



ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT 2022 BANGLADESH

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Foreword

Odhikar continues to struggle for the establishment of a democratic state based on equality, human dignity and social justice. Odhikar monitors and highlights the human rights situation of the country, with the aim of ensuring the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the people. Odhikar has faced severe state repression and harassment since 2013. In 2022, government surveillance and harassment on Odhikar continued. During this reporting period, the NGO Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office, refused to renew the registration of Odhikar. Challenging this, Odhikar appealed to the Prime Minister's Office as per the Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act 2016, but the appeal was rejected by the said Office. The government has also expedited the proceedings of the case filed against the Secretary and Director of Odhikar under the repressive Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amended 2009). The greatest strength of Odhikar is the human rights activists and organisations located in different countries of the world, including human rights defenders associated with it all over Bangladesh. During this period, human rights defenders associated with Odhikar in different parts of the country have been subjected to various forms of oppression and harassment by the government.

Based on reports sent by local human rights defenders and collected data and information published in various media, Odhikar has published the Annual Human Rights Report 2022, despite continued obstructions from the state. The report highlights violations of civil and political rights, including systematic suppression of freedom of speech, destruction of democratic systems, politicization of the judiciary, and deprivation of the right to life.

Odhikar expresses its gratitude to all well-wishers, human rights defenders and allied organisations at home and abroad who have expressed their solidarity with Odhikar. This solidarity strengthens and accelerates the organised struggle of rights activists against human rights violations.

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Contents

A. Suppression of Opposition Political Parties and Dissidents; Attacks on and Disruption of Meetings and Assemblies	7
<i>Suppression of opposition party leaders and activists</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Disruption and attacks on freedom of assembly</i>	<i>10</i>
B. Political Violence and Criminal Activities.....	22
C. Politicization of Constitutional and State Institutions	24
<i>Controversial Election Commission.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Awami League Government and Election Commission interested in Electronic Voting Machine</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Elections under the present Election Commission</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Prevalence of corruption and the Anti-Corruption Commission</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>The National Human Rights Commission.....</i>	<i>29</i>
D. State Repression on Citizens	30
<i>Extrajudicial killings.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Torture, degrading treatment and lack of accountability by law enforcement agencies and security forces.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Allegations of torture and death in custody.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Enforced disappearances.....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Public lynching.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Provision of death penalty and human rights.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Human rights violations in prisons</i>	<i>38</i>
E. Violations to Freedom of Expression	39
<i>The Data Protection (Draft) Act, 2022</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Imposition of the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Freedom of the media.....</i>	<i>42</i>
F. Labour Rights.....	44
G. Human Rights Violations of Minority Groups	45
H. Violence against Women.....	46
<i>Rape</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Sexual harassment</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Dowry related violence</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Acid violence</i>	<i>48</i>
I. Bangladesh and its Neighbouring Countries	49
<i>India's Interference with Bangladesh and Human Rights Violations by BSF.....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Human Rights of the Rohingya Population</i>	<i>52</i>
J. State Repression on Odhikar	53
K. Recommendations.....	55

Statistics: January - December 2022*														
Type of Human Rights Violation		January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Extrajudicial killings	Crossfire	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	2	7
	Tortured to death	2	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	10
	Shot to death	4	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	2	0	1	1	12
	Beaten to death	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Total	6	1	2	5	0	0	4	2	5	0	2	4	31
Enforced Disappearances		0	0	3	5	0	0	0	5	3	2	1	2	21
Death in Jail		3	14	9	6	6	7	2	3	11	2	0	5	68
Death Penalty	Sentenced to death	19	30	42	18	36	35	22	31	31	40	30	4	338
	Execution of death sentence	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	4
Human rights violations by Indian BSF	Bangladeshis Killed	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	3	2	4	3	18
	Bangladeshis Injured	6	2	2	1	1	0	1	2	1	4	0	1	21
	Total	7	3	4	1	1	0	2	3	4	6	4	4	39
Attack on journalists	Killed	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Injured	17	25	4	11	18	1	0	10	7	3	0	7	103
	Assaulted	7	1	1	2	3	1	3	2	9	5	2	1	37
	Attacked	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	7	0	2	0	1	15
	Arrested	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
	Threatened	0	1	5	1	4	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	21
	Total	25	29	10	17	27	8	6	24	16	10	2	9	183
Political violence	Killed	15	12	4	16	12	7	15	3	15	6	11	5	121
	Injured	558	395	738	449	868	472	414	1033	906	650	568	416	7467
Public lynching		5	3	5	0	5	4	2	2	3	3	0	5	37
Arrest under the Digital Security Act, 2018	For allegedly posting critical post against Prime Minister, high-ranking officials of the government, their family members, anti government and the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Bangladesh in social media	7	4	6	4	6	9	2	11	4	3	4	2	62
	For allegedly making derogatory remarks on religion or religious people	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	1	1	1	0	0	9
	Total	7	4	6	4	6	13	4	12	5	4	4	2	71

Introduction

Members of Parliament are elected by the people, and both the right to vote and a National Parliament are very important to a democratic state. However, the incumbent government has destroyed the process of changing power through elections, which contravenes the Constitution and international law. Article 11 of the Constitution states that the 'Republic shall be a democracy, where basic human rights and freedoms shall be guaranteed, respect for the dignity and worth of human beings shall be ensured and effective participation of the people shall be ensured through elected representatives at all levels of administration.' Furthermore, Article 25(b) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights clearly mentions: 'to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.'

However, the current government, in order to stay in power by any means, has continued an authoritarian regime by taking over state power through fraudulent and farcical national elections in 2014 and 2018. As a result, the state forces and leaders and activists of the ruling party are recklessly engaged in human rights violations. The Sweden-based research organisation, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), has said that Bangladesh has been placed in the list of authoritarian countries, in a report titled [“The Global State of Democracy 2022”](#). After the Awami League came to power in 2009, the government abolished the caretaker government system by amending the Constitution unilaterally without a referendum, ignoring the objections of the civil society and opposition political parties. With the caretaker system gone, the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) boycotted the 2014 elections. The Awami League took advantage of the boycott of the opposition party in the controversial elections¹ and came to power. The [farcical parliamentary elections](#) of 2018² were held with hardly any voters amid reports of violence, corruption and election fraud. These two disputed elections created a huge vacuum in the country in terms of democracy, accountability and rule of law, and a dire political crisis, which continued in 2022. During this period, the government used members of law enforcement agencies to crackdown on opposition leaders-activists and ordinary citizens. The government also filed [false and fabricated cases](#) against citizens and made mass arrests. Freedom of expression has been severely curtailed in the country and citizens from various walks of life have been booked and arrested under the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018. Apart from this, various human rights

¹ The caretaker government system was incorporated through the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution when the Awami League was in opposition from 1991 to 1996, as a result of the coalition led by them and the people's movement. However, in 2011, without any referendum and ignoring all the protests of the conscious population, the AL abolished the caretaker government system through the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution and enforced the provision of holding national elections under the Awami League (incumbent) government. As a result, the 10th National Parliament elections were held unilaterally on 5 January 2014 despite the boycott of almost all political parties. In these parliamentary elections, 153 members of parliament out of 300 seats were 'elected' unopposed before polling even commenced.

² In the 11th Parliamentary elections on 30 December 2018, the ruling Awami League nominated candidates in most of the polling stations, sealed the ballot papers the night before the polls and stuffed the ballot boxes, casted fake votes, forced the voters to vote for the ruling party candidates, occupied the polling centres and arrested and ousted the polling agents of the opposition candidates and committed other irregularities, including intimidation of voters.

violations including enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings have occurred in the country.

The Awami League government has systematically converted various important state institutions of the country into subservient institutions through politicization. As a result, victims are being deprived of assistance and justice.³ Due to the violations on freedoms of expression and media, incidents of various human rights abuses did not get reported. Victims too were afraid to disclose the incidents for the sake of their own safety. It is safe to assume that the number of human rights violations was much higher than the published statistics.

It may come as a surprise to learn that Bangladesh has ratified eight major human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Bangladesh has also been elected as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council for the [fourth time](#) under the current government, despite the country's extremely poor record of human rights.⁴

The widespread disenfranchisement and continued serious human rights violations in Bangladesh, and the crackdown on popular discontent, may ultimately pose a threat to South Asian regional security and stability.

³The daily Samakal, 13 December 2022; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/2212146014/>

⁴<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/hrc-elections>

A. Suppression of Opposition Political Parties and Dissidents; Attacks on and Disruption of Meetings and Assemblies

1. In 2022, the government's repression on leaders and activists of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and other opposition political parties became widespread. In order to thwart peaceful programmes during this period, the government carried out various violations, including filing false and fabricated cases⁵ and mass arrests against supporters and members the opposition political parties and dissident citizens⁶. The police and the leaders-activists of the ruling Awami League and its affiliated organisations attacked meetings and programmes of the opposition parties. In many incidents, the police and Awami League supported Chhatra League⁷ jointly carried out these attacks.⁸

Suppression of opposition party leaders and activists

2. The current government assumed power through farcical elections in 2014 and 2018. Numerous cases were filed to suppress opposition party leaders before and after these two elections. As most of these cases are false and fabricated, they came to be known as '[ghost cases](#)'. One of the hallmarks of such cases is that the police accuse a large number of unknown persons, so that anyone arrested later, can be shown as arrested in that case. It has become a regular practice of the government to indict anonymous persons. Many leaders and activists of BNP were arrested in 2022 in [false and fabricated cases](#) filed in the past.⁹ During this period [false cases](#) were filed in a similar way¹⁰ and [ordinary people](#) and [political activists](#) were arrested in order to suppress democratic movements.¹¹ Various laws, including the Special Powers Act of 1974, have been applied to suppress opposition party

⁵The daily Prothom Alo, 21 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/57vkv840o5>

⁶On 13 January, 2022, an organisation called the People's Activist Coalition (PAC) organised a rally in front of Shahbagh to protest the attack by the Awami League-backed Chhatra League on a Qawwali song event at Dhaka University's TSC, when the police attacked and baton charged them. The daily Naya Diganta, 13 January 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/national/636285/>

⁷Student wing of Bangladesh Awami League.

⁸The daily Prothom Alo, 26 May 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/খুলনায়-সংঘর্ষের-পর-বিএনপি-কার্যালয়ে-ছাত্রলীগের-হামলা-পুলিশের-লাঠি-পেট>

⁹In a sabotage case filed at the Uttara West Police Station on 11 September 2018, for fighting and attacking a vehicle with explosives in the Uttara area of Dhaka, the police included BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's advisor Tazmeri SA Islam, a former teacher of Dhaka University, and filed a charge sheet against him in the court arrested him on 3 January 2022. Prothom Alo, 15 January 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/গায়েবি-মামলায়-অধ্যাপক-তাজমেরী-করাগারে>

¹⁰Three BNP leaders and activists have been arrested by the police in Jashore's Jhikargacha Police Station in one such 'ghost' case. It is known that this case was filed to oust the leaders and activists of the opposition party ahead of the Jhikargacha Municipality elections on 16 January 2022. The police have written in the statement, that some disorderly leaders-activists and miscreants of BNP gathered for destructive and anti-government activities. On receiving such information, the police rushed to the spot and arrested three people. The others escape by exploding crude bombs. They also wrote that weapons were recovered from the arrested persons in front of two witnesses. However, several people around the alleged scene said that nothing of this kind had happened in that area at that time. They did not hear any sound of crude bomb explosions. The incident was 'witnessed' by Farooq Hossain, a former sports secretary of the Jhikargacha Upazila unit Chhatra League, and Abdul Hai, a cotton processing factory worker. They said that they do not know anything about the incident.

¹¹The daily Naya Diganta, 8 April 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/politics/655841/>

leaders and activists.¹² In May 2022, the police accused BNP leaders and activists of a clash between Dhaka College students (Awami League-backed Chhatra League leaders led the incident) and Newmarket businessmen. Many of the accused persons were abroad when the incident took place or were under treatment in the hospital or were deceased.¹³ In 2022, opposition leaders and activists were also sentenced in such cases.¹⁴ Below are some examples of repression on the opposition party leaders and activists by the police and leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League and its affiliates:



Photos taken while students of Dhaka College clashed with New Market shop owners. From Left: Dhaka College Chhatra League activist Kaiuum. A shopkeeper being beaten by miscreants wearing helmets during a clash. Courier worker Nahid being hacked by a miscreant in a helmet. A person seen wielding a weapon. (Photo: Prothom Alo, 24 April 2022 and Jugantor 25 April 2022)

3. Saiful Islam Saif, former Deputy General Secretary of Chittagong Metropolitan unit Chhatra Dal¹⁵, who was crippled by police firing¹⁶ in 2021, appeared in Chittagong Court on 28 June 2022 in a political case. On his way back, the police arrested him along with four BNP activists. However, the police denied the arrests. Later they were shown as arrested in the sabotage case. It should be noted that Saif cannot walk properly even with crutches. When he was taken to the doctor, he had to be carried to the car.¹⁷
4. On 7 June 2022, Chhatra League leaders and activists attacked leaders and activists of Gonoshonghoti Andolon and Gono Odhikar Parishad (two civil

¹²The daily Prothom Alo, 12 April 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/কুমিল্লায়-বিশেষ-ক্ষমতা-আইনের-মামলায়-বিএনপির-১৫-নেতাকারাগারে>

¹³The daily Prothom Alo, 26 April 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/বিএনপির-১৪-নেতাকম্বীকে-ছয়-সপ্তাহের-মধ্যে-আত্মসমর্পণের-নির্দেশ>

¹⁴On 8 March 2022, Dhaka Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Hasibul Haque sentenced Jahangir Molla, Ismail Hossain, Abu Bakkar and Mohammad Bachchu, members of the BNP Dhaka Metropolitan North Convener Committee, to two years in prison in a sabotage case filed at Dhaka's Badda Police Station in 2013. [Banglanews24.com](https://www.banglanews24.com/law-court/news/bd/916836.details), 8 March 2022; <https://www.banglanews24.com/law-court/news/bd/916836.details>

¹⁵Student wing of BNP

¹⁶On the night of 16 June 2021, police of Bayezid Police Station in Chittagong picked up Saiful Islam Saif, a former deputy general secretary of Chittagong Metropolitan Chhatra Dal, from his home. After that, the police took Saif to the Arefin Nagar area and shot him in his left leg, causing seriously injured, and he was sent to the National Institute of Traumatology & Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) in Dhaka in critical condition. Saif was treated at NITOR for half a year and doctors were forced to amputate his left leg. After that the police arrested him in a case from NITOR and sent him to jail through the court. Saif was released on bail after serving nine months in jail. [New Age](http://www.newagebd.net/article/141037/former-ctg-jcd-leader-shot-in-leg-after-being-picked-up-by-police), 17 June 2021; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/141037/former-ctg-jcd-leader-shot-in-leg-after-being-picked-up-by-police>

¹⁷The daily Manabzamin, 26 June 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=9650>

society groups) when they went to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital to visit the people who were injured in an explosion at the container depot in Sitakunda, Chittagong. At least 20 leaders and activists, including Zonayed Saki, Chief Coordinator of Gonoshonghoti Andolon and Rashed Khan, Joint Convener of the Gono Odhikar Parishad, were injured in the attack.¹⁸

5. On 17 September 2022, BNP Vice Chairman Barkatullah Bulu and his wife Shamima Barkat, were attacked and seriously injured by Awami League leaders and activists while they were drinking tea at a shop in Manoharganj under Cumilla District on their way back to Dhaka from Begumganj in Noakhali.¹⁹



Saiful Islam Saif, former Assistant General Secretary of Chittagong City unit Chhatra Dal, disabled after being shot by police. Photo: Manabzamin, 29 June 2022



The Chief Coordinator of Gonoshonghoti Andolon, Zonayed Saki was attacked by miscreants when he visited the injured victims of the Sitakunda container depot fire. Photo: Jugantor, 8 June 2022

¹⁸The daily Prothom Alo, 8 June 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/চট্টগ্রামে-জানায়েদ-সাকির-ও-পর-হামলা>

¹⁹The daily Prothom Alo, 17 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/ydrdf4ci3o>



BNP Vice Chairman Barkatullah Bulu was attacked in Manoharganj of Cumilla. Photo: Prothom Alo, 18 September 2022



BNP leader Tabith Awal, injured in an attack on BNP programme, was admitted in United Hospital at Banani, Dhaka. Photo: Prothom Alo, 18 September 2022

Disruption and attacks on freedom of assembly

6. In 2022, the government severely violated the constitutional right to freedom of assembly. Members of the law enforcement agencies filed cases, [arrested and persecuted](#) opposition BNP party leaders-activists after terming BNP's peaceful assemblies 'illegal' and accusing them of [anti-state activities](#). Filing of so-called 'sabotage' cases against opposition party leaders and ordinary people has become a regular practice of the police. During this period, when leaders and activists of the opposition parties, especially the BNP, gathered at closed spaces for internal meetings, even in homes, they were arrested after being accused of [planning 'sabotage'](#) and '[anti-government conspiracy](#)'. Even women activists of the opposition party were arrested for planning sabotage while holding indoor meetings.²⁰ Leaders and activists of the ruling party also attacked various BNP programmes. For example, [celebrations of Independence Day](#) on 26 March, [Iftar Mahfil](#) during Ramadan, [Eid reunion](#)

²⁰Shomoyer Alo, 20 December 2022; <https://www.shomoyeralo.com/details.php?id=208903>

and prayer programmes, food distribution events, flood relief distribution events, symbolic hunger strike, distribution of leaflets, human chain and candle vigil programmes, etc. were attacked.



Police stopped a BNP Eid reunion and prayer ceremony in Bagmara. Photo: Prothom Alo, 14 July 2022

7. Other political parties such as Nagrik Oikya, Gono Odhikar Parishad, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) organised meetings and rallies. A general strike was called by Left Democratic Alliance and the distribution of anti-government pamphlets by Sorbajan Biplobi Dal²¹ was organised. All events were attacked by Awami League leaders, activists or the police. Chhatra League leaders and activists continued to attack and persecute the meetings and rallies of opposition student organisations with the help of the police. During this period, Chhatra League leaders and activists attacked lawyers and Chhatra Dal leaders, seriously injuring them and vandalizing their cars after entering the Supreme Court premises.²² Chhatra League leaders-activists attacked and stopped a meeting organised by Chhatra Odhikar Parishad in memory of BUET student Abrar Fahad²³, who was killed by Chhatra League activists. When Chhatra Odhikar Parishad leaders and activists who were injured in this attack went to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment, Chhatra League leaders and activists attacked them there. Police arrested 22 leaders and activists of Chhatra Odhikar Parishad from Dhaka Medical College Hospital instead of the perpetrators. Chhatra League activists also attacked a procession brought out by left-wing student organisations from Dhaka's Shahbagh area to Dhaka University, in protest of the horrific explosion at the container depot at Sitakunda in Chittagong, that left eight people injured.

²¹A new political party led by Engineer M Enamul Huq

²²The daily Manabzamin, 26 May 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=4652>

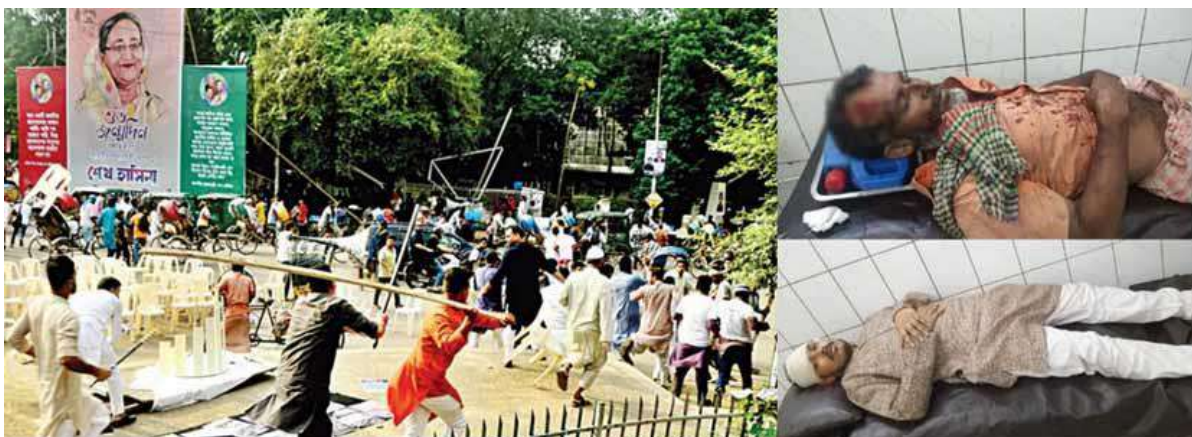
²³In 2019, Abrar Fahad, a student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), was beaten to death by Awami League-backed Chhatra League leaders and activists when he posted a status on Facebook expressing disagreement about Bangladesh's water and gas agreement with India.



Injured CPB leaders and activists who were attacked by the ruling party activists and the police during a meeting Photo: Prothom Alo, 10 September 2022



The police baton charged a procession in support of the strike of the Left Democratic Alliance at Chashara area of Narayanganj City. Photo: Prothom Alo, 28 March 2022



Chhatra League attacked the memorial meeting of BUET student Abrar Fahad called by Chhatra Odhikar Parishad and injured leaders and activists of Chhatra Odhikar Parishad. Photo: Prothom Alo, 7 October 2022

8. During this period, leaders and activists of the opposition BNP were attacked on their way to a rally.²⁴ To prevent the rally from taking place, the labour organisers who called the rally were picked up and illegally detained by the law enforcement agencies.²⁵ Before a street meeting, the [police arrested BNP leaders and activists](#) and homes of the leaders and activists of the opposition party were [attacked](#). Moreover, local Awami League leaders and activists announced a programme on the same day and at the same time as a BNP programme and used the local administration to issue Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and stop meetings and gatherings.²⁶ In many incidents, the police and Awami League-backed Chhatra League jointly conducted attacks.²⁷ Miscreants belonging to the ruling party used local weapons and firearms.²⁸ BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia was threatened with being sent back to jail from house arrest due to anti-government movements by BNP.²⁹



Chhatra League leaders and activists vandalize the stage and chairs in front of the BNP office in Khulna after an altercation. Photo: Prothom Alo, 26 May 2022

9. From August to December 2022, BNP organised anti-government meetings in different areas of the country and rallies in the divisional cities. During this

²⁴The daily Prothom Alo, 10 September 2022;

²⁵ On 11 March 2022, the Khalishpur-Daulatpur Jute Mill Joint Factory Committee announced a protest rally in Khulna City demanding the launching of state-owned jute mills, payment of arrears and withdrawal of cases filed against Khalishpur Jute Mill workers. On the day before the programme, at around 2:30 pm on 10 March, the police came to the road adjacent to Khulna Circuit House, in plainclothes, and picked up Monir Hossain, President of Khalishpur-Daulatpur Jute Mill Joint Factory Committee and Organizing Secretary of Khalishpur Jute Mill Workers Union. Monir Hossain informed Odhikar that when he asked them for the reason behind his arrest, the police abused him. He was first taken to the Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) office and later detained at the Boyra Police Outpost. He wanted to drink water but he was not given water till half past two in the morning. Alamgir Kabir, General Secretary of the Committee, was also arrested from the Khalishpur Jute Mill gate at around 8:00 pm on 10 March. Both were taken to Khalishpur Police Station on 11 March at noon. After 29 hours of detention, they were released on 11 March at around 7:00 pm. Monir Hossain also informed Odhikar that they had called a meeting in front of the Khalishpur Jute Mill gate on 15 March with the same demand but the police did not allow them to assemble.

²⁶The daily Prothom Alo, 23 August 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/b5bxp7tfg4>

²⁷The daily Prothom Alo, 26 May 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/খুলনা-সংঘর্ষের-পর-বিন-পি-কার্যালয়ে-ছাত্রলীগের-হামলা-পুলিশের-নাতি-পেটা>

²⁸The daily Jugantor, 28 May 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/555645/>

²⁹The daily Jugantor, 4 November 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/612216/>

period, six BNP leaders and activists were shot dead by members of law enforcement agencies. When members of law enforcement agencies [opened fire](#) and attacked BNP's peaceful rallies and processions, violating [international norms on the use of firearms](#), Bhola District unit Swechchasebak Dal³⁰ leader [Abdur Rahim](#) (32), Chhatra Dal³¹ President [Noore Alam](#), Narayanganj Juba Dal³² activist [Raja Ahmed Shaon](#), Munshiganj Juba Dal leader [Shahidul Islam Shawon](#), Brahmanbaria Chhatra Dal leader [Nayan Mia](#) (22), and Swechchasebak Dal leader [Moqbul Hossain](#) (33) were killed.



Deceased Chhatra Dal leader Noore Alam. Photo: Prothom Alo, 4 August 2022; Deceased Juba Dal activist Raja Ahmed Shaon. Photo: Prothom Alo, 2 September 2022; Deceased Juba Dal leader Shahidul Islam Shawon. Photo: Jugantor, 23 September 2022; Deceased Chhatra Dal leader Nayan Mia. Photo: Jugantor, 19 November 2022; and Deceased Swechchasebak Dal Moqbul Hossain. Photo: Prothom Alo, 7 December 2022.

10. The police filed cases against BNP leaders and activists for the deaths by getting the family members of the deceased to sign blank papers and then apparently filling in fabricated details.³³ The police and the local Awami League also threatened and intimidated victim-families in various ways.³⁴ Members of the law enforcement agencies even blocked the way when the body of one of the deceased was being taken from Dhaka to his locality.³⁵ A case was filed in the court by BNP and the family of the deceased in connection with these murders, but the court dismissed it.³⁶ Even though the leaders and activists of the opposition party were killed and injured, the police filed cases against the opposition party and arrested and tortured members in custody after taking them into remand.³⁷ If bail is granted in one case, a person is then arrested in another case.³⁸ It is a vicious cycle. As in the past, a large number of 'anonymous persons' have also been accused in all these cases filed by the police.³⁹ Ordinary citizens have also been accused in these cases, due to land related or other disputes with local leaders of Awami League.⁴⁰

³⁰ Volunteer wing of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

³¹ Student wing of BNP

³² Youth wing of BNP

³³ The daily Prothom Alo, 4 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/49fguieo0t>

³⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 3 September 2022;

³⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 22 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/cctf5hw6fw>

³⁶ The daily Jugantor, 24 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/5tatsnavrc>

³⁷ The daily Naya Diganta, 27 March 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/politics/653156/>

³⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 5 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/b7qc61n7rt>

³⁹ The daily Manabzamin, 07 January 2022; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=310222&cat=9>

⁴⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 13 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/fuz6am6zsd>



Detective Branch Police Sub-Inspector Mahfuzur Rahman firing a rifle during a clash between BNP leaders-activists and the police, before a procession in Narayanganj on the occasion of the founding anniversary of BNP. Photo: Prothom Alo, 4 September 2022



BNP activists clash with the police over a programme in Muktarpur of Munshiganj. A member of the police is seen firing his rifle. Photo: Prothom Alo, 22 September 2022



Police attacked and stopped a procession brought out by Narayanganj City and District unit BNP on the occasion of the party's founding anniversary. Photo: Prothom Alo, 4 September 2022

11. To disrupt the divisional meetings of the BNP, the government cracked down on BNP leaders and activists and arrested them after [filing false cases](#) for 'sabotage' under the Special Powers Act and the Explosives Act.⁴¹ The police

⁴¹The daily Jugantor, 23 November 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/618386/>

and leaders of the ruling party also attacked the preparatory meetings of the rallies.⁴² On the day of each rally, mobile network operators slowed down the internet speed of cell phones in certain areas, under government directives.⁴³ Even after the rally ended, false cases were filed against BNP leaders and activists.⁴⁴ Buses, launches and other vehicles were stopped so that the opposition party activists and supporters could not join the rally.⁴⁵ Due to this, ordinary citizens suffered. Opposition [leaders and activists on their way to and from the rallies were attacked by pro-government men](#) and many were arrested by law enforcement agencies.⁴⁶ A [labourer was hacked](#) on suspicion of attending a BNP rally and [a speech-impaired person was beaten up and injured](#) by ruling party leaders and activists in Barishal's Gournadi for attending the rally in Barisal. Mohammad Shahjahan, a former BNP MP from Patuakhali-3 constituency, who was attacked by Awami League leaders and activists on his way to a rally in Barishal, later died in hospital.⁴⁷ Ahead of Comilla's divisional rally, BNP and its affiliated organizations' leaders and activists brought out a peaceful procession after distributing leaflets in Brahmanbaria Sadar Upazila, when police detained some leaders and activists from the procession. When BNP supporters and leaders-activists had an argument with the Officer-in-Charge of the police station, a Constable of the police fired directly at the BNP leaders and activists, killing Chhatra Dal leader Nayan Mia.⁴⁸ The government used ruling party activists and members of the law enforcement agencies to disrupt a peaceful BNP rally in Dhaka on 10 December. The police raided the houses of BNP leaders and activists all over the country, including Dhaka and Awami League leaders and activists attacked them.⁴⁹ Awami League office assistant Abdul Mannan Sheikh, named as the plaintiff, in a case filed under the Explosives Act for the attack on Awami League office at Chandra intersection under Kaliakoir Upazila of Gazipur, said that he did not know anything about the incident and the case.⁵⁰ Police from Kaliakoir Police Station called him to the station and made him sign a sheet of paper. Meanwhile, some shopkeepers near the scene of occurrence said that the shops were open till 11:00 pm. At that time, there was no procession or cocktail explosion and no attack on the Awami League office.⁵¹ On 30 November 2022 at 10:00 pm, a 'crude bomb explosion' took place in Sakhipur Municipality under Tangail District. After that, the police filed a case against 88 people, including 38 people from BNP and its affiliated organisations, on the charge of creating panic by 'explosion'. An hour before the 'crude bomb explosion', the police arrested four people in the case.⁵² On 2

⁴²The daily Jugantor, 19 November 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/617047/>

⁴³The daily Prothom Alo, 19 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/xfefua57zk>

⁴⁴The daily Jugantor, 1 November 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/611292/>

⁴⁵The daily Prothom Alo, 10 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/Oi1piq79qo>

⁴⁶The daily Prothom Alo, 14 October 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/551wnvjrqx> and Naya Diganta, 22 October 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/dhaka/700729/>

⁴⁷The daily Prothom Alo, 11 November; and 28 November 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=31632>

⁴⁸The daily Prothom Alo, 20 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/g5u8xdxak>

⁴⁹The daily Jugantor, 5 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/622278/>

⁵⁰The daily Prothom Alo, 20 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/57vkv840o5>

⁵¹The daily Samakal, 22 December 2022; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/2212147386/>

⁵²The daily Prothom Alo, 2 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/6bij0cba58>

December, apart from mentioning the names of 91 BNP leaders and activists in Kotwali and Bagharpara police stations, the police filed a case against 200 people under the Special Powers Act, 1974. One of the witnesses in this case, Omar Ali, a night watchman of Rajarhat Bazar, said that on 1 December, a Constable named Rezaul came and took his signature on a blank sheet of paper. He knew nothing beyond that. He did not know whether any incident of ‘sabotage’ had happened anywhere.⁵³



Injured BNP leaders and activists who were at a mass rally in Khulan. Photo: Naya Diganta, 22 October 2022



BNP leader Ali Azam leading his mother's funeral prayers in handcuffs and shackles, in Pabriachala area of Kaliakir in Gazipur. Photo: Prothom Alo, 20 December 2022

12. In 2022, the police made mass arrests of opposition party leaders and activists including of the BNP.⁵⁴ The police also made arrests by accusing thousands of ‘unknown’ people. Boali Union unit BNP President Ali Azam was arrested on

⁵³ The daily Prothom Alo, 3 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/key7qpsq67>

⁵⁴ The daily Jugantor, 5 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/622278/>

2 December 2022 as one of the unknown accused, whose name was not in the FIR. When Ali Azam's mother died on 18 December, he was released on parole and attended his mother's funeral while handcuffed and shackled. Ali Azam's family members requested the police to remove the handcuffs and shackles, but the police refused to do so.⁵⁵ Police arrested Narayanganj's Siddhirganj unit BNP leader Monirul Islam Robi's college-going son Robayet Ishfaq Priyatam (20) after failing to find Robi at home.⁵⁶ Sub Inspector Lutfar Rahman of Mirpur Police Station went to arrest a 71-year-old Jamsher Ali, the father of Mohan Mia⁵⁷ who had gone missing in the hands of members of the law enforcement agency. SI Lutfar Rahman threatened to shoot Jamsher Ali if he did not go to the police station. Later he was brought to the police station and interrogated.⁵⁸ On 7 December, leaders and activists of the ruling party attacked Jubo Dal leader Faisal's house at Wari in Dhaka. The miscreants of the ruling party ransacked Faisal's house and, after failing to find Faisal, they beat his father Millat Hossain to death. Faisal's uncle Shahadat Hossain was also beaten and injured and handed over to the police.⁵⁹ The so-called accused were persons who were living abroad at the time of the incident described in the case filed by police.⁶⁰ The opposition leader, who was seriously ill and admitted in the hospital's ICU, had also been an accused.⁶¹

13. On 7 December 2022, the police attacked BNP leaders and activists who were gathered in front of the BNP office in Nayapaltan, Dhaka. The BNP men threw brickbats to resist the police attack. Police fired tear gas and sound grenades and shot at BNP leaders and activists with shotguns. A person wearing the jersey of the [Argentina football team was seen shooting](#) at BNP leaders and activists.⁶² Hundreds of BNP leaders and activists and some members of the police were injured in this incident and Swechhabebak Dal⁶³ leader Maqbul Ahmed was killed.⁶⁴ SWAT members joined the policemen during the attack. Later the police raided the BNP office and arrested around 300 leaders and activists, including the central leaders.⁶⁵ After the operation, the police occupied the BNP office and later the office was found ransacked.⁶⁶ After this incident, the police blocked the movement of people by barricading both sides of the road to the BNP office and locked the gate of the office.⁶⁷ The day after the incident, on 8 December, the police registered four cases in Paltan, Motijheel and Shahjahanpur Police Stations against 725 people who

⁵⁵The daily Prothom Alo, 20 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/57kv840o5>

⁵⁶The daily Jugantor, 9 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/623540/>

⁵⁷In 2018, members of RAB-4 have allegedly disappeared Mohan Mia. Mohan Mia's name is on the UN's list of enforced disappearances.

⁵⁸The Daily Star, 5 December 2022; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/news/the-father-disappearance-victim-held-police-3hrs-3187596>

⁵⁹The daily Prothom Alo, 9 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/623353/>

⁶⁰The daily Jugantor, 2 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/621211/>

⁶¹The Daily Ittefaq, 4 December 2022; <https://www.ittefaq.com.bd/622906/>

⁶²New Age, 9 December 2022; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/188617/>

⁶³Voluntary wing of BNP

⁶⁴The daily Prothom Alo, 7 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/x6joh03iik>

⁶⁵The daily Jugantor, 8 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/623030/> and Prothom Alo, 8 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/x6joh03iik>

⁶⁶The daily Manabzamin, 12 December 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=33600>

⁶⁷The daily Prothom Alo, 10 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/ei7lxzz3sw>

have been named, and accusing another 2975 leaders and activists. In the night of 9 December, BNP Secretary General Fakhru Islam Alamgir and Standing Committee member Mirza Abbas, were arrested by the Detective Branch (BD) of Police from their residences without any warrant. The government blockaded Dhaka City due to the 10 December rally. Members of the law enforcement agencies and Awami League leaders and activists took position on the roads entering Dhaka. They harassed ordinary citizens, including searching their cell phones.⁶⁸ If there was any suspicion that they had come to attend the BNP rally, Awami League leaders and activists attacked them and beat them up, suspecting them to be BNP leaders and activists, and handed them over to the police.⁶⁹ Acts of enforced disappearance also happened. After arresting some BNP leaders and activists, who had come from outside Dhaka to join the rally, it is alleged that members of the law enforcement agencies denied the arrests.⁷⁰



A person, left, in a Brazil football jersey donning a police vest and a helmet, carries two sticks while another person, right, in an Argentina football jersey carries a shotgun, and was seen firing at BNP activists during a clash with police at Naya Paltan in Dhaka. Photo: New Age, 9 December 2022



A person lying on the road after being injured during the police-BNP clash at Nayapaltan in Dhaka on 7 December. Photo: Prothom Alo, 8 December 2022; A policeman beating a man. Photo: Daily Star, 7 December 2022

⁶⁸The daily Prothom Alo, 8 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/bto7oks31g>

⁶⁹The daily Jugantor, 11 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/623987/>

⁷⁰The daily Samakal, 14 December 2022; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/2212146166/>, Jugantor, 12 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/politics/624560/>



Police action against BNP leaders and activists in Nayapaltan in Dhaka City on 7 December. Photo: Jugantar, 8 December 2022



BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and the party's Standing Committee Member Mirza Abbas are being taken to jail from Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court. Photo: Daily Star, 9 December 2022



Awami League activists are beating a person on the suspicion that he was going to join the BNP mass rally. Photo: Naya Diganta, 10 December 2022



Awami League activists holding sticks in front of Bangladesh Bank at Motijheel, Dhaka during the divisional rally of BNP. Photo: Jugantar, 11 December 2022



Awami League activists in front of Buddhist Temple at Basabo, Dhaka. Photo: Jugantar, 11 December 2022

14. On 24 December 2022, the police attacked and arrested numerous leaders and activists in different areas of the country, who were going to the mass procession called by BNP and other opposition political parties for their 10-point demand.⁷¹ BNP leaders and activists in Panchagarh wanted to bring out a peaceful procession when the police stopped them and a clash broke out. BNP leader Abdur Rashid was seriously injured when the police baton charged, threw tear gas shells and rubber bullets at BNP leaders and activists. He died on the way to hospital.⁷² In this incident, police filed a case accusing 81 named people and 2,000 unknown people and arrested 8 activists of BNP and Jamaat.⁷³ BNP Member Secretary Hasan Ajmal Bhuiyan was arrested by Gazipur Sadar Police Station for participating in the BNP rally in Gazipur and the police tortured him and broke his left leg.⁷⁴

⁷¹The daily Jugantor, 25 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/628215/> and Samakal, 24 December 2022; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/2212147888/>

⁷²The daily Jugantor, 25 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/628215/>

⁷³The daily Naya Diganta, 25 December 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/rangpur/715724/>

⁷⁴The daily Naya Diganta, 25 December 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/dhaka/715663/>

B. Political Violence and Criminal Activities

15. In 2022, at least 121 people were killed and 7,467 were injured in political violence. Election-related violence is included within these statistics. Furthermore, 276 incidents of internal violence within Awami League and 30 incidents of internal violence within BNP were recorded. 45 persons were killed and 2618 were injured in internal conflicts within Awami League while one person was killed and 228 persons were injured in internal conflicts within BNP.
16. Since assuming power, the Awami League and its affiliated organisations have been involved in criminal activities and violence. 14 years in power has enabled leaders and activists of Awami League from the grassroots to the top level, to illegally amass huge amounts of wealth.⁷⁵ Several allegations of irregularities and criminal activities, including the establishment of a party office by occupying government land, extortion, drug peddling, forcing women to do immoral work, patronage of drug dealers, mugging, acquisition of illegal wealth, money laundering, embezzlement of VGF rice, occupying houses allocated for the poor, construction of multi-storied buildings by occupying government land, taking khas⁷⁶ land settlement in their own name instead of allocating to the poor and landless, illegally stocking farmers' fertilizers, grabbing the land of ordinary citizens⁷⁷, grabbing khas and government land, occupying hospitals, illegally extracting sand from the river, etc. were found against them. Awami League Parliamentarians have also been accused of corruption and various other forms of unlawful activities.⁷⁸



A poor day labourer, Belayet Hossain, staged a hunger strike in protest of his land being grabbed by Awami League MP Shawkat Hachanur Rahman Rimon, from the Borguna-2 constituency. Photo: Manabzamin, 11 March 2022

17. During this reporting period, ruling party leaders and activists were involved in various acts of violence, including attacks on a government health complex,

⁷⁵The daily Jugantor, 17 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/625861/>

⁷⁶Khas land means government owned fallow land, where nobody has property rights. It is land which is deemed to be owned by government and available for allocation according to government priorities.

⁷⁷The daily Prothom Alo, 8 May 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/সংসদ-হাটানুরের-কাজকমে-লজিত-এলাকার-মানুষ>

⁷⁸The daily Prothom Alo, 2 November 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/611779/>

on [traders](#), [army vehicles](#), and [Upazila Nirbahi Officer](#) and acts of [brutality on ordinary citizens](#), [killing a relative to trap the opposition candidate after being defeated in an election](#), [killing a citizen openly in collusion with the police](#), and [oppression of slum dwellers](#). Furthermore, they have carried out different types of [violence against women](#), including [kidnapping](#), [rape](#), and [killings](#).

18. There are allegations of widespread violence against Chhatra League leaders and activists in the educational institutions as well. During this reporting period, Chhatra League leaders and activists [attacked Chhatra Dal leaders and activists when they went to meet the Vice-Chancellor](#) of Dhaka University, [vandalized the Vice-Chancellor's office](#), [beat college teachers](#), [physically abused university students](#) in hall rooms, [beat university students](#), [suppressed college students](#) and [forcibly ousted students from the dormitory](#), and were involved in ['seat-trading'](#) in student residential halls and [encroachment](#) in educational institutions. On 28 February 2022, Dhaka University's student platform 'Students Against Torture (SAT)' held a press conference and alleged that Chhatra League leaders and activists have subjected students to various forms of oppression in different universities of the country. 18 students, three journalists and two photojournalists were subjected to physical and mental abuse in different halls of Dhaka University in five months.⁷⁹ It has also been alleged that some of the pro-government teachers of the university are supporting Chhatra League leaders and activists.⁸⁰ In 2022, Awami League leaders-activists clashed with each other due to conflicts related to dominance in their area and vested interests, and openly used various weapons including [firearms](#).⁸¹ In this violence, many ordinary people and leaders and activists of the ruling party have been injured.



*Jubo League (youth wing of AL) leader with sophisticated machine gun in Choudagram of Cumilla.
Photo: Manabzamin, 14 July 2022*

⁷⁹The daily Jugantor, 1 March 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/525627/>

⁸⁰The daily Prothom Alo, 18 March 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/opinion/column/শিক্ষক-বধন-শিক্ষার্থী-নির্ঘাভনের-পক্ষ-নয়>

⁸¹The daily Prothom Alo, 8 November 2022;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=811208c4b91&imageview=1&epe>



The name of the young man holding a fire arm in Cumilla is Shimanta. Bappi and Shakib are helping him load the gun. Photo: Prothom Alo, 8 November 2022



Chhatra League leaders and activists attacked Chhatra Dal leaders and activists when they entered the Dhaka University campus. Photo: Prothom Alo, 27 September 2022

C. Politicization of Constitutional and State Institutions

19. The Awami League government has systematically converted various important state institutions of the country into submissive institutions through politicisation. Among the various important state institutions, the Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and National Human Rights Commission are being used by the Awami League government to implement its political agenda. As a result of the ineffectiveness of these institutions, political intolerance, undemocratic state behaviour and the absence of an effective role in preventing human rights abuses have been widely observed in 2022. During this reporting period, the people working in the Executive Branch of the State, despite being public employees of the Republic, [made political statements](#) and took part in the [processions of the ruling party](#). There are allegations that the Awami League government is also [controlling the Judiciary](#) and a High Court judge has been accused of speaking at a ruling party meeting.⁸²

⁸² The daily Prothom Alo, 30 September 2022; <https://www.kalerkantho.com/print-edition/news/2022/09/30/1188611>



On the occasion of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's birthday, top officials of the local administration and police are seen in the pick-up van at an Awami League procession in Patia of Chittagong. Photo: Prothom Alo, 30 September 2022

Controversial Election Commission

20. Election Commission as a constitutional institution, is responsible for protecting the voting rights of the people. For its own vested interest, the current Awami League government has politicised the Election Commission, and it has become a dysfunctional institution that acts in favour of the ruling party. Two farcical elections were held under the Election Commissions headed by Rakibul Huda and KM Nurul Huda, formed during the Awami League government. Before the expiry of the term of the Election Commission headed by Nurul Huda, the Awami League hastily drafted the Election Commissioner Appointment Act-2022. Under this Act, a Search Committee was constituted. The opposition parties alleged that the members of the Search Committee were loyal to the government.⁸³ Based on the recommendation of this Committee, Kazi Habibul Awal, a privileged bureaucrat of the government, has been appointed as the Chief Election Commissioner by the President of Bangladesh.⁸⁴

Awami League Government and Election Commission interested in Electronic Voting Machine

21. It has been alleged that the ruling Awami League has been involved in resorting to/planning new tactics in the upcoming 12th National Parliament

⁸³The daily Prothom Alo, 6 February 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/আলীগ-বলছে-সন্দর্ভ-আগ্রহ-নই-বিএনপি-র>

⁸⁴ The daily Manabzamin, 26 February 2022; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=317328&cat=1/>

elections after using different methods in the 2014 and 2018 elections to seize power. One new tactic is the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).⁸⁵ The Awami League has announced that the next Parliamentary elections will be held through EVMs.⁸⁶ There are allegations that digital fraud can be done through EVMs and the polling results can be manipulated in favour of the ruling party candidate. As a result, even if the voters vote for the symbol of their choice, it will go to the symbol of the ruling party.⁸⁷ It is alleged that the Awami League nominated mayoral candidate won the Chittagong City Corporation election through EVM fraud.⁸⁸ On 14 September 2022, the Election Commission announced the action plan for the upcoming Parliamentary elections. It has been stated in the action plan that a decision has been taken to use EVMs in a maximum of 150 seats. It was reported that of the 29 political parties that participated in the dialogues, 17 were in favour of EVMs and 12 were against it, as per the Election Commission. It was later learnt that in reality, of the 17 political parties that the EC said had voted in favour of EVM, at least five political parties had actually voted against the use of EVM.⁸⁹ Other political parties, including BNP, which did not participate in the dialogue, have also opposed the use of EVMs in elections.

Elections under the present Election Commission

22. The current Election Commission has used EVMs in some local government elections. Many cases of rigging/fraud have been observed in some elections.⁹⁰ On 15 June 2022, elections for five Municipalities, four Upazilas and 176 Union Parishads were held in different parts of the country, including Cumilla City Corporation, under the new Election Commission. Although the main opposition BNP and other political parties boycotted the elections, prior to the polls, some [Awami League leaders publicly boasted about various irregularities](#), including occupying polling stations, intimidating voters, and [attacks on election rallies of independent and opposition candidates](#). Voting in the elections were held through both EVMs and ballots. Voters were subjected to widespread harassment due to various problems faced by voting through EVM. There were allegations of rigging and violence in different parts of the country during the elections, and the Cumilla City Corporation election was rigged so that the ruling party's mayoral candidate was declared the winner, by changing the election results.⁹¹ Furthermore, independent chairman candidate Mohammad Shafiqul Alam, Islami Andolon nominated chairman candidate Moslem Musulli Musa and woman Member for reserved seat candidate Masuma Akhtar Nasreen,

⁸⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 9 May 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/ইতিএমকে-অগ্রাধিকারে-রেখেই-ভোটের-কৌশল>

⁸⁶ The daily Jugantor, 9 May 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/548825/>

⁸⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 2 June 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/opinion/column/ইতিএম-স্বাতিভ্রম-রোগ-ও-ডাকাত-প্রসঙ্গ>

⁸⁸ The daily Jugantor, 10 May 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/549228/>

⁸⁹ The daily Jugantor, 15 September 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/595254/>

⁹⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 27 July 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/7s1zmcc0vo>

⁹¹ The daily Manabzamin, 16 June 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=7839>

alleged at a press conference that the Presiding Officer rigged the election results and declared Awami League nominated chairman candidate Ansar Uddin Mollah as the winner in Latachapali Union Parishad under Kalapara Upazila in Patuakhali District.⁹² In the Cumilla City Corporation elections, voters at MI High School polling centre in Ward No. 19 alleged that they saw only the 'boat'⁹³ displayed on the EVMs when they went to cast their votes. When Judicial Magistrate Omar Farooq went to the polling centre to investigate the matter, the Presiding Officer Nazmul Amin prevented him from entering the polling booth.⁹⁴ Supporters of the ruling Awami League nominated chairman candidate took control over different polling centres of Saral Union and Baharchhara Union in Chittagong and voters were forced to vote for the boat symbol in their presence. Although these irregularities took place in front of the members of law enforcement agencies inside the polling stations, they did not take any action.⁹⁵ On 27 July 2022, the results were announced after the counting of votes at the Bhangbari polling centre in Bachor Union Parishad elections under Ranishankoil Upazila of Thakurgaon District. After the announcement of the results, the police opened fire when supporters of the defeated candidate for the general membership, clashed with the police. Sumaiya, a seven-month-old child, was shot dead in her mother's arms.⁹⁶



Not a secret ballot. Voters in the same polling booth at the Shanta Gurni Government Primary School of Panchbibi Upazila of Joypurhaat District. Photo: Prothom Alo, 15 June 2022

23. Elections of seven Upazilas, four Municipalities and 14 Union Parishads were held in different parts of the country on 2 November 2022. Voter turnout was low. There were incidents of gunfire and clashes at several places during the

⁹²The daily Jugantor, 19 June 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/563877/>

⁹³The ruling party Awami League's election symbol.

⁹⁴The Daily Star, 15 June 2022; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/elections/news/evm-displays-only-boat-some-cumilla-city-voters-allege-3047941>

⁹⁵The daily Prothom Alo, 15 June 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ইতিএমে-ধীরগতি-গোপন-কক্ষে-সাহায্যকারী-গালি-কমকর্তা>

⁹⁶ The daily Jugantor, 27 July 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/577521/>

elections. Voters were left in the lurch as EVM machines malfunctioned at different polling areas. Three supporters of independent chairman candidate Mahbub Mia, were shot and injured in an attack by supporters of Awami League nominated chairman candidate Monirul Haque Mithu in Ghazaria Union Parishad by-election in Munshiganj.⁹⁷

24. In Rangpur City Corporation elections on 27 December 2022, voters suffered due to various complications, including EVMs hanging and delays. Voting continued for three hours after the scheduled time. Many voters left unable to vote. Supporters of Poroshuram Upazila unit Awami League President Haradhan Roy set fire to a vehicle used by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) during vote counting.⁹⁸

Prevalence of corruption and the Anti-Corruption Commission

25. During the current Awami League government, corruption has taken a terrible form in every sector in Bangladesh. The current government has been in power for 14 years since 2009. There are allegations of widespread corruption against the [Awami League leaders, Members of Parliament](#)⁹⁹, leaders and activists of the ruling party, [people from various professions who support the government, government officials and employees](#), and [people close to the Ministers](#) and government¹⁰⁰. During this period, it has been alleged that the ruling party leaders and activists and government supporters have become the [owners of vast wealth](#) through [corruption, illegal businesses, recruitment trade, embezzlement of funds from government projects, embezzlement of money](#) from TR¹⁰¹, Kabita¹⁰² and Kabikha¹⁰³, [tender-bidding and extortion](#). The banking system is in jeopardy due to corruption and looting. The ruling party members own the banks through political influence.¹⁰⁴ It has been alleged that a large portion of the money earned by illegal means has been laundered abroad. In December 2021, the deposits of Bangladeshis in Switzerland stood at 871.1 million Swiss francs. At the rate of BDT 95.70 taka per franc, the total amount of money stands at 83.33 billion, which is the highest ever. Swiss Ambassador to Bangladesh, Natalie Chuard said that there are allegations that most of the money deposited by Bangladeshi citizens in various banks of Switzerland has been earned illegally. However, the Government of Bangladesh has not yet asked for any specific information from the Swiss bank or the authorities.¹⁰⁵ Defaulted loans and money laundering have caused massive disruption in the banking sector. A group has withdrawn thousands of crores of Taka from three private banks

⁹⁷The daily Jugantor, 3 November 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/611934/>

⁹⁸The daily Prothom Alo, 28 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/p9uqd6u2je> and Manabzamin, 29 December 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=35985>

⁹⁹The daily Jugantor, 20 November 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=35985>

¹⁰⁰The daily Prothom Alo, 30 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/sujsrbpzke>

¹⁰¹Maintenance of rural infrastructure

¹⁰²Money for work programme

¹⁰³Food for work programme

¹⁰⁴The daily Samakal, 18 December 2022; <https://samakal.com/economics/article/2212146767/>

¹⁰⁵The daily Prothom Alo, 10 August 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/7atbfwk0xg>

including Islami Bank in the guise of loans. The loans were taken using a fake address and an unregistered company.¹⁰⁶ The government has announced 'special facilities' for one year in order for individuals to declare or bring back money and assets laundered abroad during the budget of the financial year 2021-2022.¹⁰⁷ Odhikar believes that the crimes of corruption and money laundering have only been encouraged by providing these facilities and giving 'opportunities' to money launders. Corruption has seriously affected the livelihood of the ordinary people of the country and created huge economic disparity and income inequality.¹⁰⁸

26. The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is supposed to work as an independent and neutral body.¹⁰⁹ However, the ACC has become a subservient body of the incumbent government.¹¹⁰ Although acts of corruption by Members of Parliament belonging to the ruling Awami League and influential politicians and bureaucrats, have been exposed and investigated in some cases, most of the results of these investigations have not seen the light of day.¹¹¹ In some cases, [complaints are not taken into account](#) by the scrutiny committee.¹¹² Meanwhile, honest ACC officers have been subjected to various forms of harassment, including dismissal, for reporting against corruption by influential people related to or close to the government.¹¹³

The National Human Rights Commission

27. The victims of massive civil and political rights violations in the country are not getting any assistance from the government-mandated National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). The tenure of National Human Rights Commission Chairperson, Former Senior Secretary (under the incumbent regime) Nasima Begum, ended on 2 September 2022. On 8 December 2022, the government appointed its former Home Secretary and full-time member of the outgoing NHRC, Dr. Kamal Uddin Ahmed, as Chairman and former Secretary Salim Reza as full-time member and five others as unpaid members.¹¹⁴ Section 6(2) of the [National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009](#) entitled 'Appointment, Tenure, Resignation, etc. of Chairman and Members' states that the Chairman and Members should be selected from among persons who have made significant contribution to law or justice, human rights, education, social service or human welfare. However, the government

¹⁰⁶The daily Jugantor, 6 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/622411/>

¹⁰⁷The daily Prothom Alo, 11 June 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/business/economics/পাচার-হায়ে-তাই-ফরতের-চেইন>

¹⁰⁸Bangladesh Protidin, 23 May 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=4026>

¹⁰⁹ According to Article 3(2) of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2004 (Amended in 2016), this commission shall be an independent and neutral institution.

¹¹⁰ The daily Jugantor, 28 July 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/577589/>

¹¹¹The daily Jugantor, 21 May 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/553129/>

¹¹²The daily Jugantor, 9 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/623348/>

¹¹³The daily Prothom Alo, 19 February 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/দুর্নীতি-র-তদন্তে-যাঁদের-নাম-তরাই-অভিযোগকারী>

¹¹⁴The daily Jugantor, 10 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/623746/>

is setting up a National Human Rights Commission with its loyal ex-bureaucrats who have no past or present involvement with law or human rights activities. This is also reflected in their actions. After being appointed as the Chairman of the NHRC, Kamal Uddin Ahmed said in a discussion meeting on International Human Rights Day on 10 December, “Bangladesh became a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council for four terms during the tenure of the current government. As a result, the image of Bangladesh on the question of human rights has become brighter in the world.”¹¹⁵ While the current Chairman of the Commission is praising the government for the ‘improvement’ of human rights, the human rights situation in Bangladesh has actually taken dire shape. The government is using ruling party leaders-activists and members of law enforcement agencies to crack down on human rights defenders, opposition party leaders-activists and ordinary citizens. The NHRC remains silent despite the gross violations of freedom of expression and various human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings in the country. It is unfortunate that despite the harsh realities, the NHRC receives foreign funding. The question is – for what purpose?

D. State Repression on Citizens

28. As a result of state repression, citizens have been subjected to various serious human rights violations in 2022, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture by members of law enforcement agencies. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, after a four-day visit in Bangladesh from 14-17 August, said at a [press conference](#) that various UN human rights mechanisms, including the Committee Against Torture, have been expressing concern over the acts of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and torture in Bangladesh for several years. She also pointed out the lack of accountability for violations of the law.¹¹⁶ However, the Bangladesh government continues to deny allegations of human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances in the country, and pro-government individuals and media outlets are enthusiastically spreading false [propaganda against human rights activists](#) and [family members of the disappeared](#) victims.¹¹⁷

Extrajudicial killings

29. In 2022, a total of 31 persons were allegedly killed extra-judicially, as reported. Among them, two were Rohingyas who were killed in Bangladesh during this reporting period. Among the 31 persons killed extrajudicially, seven were killed in “crossfire/encounters/gunfights”. It is alleged that 10 persons were tortured to death, 12 were shot to death, one was beaten to death, and one was killed in ‘clash’ with DB police during

¹¹⁵ The daily Amader Shomoy, 11 December 2022; <https://www.dainikamadershomoy.com/post/412623>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/08/un-high-commissioner-human-rights-michelle-bachelet-concludes-her-official-visit>

¹¹⁷ New Age, 11 September 2022; <https://www.newagebd.net/print/article/180757>

this period. It is also alleged that among the deceased, five were killed by the RAB, 18 by the police, one by the DB Police, four by the BGB, two were by APBn and one was killed by security force.

30. Extrajudicial killings¹¹⁸ continue in the country. On 10 December 2021, after the United States imposed sanctions against Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and seven of its former and current top officials, on charges of gross human rights violations, the incidents of 'crossfire', 'gunfight', and 'shootout' were temporarily suspended until March 2022. However, acts of torture and death in custody continued. Incidents of 'crossfire' and 'gunfight' started again from April 2022.
31. On 16 April 2022, [Mohammad Raju](#) in Golabari area of Sadar Upazila of Cumilla, on 20 April, [Kaisar Ali Mandal](#) in Alammara area of Charigram Union of Singair in Manikganj and on 11 November [Mohammad Shaheen](#) in Rupganj Upazila of Narayanganj, were killed in 'gunfights' with RAB. It is to be noted that Lt. Col. Abdullah Al Momen, Commanding Officer of RAB-1 claimed that Mohammad Shaheen was killed in a 'gunfight' with RAB when a team of RAB surrounded Chonpara area of Narayanganj at 2:00 am. He said that Shaheen and his associates fired at RAB members and RAB members retaliated. When Shaheen was seriously injured, he was taken to Mugda Medical College Hospital in Dhaka where he succumbed to his injuries. However, Shaheen's brother-in-law Parvez alleged that Shaheen was picked up from Chonpara area on 11 November at noon and killed near Demra College. Parvez shared a video of an eyewitness to the incident.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, two Rohingya refugees named Salim Ullah (33) and Ridwan (28) were killed in an alleged 'gunfight' with the police on 9 December.¹²⁰

Torture, degrading treatment and lack of accountability by law enforcement agencies and security forces

32. The current government uses law enforcement agencies to suppress political opposition, government critics and dissidents, and to 'win' national elections. As a result, many members of law enforcement agencies enjoy impunity despite being involved in gross human rights violations, corruption and other unlawful activities.
33. During this reporting period, various types of allegations, were made against members of law enforcement agencies, including the demand of bribes from a BNP leader after arresting him and [threatening to kill him in crossfire](#), collecting money by threatening lawsuits, [illegal detention](#), arrests on fabricated cases filed before the elections, [bribery](#), [acquiring illegal wealth through corruption](#), [extraction of false statements with threats of crossfire](#), [beating of a pregnant woman](#), [arrests for filing a murder case against the police](#), [extortion](#), [collecting money from an accused after detaining him at the police station](#),

¹¹⁸ Persons killed in the name of 'gunfight'/'crossfire', torture and those shot and/or beaten to death by law enforcement have been incorporated under Extrajudicial Killings.

¹¹⁹The Daily Star, 11 November 2022; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/man-killed-crossfire-rab-3166301>

¹²⁰New Age, 11 December 2022; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/188742/two-rohingyas-killed-in-gunfight-with-police>

[collecting money with threats of crossfire](#), [torture to death](#), [filing of false cases and charge sheets](#). Furthermore, there were also allegations against members of the law enforcement agencies of being involved in [death in custody](#), [torture on children](#) and [juveniles](#), trying to arrange drug deals after [killing innocent people](#), [implicating people in false cases without getting money](#) and [refusal to take cases](#). During this period, there were also allegations against members of the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) for arresting and torturing citizens.¹²¹

34. On 31 December 2022 at 6:40 pm, Mohammad Aktaruzzaman Samrat, Science and Technology Affairs Secretary of the Central Committee of Chhatra Odhikar Parishad and Nazmul Huda, Organising Secretary of its Suhrawardy College unit of Chhatra Odhikar Parishad, were picked up by some men claiming to be members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police, from under the Gulistan Phulbaria flyover in Dhaka. On 30 December, Samrat wrote 'Democracy is now in a coffin' and 'December 30, Democracy Killing Day' on his body and joined the rally organised by the Gono Odhikar Parishad. This was apparently the reason why they were picked up and taken away according to Chhatra Odhikar Parishad. They were released from the DB office at 11:00 pm.¹²²



Mohammad Aktaruzzaman Samrat, Science and Technology Affairs Secretary of the Central Committee of Chhatra Odhikar Parishad. Photo: Manabzamin, 31 December 2022

Allegations of torture and death in custody

35. Section 167 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 states that with the permission of the judge, the police can take an accused into custody for questioning for the purpose of investigation. This is called 'remand'. The police take unlawful advantage of the remand procedure and torture detainees in custody as 'interrogation'. The accused are specifically tortured in remand for two reasons. One is extortion of money with threats of torture and the other is torture in remand as a way to harm dissenters and political opponents. Police continue to torture the accused due to impunity, violating the [Torture and Custodial Death \(Prevention\) Act, 2013](#) and the UN

¹²¹The daily Jugantor, 29 January 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/514495/>

¹²²The daily Manabzamin, 1 January 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=36414>

Convention against Torture. In 2022, police filed false and fabricated cases and carried out mass arrests against opposition leaders and activists during the anti-government protests. In these cases, after arrest, police tortured detainees in the name of interrogation.¹²³

36. Even though there are many cases of torture in the country, victims and/or their families do not dare speak out due to fear of harassment and reprisals. Victims of torture or degrading treatment and/or their relatives had to face harassment and intimidation after filing cases against members of law enforcement agencies.¹²⁴ It is alleged that the few investigations that are done, are not done impartially. The Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) submitted its final report to the court on 17 September 2022 in a case of a former college student named Limon Hossain¹²⁵ who lost his leg after RAB shot him on 23 March 2011. Limon Hossain's mother Henoara Begum, the plaintiff in this case, submitted a Naraji Petition (no confidence petition) against this final report at the Jhalkathi Senior Judicial Magistrate Court on 5 December 2022.¹²⁶
37. Deaths in custody as a result of torture by law enforcement agencies continued in 2022. It is alleged that when a person dies in custody due to torture, such death is being disguised as 'suicide' to cover up the death.¹²⁷
38. It was alleged that on 1 January 2022, a car mechanic named [Asadul Islam Asad](#) in Ershadnagar area of Gazipur district was tortured to death by RAB members. Other victims are: on 7 January, a tea stall owner named [Himanshu Roy](#) in Hatibandha of Lalmonirhat district by the police; on 9 February, a farmer named Uzir Mia in Shantiganj of Sunamganj by SI Debashish, SI Pardon Kumar Singh and ASI Aktaruzzaman of Shantiganj Police Station¹²⁸; on 13 March, a person named [Zahirul Howladar](#) in Barishal by members of the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI); on 15 March, [Milan Chakma](#), leader of the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF-Prasit Khisa Group) in Dighinala of Khagrachari by members of the law enforcement agency; on 16 March, [Mohammad Sayed Hossain](#) in Lakshmipur by the police; on 14 April a young man named [Rabiul Islam Khan](#) in Lalmonirhat by a group of policemen led by Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station Sub Inspector Halimur Rahman; on 16 July, a farmer named [Abdus Salam](#) in Sreepur Upazila of Magura district by Nakol Police Outpost-in-Charge SI Mohammad Jamal; on 11 August, a person named [Anwar Hossain](#) by the police; on 27 September, a

¹²³ The Daily Star, 9 January 2022; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/man-dies-police-custody-2935046>

¹²⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 22 June 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/পুলিশের-বিরুদ্ধে-মামলা-পালিয়ে-বড়াই-ন-বাদী> Manabzamin, 13 August 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=16028>

¹²⁵ On 23 March 2011, Limon Hossain (16), a HSC candidate of Kathalia PGS Technical College and son of a day labourer Tofazzal Hossain of Satoria Village under Rajapur Upazila of Jhalkathi District, was returning from the field with cattle. A group of RAB members led by RAB-8 Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) Mohammad Lutfar Rahman held him up in front of the local martyr Jamaddar's house and asked for his identity. Limon identified himself as a student. The RAB members shot him in the left leg and left Limon lying on the ground for two to three hours. Later he was admitted to Barisal Medical College Hospital and when his condition deteriorated, he was brought to the National Institute of Traumatology & Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) in Dhaka. Limon's bullet-ridden left leg had to be amputated at the orthopaedic hospital.

¹²⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 6 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/6v461ka6qy>

¹²⁷ The daily Jugantor, 10 November 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/614246/>

¹²⁸ Report sent by local human rights defenders from Sylhet and Sunamganj

person named [Lebu Miah](#) in Tangail District by the police of Mirzapur Police Station; and on 9 November, a person named [Sujan Mia](#) in Narsingdi by the police Raipura Police Station. Local people protested and demanded justice against members of the law enforcement agency for those tortured to death.¹²⁹

Enforced disappearances

39. In 2022, a total of 21 persons were allegedly disappeared¹³⁰ after being picked up by members of law enforcement agencies. All of them surfaced alive, either released or produced in courts after disappearance. Although there have been [statements denying that these incidents](#) can be categorized as ‘enforced disappearance’, the manner in which these persons were picked up and their whereabouts remained unknown for a period of time, categorizes such acts as ‘enforced disappearances’ as per the UN definition articulated in Article 2 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.
40. Enforced disappearance is a crime against humanity under [Article 7](#) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Bangladesh ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC in 2010. However, the government has used enforced disappearances as a tool to suppress political movements and gag the voices of dissidents and has created an environment of fear in the country. Acts of enforced disappearance are gross violations of [Articles 9 and 16](#) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and [Articles 31, 32 and 33](#) of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. After the Awami League government came to power in 2009, incidents of enforced disappearance became widespread, which also continued in 2022. It is to be noted that before and after the two controversial and farcical parliamentary elections held under the Awami League government on 5 January 2014 and 30 December 2018, opposition party activists and dissidents became victims of enforced disappearance. There are fears that cases of enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings might increase again before the upcoming 12th Parliamentary elections, if elections are conducted under the incumbent government.
41. Reviewing the cases of enforced disappearance, it was seen that most of the people who have disappeared in 2022 are opposition party leaders and dissident citizens. There are allegations that some people have been disappeared under the excuse of ‘counter terrorism’. However, the families have denied that the victims were ‘Islamic militants’. During this period, under pressure from national, international and UN bodies, members of law enforcement agencies either kept persons disappeared for a short period of time and then released them or handed them over to the police station or produced them before the courts.

¹²⁹The daily Prothom Alo, 15 April 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/লালমনিরহাটে-আটকের-পূর্ণ-পুলিশের-নিষেধনে-যুবকের-মৃত্যুর-অভিযোগ>

¹³⁰Odhikar only documents allegations 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.

42. The government's efforts to harass the relatives of the disappeared persons in various ways continued in 2022. There are allegations of various harassments, including visiting the houses of the families of the disappeared and interrogating them, calling them to the police stations and in some cases taking signatures on blank sheets of paper.¹³¹ Furthermore, the police have also pressurized the families of the disappeared victims to sign a statement, stating that the disappeared person was actually missing and the family members were hiding information.¹³² During this reporting period, it has been alleged that supporters of the ruling party published various photoshopped pictures and statements on social media against the women and children of the families of the victims of enforced disappearances.¹³³ In view of this, on 14 March 2022, UN human rights experts called on Bangladesh to immediately stop 'retaliatory actions' against the families and relatives of the disappeared victims and human rights defenders.¹³⁴ Government harassment and intimidation on the family members of the disappeared victims continued despite calls from the United Nations. On 14 December 2022, US Ambassador Peter Haas visited the house of Hajera Khatun, the mother of disappeared Sajedul Islam Shumon, in Shahinbagh, Dhaka. She is the Convener of Maayer Daak, a network of the families and relatives of the disappeared. At that time, ruling party leaders and activists, with some other people gathered in front of Hajera Khatun's house under a banner of 'Mayer Kanna,' and began shouting slogans. Peter Haas hurriedly concluded his meeting with families of the victims of enforced disappearance due to security risks.¹³⁵
43. On 6 March 2022 at around 11:00 am, Arman Hossain, former vice-president of South Keraniganj unit Jubo Dal, was picked up from the gate of Kashimpur Central Jail-1 by a group of people in plainclothes in a microbus.¹³⁶ On 9 March, the Detective Branch (DB) of Police called Arman's family members to the DB office and handed him over to them.¹³⁷
44. On 6 November 2021, Imam Mehdi Hasan Dollar, a fish trader of Mymensingh, was allegedly picked up in a microbus by a group of plainclothes RAB members.¹³⁸ Dollar's wife said that after nine months of disappearance, Dollar was released on 29 August 2022 and returned home.¹³⁹

¹³¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 13 January 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/গুম-হওয়া-ব্যক্তির-স্বজনদের-বাসায়-বাছে-পুলিশ-সাদা-কাগজে-সই-দিতে-চাপের-অভিযোগ>

¹³² New Age, 13 January 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/a6905i176i>

¹³³ In April 2022, an organization called People's Activist Coalition (PAC) met the women and children of some families of the disappeared, had Iftar with them and took pictures. One picture was published on 30 May 2022 on the Facebook of Ratul Mohammad, a member of PAC. On 8 September, some ruling party men named Arif Rabbani, Milu H Rahman and a group called Crab Soldiers, photoshopped the picture of the women and girls of the disappeared families, labelled them as 'prostitutes' and launched a hateful campaign against them on various social media including Facebook.

¹³⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 13 March 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/গুমের-শিকার-ব্যক্তিদের-স্বজনদের-বিরুদ্ধে-প্রতিশোধ-বঞ্চিত-আত্ম-জাতিসংঘের-বিশেষজ্ঞদের> Prothom Alo, 15 January 2022;

<https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/এত-বছর-পর-পুলিশ-এসে-জিজ্ঞেস-করছে-স্বামী-গুম-হয়েছে-কি-না>

¹³⁵ New Age, 15 December 2022; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/189061/us-ambassador-to-bangladesh-raises-security-concerns>

¹³⁶ The daily Naya Diganta, 7 March 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/politics/648716/>

¹³⁷ Information gathered by Odhikar

¹³⁸ Report sent by local human rights defender from Mymensingh. New Age, 19 December 2021;

<https://epaper.newagebd.net/19-12-2021/1>

¹³⁹ The daily Manabzamin, 30 August 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=18514>

45. Dr. AKM Wali Ullah alleged that four men in plainclothes, claiming to be members of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the police, took away his son Dr. Shakir Bin Wali on 11 September 2022 at approximately 3:00 pm, from his residence at Rampura in Dhaka.¹⁴⁰ On 13 September, Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit showed Shakir bin Wali as arrested as a member of the banned organization 'Ansar Al Islam'. On 14 September, Shakir's father told a press conference that his son had been implicated in a false case.¹⁴¹
46. On 19 September 2022 at around 9:00 am, Dilowar Hossain, an employee of a private company, was picked up by eight men in plainclothes claiming to be members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police, from his rented house in Basila Garden City in Dhaka's Mohammadpur area. This was alleged by Dilowar's sister Amina Khatun.¹⁴² On 28 September, after being disappeared for nine days, the DB Police brought Dilowar Hossain to court, showing him arrested as a 'terrorist' under the Anti-Terrorism Act.¹⁴³
47. On 22 September 2022, Nurul Afsar Howladar, a Marketing Officer of a real estate company, was taken away from his office by 10 RAB members in plainclothes.¹⁴⁴ On 9 October, Assistant Director of RAB-15, Mohammad Billal Uddin said in a press release that Nurul Afsar Howladar was arrested on 7 October from Cox's Bazar due to his involvement with militant organisations.¹⁴⁵
48. On 10 November 2022 at around 9:30 am, a group of people claiming to be members of the DB Police picked up Mohammad Faizullah (28), a madrassa teacher, from Raojatul Uloom Madrassa of Shashibhushan Police Station under Charfashan Upazila in Bhola.¹⁴⁶ After 18 days of disappearance, on 28 November, police showed him as arrested in a case filed with Demra Police Station.¹⁴⁷
49. On 8 December 2022, Azizur Rahman Moshabbir, General Secretary of Dhaka North Swechchasebak Dal¹⁴⁸, was picked up by some plainclothes men while he was donating blood to a BNP activist at a hospital in Uttara, Dhaka. That evening he was handed over to Tejgaon Police Station. Moshabbir's wife Suraiya Begum met him at Tejgaon Police Station the same night. When Suraiya Begum went to the police station again on 9 December, the police told her that Moshabbir was not there and asked her to look for him at the Office of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police. After that, when Suraiya Begum went to the DB office, she was informed that Moshabbir was not with them.¹⁴⁹ On 12 December, Moshabbir was shown as arrested in a case.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁰Bangla Tribune, 12 September 2022; <https://www.banglatribune.com/others/762881/>

¹⁴¹The daily Prothom Alo, 15 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/onito88990>

¹⁴²New Age, 26 September 2022; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/182079/youth-taken-by-db-goes-missing>

¹⁴³Information gathered by Odhikar

¹⁴⁴The Daily Star, 7 October 2022; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/no-trace-man-taken-away-14-days-ago-3137006>

¹⁴⁵The daily Kaler Kantha, 10 October 2022; <https://www.kalerkantho.com/online/country-news/2022/10/10/1191681>

¹⁴⁶The daily Jugantor, 10 November 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/614459>

¹⁴⁷Information sent by human rights defender associated with Odhikar

¹⁴⁸Voluntary wing of BNP

¹⁴⁹The daily Jugantor, 12 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/politics/624560/>

¹⁵⁰Information gathered by Odhikar

Public lynching

50. **A total of 37 persons were killed by public lynching in 2022.**
51. Public lynching is a violation of constitutional safeguards related to right to life and personal security, and [Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#). Like other years, in 2022, people were killed by mob beatings in the country. A dysfunctional Judiciary, impunity of law enforcement agencies, and corruption have led to a decline in trust in state institutions, leading to a tendency among ordinary people to take the law into their own hands. Apart from this, the level of brutality among the common people has also increased due to the increase in instability in society as a result of an authoritarian regime. Among those who were killed in public lynching during this reporting period were the elderly and mentally challenged persons.
52. On 9 March 2022, an [old man named Rahman alias Raham Ali](#) (65) on suspicion of stealing a cow in Ulipur of Kurigram District; on 21 May, a young man named [Rabbi Hossain Chanchal](#) (22) on suspicion of theft in Ilshamari Village under Ishwardi Upazila of Pabna; on 1 August, [a bus driver named Ariful Islam](#) (29) in Ashulia of Savar; on 14 November, a [mentally unstable person named Shahidul Islam](#) (50) in Naogaon Bazar of Dhamrai, Dhaka; and on 24 December, [Asadullah](#) (28), an alleged robber of Araiuhajar Upazila under Narayanganj District, were beaten to death by lynch mobs.

Provision of death penalty and human rights

53. **As per Odhikar's documentation, four accused persons were executed in jail and 338 were sentenced to death by lower courts in 2022. Execution is carried out by hanging in Bangladesh.**
54. The government has no plans to abolish, suspend or impose a moratorium to the death penalty. Rather, the government has [amended existing laws](#) and introduced new laws to include the death penalty¹⁵¹, which is contrary to the government's position as stated in the [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR) report.¹⁵²
55. As of August 2022, the number of prisoners sentenced to death in 2,265 cases was 2,102.¹⁵³ According to a research report, most of the accused individuals given the death penalty were poor and socially disadvantaged, and they were tortured in police custody.¹⁵⁴ The government can impose severe punishment such as death penalty or long-term imprisonment to leaders and activists of the opposition party or a person who they feel is a threat to them. As soon as the trial court passes a death sentence, the accused is kept in a condemned cell. A death row inmate has to stay in a condemned cell for years until the

¹⁵¹ Women and Children Repression Prevention (Amendment) Bill, 2020 was passed in the National Parliament on 17 November 2020, incorporating the provision of death penalty for rape as the highest punishment.

¹⁵² A/HRC/39/12/Add.1, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh at Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session from 10–28 September 2018.

¹⁵³ The daily Naya Diganta, 2 October 2022; <https://dailyingilab.com/article/522714/>

¹⁵⁴ New Age, 30 March 2022; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/166706/>

case is settled in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court.¹⁵⁵ By order of the High Court, several have been acquitted and released, but their prolonged confinement in the condemned cells, has resulted in physical and psychological damage. Keeping death row convicts in condemned cells till the trial is final is unjustified and a violation of human rights. On 7 June 2022, Ghulam Mustafa, who was sentenced to be hanged in the Kashimpur High Security Central Jail in Gazipur, committed suicide by hanging inside the bathroom of the condemned cell.¹⁵⁶

56. On 9 March 2022, Shipon Hawladar and Naimul Islam Emon were executed in Cumilla Central Jail¹⁵⁷ while Kamal (47) in Kashimpur Central Jail-2 and Rakibur Rahman in Rajshahi Central Jail, were executed on 30 November.¹⁵⁸

Human rights violations in prisons

57. In 2022, a total of 68 prisoners died in the prisons around Bangladesh. Among the deceased, 65 prisoners died due to 'illness' and three prisoner committed suicide.
58. According to the information received from the Directorate of Prisons, the official capacity of the country's 68 prisons, including Dhaka Central Jail, is slightly more than 42,500. However, as a result of mass arrests to suppress dissent and opposition, the number of inmates in jails crossed 100,000 as of 11 December 2022.¹⁵⁹
59. There are allegations of irregularities and corruption against many officials, including the Superintendents and Jailors of the country's 68 prisons. The inquiry committee formed by the Directorate of Prisons, investigated and [found the truth of the allegations](#), however, the government did not take any action against the culprits. As a result, inmates continued to be oppressed in jails. Money was also being collected from the prisoners through a 'syndicate' and shared among the prison officials.¹⁶⁰ Various other allegations have been received against the prison authorities, including [illegal recruitment of manpower](#), 'sale' of prisoners for money¹⁶¹, [special facilities given to prisoners in exchange of money](#) and [extortion of money by torturing](#) the prisoners. In Sylhet Central Jail, there were allegations of sexual abuses of juvenile inmates and the handcuffing and beating of inmates with sticks.¹⁶² The family members of Fazor Ali alleged that he died in Narsingdi District Jail due to torture by jail authorities.¹⁶³
60. The inmates are living an inhumane life inside the jails due to the overcrowding. The bail order of many dissidents and opposition leaders-

¹⁵⁵The daily Jugantor, 23 March 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/533448/>

¹⁵⁶The daily Manabzamin, 8 June 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=6587>

¹⁵⁷The daily Manabzamin, 9 March 2022; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=318870>

¹⁵⁸The daily Jugantor, 2 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/621276/>

¹⁵⁹The daily Jugantor, 12 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/624275/>

¹⁶⁰The daily Naya Diganta, 20 February 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/post-editorial/645050/>

¹⁶¹ When a new inmate enters the prison, the jail authority hand him over to the old inmates. Later, he is given facilities after extorting money from him. Such inmates are tortured if they cannot pay.

¹⁶²The daily Prothom Alo, 29 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/l40uv9eh2k>

¹⁶³The daily Jugantor, 21 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/627014/>

activists have been [detained by the government](#) for long periods of time and their release from prison has thus been deliberately delayed.¹⁶⁴ Opposition leaders and activists were [re-arrested from the jail gate](#) soon after they were released from jail on bail. Many of them were shown as arrested in old cases. It is alleged that the government has arrested many BNP leaders and activists on false charges since the beginning of BNP's divisional rally on 12 October. The police also made mass arrests in an attempt to stop the 10 December BNP rally in Dhaka. Prisons are overcrowded due to these mass arrests.¹⁶⁵ During this period, it was also alleged that leaders and activists of the opposition political parties were treated inhumanely in the prisons. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Standing Committee member Mirza Abbas and other leaders have been subjected to various forms of mental torture, including keeping them in cells for 24 hours, not allowing them to meet their relatives, and depriving them of necessary medical treatment.¹⁶⁶

E. Violations to Freedom of Expression

61. Bangladesh has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 19 (2) of this Covenant states that 'everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice'. Since assuming power in 2009, the Awami League has consistently enacted and amended various repressive laws and implemented them to interfere with citizens' freedom of expression.¹⁶⁷ Social media has also been brought under extensive surveillance by the government.
62. Dissidents, opposition activists and ordinary citizens have been booked under the Digital Security Act, 2018 and arrested and sent to jail for writing or 'liking/sharing' any post on social media. Criticism of the government has been equated with 'anti-state activities and association with militant organisations'. On the other hand, freedom of expression is being freely abused by government supporters who are spreading false and damaging information regarding human rights defenders through social media. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has developed a new draft policy titled "Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission Regulation 2021" to regulate digital, social media, and OTT platforms, many of which are contrary to the Constitution and

¹⁶⁴The daily Prothom Alo, 30 March 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/সংবাদিক-কনক-সারোয়ারের-বোন-মুক্তি-পেয়েছেন>

¹⁶⁵The daily Jugantor, 12 December 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/624275/>

¹⁶⁶The daily Manabzamin, 24 December 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=35300>

¹⁶⁷By 2019, the government had made two amendments to the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (2009 and 2013) and enacted the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018.

ICCPR.¹⁶⁸ Curbing freedom of expression by enacting and enforcing various repressive laws has had a negative impact on people from all walks of life.

63. There are Bangladeshi citizens living abroad who also run online media portals that publish ‘anti-government’ news. Members of law enforcement agencies have harassed and arrested relatives of such individuals living in Bangladesh.¹⁶⁹ Social activist Mizanur Rahman was picked up by the police on 9 June 2022, for commenting on public interest issues on Facebook and was accused of being involved in activities against the state and the law. He was also threatened that his family members would be picked up. He was later released.¹⁷⁰ On 31 August 2022, Rajbari district unit Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal¹⁷¹ member Sonia Akhter Smriti, criticized a speech by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on her Facebook account. A local Awami League leader named Samsul Arefin Chowdhury filed a written complaint against Sonia Akhter Smriti with Rajbari Sadar Police Station a month after the Facebook post. The complaint was later recorded as a case and Sonia Akhtar was arrested under Sections 153 and 505 of the Penal Code, 1860 on the charge of defaming the Prime Minister’s ‘reputation and image’. After the arrest, Sonia was produced in the Rajbari court on 5 October, from where she was sent to jail.¹⁷² On 22 December, in Shariatpur, the police went to the house of Zillur Rahman, a moderator of the country’s popular TV talk show ‘Tritiya Matra’ and Executive Director of the Center for Governance Studies (CGS), to ‘collect information’ about him. Zillur Rahman alleged that the police were being used to silence his voice and to intimidate and obstruct his work.¹⁷³



Rajbari District unit Jatiyatabadi Mahila Dal member Sonia Akhtar Smriti being taken to court after her arrest. Photo: Banglatribune, 6 October 2022

¹⁶⁸Similar to the Digital Security Act, this regulation prohibits any content that “creates disturbance or disorder or tends to aggravate or worsen the law and order situation” or is “offensive, false or threatening and defamatory or insulting to a person”. This will severely curtail freedom of speech and thereby bring private service providers under scrutiny. Under the BTRC Act 2001, private service providers who violate this policy can be fined up to Tk 3 billion and punished up to 5 years imprisonment.

¹⁶⁹New Age, 10 September 2022; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/180735/>, Prothom Alo, 18 September 2022; https://images.eprthomalo.com/PA/2022/09/18/dh/5_04/e8c9510f_409218_11.jpg

¹⁷⁰The daily Manabzamin, 19 June 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=8289>

¹⁷¹The women’s wing of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

¹⁷²The Daily Star, 5 & 6 October 2022; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/woman-sent-jail-over-facebook-post-pm-rajbari-3135851> <https://bangla.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news-401236>

¹⁷³The daily Manabzamin, 23 December 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=35160>

The Data Protection (Draft) Act, 2022

64. The government has drafted a Data Protection Act, 2022 to protect information, saying it would restrict the unauthorised use of personal information for commercial purposes. However due to the ambiguity of the provisions of the draft law, lack of proper definition and the absolute power given to the 'Digital Security Agency' mentioned therein, it has been alleged that this draft law is repressive like the Digital Security Act, 2018. The law, if enacted, will create the risk of administrative and governmental control over information in the name of protecting personal data. The law calls for the inclusion of a Digital Security Agency as regulator of personal data protection. The Act gives unlimited and absolute powers to the Director General of the Digital Security Agency to establish a 'Data Protection Office' as head of the agency. Such law is in conflict with the right to privacy, as enshrined in the ICCPR and Constitution of Bangladesh.¹⁷⁴

Imposition of the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018

65. In 2022, a total of 71 people were arrested under the Digital Security Act, 2018. Among them, 62 were arrested for online posts/comments criticizing the Prime Minister, high-ranking persons of the government and/or their family members and for making 'anti-government' comments; and nine persons were arrested for posting 'provocative' religious comments.
66. In 2022, the government sweepingly imposed the repressive Digital Security Act (DSA), 2018 on citizens to curb freedom of expression. Over 1,700 cases have been filed under this Act in the last four years. Out of this, a data analysis of 353 cases showed that the plaintiffs in 165 cases were the police and leaders-activists of the ruling party. Under this law, 36 percent of the cases were filed with allegations of propaganda and derogatory remarks against the government, the Prime Minister, law enforcement agencies, the ruling party and leaders and activists of the ruling party.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, the DSA has also been used in allegations of hurting 'religious sentiments'.
67. In 2022, the Digital Security Act had been imposed on citizens for writing or 'liking/sharing' any post on social media about the [government and the court](#), [Prime Minister of Bangladesh](#) and [her visit to India](#), [leaders of the ruling party or their family members](#) and [senior police officers](#). During this reporting period, cases were filed under the DSA against [dissidents](#), [opposition leaders-activists](#), [journalists](#) and [ordinary citizens](#) were arrested and sent to jail, for criticizing the government. Leaders and activists of the BNP have been arrested under this law for speaking in public meetings. During this period, cases were filed and people arrested under the DSA for criticising, on social media, the increase in fuel prices and the price hike in daily commodities.¹⁷⁶ Many of those arrested, including women, have been taken into police remand.¹⁷⁷ Despite the constitutional right to get bail, it has

¹⁷⁴The daily Naya Diganta, 10 May 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/662186/>

¹⁷⁵The daily Prothom Alo, 19 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/Oluicujl29>

¹⁷⁶ The daily Kaler Kantha, 11 August 2022; <https://www.kalerkantho.com/online/country-news/2022/08/11/1171838>

¹⁷⁷ The Prothom Alo, 6 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/tgmhcsnat9>

been observed that accused persons remain in jail for longer periods of time under the DSA.¹⁷⁸



Fazle Elahi, Editor of Rangamati's local daily Parbatya Chattogram and Sultana Ahmed, General Secretary of Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal, were arrested under the Digital Security Act. Photo: Prothom Alo 7 June and 6 November 2022.

68. On 15 October 2022, Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit filed a case under the DSA at Ramna Police Station, accusing three people, including writer and online activist Pinaki Bhattacharya, of conspiring to malign the image of the state.¹⁷⁹ On 17 November, the Detective Branch of Police arrested Nahid Islam, an activist of Manikganj Municipality unit Swachhasebak Dal¹⁸⁰, on charges of caricaturing the Prime Minister's picture and posting various anti-government posts on his Facebook.¹⁸¹
69. In 2022, the [Cyber Tribunal of Dhaka](#) sentenced the accused in the case filed under Section 57¹⁸² of the Information and Communication Technology Act and the [Cyber Tribunal of Rajshahi](#) sentenced the accused in the case filed under the Digital Security Act. During this period, the [Cyber Tribunal of Khulna](#) framed a charge in a case filed against two journalists and the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court dismissed the Leave to Appeal filed against the High Court Division's dismissal of the Writ Petition against internationally known photographer Shahidul Alam regarding the validity of the investigation proceedings, in the case filed under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amended 2009 & 2013).¹⁸³

Freedom of the media

70. In 2022, two journalists were killed, 103 were injured, 37 were assaulted, 15 were attacked, five were arrested, 21 were threatened and nine journalists were sued for carrying out their professional duty.
71. The authoritarian Awami League government has created an atmosphere of fear among people associated with the media.¹⁸⁴ As a result, journalists are

¹⁷⁸The daily Prothom Alo, 19 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/0luicujl29>

¹⁷⁹The daily Prothom Alo, 18 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/u2hhtvok66>

¹⁸⁰Voluntary wing of BNP

¹⁸¹The daily Prothom Alo, 18 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/o68zjhk4ez>

¹⁸²The government removed Section 57 from the ICT Act and incorporated this provision in the Digital Security Act, 2018.

¹⁸³The daily Prothom Alo, 27 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/hb3ty28qpi>

¹⁸⁴The daily Prothom Alo, 6 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/opinion/interview/yisow42n4p>

forced to practice self-censorship. In a report published on World Press Freedom Day in 2022, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said that Bangladesh has fallen 10 steps in the [World Press Freedom Index 2022](#) compared to last year. Bangladesh ranks 162 out of 180 countries in the index with a score of 36.63. The government's interference on the media began in 2013 with the shutdown of pro-opposition electronic and print media - Diganta TV, Islamic TV and the daily Amar Desh. So far, these media have not been re-opened. On 8 December 2022, Narayanganj District Administration cancelled the declaration¹⁸⁵ of the daily 'Sojasapta' published from Narayanganj, which was sympathetic to the opposition party, and on the same night, Hafizur Rahman, Private Secretary of Shamim Osman, Awami League Member of Parliament from Narayanganj-4 constituency, filed a case under the Digital Security Act against the editor and publisher of the daily 'Sojasapta', Abu Saud Masud.¹⁸⁶ On 26 December, Dhaka District Administration cancelled the declaration of the daily Dinkal, a party newspaper of the opposition BNP.¹⁸⁷

72. In 2022, while performing their professional duties, [journalists were attacked](#) by the leaders and activists of the [ruling party](#), [humiliated by government officials](#), arrested in false cases filed by the police under repressive laws and subjected to inhumane treatment. During this reporting period, Awami League leaders and activists attacked the [newspaper office](#) and [journalist's house and looted](#) and [threatened to kill](#) the journalist.¹⁸⁸ Members of the law enforcement agencies threatened to implicate the journalist in a false case.¹⁸⁹ Journalists have also been arrested and jailed under the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018. They suffered financially and emotionally due to this and could not perform their professional duties independently.¹⁹⁰
73. On 11 October 2022, Sharif Hassan, Dohar Upazila correspondent of the daily Ajker Potrika, received news that a boy was being beaten up by leaders and activists of Chhatra League. When Sharif Hassan went to gather information, he was also beaten up and his cell phone was taken away by Chhatra League leaders and activists.¹⁹¹ Barisal Metro online portal journalist Farooq Hasan was beaten and his leg broken by Chhatra League leaders and activists, for not mentioning Rashed Howladar, President of Ward unit Chhatra League of Gournadi Municipality in a live programme commemorating Victory Day on 16 December.¹⁹²
74. While expressing concern about the lack of justice for the murder of journalists in Bangladesh, [UN human rights experts](#) said that an appalling and pervasive culture of impunity exists in Bangladesh.¹⁹³ It is to be noted that journalist couple Sagar Sarwar and Meherun Nessa Runi were killed on

¹⁸⁵ See section 7 of The Printing Presses and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act 1973.

¹⁸⁶ Report sent by human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Narayanganj.

¹⁸⁷ The daily Ittefaq, 27 December 2022; <https://www.ittetaf.com.bd/625881/>

¹⁸⁸ Bangladesh Pratidin, 5 July 2022; <https://www.bd-pratidin.com/country-village/2022/07/05/786113>

¹⁸⁹ The daily Manabzamin, 4 April 2022; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=322506>

¹⁹⁰ The daily Jugantor, 14 May 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/551014>

¹⁹¹ The daily Jugantor, 11 October 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/604458/>

¹⁹² The daily Prothom Alo, 21 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/4pwe2mzg4n>

¹⁹³ New Age, 12 February 2022; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/162522/un-experts-concerned-over-impunity-for-killings-of-sagar-runi>

11 February 2012. The law enforcement agency has yet to file a charge sheet in this case.¹⁹⁴ It is alleged that any citizen in the country can be labelled as an 'Islamic militant' and charged with conducting 'destructive' incidents. In the case of the murder of Dipankar Chakraborty¹⁹⁵, Executive Editor of a Bogura-based newspaper, the daily Durjoy Bangla and former vice-president of Bangladesh Federal Journalists Union, his family members have alleged that in order to hide the real culprits, the police concluded the investigation of the case by claiming that the killing was done by Islamic militants.¹⁹⁶

F. Labour Rights

75. The human rights of labourers/workers have been violated in various ways in 2022. Although owners have built a mountain of profit in exchange for the blood and sweat of the workers in the ready-made garment industry, the government and the owners have been observed to act with indifference in various matters such as workers' safety, wages, health and medical care, maternity leave, trade union rights, etc. During this reporting period, there have been cases of [factory closures and workers layoffs](#), [non-payment of arrears of wages](#) and [inhuman treatment](#) of workers in the garment industry and other sectors. The garment factory workers staged hunger strikes and protest rallies demanding arrears of wages.¹⁹⁷ During the protests and rallies of the workers, the police and men on the payroll of the factory owners attacked workers.¹⁹⁸ The police also registered false cases against the workers and arrested them. In 2022, workers of a private jute mill in Khulna staged a 'hunger' procession to demand payment of outstanding dues.¹⁹⁹



Workers' sit-in programme in front of BKMEA office in Narayanganj, demanding payment of arrears of wages. Photo: Prothom Alo, 15 December 2022

¹⁹⁴The daily Prothom Alo, 11 February 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/এক-দশকে-ও-ত-দত্ত-শেষ-হলো-না>

¹⁹⁵Dipankar Chakraborty was stabbed to death by criminals on 2 October 2004 when he was returning home from the newspaper office late at night. In 2019, the DB Police filed a charge sheet against Jahangir Alam, the mastermind of the Holi Artisan attack, in a case filed in this incident.

¹⁹⁶The daily Prothom Alo, 1 October 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/nj08oh0m08>

¹⁹⁷The daily Prothom Alo, 15 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/0m247t9gjb>

¹⁹⁸The daily Naya Dignata, 31 March 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/dhaka/654018/>

¹⁹⁹The daily Naya Dignata, 5 March 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/648109/>

76. Migrant workers also have to face various adversities. As of 30 November 2022, the bodies of 3,222 Bangladeshi migrant workers arrived in the country, most of whom were young. Among them there were 103 women. Harsh environment, inhumane working conditions, unhygienic living arrangements are some of the reasons mentioned as the cause of death of those workers.²⁰⁰



Jute Mill workers at 'hunger procession' demanding the payment of dues. Photo: Samakal, 4 March 2022

G. Human Rights Violations of Minority Groups

77. In the year 2022, the houses, places of worship and shops of religious and ethnic minority groups were attacked and set on fire in different parts of the country and their homes and lands were seized. It is alleged that leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League were involved in all these incidents.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the human rights of linguistic minority citizens have also been violated during this period.²⁰²
78. There were allegations that Khulna's Koira Sadar Union Parishad Chairman and Upazila unit Awami League's Organizing Secretary Mohammad Baharul Islam and his father Fajr Ali Sana forcibly occupied the homestead of a day labourer Birinchi Roy, a Hindu.²⁰³ On 15 July 2022, a college student named Aakash Saha in Lohagara Digholia area of Narail District was accused of posting a derogative remark 'insulting' the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on Facebook. Due to this, some miscreants attacked and set fire to houses and shops belonging to the Hindu community in Digholia Bazar.²⁰⁴ On 26 September, it was alleged that houses and shops of the Hindu community were attacked, vandalized, looted and set on fire in Pakuria Village under Singra Upazila of Natore, centering around local government elections, under

²⁰⁰The daily Manabzamin, 2 January 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=36562>

²⁰¹The daily Prothom Alo, 16 October 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/brddji25ul>

²⁰²The daily Jugantor, 14 June 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/562015/>

²⁰³Janajug, Volume 2, November 2022;

²⁰⁴The daily Manabzamin, 17 July 2022; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=11979>

the leadership of Itali Union Parishad Chairman and Joint General Secretary of Singra Upazila unit Awami League Ariful Islam Arif.²⁰⁵

79. Apart from attacks on religious minorities, there have been allegations of attacks on ethnic minority communities and the grabbing of their lands. On 19 August, four people were injured when a group of miscreants blocked and attacked the families of an ethnic minority community at Mundapara over a land dispute in Dhumghat Antokhali Mundapalli of Shyamnagar in Satkhira. Among the injured, Narendranath Munda died on 20 August.²⁰⁶ Awami League Member of Parliament Shibli Sadiq of Dinajpur-6 Constituency and his uncle, former Member of Parliament Delwar Hossain, have been accused of grabbing the land of ethnic minority Santals.²⁰⁷ There have also been cases of arrest and assault of linguistic minority citizens (Urdu speaking) in Narayanganj by members of law enforcement agencies.²⁰⁸
80. In the past it has also been observed that due to the politicization of such incidents, the real accused could not be brought to justice and the trials have been pending for years.²⁰⁹ For example, in 2018, in [Santalpalli of Gobindganj Upazila](#) in Gaibandha, three Santals were killed in attack, arson and police firing, but the trial has not yet commenced.²¹⁰

H. Violence against Women

81. Due to lack of accountability and impunity, women have been subjected to various forms of oppression and violence, including rape by ruling party activists and members of law enforcement agencies. Moreover, gender discrimination in various fields, including education, and the health sector, and in the legal framework, has increased violence against women.²¹¹ The [‘Global Gender Gap Report 2022’](#) of the World Economic Forum (WEF) on gender inequality, published in July 2022, states that Bangladesh is ranked 71 out of 146 countries. However, in 2021, the position of Bangladesh was ranked 65 out of 156 countries.²¹² Violence against women continues to increase as the perpetrators go unpunished, in most cases due to a dysfunctional justice system.

Rape

82. A large number of women and girls were victims of rape and gang rape in 2022. Non-cooperation of police is one of the reasons behind the lack of prosecution for rape. Family members of the victims were [harassed by the police at the police station](#) and as the police did not arrest the accused men, they roamed around publicly and pressured the victim-family to withdraw

²⁰⁵The Daily Star, 27 September 2022; https://bangla-thedailystar-net.translate.google.com/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news-398321?x_tr_sl=bn&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en&x_tr_pto=sc

²⁰⁶The Daily Star, 21 August 2022; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/one-dead-after-attack-munda-community-3099436>

²⁰⁷The daily Prothom Alo, 30 July 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/5119gftjix>

²⁰⁸The daily Jugantor, 14 June 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/562015/>

²⁰⁹The daily Prothom Alo, 29 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ypabisdcoe>

²¹⁰The daily Prothom Alo, 5 November 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/frzdk3lzzd>

²¹¹The daily Prothom Alo, 27 December 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/dl8isao1k1>

²¹²The daily Prothom Alo, 14 July 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/opinion/editorial/ocy5l8uf4n>

the case.²¹³ Furthermore, there are allegations against the police of involvement in rape, including not taking rape cases, beating up the victim's family members instead of lodging a case of attempted rape of a child, putting pressure on the family members to settle the rape case of a mentally challenged child through arbitration, and destroying evidence of rape. A 15-year-old girl who was raped by a BGB²¹⁴ member appeared with her mother at the High Court Division of the Supreme Court and told the judges, “Sir, I have been raped. We are very poor. We have no money for the case. I want justice.”²¹⁵

83. During this period, Awami League leaders and activists committed rape²¹⁶ and attacked the students who demanded justice for the rape.²¹⁷ A survivor was forced to flee her home with her family members after filing a rape case against an Awami League leader.²¹⁸ Leaders and activists of the ruling party took away the rapist in another incident before the people handed him over to the police.²¹⁹ Through illegal arbitration, influential people and the leaders of the ruling party cover up the incident of rape and attempted rape as well.



A student of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman University of Science and Technology in Gopalganj was gang-raped. Students in protest of the rape, blocked the Dhaka-Khulna highway at Ghonapara intersection of Gopalganj. Photo: Prothom Alo, 24 February 2022

Sexual harassment

84. Apart from rape, incidents of stalking and sexual harassment of women occurred in 2022. Under the shelter of the ruling party, criminal gangs have

²¹³The Jugantor, 15 September 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/595299/>

²¹⁴Border Guard Bangladesh

²¹⁵The Daily Star, 16 June 2022; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/i-now-ask-you-justice-3048436>

²¹⁶ The daily Jugantor, 19 September 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/596824/> and Jugantor, 2 October 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/601422/>

²¹⁷The daily Prothom Alo, 24 February 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ধাওগাঁ-বিচারের-দাবিতে-আন্দোলনরত-শিক্ষার্থীদের-ধাওয়া-আহত-৩>

²¹⁸ The Naya Diganta, 28 February 2022; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/barishal/647067/>

²¹⁹ The daily Jugantor, 21 April 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/543905/>

emerged in the localities and are committing sexual harassment. In addition, there were allegations of sexual harassment against leaders and activists of the Chhatra League of the Awami League, in colleges and universities. Relatives of victims have been attacked for protesting this sexual harassment.²²⁰ During this period, there were also allegations that a [pedestrian was sexually assaulted by the police](#), a [female colleague by her senior government official](#) and a [female student by five Chhatra League activists](#) on Chittagong University campus.

Dowry related violence

85. Although giving and receiving dowry is a punishable offence, the practice of dowry is prevalent in society and most of the victims are deprived of justice. In 2022, women were subjected to various inhuman incidents, including murder and violence due to dowry demands. During this reporting period, women were [burnt](#), [beaten](#), and [strangled to death](#) for non-payment of dowry, and a [housewife was killed and her body was thrown into the water](#) after failing to bring dowry. A housewife's [head was shaved after her hands and legs were tied](#) and [wrist of a woman was cut](#) by her husband. A husband killed his wife and minor daughter for not getting dowry.²²¹ Unable to bear the dowry violence, a housewife committed suicide by setting herself on fire.²²²



A housewife named Rokeya Begum had her wrist cut off by her husband Rafiq after failing to receive one hundred thousand taka of dowry in Narayanganj. Photo: Jugantor, 20 January 2022

Acid violence

86. As per the Acid Crime Control Act, 2002, cases are supposed to be completed within 90 working days, but the cases remain pending for years due to lack of implementation of law. As a result, victims are deprived of justice.²²³ It was

²²⁰ Bangladesh Protidin, 6 July 2022; <https://www.bd-pratidin.com/last-page/2022/07/06/786391>

²²¹ The daily Jugantor, 24 January 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/512501/>

²²² The daily Prothom Alo, 9 April 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/মুন্সিগঞ্জে-যৌতুকের-জন্য-নির্যাতনের-অভিযোগ-গায়ে-আগুন-দিয়ে-গৃহবধূর-মৃত্যু>

²²³ Bangladesh Protidin, 25 August 2022; <https://www.bd-pratidin.com/last-page/2022/08/25/801898>

observed that in most cases, acid is thrown due to [refusals of love or marriage proposals](#), [family quarrels](#), [land related disputes](#) and [previous enmity](#). During this reporting period, [Sathi Akter, a garment factory worker](#) in Manikganj's Satoria, and [Rozina Begum, a housewife](#) in Siddhirganj Upazila of Narayanganj district, died due to acid burns.

I. Bangladesh and its Neighbouring Countries

India's Interference with Bangladesh and Human Rights

Violations by BSF

87. In 2022, 18 Bangladeshis were killed and 21 were injured by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). Among those who were killed, 14 were gunned down, four were tortured. Among the 21 who were injured, 11 were shot, nine were tortured and one was injured by a stun grenade blast by BSF.
88. Both India's dominance over Bangladesh and human rights violations by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) continued in 2022. The current government has adopted a submissive foreign policy to stay in power as it was not elected by the people. As a result, the Indian government has been implementing its own plans, with vested interest, by imposing economic and political dominance over Bangladesh. The interests of Bangladesh are being severely damaged.²²⁴ India has been depriving Bangladesh of its right to water during the dry season for a long time. Although the Teesta Treaty would have been very important for the realization of Bangladesh's water rights, the Government of India has not executed the Treaty with the Government of Bangladesh. During Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in September 2022, the Kushiara Water Withdrawal Agreement was signed with India instead. The Agreement was signed to obtain India's permission to withdraw 153 cusecs of water from the Kushiara River, which is within Bangladesh. Bangladeshi experts consider this Agreement a mistake and a bad precedent. Due to this Agreement, India can intervene if Bangladesh wants to lift water from the joint rivers of Bangladesh and India from now on.²²⁵
89. Bangladeshi citizens have been killed and tortured along the India-Bangladesh border for decades. A bilateral Agreement on the non-use of lethal weapons at the border, was signed by the two countries during a Bangladesh-India Border Conference held in Dhaka in 2018.²²⁶ However, due to the aggressive attitude of the Indian government, members of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) have been killing, suppressing and torturing Bangladeshi citizens in violation of that agreement. Despite the repeated attacks on Bangladeshi citizens, the Government of Bangladesh has not taken

²²⁴The Indian government is taking transit facilities over Bangladesh almost free of cost. On India's request, Bangladesh has reduced the 'fee' from Tk 1054 per ton to Tk 192 per ton for transporting goods through it to the Indian states of Assam and Tripura. Despite protests from all quarters, India continued construction of the Rampal coal-based power plant. The construction of this power plant will destroy the biodiversity of Bangladesh's Sundarbans and its surroundings and push the country towards a dire humanitarian and natural disaster.

²²⁵The daily Prothom Alo, 18 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/j700wgfz17>

²²⁶The daily Samakal, 25 November 2022; <https://samakal.com/sports/article/2211143192/>

any effective role in stopping this. Not a single case of killing of a Bangladeshi citizen along the border has been prosecuted. BSF Director General Pankaj Kumar Singh told reporters in a joint press conference, after the BGB-BSF Director General level border conference at the BGB headquarters in Dhaka, that all the Bangladeshis who were shot dead by the BSF along the border were ‘criminals’ and involved in various crimes, including drug peddling. BGB Director General Major General Shakil Ahmed was present at the press conference but did not protest this statement.²²⁷ During Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s visit to India in September, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh Prime Minister expressed satisfaction over the reduction in border killings and agreed to reduce such killings to zero.²²⁸ Ironically on the night of the meeting held between the Prime Ministers of the two countries, a Bangladeshi schoolboy, Minarul Islam (16), was shot dead by the BSF at Dainur border under Dinajpur Sadar Upazila.²²⁹ A glimpse of human rights violations by BSF members is given below:



Deceased Minarul Islam (16). Photo: Prothom Alo, 9 September 2022

90. On 8 January 2022, [Maqbul Hossain](#) at Sapahar border in Naogaon District; on 13 February, [Faridul Islam](#) at Roumari border in Kurigram District; on 5 March, [Liton Biswas](#) at Daulatpur border in Kushtia District; on 17 March, [Rezaul](#) at Patgram border in Lalmonirhat District; on 30 August, [Shariful Islam Bhodu](#) (30) at Shinnagar border in Chapainawabganj District; on 7 October, [Abu Hasan](#) (25) at Kaliani border in Satkhira District; on 9 October, [Muntaz Hossain](#) (40) at Damarhudar Baldia border in Chuadanga District; on 9 November, [Waskuruni](#) (30) and [Aynal Haque](#) (28) at Aditmari Upazila border in Lalmonirhat District; on 15 December, [Shahdat Hossain](#) (28) at Patgram border in Lalmonirhat District; on 18 December, [Mohammad Shamim](#) (30) at Shibganj border in Chapainawabganj District; on 29 December, [Naziur Rahman Monglu](#) (40) and [Sadiq Hossain](#) (23) at

²²⁷The daily Prothom Alo, 22 July 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/o97jzdgteg>

²²⁸The daily Prothom Alo, 7 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/p9v16bibcc>

²²⁹The daily Prothom Alo, 9 September 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/briog2fncs>

Hatibandha border in Lalmonirhat District; and on 31 December, [Biblab at Patgram border](#) in Lalmonirhat District, were shot dead by BSF members.

91. On 13 November 2022, a Bangladeshi farmer named Mezhar was harvesting paddy in the Bangladesh side of Banspadua border under Parashuram Upazila in Feni District. BSF personnel illegally entered Bangladesh, beat Mezhar, injured him and took him to India. Mezhar was shot dead by BSF personnel shortly after the abduction.²³⁰
92. Apart from shooting and killing, BSF members also torture, sometimes to death, Bangladeshi citizens. On 27 February, a cowherd named Badal Hossain was tortured by BSF personnel and left near the border at Godagari in Rajshahi District.²³¹ On 8 September, a Bangladeshi national named [Tushar Khan](#) from the border area of Brahmanpara in Cumilla and on 19 September a teenager named [Abdur Rahim Masud](#) (18), while working in the land at Char Ashariadah border in Godagari, Rajshahi were abducted by BSF personnel. On 26 November, [Saddam Hossain](#) (32) at Hatibandha border in Lalmonirhat District; on 11 December, [Shahinur Rahman Shahin](#) at Putkhali border in Jessore were both tortured to death by BSF. In addition to this, two children aged 4 and 8 drowned in the river after being chased by BSF as they were returning to Bangladesh.²³² Furthermore, BSF members illegally entered [Bangladesh territory and attacked a farmer](#) while he was working.²³³ On 12 April 2022, a [Bangladeshi farmer named Mamun](#) (36) was arrested while spraying pesticides on his land at Porsha border in Naogaon District; and [Nazrul Ahmad alias Sefur Mia](#) was shot and taken away by BSF on 28 April at Juri border in Moulvibazar District.



Parveen Khatun (8) and Shakibul Hasan (4), who drowned trying to flee from BSF. Photo: Jugantor, 3 July 2022

93. Apart from killings, torture and abductions, BSF personnel unlawfully crossed the border, entered into Bangladesh and interfered in various activities. During this reporting period, a [BSF member was arrested while entering Bangladesh](#) through Dhamairhat border in Naogaon; armed BSF personnel illegally entered Bangladesh at the Akhaura border in

²³⁰The daily Jugantor, 30 November 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/620651/>

²³¹The daily Jugantor, 1 March 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/525552/>

²³²The daily Jugantor, 3 July 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/569377/>

²³³The daily Prothom Alo, 13 October 2022; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/1b3tk112c2>

Brahmanbaria and [removed the memorial plaques of the freedom fighters](#), who were martyred during the 1971 Liberation War at the border and [barred the construction of roads](#) within Bangladesh at Phulbaria border in Kurigram. These are violations of international law.



BSF members illegally entered Dahagram Union under Patgram Upazila of Lalmonirhat. Photo: Prothom Alo, 9 February 2022

Human Rights of the Rohingya Population

94. Most of the able-bodied adult Rohingya men and women living in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar are passing a despondent life, depending on relief, due to the lack of legal livelihood opportunities. They are also frustrated by the lack of progress of their repatriation to Myanmar. Rohingya men and women are fleeing the camps to different parts of the country and risking their lives by trying to go abroad by sea.²³⁴ About 180 Rohingya refugees are feared to have drowned after a boatload of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh went missing after floating in the Andaman Sea for several weeks.²³⁵ According to UNHCR data, about 400 people, mostly Rohingya, are believed to have died due to boats capsizing while making perilous journeys from Myanmar and Bangladesh across the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal in 2022.²³⁶ Rohingya women are also being raped while secretly trying leaving refugee camps.²³⁷ Fortify Rights made allegations of various forms of harassment and oppression, including police torture on Rohingyas, and the imposition of restrictions on the movement of Rohingya refugees in their camps during the Eid-ul-Fitr holiday in May 2022.²³⁸

²³⁴The daily Jugantor, 20 May 2022; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/552863/>

²³⁵The Guardian, 27 December 2022; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/26/very-weak-rohingya-refugees-land-on-indonesia-beach-after-weeks-at-sea?fbclid=IwAR0uplb5sVg1sMHF2MFpnTOFmyGifvQhFWTfdXOIe8MJScd79PtTh-vx3A&mibextid=Zxz2cZ>

²³⁶The Guardian, 4 January 2023; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/08/rohingya-refugees-bet-lives-boat-crossings-rising-death-toll-myanmar-bangladesh>

²³⁷The Daily Star, 4 May 2022; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/man-arrested-over-rape-rohingya-refugee-camp-coxs-bazar-3017026>

²³⁸ Bangladesh: Investigate Refugee-beatings by Police, lift Restrictions on Movement; <https://www.fortifyrights.org/bgd-inv-2022-05-26/>

J. State Repression on Odhikar

95. Extreme state repression on Odhikar, that started in 2013, continued in 2022. Odhikar and human rights defenders associated with it, have never stood back from the human rights movement, despite being subjected to human rights violations by state forces. For this reason, the Awami League government has used law enforcement agencies, the NGO Affairs Bureau, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Election Commission, and print and electronic media owned by supporters of the government and ruling party against Odhikar. In 2013, Odhikar Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan were detained under the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 (amended 2009), for publishing a fact-finding report on extrajudicial killings. They are currently on trial at the Cyber Tribunal of Dhaka.²³⁹
96. On 13 May 2019, Odhikar filed a Writ Petition (No. 5402/2019) at the High Court Division of the Supreme Court against the non-renewal of its registration by the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) under the Prime Minister's Office. Odhikar submitted its application for renewal of registration in 2014. The honourable court issued a Rule to the NGOAB asking why the inaction of the NGOAB regarding the renewal of registration of Odhikar filed on 25 September 2014, should not be considered as unlawful and why the NGOAB should not be directed in accordance with the law, to renew the registration of Odhikar since 2015. The NGOAB was asked to respond to the Rule within two weeks, but it did not take any action regarding the renewal of Odhikar's registration.
97. On 7 February 2022, the NGO Affairs Bureau sent a letter to Odhikar. Although the content of the letter was related to the renewal of registration of Odhikar, it irrelevantly wanted to know the names and full addresses of the victims of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances from 2009-2021. In response to this letter, on 28 February Odhikar said that since the issue of renewal of Odhikar's registration was being heard in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, there was no opportunity for Odhikar to provide any information on this matter outside of court. On 1 March, the Attorney

²³⁹ On 14 February 2021, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court (AD) dismissed the application for dismissal of the case filed against the Secretary and Director of Odhikar and directed that the case be referred to the Cyber Tribunal for hearing. Subsequently, a review application was filed with the AD seeking reconsideration of Odhikar's application for dismissal of the case. The first hearing of the case was held on 12 September 2021 at the Dhaka Cyber Tribunal. On this day, when Odhikar's Secretary and Director appeared before the Tribunal, their lawyer informed the Tribunal of the application for review (Review Petition No. 8/2021, dated 04/04/2011) pending in the Appellate Division and appealed to the Tribunal to take necessary steps after the review hearing in the AD. But the Tribunal did not grant the prayer and fixed 5 October 2021 as the date for taking evidence and examining witnesses for the Prosecution (PW). The Tribunal then proceeded to take evidence and examined witnesses for the Prosecution on 9 November and 24 November 2021. On 15 December the PW was not present, so the next date for examination was set for 20 January 2022. On 20 February, the next date, the PW to be examined was absent as well, and the same thing occurred on the next given date, 28 March. On 8 May a PW was examined but on the next given date, 9 June 2022, it was learnt at the Tribunal, that the PW who was to be examined that day, had passed away several months ago. The Tribunal fixed 13 July 2022 as the next date. On 13 July as the PW was absent. The PW who was to be examined on 3 August was deceased. The PW who was to be examined on 22 August was also deceased. However, the defendants still had to appear at the Tribunal on those days. Prosecution of witnesses were examined on 5 and 26 September, and 17 October respectively. On 27 November, the special Public Prosecutor presented two PWs from the Detective Branch of Police. However, the Tribunal Judge did not take their depositions as they were not relevant to the case. The Tribunal fixed 15 January 2023 as the next date.

General's Office, without informing Odhikar (the Petitioner), hastily moved for Odhikar's Writ Petition to be heard by a Division Bench of Justice Mohammad Khasruzzaman and Justice Mohammad Mahmud Hassan Talukder at the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. Simultaneously, the NGOAB suspended its registration for eight years and refused to renew it on 5 June 2022. On 28 June, Odhikar appealed to the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office against the decision of the NGOAB. After a hearing on 3 August, the Prime Minister's Office upheld the original decision of the NGO Affairs Bureau on 1 September not to renew Odhikar's registration. Odhikar filed another Writ Petition (12007/2022) on 18 October 2022 before the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, challenging the NGOAB's decision not to renew the registration and the Order of the Prime Minister's Office. On 30 October, the court issued a Rule to the government in this regard. There is no response from the government side.

98. After the United States imposed sanctions against the RAB for serious human rights abuses, surveillance by government intelligence agencies on Odhikar intensified throughout 2022. During this period, the government and pro-government activists carried out malicious propaganda against Odhikar in various media.
99. In 2022, human rights defenders associated with Odhikar were under intelligence surveillance and subjected to various forms of intimidation and harassment for speaking out about human rights violations and communicating with members of the victims' families. Abdul Kaium, a human rights defender in Mymensingh associated with Odhikar, was arrested on 11 May 2019 under the Digital Security Act (DSA), 2018. On 17 January 2022, Mymensingh's Cyber Tribunal Judge held a one-sided hearing in the absence of Abdul Kaium's lawyer in a case filed against him under the DSA. Another human rights defender in Rajshahi associated with Odhikar, was called by a RAB official from his office at 9:00 pm on 7 March 2022 and asked about his contacts with the families of the disappeared victims and also about the meetings organised by 'Maayer Daak', a network of the families of the disappeared.

K. Recommendations

1. Immediate steps must be taken to establish democracy by forming an accountable government through free, fair and participatory elections under an interim government and to take steps to prevent human rights violations by reconstructing the dysfunctional institutions into effective, independent ones.
2. The UN Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) must adopt a new mandate on Bangladesh to collect evidence of gross human rights violations.
3. The Government's interference with constitutional and state institutions must be stopped. Political violence and criminalisation must cease. Rule of law must be reinstituted and reinforced with a truly independent Judiciary and justice system.
4. Members of the law enforcement agencies who are involved in human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance, torture and inhumane treatment, must no longer enjoy impunity. They must be brought to justice and punished as per law of the land. Law enforcement agencies and security forces must be made to follow the Basic Principles on the use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.
5. The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 must be implemented effectively and the High Court and Appellate Division directives contained in the matter of BLAST and Others vs. Bangladesh and Others (2003) must be followed to control and prevent violations. The government must also ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.
6. All victims who still remain disappeared must be returned to their families. The government must accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and criminalise enforced disappearance by bringing it under domestic law.
7. The government must respect the rights to freedom of assembly and association guaranteed in the Constitution. Harassment on the leaders and activists of the opposition political parties and dissenters must be stopped. The government should stop filing cases against 'unidentified persons'. All political prisoners must be released.
8. Interference on freedoms of expression and the media must stop. All false cases filed against journalists and human rights defenders should be withdrawn and incidents of attacks on them must be properly investigated and those responsible be brought to justice. The targeted ban on some print and electronic media must be removed.
9. All repressive and abusive laws, including the Special Powers Act, 1974, the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006, Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009 and the Digital Security Act, 2018 should be repealed immediately.
10. To stop violence against women and children, the perpetrators must be tried and punished. Police accountability must be ensured.

11. Citizens belonging to linguistic, ethnic, religious and all other minority communities, must be protected and the state and government must take special measures to ensure their full rights.
12. Labour rights must be implemented in accordance with the ILO Conventions, including the right to form trade unions in all factories, including the readymade garment industries. Migrant workers must be protected and those involved in human trafficking must be brought to justice under the existing laws.
13. The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) must stop all human rights violations, including the killing and torturing of Bangladeshi citizens along the border areas, and compensate the victims. India must abide by all Agreements and Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two countries. India's invasive and aggressive behaviour towards Bangladesh must stop.
14. Rohingyas must be repatriated by establishing and guaranteeing their full civil and political rights. Education, medical treatment and employment must be ensured in camps for Rohingya refugees. Repression on refugees must stop.
15. The ongoing state repression, surveillance and harassment on human rights organisations and human rights defenders must cease. The case filed against Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and its Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amended in 2009) must be withdrawn. The NGO Affairs Bureau must renew Odhikar's registration. The government must allow human rights defenders to work independently and with no fear of persecution, violence or harassment.

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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.