate Division directives contained in the matter of BLAST and Others Vs. Bangladesh and Others.
4. The government must stop enforced disappearances perpetrated by law enforcement agencies and bring the members of the state security forces and law enforcement agencies who are involved in this heinous crime, before the law. The government must accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.
5. The government must ensure the medical facility for prisoners in jails. Torture and ill-treatment on inmates must also be stopped.
6. Political violence and criminalisation must be stopped and the government must take legal action against the ruling party leaders and activists for all criminal activities proven to be perpetrated by them.
7. The government should refrain from repressive, unconstitutional and undemocratic activities. Human rights, including freedom of assembly of the opposition political parties and people who have alternative beliefs, have to be respected. The government must stop harassment against the opposition dissenters and critics.
8. Freedoms of speech, expression and the media must be ensured and protected. The ban on the publication of the daily Amar Desh and on the broadcasting of Diganta TV, Islamic TV and Channel 1 must be removed.
9. All repressive and abusive laws, including the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amendment 2009 and 2013), the Digital Security Act, 2018 and the Special Powers Act, 1974 must be repealed.
10. Bangladesh must accede to both Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (OP-ICCPR 1 and OP-ICCPR 2).
11. The government must ensure effective implementation of laws to stop violence against women and minors and the offenders must be effectively punished under prevalent laws. Police must investigate reports of such crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice. Criminals affiliated with the ruling party should not be given immunity. The government should also execute mass awareness programmes in the print and electronic media, in order to eliminate all forms of violence against women and children.

12. Trade union rights should be guaranteed at all the ready-made garment factories and workers rights should be protected as per ILO Conventions. Human traffickers must be brought to justice.
13. The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) must stop human rights violations, including killing, torturing and abducting Bangladeshi citizens along the border areas; and it must compensate the victims of violence. The hazardous Rampal Power Plan must be stopped to save Bangladesh's environment and ecology and a balance has to be maintained in unequal trade between the two countries.
14. The international community must put effective pressure on the Myanmar government and support the establishment of the human rights of the Rohingya community in Myanmar. Odhikar urges the UN Member States to assist the International Criminal Court to prosecute all perpetrators, including the Myanmar military and Buddhist extremists for committing genocide against Rohingya population. Bangladesh government must refrain from its policy of tracking down and expelling Rohingya refugee students and ensure the right to education of Rohingya students.
15. The on-going state repression on Odhikar must be stopped. The case filed against Odhikar's Secretary and its Director under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (Amended in 2009) must be withdrawn. The NGO Affairs Bureau must renew Odhikar's registration, which is pending with it. The government must release the funds of Odhikar to enable it to continue its human rights activities.

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**Notes:**

1. Odhikar seeks to uphold the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the people.
2. Odhikar documents and records violations of human rights and receives information from its network of human rights defenders and monitors media reports.
3. Odhikar conducts detailed fact-finding investigations into some of the most significant violations, with assistance from trained local human rights defenders.
4. Odhikar is consistent in its human rights reporting and is committed to remain.