

Six-Month Human Rights Monitoring Report

January 1 – June 30, 2017



July 01, 2017

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Preface

Bangladesh has ratified various international conventions and treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UN-CAT) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The overall situation of Bangladesh remains very vulnerable as a result of widespread human rights violations, including violations of the right to vote; acts of corruption; and economic disparity. Under these circumstances, there is a possibility to go on with massive human rights violations, if an accountable government is not formed through free, fair, participatory and credible elections. Bangladesh has been elected as a Member of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) for the third term, despite allegations of grave human rights violations. This seems only to have encouraged disinterest in improving the human rights situation and thus, perpetration continues.

Odhikar is facing severe state repression and harassment by the government since 2013 in order to perform its human rights work. The Organisation has released human rights monitoring reports every month, based on Odhikar's own fact finding, information collection and reports sent by associated local human rights defenders across the country and information and statistics published in different mass media. This six-month report is the outcome of a compilation and analysis of the monthly human rights situation monitoring reports published every month in 2017 from January to June. Odhikar is deeply grateful to all the human rights defenders and partners at home and abroad who have expressed solidarity with the Organisation and are supporting it to continue its work.

Executive Summary

This report is produced after analyzing the human rights situation of Bangladesh from January to June 2017. Some other relevant issues were also incorporated in the synopsis of this report, as the Awami League government has been in power since 2009. After the controversial and farcical Parliamentary elections¹ on January 5, 2014, all the government institutions, including national and autonomous institutions have been politicized by the government. The government was involved in widespread and varied human rights violations through suppressing the opposition political parties, particularly BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami and dissenting voices, including human rights organisations. Repression of the incumbent government was observed during the first six months of 2017. Since the 2014 elections, all local government polls have been marred by widespread and widely reported irregularities, violence and vote rigging, which also continued in local government polls held during this reporting period.

The leaders and activists of the ruling party and police and members of other state security forces have become desperate to hold on to power through farcical and controversial elections, using the administration for their politically vested interest, without being accountable to the people. Criminal activities, perpetrated by leaders and activists of the Awami League affiliated student and youth wings, across the country continued in these six months. Of the incidents of criminal activities that took place during this period, most of them involved ruling party leaders-activists. They attacked leaders and activists of the opposition parties and ordinary citizens. Furthermore, they were also engaged in internal conflicts among themselves for their vested interest.

Hindrances to freedom of expression and repression on the ordinary people and leaders and activists of the opposition political parties continued during this reporting period. The incumbent government is allegedly involved in various activities that abuse human rights, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and arbitrary arrests of leaders and activists of the BNP-led 20-Party Alliance. Apart from enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and attacks, the government is also harassing opposition party leaders and activists in various ways to create pressure on them, including implicating them in criminal cases or lodging false cases against them. It is alleged that the government is using the law enforcement agencies in these activities. As per orders given by the 'higher

¹ The Caretaker Government system was incorporated in the Constitution through the 13th Amendment, as a result of a people's movement led by the then Opposition, Awami League and its alliance between 1994 and 1996. However, in 2011 the Caretaker Government system was removed unilaterally by the Awami League government through the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, without any referendum; and ignoring the protests from civil society organisations, political opposition and the people at large. Instead, a provision was made that elections were now to be held under the incumbent government. As a result, the controversial 10th Parliamentary elections were held on January 5, 2014 despite boycotts by all the major political parties. The election was not only farcical (for example, 153 MP's were declared elected uncontested even before the polling commenced), it was a hotbed for election-related crimes such as ballot-box stuffing, capturing of polling stations, intimidation of voters and violence.

authority' of the government, the Special Branch (SB) of Police sent official letters to the relevant police stations for gathering personal information of the leaders of the opposition political party, BNP. Thirty-two kinds of specific information have been asked for in a three-page form.² On May 20, as per instruction from 'high-up in the government', police raided the political party office of the BNP Chairperson at Gulshan, Dhaka without any prior notice. Police said in this regard that an operation was conducted at the BNP Chairperson's party office to see whether there was any anti-state activities being carried out or any such documents preserved therein. Nothing was found.³

Although leaders-activists of the ruling party had freely organised meetings and assemblies, ruling party activists and members of law enforcement agencies barred and attacked meetings and assemblies of the opposition parties and organisations or groups that highlighted various demands and issues. During the month of Ramadan in June, the ruling party activists attacked and stopped the *Iftar Mahfil* organised by BNP in a mosque.⁴ Supporters of the ruling party attacked the motorcade of BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir in Rangunia of Chittagong while he along with his party men were going to Rangamati to express condolences and provide aid to the victims of landslides. As a result, 15 BNP leaders and activists, including Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir were injured.⁵

The government flatly denies the existence of incidents of enforced disappearance, despite the fact that on January 16, 2017 Narayanganj District and Sessions Judge Syed Enayet Hossain convicted 26 accused persons, including RAB-11 unit's commander Lt. Col. (Retd.) Tareque Sayeed and 16 RAB officers and members, for the disappearance and murder of seven men in Narayanganj on April 27, 2014.⁶ There were also several allegations of extrajudicial killings in the first six months of 2017, although the Supreme Court of Bangladesh had issued several rules in recent years on extrajudicial killings.⁷ The law and justice delivery system of the country is increasingly under threat and human rights are seriously violated due to the persistence of extrajudicial killings. Many victims-families alleged that members of law enforcement agencies arrested their relatives and later the law enforcement claim that the victims were killed in an incident of 'crossfire', 'encounter' or 'gunfight' after allegedly shooting them dead. These staged narratives given by

² The daily Jugantor, 19/04/2017; www.jugantor.com/first-page/2017/04/19/118423/

³ The daily Bangladesh Pratidin, 21/05/2017; <http://www.bd-pratidin.com/first-page/2017/05/21/233400>

⁴ The daily Jugantor, 03/06/2017 www.jugantor.com/first-page/2017/06/03/129490/

⁵ The daily Naya Diganta, 19/06/2017 <http://www.dailynavadiganta.com/detail/news/229670>

⁶ The daily Jugantor, 17/01/2017, www.jugantor.com/first-page/2017/01/17/93821/
http://www.esamakal.net/2017/01/17/images/03_112.jpg

⁷ Radio Sweden published a report exposing method used by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) to execute a staged 'crossfire'. In that report, a high-ranking official of RAB, as claimed by Swedish Radio, was describing the torture and killings perpetrated by RAB. The conversation was recorded without his knowledge. The man was giving instructions to the field level officers on how they must shoot and kill and keep a weapon beside the body. He also said that they buy weapons with the money collected as bribes and leave them beside the bodies; so that it looks like a shooting in self-defense. The RAB official said (in the broadcast) that they are very careful to make sure that no clue is left behind. No ID cards that slip-off. They put on gloves and also cover their shoes so as not to leave footprints behind in the place of incident.
<https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&artikel=6665807> . Also see the daily Jugantor, 25/04/2017

police or RAB during press briefings or press releases, are almost the same in all the incidents. As a result, what actually happened is unknown and the truth behind the incident remains hidden. Instead of the legal process of arrest, investigation and judicial intervention, it is observed that some members of RAB and police are involved in criminalisation or are instructed by 'higher authority', which is a matter of grave concern. The law enforcement agencies are enjoying impunity in this regard.

There are also allegations of labeling people as 'extremists' after disappearing them. A possibility is thus created to harm people who are not 'extremists' during the operations at 'extremists' dens'. Human rights defenders have repeatedly cautioned about the possibility of rising extremism in politics as a result of the hindrance to freedoms of expression and assembly and constantly barring dissenting voices and protests. Despite this caution, the government continues its acts of suppression. The narrative that the law enforcement agencies have given regarding their operations against 'extremism' are similar in almost all the cases. This resembles the way the law enforcement agencies narrate the death of crime suspects in 'gunfight', 'crossfire' and 'encounter.'⁸

Several repressive laws have been drafted and enacted and a few repressive Acts have been made more stringent, during the period of the current government. An example of the latter is the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 (amended 2009 and 2013). The government is suppressing dissenters and alternative voices through imposing such repressive laws. If any citizen criticizes the government or posts any critical comment against the government on facebook, there is the possible risk that the government and the ruling party activists, in retaliation, will file cases against them. The social media was under monitoring by the government during these six months. The Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 (amended 2009, 2013) (the ICT Act) is being imposed against people who are critical of the decisions and activities of those in high positions of the government and their families. Accurate and impartial reporting and proper journalism are hindered as the government puts pressure on the media and in most cases, journalists are forced to practice self-censorship. The government is controlling most of the print media and the electronic media. The government has already given approval to some new private television channels under political consideration, whose owners are closely connected with the government. Meanwhile, the government closed down pro-opposition electronic media, such as Channel 1, Diganta TV, Islamic TV and the publication of the print media, the daily Amar Desh since 2013. The Cabinet has approved a draft policy to control the online

⁸ As for operations against 'religious extremism' so far, after the July 2016 attack on Holey Artisan Bakery at Gulshan in Dhaka. For example, newborn and children were also killed during such operations conducted against 'religious extremism' in these six months. As a result what actually happens or happened in such operations, the government could not clarify it to the people. The daily New Age, 29/04/2017; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/14532/extremism-tackling-narrative-warrants-transparency>

media.⁹ Journalists are being attacked by criminals backed by the ruling party, while gathering information or in relation to publishing reports. Local journalist and human rights defender associated with Odhikar, Abdul Hakim Shimul was shot dead by a ruling party leader in Sirajganj. On April 26, 2017, a Paris based organisation named Reporters without Borders, that work in the area of freedom of mass media, after reviewing the mass media of 180 countries, reported that Bangladesh's position on the 'Freedom of Mass Media Index' has gone down two positions compared to 2016. In the previous year, Bangladesh was in 144th position.¹⁰

Regarding the situation of workers during these six months, many incidents of closure of garment factories without notice, termination of RMG workers and non-payment of wages occurred. As a result, workers unrest took place. In order to prevent such unrest, law enforcement agencies attacked workers. Furthermore, lower earning workers in other sectors (informal sector), such as construction workers and domestic workers are being discriminated in various ways. Women workers appointed for brick breaking are paid less compared to their male counterparts. Sexual discrimination is very common in the informal sector. Children are also working in this sector in hazardous conditions.

Attacks on citizens belonging to religious and ethnic minority communities continue. The ruling Awami League leaders and activists and some members of law enforcement agencies were allegedly involved in these incidents.¹¹ In such cases, victims did not get justice due to politicization of these incidents and the responsible persons enjoyed impunity.

In Bangladesh, the economic gap between the rich and poor is all too visible. Due to economic disparity and rights violations, Bangladeshi citizens are going abroad using illegal channels through traffickers. Among them, many tried to enter Europe with refugees of different countries. Such trend is growing, as human rights violations increase due to the lack of rule of law. A large amount of money is also being laundered abroad. On 29 June, the Central Bank of Switzerland, Swiss National Bank (SNB), mentioned in its annual report that in 2016 the savings of Bangladeshi citizens in different banks in Switzerland was BDT 56.85 billion (USD 704.23 million) while the amount was BDT 44.52 billion (USD 551.49 million) in 2015. As per such statement, the deposition of money has increased by 20 per cent compared to the previous year. This was the highest amount of money deposited by Bangladeshi citizens at different banks in Switzerland in last 12 years. According to the SNB report, the volume of deposited money from Bangladesh to Swiss Banks has increased since 2012.¹²

Violence against women is another significant issue in the country. Women become victims of dowry violence, rape, sexual harassment, acid attack and domestic

⁹ The daily Bangladesh Pratidin, 20.06.17; <http://www.bd-pratidin.com/first-page/2017/06/20/241446>

¹⁰ The daily Jugantor, 27/04/2017; www.jugantor.com/last-page/2017/04/27/120491/

¹¹ The daily Jugantor, 05/11/2016 www.jugantor.com/first-page/2016/11/05/73941/

¹² The daily Prothom Alo, 30/06/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/economy/article/1233421/

violence on a daily basis. Women continue to become victims of such violence due to a prevailing culture of impunity and lack of implementation of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1980, Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act 2000 (amended 2003), Acid Crime Control Act 2002, Acid Control Act 2002 and the Domestic Violence Prohibition Act 2010. Meanwhile, the special provision of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 has impliedly legitimised child marriage in Bangladesh.¹³

Furthermore, incidents of hindrance to human rights activities and activism continued. During this reporting period, harassment and persecution continued against Odhikar, which started in 2013. A local human rights defender affiliated with Odhikar from Sirajganj was shot dead by a ruling party leader and three other human rights defenders affiliated with Odhikar from Munshiganj and Kushtia were detained in jail under the ICT Act.

Rohingyas have been fleeing from the Rakhine State of Myanmar and taking shelter in Bangladesh as refugees, due to various forms of suppression and forced eviction carried out on them by the Myanmar government. The sheer numbers of such refugees coming out of Myanmar over the years and the targeted policies and violations they face, shows that the Rohingya community people are becoming victims of 'ethnic cleansing'.

Apart from internal violations, Bangladesh is facing aggressive policies of the Indian government. This increased after the 2014 National elections in Bangladesh. India is pushing Bangladesh towards a terrible human and environmental disaster and economic loss. India is taking transit facility through Bangladesh at almost no cost, has been given the initiative to build the Rampal Power Plant that will destroy the ecology in the Sundarbans; and a decision to implement an inter-river connection project. Moreover, Indian government (aggressive) policy continued to have an impact during this reporting period in various other ways, including the signing of an Indian multinational company agreement with Bangladesh, without any tender bids. Between January and June 2017, the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) have killed or physically harmed anyone seen near the border or anyone trying to cross the border. Bangladeshi citizens are even attacked and abducted by BSF illegally entering Bangladesh, which are clear violations of international law and human rights.

¹³ On February 27, 2017 the National Parliament passed the 'Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2017' which contains provisions for the marriage of minor girls in 'special circumstances'. The newly enacted law states that marriage of minor girls (below the age of 18) can be done with the consent of the Court and parents, following due process in 'special circumstances' and for best interest. Thus such marriage will not be considered a crime. The special provision of this Law legitimises child marriage in Bangladesh. This 2017 law will grossly violate human rights and the overall development of the child, including their rights to health, education and mental growth. The previous Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 has made 18 years the minimum marriageable age for women and 21 for men. Despite this, Bangladesh remains on the list of countries that have very high rates of child marriages. The 2017 Act now legalises this social malpractice. www.iugantor.com/first-page/2017/02/28/104781/

Statistics: January-June 2017*									
Type of Human Rights Violation		January	February	March	April	May	June	Total	
Extrajudicial killings	Crossfire	15	17	19	8	8	12	79	
	Shot to death	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	
	Tortured to death	0	0	1	1	1	1	4	
	Beaten to death	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	
	Total	16	17	20	10	9	13	85	
Enforced Disappearances**		6	1	21	2	20	7	57	
Death in Jail		1	5	4	2	4	6	22	
Human rights violations by Indian BSF	Bangladeshis Killed	2	2	0	2	0	4	10	
	Bangladeshis Injured	3	9	3	1	3	5	24	
	Bangladeshis Abducted	5	1	1	4	1	2	14	
	Total	10	12	4	7	4	11	48	
Attack on journalists	Killed	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	
	Injured	2	3	0	2	2	1	10	
	Assaulted	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	
	Threatened	0	4	3	0	0	2	9	
	Total	2	9	3	3	2	3	22	
Political violence	Killed	5	7	6	12	11	6	47	
	Injured	217	325	428	595	575	325	2465	
	Total	222	332	434	607	586	331	2512	
Dowry related violence against women		17	14	20	26	22	29	128	
Rape		44	51	69	54	83	70	371	
Sexual harassment /Stalking of women		14	22	35	23	14	16	124	
Acid violence		3	7	4	5	5	6	30	
Public lynching		1	3	8	5	2	2	21	
Situation of workers	RMG workers	Killed	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		Injured	0	20	21	70	15	50	176
		Terminated	1034	1733	43	0	0	0	2810
	Workers in other sectors	Killed	3	2	11	19	4	9	48
		Injured	7	8	16	22	0	0	53
Arrest under Information and Communication Technology Act***		0	3	1	4	1	4	13	

*Odhikar's documentation

** 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.

*** The cases of arrests under the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act that are documented are those where the presentations/statements in question are considered critical against high officials of the government and their families.

A. Political Situation, Democracy and Human Rights

1. A controversial and farcical Parliamentary election was held on January 5, 2014. Since then all the local government elections were marred with widespread irregularities, and widely reported violence and vote rigging. During this period, allegations of repression and torture against the incumbent government were made by leaders and activists of the opposition political parties. Moreover, there was an allegation against a ruling party Member of Parliament, of killing 11 bus passengers by throwing petrol bombs in 2014.¹⁴ There were also recommendations to withdraw cases of heinous crimes against the leaders and activists of the ruling party by using 'political consideration'.¹⁵ Meanwhile, many leaders and activists belonging to the opposition political parties are fleeing from the country due to suppression by the government and ruling party.¹⁶ There is no accountability of the government towards people, due to its assumption of power through farcical elections. As a result, incidents of human rights violations have increased. Criminal activities and violence perpetrated by ruling party men persisted during the first six months of 2017. During this period, the ruling party activists were seen using weapons in public, which was published in different mass media.¹⁷ They were involved in various violent acts including extortion, acquiring tender bids, land grabbing and violence at educational institutions and in most cases they enjoy impunity. The 11th Parliamentary election is supposed to be held in December 2018. The government, following this election, is becoming more aggressive towards opposition parties and civil society groups and people who have alternative beliefs, by using the administration. It is feared that the situation might take a turn for the worse, if the next election is not held under a neutral government.



A clash between two rival groups of Chhatra League in Thakurgaon. Photo: The Daily Star, 5 January 2017

¹⁴ The daily Manabzamin, 24/05/2017 www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=66716&cat=3/

¹⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 20/02/2017, www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1084939/

¹⁶ 'Bangladesh is now the single biggest country of origin for refugees on boats as new route to Europe emerges' /The daily Independent UK, May 5, 2017/ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-migrants-bangladesh-libya-italy-numbers-smuggling-dhaka-dubai-turkey-detained-a7713911.html>

¹⁷ "10 injured as rivals clash", The Daily Star, 05/01/2017; <http://www.thedailystar.net/country/10-injured-rivals-clash-1340302>

2. According to information gathered by Odhikar, from January to June 2017, 47 persons were killed and 2465 were injured in political violence. 165 incidents of internal violence in the Awami League and 10 in the BNP¹⁸ were also recorded during this period. 40 persons were killed and 1803 were injured in internal conflicts of the Awami League while 138 were injured in conflicts within the BNP.

Political violence

3. The criminal activities of the ruling party affiliated Chhatra League and Jubo League continued across the country during the last six months and most of the perpetrators of the offences could not be brought to justice.
4. A total of 40 persons, including Hossain Khan¹⁹ of Zazira Upazila under Shariatpur District; Saiful Islam and Sohel Mia²⁰ of Osmaninagar Upazila under Sylhet District; and Masud²¹ of Chorkewar Union under Munshiganj District, were killed in internal conflict among the Awami League leaders and activists due to establishing supremacy in local politics.



Relatives crying for Awami League activist Hossain Khan (inset) who died in intra-party clash of Awami League in Shariatpur. Photo: Jugantor, 11 January 2017



Saiful Islam (inset), who was killed during election violence in Osmani Nagar, Sylhet. Photo: Jugantor, 27 February 2017

¹⁸ BNP: Bangladesh Nationalist Party

¹⁹ The daily Jugantor, 11/01/2017 <http://www.jugantor.com/first-page/2017/01/11/92220/>

²⁰ The daily Jugantor, 27/02/2017 www.jugantor.com/last-page/2017/02/27/104528/

²¹ The daily Naya Dignata, 11/06/2017; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/227496> and Report sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Munshiganj

5. Many ordinary people including women and children were killed and injured in petrol bomb and arson attacks during hartals and blockade programmes, by the BNP led 20-Party Alliance, before and after the controversial January 5, 2014 Parliamentary Elections; and when commemorating January 5, 2015 as 'Death of Democracy Day'. The government and the 20-Party Alliance blamed each other for petrol bomb and arson attacks. Such incidents allegedly occurred by leaders and activists of the opposition and ruling party²² and members of the law enforcement agencies. The government and its supporters and supporters of the political party in power, blamed only the opposition for such incidents. The ruling party's involvement in the petrol bomb attacks was exposed in a recent statement made by an Awami League leader. On May 23, 2017, Mehendiganj Upazila Awami League unit President and Chairman of Barisal Zila Parishad, Moidul Islam, attended a press conference organised in protest of vote rigging in Chanpur Union; and against the criminal activities of local Awami League MP Pankanj Debnath. There Moidul Islam said, "Sechchasebak League²³ General Secretary Pankanj Debnath was involved in setting fire to his own transport company 'Bihanga Paribahan' at Shahbagh, Dhaka when the opposition political parties were protesting (the removal of the caretaker government system) before the January 5, 2014 elections. As a result, 11 persons were killed. After that incident he was able to get sympathy from the Party Chief and get nominated as a candidate for the election".²⁴



Mehendiganj Upazila Awami League unit President and Chairman of Barisal Zila Parishad, Moidul Islam, attended a press conference organised in protest of vote rigging in Chandpur Union and against the criminal activities of local Awami League MP Pankanj Debnath. Photo: Manabzamin, 24 May 2017

²² On February 4, 2015 at around 10:00 pm, according to local information, police arrested Jagannathdighi Union unit Jubo League²² President Manik, Jubo League activist Babul and Kayes with petrol bombs, while the latter were passing through Choddogram Upazila in Comilla. They were taken to Choddogram Police Station. They were released after a few hours. It is to be mentioned that in the night of February 3, 2015 seven persons, including two women were killed and 26 were severely burnt when petrol bombs were thrown on a bus at Jagmohonpur under Choddogram Upazila on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway. On February 13, 2015 at midnight, a group of criminals threw petrol bombs at vehicles in Motihara Bazar on the Dinajpur-Dhaka Highway. Though no casualties were recorded, the local police caught Putimora Union unit Chhatra League General Secretary Ujjal and another Chhatra League leader Jobaer red-handed with petrol bombs. Later police of Nobabganj Police Station released the arrested two Chhatra League leaders on request from the Awami League leaders

²³ Voluntary wing of Awami League

²⁴ The daily Manabzamin, 24/05/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=66716&cat=3/

Electoral system and local government

6. Due to the repeated irregularities in local government elections under the new Election Commission,²⁵ this Commission is now facing a crisis of confidence. Elections in 14 Upazila Parishads (including a by-election) and in four Municipalities were held on March 6, 2017²⁶; Comilla City Corporation Elections were held on March 30; and elections in 160 Union Parishads (UP) (including by-elections) were held on April 16.²⁷ At the elections held on March 6, in most of the polling centres, the absent of voters was highly noticeable. Moreover, allegations of casting fake votes, ‘capturing’ polling centres, stuffing ballot boxes and forcefully ousting polling agents of rival candidates were reported.



Attack on BNP Councilor candidate by rivals near the City College polling centre. Photo: Jugantor, 31 March 2017



BNP Councilor candidate was injured during an attack in Comilla Government High School polling centre. Photo: Jugantor, 31 March 2017



Supporters of Awami League openly stamping on ballot papers in Chouara Islamia Fazil Madrassa polling centre during Comilla City Corporation Elections. Photo: Prothom Alo, 31 March 2017

²⁵ The President of Bangladesh appointed the new commission after the tenure of controversial Election Commission headed by Rakib Uddin Ahmed in February 2017.

²⁶ For detailed report, please see Odhikar’s human rights monitoring report of March 2017. [www.http://odhikar.org/human-rights-monitoring-report-march-2017/](http://odhikar.org/human-rights-monitoring-report-march-2017/)

²⁷ For detailed report, please see Odhikar’s human rights monitoring report of April 2017. [www.http://odhikar.org/human-rights-monitoring-report-april-2017/](http://odhikar.org/human-rights-monitoring-report-april-2017/)



Faruk Mia died during a clash over casting fake votes at Marichakandi polling center of Dariadaulat Union Parishad under Banchharampur Upazila in Brahmanbaria District. Photo: Jugantor, 17 April 2017



10-year old Sharmin Akhtar was shot and injured during electoral violence in Katharia Union Parishad election in Banshkhali. Photo: Jugantor, 26 April 2017

7. Though the Comilla City Corporation elections were comparatively smoother, they were still marred by sporadic irregularities including ‘capturing’ polling centres, casting fake votes and stuffing ballot boxes and ousting the polling agents of the contesting candidates. Instead of being strengthened, the local government system has been made almost useless and dysfunctional by the present government, through the sacking of the elected public representatives and the illegal acts committed during the polls. Public opinion has been totally ignored here, not just by taking away the right to vote, but also by making an ‘example’ by sacking elected representatives. The local government division has sacked 381 elected public representatives in the last three and a half years. They were temporarily suspended for being accused in

different lawsuits. The Mayors of Gazipur, Sylhet, Rajshahi and Khulna City Corporation are on the list of suspension. The Sylhet and Rajshahi Mayors were sacked for the second time. Most of the sacked public representatives are involved in the politics of (Opposition) BNP-Jamaat.²⁸

8. Since the controversial and farcical 10th Parliamentary elections held on January 5, 2014, all local government polls, except Narayanganj City Corporation polls, were marred with widespread and widely reported irregularities, violence and vote rigging. In the past, elections were generally conducted in a festive manner and people used to willingly participate in the elections. But there is no scope for the people to vote freely in the current existing political atmosphere. That is why, voter presence has significantly decreased in recent elections. Ensuring transparent, creditable, free and fair elections is the Constitutional responsibility of the Election Commission (EC). However, the previous Election Commissions have totally failed to deliver, and tried to claim that elections held under them were transparent, free and fair – as an attempt to cover their failures. After the tenure of the controversial Election Commission headed by Rakib Uddin Ahmed in February 2017, people and political parties hoped that a fair and strong new Election Commission would be formed. Although the President of Bangladesh appointed a new Election Commission through a search committee in February 2017, the elections held under this new Commission have repeated the failures of its predecessor.

Bangladeshis leave the country due to human rights violations

9. Many leaders and activists of the opposition parties are leaving the country due to alleged repression by the ruling political party. Bangladeshis are trying to get into Europe. A report published in the daily Independent from UK stated that during the first three months of last year, one Bangladeshi citizen was able to reach Italy by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. However, this year in the same period, more than 2800 Bangladeshis fled to Italy.²⁹

Criminal cases withdrawn out of political consideration

10. The government has taken an initiative to withdraw 206 cases, including 34 cases of murder perpetrated by ruling party activists, by considering them to be ‘politically motivated cases’. Among them, more than 150 cases were filed during the two consecutive terms of the Awami League regime.³⁰ Most of the

²⁸ The daily Manabzamin, 07/04/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=60531&cat=2/

²⁹ ‘Bangladesh is now the single biggest country of origin for refugees on boats as new route to Europe emerges’ /The daily Independent UK, May 5, 2017/ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-migrants-bangladesh-libya-italy-numbers-smuggling-dhaka-dubai-turkey-detained-a7713911.html>

³⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 20/02/2017, www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1084939/

plaintiffs of such cases were various institutions of the government. Even cases filed last year were incorporated in the list. Apart from murder cases, there were cases relating to crimes such as rape, destruction of property, bribing, stealing from government funds, theft, robbery, extortion, black-marketeering, kidnapping, committing fraud, bombing and possessing, carrying and using illegal arms. Such cases were recommended for removal. The Ministers and Members of Parliament have given Demand Orders to the Ministry of Home Affairs for the removal of these cases.³¹

B. State Repression and Culture of Impunity

11. Due to state repression and impunity, several incidents of enforced disappearance, extrajudicial killing and torture in custody by law enforcement agencies, and deaths in jail took place in the first six months of 2017. Moreover, inhuman and degrading treatment and lack of accountability of law enforcement agencies were also observed during this period.

Enforced disappearances

12. Enforced disappearance is a repressive tool used by governments and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. Many people who were picked up by men claiming to be members of law enforcement agencies, remain traceless. The families of the disappeared claim that members of law enforcement agencies arrest the victims and then they are no longer found. In some cases, law enforcement agencies deny the arrest; but days later, the arrested persons are produced before the public by the police or other law enforcement; or handed over to a police station and appear in Court; or the bodies of the disappeared persons are recovered. On March 28, 2017 the United Nations Human Rights Committee was critical of the Bangladesh government during its concluding observations on the ICCPR³² review on Bangladesh. The Committee expressed concern at the reported high rate of enforced disappearances, extra-judicial killings and the excessive use of force by State security forces. Apart from expressing concern over enforced disappearances and extra-judicial executions, the Committee also commented that victims and their families are not getting redress due to lack of investigations and accountability of law enforcers. It is further concerned that domestic law does not effectively criminalise enforced disappearances and that the State party does not accept the fact that enforced disappearances occur.³³ The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances also urged the

³¹ Ibid

³² Bangladesh acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2000.

³³ http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fBGD%2fCO%2f1&Lang=en

Bangladesh Government to take action to stop enforced disappearances in the country.³⁴

13. According to information gathered by Odhikar, from January to June, 2017, 57 persons have been disappeared after being picked up allegedly by men claiming to be members of law enforcement agencies. Among them, six were found dead and 25 were later produced before the Court or surfaced alive. The whereabouts of 26 persons are still unknown.
14. Among the persons who were picked up by men claiming to be members of law enforcement agencies and still disappeared since January 2017, are-Shafiqul Islam Modhu of Rangpur³⁵, Mohammad Hassan of Dhaka³⁶; SM Shafiqur Rahman and his two brothers-in-law, Mohammad Hasan Tareque and Moazzem Hossain Sathi of Chittagong³⁷; Abdul Kuddus of Rajshahi³⁸; Enamul Haque of Jhenaidah³⁹; Mohammad Siddiqur Rahman Nahid of Narsingdi⁴⁰, Abdul Mannan, Shomsher Fakir and Zohurul Islam from Tangail⁴¹ and 15 other persons. Among the disappeared victims, the bodies of Mohammad Hanif Mridha of Narayanganj⁴²; Nurul Alam Nuru of Chittagong⁴³; Rafiqul Islam of Kushtia⁴⁴; Moidul Islam alias Rana and Alimuddin of Jessore⁴⁵; and Mohammad Arzullah of Chuadanga were later recovered.⁴⁶



Transport businessman S M Shafiqur Rahman (left) and his two brothers-in-law Hassan Tareque and Moazzem Hossain Sathi. Photo: Jugantor, 31 March 2017

³⁴ UN expert group urges Bangladesh to stop enforced disappearances.

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21220&LangID=E>

³⁵ The daily Manabzamin, 08/02/2017 www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=52528&cat=9/

³⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 20/02/17; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1085045/

³⁷ The bd-pratidin, 31/03/17; <http://www.bd-pratidin.com/last-page/2017/03/31/219234>

³⁸ Report sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Rajshahi.

³⁹ The daily Manabzamin, 13/06/2017, www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=69693&cat=9/

⁴⁰ The daily Jugantor, 11/06/2017, www.jugantor.com/bangla-face/2017/06/11/131768/

⁴¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 20/06/2017; <http://www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1224311/>

⁴² The daily Prothom Alo, 21.03.17; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1115032/

⁴³ The daily Manabzamin, 31/03/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=59615&cat=2/

⁴⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 30.03.17; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1127041/

⁴⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 01.06.17; <http://epaper.prothom-alo.com/view/dhaka/2017-06-01/20>

⁴⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 01.06.17; <http://epaper.prothom-alo.com/view/dhaka/2017-06-01/20>



The body of Chhatra Dal leader Nurul Alam Nuru was found beside the Karnophuli river bank with his hands tied and eyes blindfolded. Photo: Naya Diganta, 31 March 2017

15. Every year, in the last week of May, the associations of families of the disappeared across the world commemorate the International Week of the Disappeared (IWD).⁴⁷ The International Week of the Disappeared was also observed in different countries in Asia, including Bangladesh from May 28 to June 4, 2017. Unfortunately, the families of the disappeared are barred by the government when they organise protests for the return of their relatives. On June 7, 2017 members of law enforcement agencies barred the rally organised by the Hill Women’s Federation in Khagrachhori in commemoration of 21 years of disappearance of its leader Kalpana Chakma. This resulted in a violent altercation between the two groups. At least 14 leaders and activists of the Hill Women’s Federation were injured and police arrested 21 persons.⁴⁸



On May 28, Mohammad Rizwan’s family organised a press conference at Jessore Press Club demanding Rizwan’s return. Photo: Odhikar



On May 30, the family members of Waliullah and Al Mukaddas organised a press conference at Barisal Reporters Unity. Photo: Odhikar

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 08/06/2017 <http://www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1209546/>



On May 31, the family members of disappeared BNP leader Mahabubur Rahman Ripon organised a meeting and human chain in Feni demanding his return. Photo: Odhikar

Extrajudicial killings

16. Several incidents of extrajudicial killing occurred between January and June 2017. The government is denying incidents of extrajudicial killing despite repeated demands to bring the perpetrators to justice.
17. According to information gathered by Odhikar, a reported total of 85 persons were extra judicially killed between January and June 2017. During this reporting period, a total of 79 persons, including Mohammad Rasel⁴⁹ and Rajib⁵⁰ of Jessore District; Bidyut Kumer Bachhar and Talha Sheikh⁵¹ of Satkhira District; Sabuj Malitha, Romesh Karmokar, Kamruzzaman Kanon and Shohagh Islam⁵² of Meherpur District; Rokibul Hassan Bappi and Lalon Molla⁵³ of Rajbari District; and Ashraf Uddin Dhol⁵⁴ of Mymensingh District were killed in alleged 'gunfight' between members of law enforcement agencies. Many families of the victims alleged that the members of law enforcement took their relatives away several days prior to their death; and later law enforcers claimed that they were killed in 'crossfire', 'encounter' or 'gunfight'. Furthermore, several people, including Nurul Amin⁵⁵ of Feni District, Romel Chakma⁵⁶ of Rangamati District and Nazrul Islam Babu⁵⁷ of Sylhet District were tortured to death while in the custody of law enforcement agencies.

⁴⁹ Report sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Jessore.

⁵⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 09/04/2017; <http://epaper.prothom-alo.com/view/dhaka/2017-04-09/20>

⁵¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 13/03/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1106380/

⁵² The daily Prothom Alo, 15/03/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1108435/

⁵³ The daily Prothom Alo, 14/05/2017; <http://epaper.prothom-alo.com/view/dhaka/2017-05-14/2>

⁵⁴ "Robber killed in 'gunfight'" The Daily Star, 25/05/2017; <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/robber-killed-gunfight-1410547>

⁵⁵ "55-year-old dies in Feni police custody", The daily Dhaka Tribune, 26/03/2017; <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2017/03/26/pentagenarian-dies-feni-police-custody/>

⁵⁶ "Death of Romel Chakma unacceptable", the daily New Age, 24/04/2017; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/14139/death-of-romel-chakma-unacceptable>

⁵⁷ "2 cops suspended over death of govt employee in police custody", The daily New Age, <http://www.newagebd.net/article/15988/2-cops-suspended-over-death-of-govt-employee-in-police-custody>



Bodies of Saddam, Romesh, Kanon and Shohagh, who were killed in 'gunfight' in Meherpur. Photo: Naya Diganta, 15 March 2017



Nazrul Islam Babu. Photo: Manabzamin, 21 May 2017

The type of deaths and the accused law enforcement agencies, who were involved in extrajudicial killings and the identities of the deceased, are given below:

Type of death

Crossfire/encounter/gunfight

18. Among the 85 persons extra judicially killed, 79 were killed in 'crossfire/encounters/gun fights'. Of them, 67 were killed by the police, 11 by the RAB and one killed by the army.

Tortured to death:

19. Between January and June 2017, four persons were allegedly tortured to death. Among them three by the police and one by the army.

Shot to death:

20. Among the deceased, one person was allegedly shot and killed by police during this period while in a protest rally.

Beaten to death:

21. Among the deceased, one person was beaten to death by police.

The identity of the deceased:

22. Of the 85 persons who were killed extra-judicially, one was a 4th class government employee; one was member of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS); one was member of the Pahari Chhatra Parishad, two were members of the Purba Banglar Communist Party (Red Flag); one was member of Sarbahara Party; one was member of New Biplobi Communist Party (Mrinal Bahini), four were members of Jama'atul Mojahidin Bangladesh (JMB); one was a member of Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji); two were accused persons in different cases; one was a convicted criminal and 65 were alleged criminals. The identities of five persons were not reported.

Torture, inhuman treatment and lack of accountability of law enforcement agencies

23. The members of law enforcement agencies are enjoying impunity due to the government practice of using the law enforcement agencies against its political opponents. As a result, members of the law enforcing agencies are harassing, picking up and torturing people on a regular basis, defying the law. From January to June 2017, many allegations of harassment, extortion, bribery, torture and killing were made against police. The number of reported allegations is probably less than the actual number, because survivors and victim-families do not want to make their experiences public due to fear of further harassment. Apart from activists of the opposition political parties, ordinary people, madrassa students, women and citizens belonging to ethnic minority communities are also becoming victims of such brutality. Some examples are as follows:

24. Mohammad Abdus Salam Hawlader, of Madhabpur Village under Bauphol Upazila in Patuakhali District, was arrested by Boga Police Outpost in-charge Sub-Inspector Jasim Uddin Khan, over a land related dispute with the Organising Secretary of Adabaria Union unit Jubo League, Mohammad Bellal Hossain. Abdus Salam Hawlader was taken to the police outpost where police allegedly tortured him and demanded 25 thousand taka.⁵⁸ A Madrassa student named Jaif Mashrur, on the occasion of the publication of his book, went to the book fair with his friends and some other students at Bangla Academy in Dhaka. Police arrested 11 persons including Mashrur and took them to Shahbagh Police Station. They were later shifted to the counter terrorism unit. After two days in detention, police released them after failing

⁵⁸ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Patuakhali.

to prove their suspicions.⁵⁹ Allegations of torturing a detained person named Hafizur Rahman Bijoy in the custody of Bauphal Police Station in Patuakhali were found against the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of the police station, Azam Khan Farooqi.⁶⁰ A woman entrepreneur name Jibon Ara organised a press conference at Cox's Bazaar Press Club and alleged that Sub-Inspector Manosh Barua of Cox's Bazaar Police Station tortured her by giving her electric shocks after taking her in remand for a 30 hundred thousand taka bribe.⁶¹ Romel Chakma, a Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) examinee of Naniyarchar Degree College and General Secretary of Naniyarchar unit Pahari Chhatra Parishad⁶² in Rangamati, had died due to alleged torture by the military in Army camp.⁶³ On May 28, 2017 a businessman named Rezaul Karim was arrested by a group of 10 men claiming to be members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police from Konabari, Gazipur. They also took his two trucks. On June 1, Parvin Akhter, the wife of Rezaul Karim said that her husband was at the DB Police office at Mintu Road in Dhaka. Parvin Akhter went to the DB Police office and saw her husband's trucks. At that time one Moazzem Hossain, claiming to be DB Police, contacted her on a cell phone and demanded five hundred thousand taka for the release of Rezaul Karim. Parvin Akhter gave them three hundred thousand taka and met her husband. DB Police did not release Rezaul due to the remaining two hundred thousand taka. DB Police did not inform her why Rezaul Karim had been arrested.⁶⁴ On June 6, Sub-Inspectors Aminur Rahman, Jamil Ahmed and Biplob of Jessore Kotwali Police Station collected two hundred thousand taka from a man named Ahsan Hbib Sujon of Ajmatpur Village under Lebutola Union in Jessore by threatening him to kill in 'crossfire'.⁶⁵ On June 29, a man named Joban Ali (50) died in the custody of Sharishabari Police Station in Jamalpur. The deceased's son-in-law Khorshed Alam claimed that his father-in-law died due to torture in police custody.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ The daily Naya Diganta, 12/02/2017, <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/195154>

⁶⁰ The daily Naya Diganta, 28/02/2017, <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/199487>

⁶¹ The daily Jugantor, 19/04/2017; www.jugantor.com/last-page/2017/04/19/118433/

⁶² Hill Students' Council.

⁶³ "Death of Romel Chakma unacceptable", The daily New Age, 24/04/2017;

<http://www.newagebd.net/article/14139/death-of-romel-chakma-unacceptable>

⁶⁴ The daily Jugantor, 08/06/2017; www.jugantor.com/first-page/2017/06/08/130822/

⁶⁵ The daily Jugantor, 14/06/2017; www.jugantor.com/last-page/2017/06/14/132425/

⁶⁶ The daily Naya Diganta and Jugantor, 30/06/2017; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/231702> & www.jugantor.com/news/2017/06/30/135631/



Tortured victim Jibon Ara tells her story to journalists in a press conference in Cox's Bazar. Photo: Jugantor, 19 April 2017



Romel Chakma, Photo: The Daily Star, 24 April 2017

Death in jail

25. According to information gathered by Odhikar, from January to June 2017, 22 persons reportedly died allegedly due to 'illnesses' in jail.
26. It is also alleged that due to lack of treatment facilities and negligence by the prison authorities, many prisoners became ill due to the effects of torture in remand, which caused their death. The prison hospitals across the country are inundated with various problems that proves how vulnerable the healthcare facility is for inmates in jail. Among the problems, the most pressing one being the acute shortage of medical facilities with 93 percent of the doctors posts remaining vacant. According to prison officials, there are at present only six permanent doctors to attend approximately 75,000 inmates at 68 prisons across the country.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ "Prison hospitals in shambles", The daily New Age, 16/05/2017; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/15646/prison-hospitals-in-shambles>

C. Interference on Freedom of Expression and Assembly and Repressive Laws

Freedom of assembly

27. The right to freedom of assembly and the holding of peaceful meetings and processions are the democratic and political rights of every citizen, as enshrined in Article 37 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. The government is taking away the rights to freedom of expression and assembly by putting bars on meetings and assemblies of the opposition and groups with alternative beliefs; and suppressing them under an authoritarian rule. As a result, the political situation has become repressive.
28. Police used water cannons and threw tear gas shells at protestors when the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Port called a hartal in Dhaka, calling for implementation of its seven-point demands, including cancelation of all destructive agreements relating to the coal-based power plant in Rampal, near the largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans. Over a hundred hartal supporters, including two journalists were injured during attack by police.⁶⁸ Police obstructed black flag rallies organised by BNP across the country, on the occasion of January 5, a 'Death of Democracy Day'⁶⁹ and meetings and assemblies in many places were stopped due to attacks by Chhatra League activists and police. A group of about 10-12 men, led by Bancharampur Upazila unit Jubo League activists Diko and Tutul, attacked a meeting of the Nabinagar Upazila unit of Communist Party of Bangladesh, organised as part of its central committee's programmes, in Majhiara Village under Nabinagar Upazila in Brahmanbaria District. As a result the meeting was stopped.⁷⁰ A discussion meeting titled 'Killings at Border: Obligation of the State' organised by a new civil society organisation named People's Movement for Democracy at the Spectra Convention Centre in Gulshan, Dhaka, was stopped by police. The meeting was supposed to be chaired by poet and political analyst Farhad Mazhar and the keynote paper to be presented by Acting Editor of the daily Amar Desh, Mahmudur Rahman.⁷¹ The Democratic Left Front, Communist Party of Bangladesh and Socialist Party of Bangladesh called a hartal⁷² on February 28, from 6:00 am to 12:00

⁶⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 27/01/2017, www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1068233/

⁶⁹ The highly controversial and fraudulent parliamentary elections, boycotted by BNP and its alliance, were held on 5 January 2014. Every year the BNP observe this day as 'Death of Democracy Day'.

⁷⁰ The Daily Naya Diganta, 12/02/2017, <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/195131>

⁷¹ Information gathered by Odhikar, 28/02/2017. The Organisation had been invited to the meeting.

⁷² Hartal: general strike

pm, at Dhaka in protest against gas price hikes.⁷³ During the hartal, police attacked and baton charged the leaders and activists of Progotishil Chhatra Jote⁷⁴ and also threw tear gas shells at them.⁷⁵ A few ruling party activists attacked the meeting and vandalized chairs and assaulted Dr. Faizul Hakim, Secretary of the central committee of Jatiya Mukti Council⁷⁶, when he started his speech at a remembrance meeting in memory of late leaders Infar Ali, Mojammel Haque and Mohammad Nasir of ‘Sammobadi Dal’⁷⁷ at Charghat Central Shahid Minar in Rajshahi.⁷⁸ Police did not allow the relatives of the victims of the Rana Plaza building collapse to stand at the site of the tragedy to show tribute to those killed. At that time, when Savar Rana Plaza Survivors Association and Garment Workers Trade Union went there in a rally to place flowers, police dispersed them.⁷⁹ Activists of Awami League, Jubo League and Chhatra League, after entering the mosque, attacked and stopped *Iftar Mahfil* organised by BNP at the Baitul Aman Jame Mosque beside the house of BNP Chariperson’s advisor Amanullah Aman, in Hazratpur Union under Keraniganj Police Station in Dhaka.⁸⁰ Instead of taking action against the persons responsible for this incident, the General Secretary of Hazratpur Union unit Awami League, Mohammad Zaher Ali filed a case with Keraniganj Model Police Station against 179 persons, including BNP leader Amanullah Aman. Moreover, 300/400 unknown people were also accused in this case.⁸¹



Police beat up an activist of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Port during the hartal at Shahbagh in Dhaka. Photo: Prothom Alo, 27 January 2017

⁷³ On February 23, 2017 Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) decided to increase gas price in two phases; from March 1, 2017 in first phase and from June 1, 2017 in second phase. According to the order of BERC, the households using single burners have to pay Tk 750 from 1st March and TK 900 from 1st June compared to Tk 600 now, while those using double burners have to pay Tk 800 from 1st March and TK 950 from 1st June compared to Tk 650 now.

⁷⁴ Progressive Students Alliance

⁷⁵ Information collected by Odhikar, 07/04/2017

⁷⁶ A left-leaning political alliance.

⁷⁷ A left-wing political party.

⁷⁸ Information collected by Odhikar.

⁷⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 25/04/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1156811/, <http://epaper.prothom-alo.com/view/dhaka/2017-04-25/4>

⁸⁰ The daily Jugantor, 03/06/2017; www.jugantor.com/first-page/2017/06/03/129490/

⁸¹ The daily Manabzamin, 06/06/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=68593&cat=9/



Police assaulted a reporter of the daily Dhaka Tribune in Mirpur, Dhaka when he was gathering information on the hartal against a coal-based power plant in Rampal. Photo: Dhaka Tribune, 26 January 2017



Police stopped a seminar titled 'Killings at Border: Obligation of the State' organised by People's Movement for Democracy at the Spectra Convention Centre in Gulshan, Dhaka. Photo: New Age, 26 February 2017



Leaders and activists of various left-leaning organisations assembled at Shahbagh area during hartal. Police attacked and arrested several hartal supporters. Photo: Prothom Alo, 1 March 2017



Police barred the programme organised by Garment Workers Trade Union Centre in memory of the victims of Rana Plaza collapse. Photo: Prothom Alo, 25 April 2017



Awami League attacked the Iftar Mahfil organised by BNP in Keraniganj. Photo: Jugantor, 3 June 2017

Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 (Amended 2009 & 2013)

29. The repressive Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 (Amended 2009 & 2013) remains in force. From January to June 2017, 13 persons were arrested under this Act for writing posts against high officials of the government and their families on facebook.

30. Police filed cases under the ICT Act and arrested many people, including Arman Sikdar⁸², Habul Khalifa⁸³, Chowdhury Irad Ahmed Siddiqui⁸⁴, Sumon Hossain⁸⁵, Shahed Alam⁸⁶, Monirul Islam⁸⁷, Maksuda Akhter Sumi⁸⁸, Mohammad Bellal Hossain⁸⁹ for allegedly uploading photos, posting status and making derogatory comments on their facebook accounts against high officials of the government and their families. On June 5, Lt. Gen. (Retd.)

⁸² The daily Naya Diganta, 06/02/2017; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/193544>

⁸³ The daily Manabzamin, 07/02/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=52388&cat=9/

⁸⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 24/02/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1088554/

⁸⁵ The daily Manabzamin, 06/04/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=60335&cat=9/

⁸⁶ The daily Manabzamin, 10/04/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=60909&cat=9/

⁸⁷ The daily Manabzamin, 18/04/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=61899&cat=9/

⁸⁸ The daily Naya Diganta, 23/05/2017; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/222271>

⁸⁹ The daily Dhaka Tribune, 20/03/2017; <http://www.dhakatribune.com/epaper/2017/03/20/monday-march-20-2017/>

Masud Chowdhury filed a case with Gulshan Police Station under section 57 of the ICT Act accusing a BRAC University teacher, Professor Afsan Chowdhury for sharing a false post on facebook.⁹⁰ Police arrested Golam Mostafa Rafiq, President of Habiganj Press Club and Editor of the daily Habiganj Samachar, under the ICT Act, for publishing a report stating 80 Awami League MPs, including Abdul Mazid Khan, Member of Parliament of Habiganj-2 constituency were not getting nominations for the next election.⁹¹

Freedom of the Media

31. The sweeping interference on the media has been in existence since 2013. The government closed down the pro-opposition electronic and print media, such as Channel 1, Diganta TV, Islamic TV and the publication of the daily Amar Desh, which still continues. Meanwhile, the government has already given approval to some new private television channels under political consideration, whose owners are closely connected with the government. On June 19, the Cabinet has approved the 'National Online Media Policy 2017' taking online media and news portals under the Broadcasting Commission. According to the Broadcasting Act, violation of section 19 is tantamount to seven years imprisonment and fine of 50 million Taka or both.⁹² It is feared that the government will have excessive control over online media and news portals through this repressive law. Furthermore, attacks on journalists by criminals backed by the ruling party and its affiliated organisations continue while the former gather information; and the government continues to file cases against journalists and detain them in jail.
32. According to information gathered by Odhikar, from January to June 2017, one journalist was killed, 10 were injured, two were assaulted, nine were threatened, and four were sued.
33. ATN News cameraman Abdul Alim was pushed to the ground and kicked and beaten by police at Shahbagh while he was filming the police baton charging protesters during the hartal in Dhaka, called by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Port. Later he was taken to Shahbagh Police Station and allegedly beaten there by police. Police also beat ATN News reporter Ehsan Bin Didar when he tried to save Abdul Alim.⁹³ Journalist and human rights defender associated with Odhikar Abdul Hakim Shimul was shot dead in Sirajganj by Shahzadpur Municipality Mayor and the Organising Secretary of Sirajganj District unit Awami League, Halimul Huq Miru, while he was collecting information during an intra-party

⁹⁰ The daily Jugantor, 08/06/2017; www.jugantor.com/city/2017/06/08/130861/

⁹¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 13/06/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1215846/

⁹² The daily Bangladesh Pratidin, 20/06/2017; <http://www.bd-pratidin.com/first-page/2017/06/20/241437>

⁹³ The daily Manabzamin, 27/01/2017, www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=50934&cat=2/ and daily Jugantor, 27/01/2017, www.jugantor.com/first-page/2017/01/27/96496

clash.⁹⁴ Shahidul Islam, former President of Kalkini Upazila Press Club and correspondent of the daily JaiJaiDin from Kalkini in Madaripur District, went to Purba Enayetnagar Union to gather information about the Union Parishad elections. At that time Awami League nominated Chairman candidate Badal Talukdar and his supporters attacked Shahidul Islam while he was taking photos of an election campaign. They took away his cell phone and camera and beat him after tying him to a tree. Journalist Shahidul Islam went to Kalkini Police Station to file a case in this regard, but instead of taking his case police arrested him under a false case of extortion, due to pressure from local Awami League leaders.⁹⁵ H. M. Badal, Kathalia Upazila correspondent of the daily Barisal Protidin shared and liked news on Facebook, which was widely published in different mass media, regarding Awami League MP of Jhalokathi-1 constituency, Bazlul Huq Harun, also the owner of Rain Tree Hotel where an incident of the rape of two female university students occurred. Due to this, on May 16, 2017 Kathalia Upazila Parishad Chairman, Golam Kibria Shikdar and his associates beat H M Badal with iron rods and severely wounded him.⁹⁶ On June 11, the Anti Corruption Commission filed a case with Ramna Police Station against the Managing Director of Amar Desh Publications, Firoza Mahmud, for allegations of acquiring property outside of her declared income.⁹⁷ In protest of this, on June 12, Firoza Mahmud's husband, Acting Editor of the daily Amar Desh, Mahmudur Rahman, organised a press conference at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity and said that the ACC has been sent after his wife in order to destroy his entire family. He stated that his wife bought the property based on the undertaking of the real estate agent and at a price determined by RAJUK. If a buyer purchases any product from a shop based on the price determined by a government institution, for this matter, there is no legal basis to file any case against the buyer only. He claimed that this case was filed only to harass his family.⁹⁸ It is to be mentioned that the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) was set up under the Anti Corruption Commission Act 2004, in order to prevent corruption and activities relating to corruption and also to conduct specific inquiry and investigation. Article 2 of this Act states that 'this Commission will be an independent and impartial commission. As per law, the ACC is supposed to work as an independent and impartial institution, but the ACC is not performing such duty. It is operating as per instructions of the government and ruling party, which has been reflected in the various activities performed and cases it is investigating.

⁹⁴ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Sirajganj.

⁹⁵ The daily Bangladesh Protidin, 09/04/2017; <http://www.bd-pratidin.com/country/2017/04/09/221981>

⁹⁶ The daily Jugantor, 18/05/2017; www.jugantor.com/news/2017/05/18/125553/

⁹⁷ The daily Jugantor, 12/06/2017; www.jugantor.com/second-edition/2017/06/12/132088/

⁹⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 13/06/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1215096/



Police beating cameraman Alim of ATN News at Shahbagh in Dhaka during the hartal called by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Port. Photo: Jugantor, 27 January 2017



Slain journalist Abdul Hakim Shimul. Photo: Odhikar



Injured journalist H M Badal. Photo: Jugantor, 30 May 2017

D. Public lynching continues

34. According to information gathered by Odhikar, between January and June 2017, 21 people were reportedly killed due to public lynching.

35. Many people are being killed in different places of the country in public lynchings. The lack of respect for law, distrust in the police and instability in the country has increased the fear and insecurity among people. Due to a weak criminal justice system, the tendency to resort to public lynching is increasing, as people are losing their confidence and faith in the police and judicial system.

E. Worker's rights

36. Suppression on workers, death of workers due to negligence of owners/factory authorities, closing of factories, termination of workers and non-payment of workers, continued during this reporting period. Workers in the informal sector have been exploited in various ways due to the absence of any policy for the informal labour sector. They are deprived from the basic rights and discriminated against in various ways.

Ready-made garment industry

37. According to information gathered by Odhikar, between January and June 2017, total 176 workers were injured. Among them 116 workers were injured by the police and garment authority during workers unrest in the ready-made garment factories and 60 were injured in fire and in the stampede to exit burning buildings. 2810 workers were terminated for various reasons.

38. In 2016 the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) inspected 2,267 garment factories. According to its report, one-third of the garment factories of the country are still under 'C' Grade. These factories do not comply with any compliance standards.⁹⁹

39. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Global Rights Index 2017 has ranked Bangladesh among the bottom 10 countries in the world for (lack of) workers' rights. On June 13, the ITUC published a report based on a survey in 139 countries, which states that the number of countries experiencing physical violence and threats against workers rose by 10 per cent and trade unionists in Bangladesh have long suffered at the hands of the state, especially by its industrial police and employers, which continues in 2017.¹⁰⁰

40. The workers of a sweater factory named 'April Fashion Ltd.¹⁰¹' at North Ouchpara area of Tongi Upazila under Gazipur District; workers of a garment factory of East-West Group¹⁰² located at Boardbazar Signboard area under Gazipur City Corporation; workers of a garment factory named Lyric

⁹⁹ The daily Manabzamin, 24/04/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=62689&cat=6/

¹⁰⁰ 'Bangladesh among worst 10 countries for workers' rights', The daily New Age, 22/06/2017; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/18324/bangladesh-among-worst-10-countries-for-workers-rights>

¹⁰¹ The daily Bangladesh Pratidin, 14/02/2017, / <http://www.bd-pratidin.com/country-village/2017/02/14/207805>

¹⁰² The daily Manabzamin, 10/03/2017 www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=56706&cat=9/

Industries¹⁰³ at Rampura, Dhaka; workers of Shed Fashion Limited at Jamgora in Ashulia, Dhaka; workers of Pacific Spinning Mills Limited¹⁰⁴ in Jatramura area under Rupganj Upazila in Narayanganj; workers of Kanon Knit Fashions situated at Bhuigarh in Narayanganj, gathered to demand due wages; protest the closure of the factory without paying workers their salary and Eid bonus, for maternity leave, holidays for May Day and Shab-e-Barat¹⁰⁵ and wages that were due for the last several months. They organised various programmes in protest of these violations. The police attacked the workers and injured many of them. The authority of readymade garment factory 'Hesong BD Ltd.' at Baroipara area of Kaliakoir Upazila under Gazipur District, terminated 1733 workers without any notice. Workers saw a termination notice on the main gate to the factory when they came to work. In protest of this decision, the workers made a demonstration in front of the factory.¹⁰⁶

Situation of workers in other factories

41. Workers of a Chinese owned shoe making factory named 'Bonsho', situated at the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) area in Chittagong, started protests and acts of vandalism inside the factory due to termination of co-workers¹⁰⁷. Later the factory owner closed the factory for two days.¹⁰⁸ Two workers named Tareque Mahmood (19) and Mohammad Kamal (25) were reportedly burnt and another one named Mohammad Hanif Mia (25) was injured during a fire at a shoe factory named 'Faysal and Seba', in Satroja area of Bongshal in Dhaka.¹⁰⁹ A worker named Yusuf Ali (55) died when fire broke out at Rahim Steel Mill Ltd. in Kanchpur area under Sonargaon Upazila in Narayanganj District.¹¹⁰

F. 'Extremism' and human rights

42. Bangladesh is experiencing very difficult times. The State is taking away the civil and political rights of the citizens. Hindrance to freedom of expression and the repeated violations of the right to freedom of expression of alternative or dissenting voices, have created space for confrontation. Operations carried

¹⁰³ The daily Naya Diganta, 24/03/2017; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/206296>

¹⁰⁴ The daily Jugantor, 17/05//2017; www.iugantor.com/second-edition/2017/05/17/125357/

¹⁰⁵ Shab-e-Barat means the night of salvation. This night is called the blessed night and starts at sunset on the 14th and ends at dawn on the 15th. The Muslims observe it as a night of fortune and forgiveness.

¹⁰⁶ The daily Bangladesh Pratidin, 14/02/2017, <http://www.bd-pratidin.com/country-village/2017/02/14/207805>

¹⁰⁷ Workers alleged that the factory owner took a strategy to terminate the old workers and appoint new workers to avoid giving workers permanent jobs and related facilities. After every four or five months, the owner terminates existing workers and appoints new workers. Recently, the factory owner made a list of more than 200 workers for termination and as a result workers unrest started over this matter.

¹⁰⁸ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Chittagong.

¹⁰⁹ 'Two burnt in Bangshal shoe factory fire', The daily Dhaka Tribune, 18/01/2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2017/01/17/two-burnt-bangshal-shoe-factory-fire/> The daily Naya Diganta, 18/01/2017, <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/188349>

¹¹⁰ The daily Nayadiganta, <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/186380>

out in the name of ‘countering extremism’ have even caused the deaths of women and children.¹¹¹ Furthermore, there are reports of people becoming victims of enforced disappearance as well. Meanwhile, alleged ‘extremists’ are implicated in suicide attacks. The narrative that the law enforcement agencies have started giving, regarding their operations against ‘religious extremists’ are similar in almost all the cases. This resembles the way the law enforcement agencies narrated the death of crime suspects in ‘gunfight’, ‘crossfire’ and ‘encounter.’ After the July 2016 attack on Holey Artisan Bakery at Gulshan in Dhaka, many suspected extremists, including women and children either died in such law enforcement operations or ‘committed suicide’ or were arrested. There are reports that some of those who were arrested during such operations later died in the custody of law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, in one incident police informed that they recovered bullets and pistols from the ‘extremists den’ after the operation, though it was previously mentioned that ‘extremists’ attacked with sharp weapons. As a result what actually happened, or happens, in such operations are still unclear.¹¹²

43. From July 2016 to June 2017, members of law enforcement agencies carried out several operations in various places, suspecting ‘extremists dens’. During these operations, at least 65 persons were killed. Among them, five were children and six were women.
44. The Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT), Army, RAB, Counter Terrorism Unit and police carried out joint operations at different houses suspecting ‘extremists den’ at a house in Sitakunda, Chittagong¹¹³; a house called Atia Mahal, in South Surma of Sylhet Metropolitan City¹¹⁴; a two-storied house at Borohat Abushah Dakhil Madrasa Road at Nasirpur in Moulvabazar¹¹⁵; a house at Bozrapur Hothatpara in Moheshpur under Jhenaidah District¹¹⁶; at Shibganj in Chapainababganj¹¹⁷; and a house of a cloth merchant Sajjad Ali¹¹⁸ in Benipur Village of Matikata Union under Godagari Upazila in Rajshahi District. During such operations, 25 ‘extremists’ including women and children were killed as informed by law enforcement agencies. Among the deceased, some were infants. During these incidents, six members of law enforcement agencies, including Lt. Col. Abul Kalam Azad, Director, RAB Intelligent Unit; and two police officers were killed.

¹¹¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 01/04/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1130046/

¹¹² The daily New Age, 28/04/2017; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/14532/extremism-tackling-narrative-warrants-transparency>

¹¹³ The daily Prothom Alo, 17/03/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1110904/

¹¹⁴ The Bangla Tribune, 26/03/2017; www.banglatribune.com/country/news/192271

¹¹⁵ The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, 31/03/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1129056/

¹¹⁶ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Jhenaidah.

¹¹⁷ The daily Manabzamin, 28/04/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=63307&cat=2/

¹¹⁸ The daily Jugantor, 13/05/2017; www.jugantor.com/first-page/2017/05/13/124093/



One man injured in a bomb blast near Atia Mahal is taking to hospital. Photo: Prothom Alo, 25 March 2017



Some men wounded in the bomb blast lie on the street. Photo: Prothom Alo, 25 March 2017

45. RAB encircled a house at Gabtoli Uttarpara in Norshingdi after getting information that some 'extremists', who escaped from Atia Mahal¹¹⁹ in Sylhet, had made a 'den' there. The people inside the 'den' claimed on social media that they were Awami League activists and victims of conspiracy. Later, RAB rescued five persons from that house and took them away. The law enforcement agency informed that among the five persons, cases were filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act against two and the other three were handed over to their families.¹²⁰

G. Allegations of genocide and gang rape made by Rohingyas

46. Suppression on the Rohingya community and their forced eviction from Myanmar by the Myanmar authority, are not a new practice. For centuries, Rohingyas have been living in the Rakhine State of Myanmar and the Myanmar government has carried out operations against ethnic minority Rohingya community in various ways to evict them from Myanmar. In such operations, people belonging to Rohingya community are becoming victims of 'ethnic cleansing'. They are also becoming victims of genocide, enforced disappearance, gang rape and their houses are torched. Suppression and discrimination towards Rohingyas increased mainly after the assumption of power by General Ne Win in 1962, which has recently become widespread under the Aung San Suu Kyi regime.

¹¹⁹ The police cordoned off the building called Atia Mahal, in South Surma of Sylhet Metropolitan City at around 2:30 am on March 23, 2017, based on information that suspected extremists were staying on the ground floor. On March 24, a team of SWAT and another team from the Army reached Sylhet from Dhaka. In the morning of March 25, a Para commando team of the Army started 'Operation Twilight' and at around 11:00 am, 78 persons, who had been living in the building, were rescued. During that operation, incidents of bomb blast took place twice in the evening on March 25, which resulted in many casualties. After a day-long operation on March 26, a press briefing was organised by the Army in the evening on March 27 where it was stated that four bodies were lying on the ground floor of the building. Among them, three were men and one was a woman. Suicide vests were found on two bodies.

¹²⁰ The daily Jugantor, 22/05/2017; www.jugantor.com/first-page/2017/05/22/126472/

47. Odhikar interviewed more than 100 Rohingya families, who fled to Bangladesh from the Rakhine State of Myanmar in the aftermath of the October 9, 2016 attacks, and who took shelter at various places including the Kutupalong, Nayapara and Leda shelter camps in Cox's Bazar of Bangladesh. They informed Odhikar that Rohingyas were victims of gang rape; torture; extrajudicial executions; arson attacks; enforced disappearances; and even sex slavery, after young girls were taken to military camps. Incidents of female child gang rape and child murder; incidents of gang rape and killing (mother in front of her son; daughter in front of her parents; sister in front of her brother; wife in front of her husband) also occurred.
48. From January 8 - 23, 2017, a four-member team of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) interviewed more than 220 Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh from northern Rakhine State of Myanmar. Based on these interviews, a report of the OHCHR published from Geneva, stated that hundreds of people have lost their lives during the 'cleansing operation'. The report reveals that the eye-witnesses confirmed that security forces of Myanmar had deliberately committed mass killings - including of babies and young children; brutal beatings; shooting at people who were in hiding; arson attacks; gang-rape and sexual violence; destruction of foodstuff and food sources; and other serious human rights violations. The report also says that about 66,000 Rohingya Muslims of northern Rakhine State of Myanmar had entered Bangladesh due to the Army operation. However, the UNHCR has mentioned that the number of the Rohingya refugees as being 69,000.¹²¹
49. Rohingya families alleged that not only the Myanmar government or military junta, but also local Buddhist extremists were directly and indirectly involved in attacking and suppressing Rohingyas. Myanmar government did not give any fundamental rights, including right to education or health to the people belonging to the Rohingya Muslim community. Furthermore, Rohingyas have been deprived from the rights to freedom of movement, freedom of religion and cultural practice, rights to get married and have children and right to own property.¹²²

¹²¹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21142&LangID=E>

¹²² Information gathered by Odhikar and "Reprisals, Rape, and Children Burned Alive: Burma's Rohingya Speak of Genocidal Terror" by Nikhil Kumar, Time World, Dec 12, 2016; <http://time.com/4596937/burma-myanmar-rohingya-bangladesh-refugees-crimes-against-humanity/>; "All you can All You Can Do is Pray" Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma's Arakan State, Human Rights Watch Report, April 22, 2013; <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/04/22/all-you-can-do-pray/crimes-against-humanity-and-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims>

H. Violations of human rights of religious and ethnic minority communities

50. Attacks on citizens belonging to religious and ethnic minority communities continue. Several incidents of attacks on these minority communities; and also on their places of worship took place between January and June 2017.
51. Criminals allegedly vandalized effigies in Radha-Krishna temple at Bhulta area under Rupganj Upazila in Narayanganj District¹²³; in Romai Thakur Durga temple at Borogaon Bazaar of Moktarpur Union under Kaliganj Upazila in Gazipur District¹²⁴; at Durga temple in Tungipara of Gopalganj District¹²⁵; at a temple at Agoiljhara in Barisal¹²⁶; at a Kali temple in Tahirpur of Sunamganj District¹²⁷; at a Kali temple in Belkuchi of Sirajganj district¹²⁸; and at Shibaloy temple in Joypurhat District.¹²⁹ On June 1, 2017 police recovered the body of Mohammad Nurul Islam, Organising Secretary of Langadu Union unit Jubo League, from a forest beside a road in Charmail area under Khagrachhori-Dighinala area. Local Awmai League, Jubo League and Chhatra League leaders-activists alleged that the local ethnic minority community people were involved in his killing and visited Langadu Upazila town in Rangamati. On the way to Langadu, they vandalized and robbed houses belong to ethnic minority communities in different areas. They also set fire to various houses.¹³⁰ At least 200 houses were burnt.¹³¹ On June 8, Mohammad Mostafizur Rahman, Imam of an Ahmadiyya mosque was attacked by criminals and severely injured in Iswarganj of Mymensingh district. A man named Abdul Ahad Mohammad Mahmudulla was arrested for this incident.¹³²

I. Violence against women

52. During the first six months of 2017 a significant number of women were the victims of dowry related violence, rape, sexual harassment and acid attacks.

Dowry-related violence

53. Between January and June 2017, according to Odhikar documentation, 128 females were subjected to dowry violence. Among them, 66 were killed, 57

¹²³ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Narayanganj.

¹²⁴ The daily Jugantor, 22/01/2017, www.jugantor.com/news/2017/01/22/95193/

¹²⁵ 50 sued over Gopalganj idols vandalism, New Age 07.01.17; <http://epaper.newagebd.net/07-01-2017/4>

¹²⁶ The daily Nayadiganta, 10.01.17; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/186040>

¹²⁷ The daily Naya Diganta, 13/03/2017; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/203007>

¹²⁸ The daily Dhaka Tribune, 29/03/2017; <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2017/03/28/idols-desecrated-temples-sirajganj/>

¹²⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 27/05/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1195451/

¹³⁰ The daily Jugantor, 03/06/2017; www.jugantor.com/first-page/2017/06/03/129489/

¹³¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 03/06/2017; <http://www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1203271/>

¹³² The daily Prothom Alo, 10/05/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1175556/

were physically abused and five committed suicide over dowry demands. It has also been reported that, among 128 females, two under aged brides were killed and two were physically abused for dowry demands as well.

54. Roksana Akhter Irin (21) of Rangpur District¹³³; Fatematuz Zohra Meghla of Laksmipur District¹³⁴; Khadiza Akhter Brishty of Shariatpur District¹³⁵; Munia Yeasmin Tumpa (20) of Satkhira District¹³⁶; Kohinur Begum of Noakhali District; and Khaleda Akhter of Mymensingh District were allegedly killed by their husbands and in-laws family members for dowry demands. Furthermore, Rojoni Khatun of Chuadanga district; Surobhi Akhter of Barisal District; Khukumoni of Jessore District; and Irin Akhter of Borguna District allegedly committed suicide due to continuous violence over dowry demands.¹³⁷

Rape

55. During the first six month of 2017, a total number of 371 females were reportedly raped. Among them, 105 were women, 263 were children below the age of 16 and the age of three victims could not be determined. Of the women, nine were killed after being raped, 36 were victims of gang rape and two committed suicide. Out of the 263 child victims, eight children were killed after being raped, 53 were victims of gang rape and two children committed suicide. Furthermore, 48 women and girls were victims of attempted rape.

56. The heinous crime of rape is alarmingly persistent in society and at present such crime has become extremely widespread. Victims of rape and their families do not dare to go the police to complain due to a prevailing culture of impunity and lack of justice.¹³⁸

Sexual harassment (stalking)

57. According to information gathered by Odhikar, from January to June 2017, a total of 124 girls and women were victims of sexual harassment. Of them five committed suicide, one was killed, 24 were injured, 20 were assaulted, one was abducted and 73 were victims of stalking. During this time, five men were killed, 39 men were injured and 10 women were injured by the stalkers when they protested such acts.

¹³³ The daily Naya Diganta, 05/01/2017, <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/184567>

¹³⁴ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Bhola.

¹³⁵ The daily Manabzamin, 06/03/2017; <http://www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=56195&cat=9>

¹³⁶ The daily Naya Diganta, 09/04/2017; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/210640>

¹³⁷ Information gathered by Odhikar.

¹³⁸ Odhikar does not publish the name of the rape victims for ethical grounds

58. Shipon Akhter¹³⁹, a student of class VIII; Tania Akhter (15)¹⁴⁰, a student of class X; college students Arifa Begum¹⁴¹ and a housewife (20)¹⁴² committed suicide after being sexually harassed by stalkers. Furthermore, criminals killed a student of class VII named Rima Khatun¹⁴³ by pouring poison into her mouth. During this period, Hridoy Gazi¹⁴⁴ and Shymol Chanda¹⁴⁵ were killed by the stalkers for protesting such incidents.

Acid violence

59. According to information gathered by Odhikar, between January – June 2017, it was reported that 30 persons became victims of acid violence. Of them, 21 were women, four were men and five were girls.
60. Aklima Akhter (38) of Nakhalpara in Dhaka¹⁴⁶; Nasrin of Gazipur¹⁴⁷; and school student Sadia Akhter Priya (15) of Pabna district¹⁴⁸, were victims acid attack by their husbands due to domestic violence. A man named Abdullah threw acid on two women named Parvin Islam (45) and Saleha Sultana (28), through a window, over a land dispute at Rayer Mahal area in Khulna Metropolitan City.¹⁴⁹

J. Hindrance to Human Rights Activities

61. The present government continues to harass Odhikar for being vocal against human rights violations and for campaigning to stop this. The government, after assuming power in 2009, started the harassment on Odhikar for its reports on the human rights situation of the country. On August 10, 2013 at night, Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan was picked up by persons claiming to be from the Detective Branch (DB) of Police, for publishing a fact finding report on extrajudicial killings during a rally organised by the religious group Hefazate Islam on May 5-6, 2013. Adilur and Odhikar's Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan, were later charged under section 57(1) of the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (Amended 2009). They were detained in prison and later, Adilur and Elan were released on bail after spending 62 and 25 days in prison respectively. Odhikar regularly faces harassment by different organs of the government. Adilur Rahman Khan,

¹³⁹ The daily Jugantor, 17/02/2017; www.jugantor.com/news/2017/02/17/101738/

¹⁴⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 22/02/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1086463/

¹⁴¹ The daily Jugantor, 09/03/2017; <http://www.jugantor.com/news/2017/03/09/107344/>

¹⁴² The daily Dhaka Tribune, 04/05/2017; <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2017/05/04/housewife-commits-suicide-sexual-harassment/>

¹⁴³ The daily Manabzamin, 19/02/2017; www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=54143&cat=3/

¹⁴⁴ The daily New Age, 29/01/2017; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/8032/stalkers-hack-barisal-schoolboy-to-death>

¹⁴⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 13/03/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1106158/

¹⁴⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 15/01/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1059953/

¹⁴⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 11/05/2017; www.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/article/1176659/

¹⁴⁸ The daily Jugantor, 06/06/2017; www.jugantor.com/news/2017/06/06/130315/

¹⁴⁹ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Khulna.

staff members of Odhikar and the office are under surveillance by intelligence agencies.

62. Human rights defenders who are working fearlessly to gather information and carry out their profession impartially are harassed and victimised. For instance, in March 2016, a journalist and human rights defender associated with Odhikar, Mohammad Afzal Hossain, was shot and severely wounded by police while he was observing the irregularities of a local government election in Bhola¹⁵⁰ and in February 2017, another human rights defender associated with Odhikar, journalist Abdul Hakim Shimul, was shot dead by Shahjadpur Municipality Mayor and Awami League leader Halimul Huq Miru.¹⁵¹ In April, plain-clothed police arrested Sheikh Mohammad Ratan¹⁵², a human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Munshiganj, district correspondent of MyTV and Editor of online newspaper samakalinmunshiganj.com, from the office of samakalinmunshiganj.com, for 'liking' a news on facebook. Ratan was released on bail after being detained 21 days in jail.¹⁵³ Hasan Ali, Kushtia district correspondent of Bangla Vision TV and Aslam Ali, staff reporter of Dainik Kushtia Dorpan - both human rights defenders associated with Odhikar - were sent to jail in a case filed under section 57(2) of the ICT Act. They were released on May 29 on bail after 20 days detention in jail.¹⁵⁴
63. Furthermore, the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) has, for the last three years, barred the release of all project related funds of Odhikar and withheld renewal of its registration in order to stop its human rights activities. The Organisation is still operating due to the volunteer services of grassroots level human rights defenders associated with Odhikar and its members and staff and their commitment to human rights activism.

K. Aggressive policy of the Indian Government towards Bangladesh

64. Aggressive policies of the Indian government towards Bangladesh continue. It is clear that the Indian government had played a role in destroying the democratic system in Bangladesh and gave unconditional support to the 5th January 2014 controversial elections.¹⁵⁵ It must be noted that the Bangladeshi people could not exercise their right to vote in this election. The Indian

¹⁵⁰ For details, please see Odhikar's monthly report of March 2016. <http://odhikar.org/human-rights-monitoring-report-march-2016/>

¹⁵¹ For details, please see Odhikar's monthly report of February 2017. <http://odhikar.org/human-rights-monitoring-report-february-2017/>

¹⁵² A few news items about allegations of forging LLB (Hons.) certificates were published in different online media against an apprentice lawyer Mir Nasiruddin. When the news was shared on facebook, Sheikh Mohammad Ratan liked the news along with some others. With regard to this, Mir Nasiruddin filed a case with Munshiganj Police Station under the ICT Act on February 3, 2017 against former President of Munshiganj Press Club and Editor of Munshiganj.com, Mohammad Selim and seven other journalists. Sheikh Mohammad Ratan has been accused because of liking the facebook post.

¹⁵³ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Munshiganj.

¹⁵⁴ Information gathered by Odhikar

¹⁵⁵ www.dw.com/bn/নির্বাচন-না-হলে-মৌলবাদের-উত্থান-হবে/a-17271479

government is attempting to establish supremacy on Bangladesh in various ways. India is taking transit facility through Bangladesh at almost no cost (the shipment fee for carrying goods is only Tk. 192.22 (USD 2.38) per ton) under an amended Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT)¹⁵⁶ signed between India and Bangladesh on June 6, 2015. An Indian multinational company 'Reliance Group' signed an agreement with the Bangladesh Government, without any tender bids, to build a liquid natural gas-based power plant of 750 MW at the Meghna Ghat in Narayanganj.¹⁵⁷ It is depriving Bangladesh from getting adequate water during the dry season and creating floods over Bangladesh by opening all the sluice gates of the Farakka Barrage and the Gajaldoba Barrage, during the monsoon (rainy) season¹⁵⁸, violating international law and human rights. Furthermore, the environmentally hazardous initiative to build the Rampal Power Plant with an Indian company, near the Sundarbans and a decision to implement an inter-river connection project, will lead Bangladesh to terrible human disaster and environmental catastrophe.¹⁵⁹ Rampal coal-based power plant¹⁶⁰, if constructed, will be the largest source of air pollution in Bangladesh. This was learnt from a research conducted by a coal and air pollution expert Lauri Myllyvirta of the Netherlands based global environmental organisation Greenpeace. The study reveals that the air pollution due to this coal-based power plant will cause the premature deaths of as many as 150 people every year. The study also found that it will also cause some 600 babies to be born underweight every year. Moreover, the Indian government decided to put up a fence along no-man's land, which will be within 150 yards from the zero line along the border.¹⁶¹ Like previous years, human rights violations at the border areas by BSF continued in the first six months of 2017. The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) is torturing and killing Bangladeshi citizens indiscriminately along the border areas, and also attacking Bangladeshi citizens by entering Bangladesh territory, which is a clear violation of international law and human rights. According to the Memorandum of Understanding and related treaties signed between Bangladesh and India, if citizens of either country illegally cross the border, it would be considered

¹⁵⁶ The Daily Star, 14/06/2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/transit-gets-operational-1239373>

¹⁵⁷ For details, please see Odhikar's human rights monitoring report of May 2017. www.odhikar.org

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/bengali/news-37244367>

¹⁵⁹ UNESCO calls for shelving Rampal project", the daily Prothom Alo, 24/09/2016, <http://en.prothom-alo.com/environment/news/122299/Unesco-calls-for-shelving-Rampal-project>

¹⁶⁰ It is to be mentioned that on July 12, 2016 an agreement of the much debated project of the Rampal Coal-based Power Plant was signed in Dhaka. The agreement was signed by the Managing Director of Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company Limited (BIFPCL), Ujjal Kanti Bhattacharya; and the General Manager of the construction company Bharat Heavy Electric Limited (BHEL), Prem Pal Yadab. The Prime Minister's Advisor Toufiq Elahi Chowdhury; State Minister for Power, Nasrul Hamid; Principal Secretary of the Prime Minister, Mohammad Abul Kalam Azad; Secretary of the Ministry of Power, Monwar Islam; Indian Secretary for Power, Prodeep Kumar Pujari; and Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Harshbardhan Shringla were present at the signing programme. Environment activists and human rights defenders have been and still are protesting against the construction of Rampal Coal-based Power Plant but their protests are falling on deaf ears. www.jugantor.com/last-page/2016/07/13/44589/

¹⁶¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 05/10/2016; www.prothom-alo.com/international/article/994375/

trespass and as per law those persons should be handed over to the civilian authority.¹⁶² However, we have noticed that India has been, over the years, repeatedly violating such treaties; and its BSF is killing or physically harming anyone seen near the border or anyone trying to cross the border. Bangladeshi citizens are robbed and attacked by BSF illegally entering Bangladesh, which are clear violations of international law and human rights. Furthermore, the Indian BSF stopped the construction work of the Bangladesh Water Development Board when the latter initiated work (on Bangladesh territory) to protect the bank of Dhorola River in Bangladesh, in order to prevent river erosion at Moghalhat border in Lalmonirhat.¹⁶³

Human rights violations of Bangladeshi citizens by Indian BSF in border areas

65. According to information collected by Odhikar, from January to June 2017, 10 Bangladeshi citizens were killed by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). Among them, seven were gunned down, one was tortured to death, one was killed when the BSF members threw stones at him and one died by jumping into the Padma River and drowning, when BSF personnel chased him. Furthermore, 24 Bangladeshis were injured. Among the injured, five were shot, 10 were tortured, six were stoned at; and three were injured by sound grenade explosions. A further 14 persons were abducted by BSF personnel.
66. Bakul Mondol on January 7, at Chokoria border under Damurhuda Upazila in Chuadanga District; cattle trader Tulu Mia (60) on February 10, at Dantbhangha border under Roumari Upazila in Kurigram District; cattle trader Masud Rana (22) on February 13, at Wahedpur border under Shibganj Upazila in Chapainababganj District; cattle trader Saiful Islam on April 21, at Gilbari border under Bholahat Upazila in Chapainababganj District; and another Bangladeshi citizen named Shahalal at Rokonpur border under Gomostapur Upazila in Chapainababganj District, were killed in the hands of BSF either by torture or shooting.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, on March 25, members of Indian BSF attacked unarmed villagers by unlawfully entering Bangladesh territory through Kironganj border under Shibganj Upazila in Chapainababganj District.¹⁶⁵ On June 20, two school students named Sohel Rana (16) and Harun-or-Rashid (15) were shot dead by BSF members at Kholaspur under Moheshpur Upazila in Jhenaidah District.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² <http://archive.newagebd.net/253126/bsf-kills-2-bangladeshis-borders/>

¹⁶³ The daily Naya Diganta, 18/05/2017; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/220757>

¹⁶⁴ Information gathered by Odhikar from various sources

¹⁶⁵ The daily Kaler Kantho, 26/03/2017; <http://www.kalerkantho.com/print-edition/news/2017/03/26/478894>

¹⁶⁶ "2 Bangladeshi teens killed in BSF firing", The daily New Age, 21/06/2017; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/18221/2-bangladeshi-teens-killed-in-bsf-firing>

Recommendations

1. Political violence must stop. In order to stop criminalisation the government must take legal action against the ruling party activists and supporters involved in such acts. The persons who are responsible for violence during local government polls must be brought to justice. An initiative needs to be taken immediately for the restoration of democracy by establishing an accountable government through free, fair and inclusive national elections under a neutral interim government or even under the supervision of the United Nations; and the dysfunctional national institutions must be made thoroughly independent.
2. The Government has to investigate and explain all incidents of enforced disappearance and post-disappearance killings, allegedly perpetrated by law enforcement agencies. The Government must take effective measures to recover the victims of enforced disappearance and return them to their families. The Government must bring the members of the security and law enforcement agencies who are involved, before the law. The Government should follow the recommendations made by the UN Human Rights Committee in its 119th session, to criminalise enforced disappearance in the national laws. The government must sign and ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006.
3. The Government must bring to effective justice, the members of the law enforcement agencies, involved in incidents of extrajudicial killings and torture. And also those involved in harassment and extortion.
4. The law enforcement agencies must follow international guidelines “Basic Principles on the use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials” and the “UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials”. 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.
5. The Government must refrain from repressive, undemocratic and unconstitutional activities. Rights to freedoms of assembly and association of the opposition political parties, people who have alternative beliefs and dissenters must be ensured, as per the Constitution and international norms.
6. Government interference on freedom of expression and the media must be stopped and the rights to freedom of speech, expression and the media must be ensured and protected. Cases filed against journalists and human rights defenders must be withdrawn and the government must bring the perpetrators of attacks on human rights defenders and journalists to justice through proper and impartial investigation. The ban on the publication of the

daily Amar Desh and on the broadcasting of Diganta TV, Islamic TV and Channel One must be removed.

7. All repressive laws, including the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amendment 2009, 2013) and the Special Powers Act, 1974 must be repealed. Monitoring on the social median and internet apps by the government must be stopped.
8. The Government must stop harassing and violating the rights of political opponents and people holding dissenting or alternative opinions.
9. The ready-made garment factories and other factories need to be brought under synchronized security programmes and adequate wages must be given to workers; and all factories should be made with adequate infrastructural and other facilities. Trade union rights should be guaranteed at all the ready-made garment factories and workers rights should be protected with no bias or discrimination and as per ILO Conventions.
10. All operations conducted by security forces against 'extremists' must be transparent and the government should give explanations/justifications as to why the killings of women and children were committed during such operations.
11. The Government must take all measures to protect the rights of the citizens belonging to all religious, ethnic and linguistic minority communities and ensure their security and their basic fundamental rights.
12. The Government must ensure the effective implementation of laws to stop violence against women and children and the offenders must be brought to effective justice under prevalent laws. The Government should also execute mass awareness programmes in the print and electronic media, in order to eliminate violence against women.
13. The case filed against Odhikar's Secretary and its Director under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (Amended in 2009) must be withdrawn. All repressive measures and harassment against human rights defenders associated with Odhikar should be ceased. The government must release the funds of Odhikar to enable it to continue its human rights activities.
14. The international community must take initiatives to stop the Myanmar government from continuing the perpetration of ethnic cleansing of Rohingya people and take responsibility to rehabilitate them.
15. The construction of the Rampal coal-based power plant must be stopped to prevent ecological and human disasters.
16. The Government should protest strongly against human rights violations on Bangladeshi citizens by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and initiatives taken to investigate and make the Indian Government accountable. The victim-families must also be compensated. The Government must also ensure

the safety and security of the Bangladeshi citizens residing along the border areas. The Indian Government must follow international laws relating to international borders and respect human rights of its neighbouring country.

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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 so.