



# **Three-month Human Rights Report**

**January - March 2024**

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## Foreword

Since its establishment in 1994, Odhikar, as a human rights organisation, has always strived to raise public awareness of human rights violations committed by the state and to campaign, protest, and prevent the state from committing human rights violations of internationally recognized civil and political rights. Odhikar stands in solidarity with victims of human rights abuses and works to ensure victims' safety and justice.

The human rights situation in the first three months of 2024 is a continuation of the human rights situation of the last 15 years under the current government. After the Awami League (AL) government came to power in 2009, the human rights situation took a turn for the worse and is still in bad shape, predominantly due to the forceful power hogging of the AL, through destruction of the electoral system. Bangladesh is a state party to eight key international treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Bangladesh has also ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. However, the current government has taken away the people's right to vote without respecting the obligations contained in these treaties; and usurped power through farcical elections<sup>1</sup>. A huge vacuum has been created in terms of democracy, accountability and rule of law in the country as a result. The government has chosen the path of repression to remain in power.

Odhikar has been facing extreme state repression and harassment since 2013, over its human rights activities. On 14 September 2023, Dhaka Cyber Tribunal Judge AM Zulfiker Hayet sentenced Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan each to two years in prison and fined both men Tk 10,000 under the repressive Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 over the publication of a fact-finding report on extrajudicial killings in 2013. In 2022, the NGO Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office refused to renew Odhikar's registration, after keeping its renewal application pending for eight years. Despite ongoing state harassment and obstruction, Odhikar continues to highlight human rights violations. Government repression, regulation and interference with freedom of expression have led to the imposition of self-censorship in reporting. In such an adverse situation, Odhikar has prepared human rights report for the first three months of 2024, based on the reports sent by the human rights defenders associated with it and the data published in various media.

Website: [www.odhikar.org](http://www.odhikar.org)

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/>

Twitter: @odhikar\_bd

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<sup>1</sup> Awami League unilaterally participated in the 10<sup>th</sup> National Parliament election on 5 January 2014, despite the boycott of almost all political parties. In this controversial election, people were disenfranchised and 153 Members of Parliament were elected unopposed before the polls. On 30 December 2018, the ruling Awami League nominated candidates in the 11<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary elections also stamped the ballot papers and stuffed them in boxes the night before the polls, and cast fake votes, openly forced voters to vote for the ruling party's candidates, occupied the polling centres and detaining and forcibly ousting polling agents of the opposition nominated candidates, and intimidated voters.

## Contents

<b>Statistics: January - March 2024*</b> .....	1
<b>The Election Commission and a one-sided Election for the Twelfth National Parliament</b> ...	2
<i>Local government elections</i> .....	5
<b>Acts of Violence and Criminalization of the ruling Awami League</b> .....	6
<i>Repression on opposition party leaders and activists</i> .....	9
<i>Perpetuation of the repressive Speedy Trial Act</i> .....	11
<i>Hindrance to and attacks on rallies and meetings of the opposition</i> .....	12
<b>Prevalence of Corruption and the Anti-Corruption Commission</b> .....	14
<b>Extrajudicial Killings</b> .....	15
<b>Torture, Degrading Treatment, Lack of Accountability and Death in Custody</b> .....	16
<b>Enforced Disappearances</b> .....	18
<b>Provision of the Death Penalty and Human Rights</b> .....	19
<b>Human Rights Violations in Prisons</b> .....	19
<b>Public Lynching</b> .....	21
<b>Freedom of Expression</b> .....	21
<i>Repressive Cyber Security Act, 2023</i> .....	22
<i>Freedom of the media</i> .....	23
<b>Violence against Women</b> .....	25
<i>Rape</i> .....	25
<i>Sexual Harassment</i> .....	26
<i>Dowry related violence</i> .....	27
<i>Acid violence</i> .....	27
<b>Policies of the Indian government and Human Rights Violations on the Bangladesh-India border by Indian BSF</b> .....	28
<b>Impediments to Human Rights Activities and State Repression on HRDs</b> .....	30

## Statistics: January - March 2024\*

Statistics: January - March 2024*					
Type of Human Rights Violations		January	February	March	Total
Extrajudicial killings	Crossfire	0	0	0	0
	Tortured to death	1	1	0	2
	Shot to death	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
Enforced Disappearances		0	0	1	1
Death in Jail		15	15	11	41
Political Violence	Killed	22	15	8	45
	Injured	1,555	385	202	2,142
Death Penalty	Sentenced to death	36	43	32	111
	Execution of death sentence	0	0	0	0
Human rights violations by Indian BSF	Bangladeshis Killed	2	0	4	6
	Bangladeshis Injured	0	1	4	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>
Attack on journalists	Killed	0	0	0	0
	Injured	29	14	8	51
	Assaulted	2	2	2	6
	Attacked	0	0	4	4
	Arrested	0	0	1	1
	Threatened	9	2	9	20
	Sued	0	2	1	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>85</b>
Public lynching		6	4	8	18

\* Odhikar documentation

## The Election Commission and a one-sided Election for the Twelfth National Parliament

1. The National Parliament is very important to a democratic state. However, the AL-led government's Election Commission, like the previous Commissions under this regime, conducted another farcical parliamentary election on 7 January 2024. With the aim of conducting this one-sided and farcical election, the government systematically cracked down on political opponents and suppressed leaders and activists of the opposition parties (especially BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami) throughout 2023. The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and other opposition political parties have been agitating for the resignation of the Awami League government, a dissolution of parliament and elections to be conducted under a non-partisan caretaker government. On 28 October 2023, the government went on an all-out attack by using members of the law enforcement agencies to halt BNP's mass rally set to be held that day. Apart from BNP, most of the political parties, including leftist and Islamist parties boycotted this election. Before this farcical election, the government sponsored the creation of new political parties (popularly known as 'king's party') and enabled them to participate in the election by registering them with the Election Commission. Besides, to make a show of a 'participatory' election, the ruling party created 'dummy candidates' and made their party leaders (who had not won nominations) 'contest' as independent candidates.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, according to clause 47(tha) of the Awami League Constitution, a party member is to be expelled if he/she stands against the party-nominated candidate. Thus, the Awami League took this decision contravening its own party constitution, to artificially create an atmosphere of competition. Although the Awami League restricted a national election to within its own party, widespread clashes across the country occurred before the elections. During that period several polling stations were set on fire in different places. Political parties boycotting the elections called upon the people to refrain from voting. Heeding this call, a majority of voters boycotted this one-sided and farcical election.<sup>3</sup>
2. Voter turnout inside most of the polling stations was very low on election day.<sup>4</sup> The leaders and activists of the ruling party even created a fake voter line to show the presence of voters.<sup>5</sup> The government's subservient Election Commission reported that 41.8 percent of voters exercised their franchise. However, the Election Commission had said that the total vote cast in the first 7 hours till 3:00 pm, was at 27.15 percent.<sup>6</sup> 15 percent vote casting in last one

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<sup>2</sup> Manabzamin, 27 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=85494>

<sup>3</sup> Jugantor, 8 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/760577/>

<sup>4</sup> Manabzamin, 8 January 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=92083>, Prothom Alo, 8 January 2024; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=812205dd39&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=08/01/2024&sedl=1>, Jugantor, 8 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/760641/>

<sup>5</sup> Manabzamin, 8 January 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=92143>, Manabzamin, 8 January 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=92148>

<sup>6</sup> Samakal, 8 January 2024; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/217119/>

hour, as per EC's report, raised questions in the public mind.<sup>7</sup> No votes were cast in 27 polling centres of Khagrachari and Rangamati Districts.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, 50 to 60 per cent voting was also shown by the EC in the polling centres which were reported to have been empty throughout the day.<sup>9</sup> At the last minute of the election, incidents of frantic stamping on the AL's 'boat symbol' on ballot papers, occurred openly.<sup>10</sup> There was no contest in 241 of the 300 parliamentary seats in the election. All the candidates who contested against Awami League nominated candidates in 104 of the seats have lost their security money.<sup>11</sup>



*In Jamla Gabtali Government Primary School polling centre under Dumki Upazila in Patuakhali, agents of two candidates were seen stuffing ballot boxes. Photo: Prothom Alo, 10 January 2024*

3. Although the election was held between Awami League nominees and independent candidates belonging to Awami League, polls were far from smooth. There were allegations of various irregularities, including capturing polling centres<sup>12</sup>, vote rigging, clashes, expulsion of opposition party polling agents from centres, crude bomb explosions and widespread casting of fake votes in various polling centres.<sup>13</sup> Children and adolescents were also seen voting in various polling centres.<sup>14</sup> Election officials were also involved in various irregularities.<sup>15</sup> The Presiding Officers illegally obtained signatures on the result sheets from the polling agents of the candidates, before the end of polling in Dhaka and Dinajpur.<sup>16</sup> It has been reported that the opposition candidates did not get any response to their complaints of vote rigging, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Manabzamin, 8 January 2024; [https://mzamin.com/uploads/cover/2024-01-0824\\_Back%20Page%20\(08-01-2024\)-CITY%20copy.webp](https://mzamin.com/uploads/cover/2024-01-0824_Back%20Page%20(08-01-2024)-CITY%20copy.webp)

<sup>8</sup> Prothom Alo, 8 January 2024; [https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=8168f06cd1&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=08/01/2024&sedl\\_d=1](https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=8168f06cd1&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=08/01/2024&sedl_d=1)

<sup>9</sup> Samakal, 11 January 2024; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/217549/>

<sup>10</sup> Prothom Alo, 10 January 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/nnp51gsxdn>

<sup>11</sup> Prothom Alo, 10 January 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/7ywjrv72xr>

<sup>12</sup> Manabzamin, 8 January 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=92080>

<sup>13</sup> Jugantor, 8 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/760546/>

<sup>14</sup> Jugantor, 8 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/760570/>

<sup>15</sup> Jugantor, 8 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/760648/>

<sup>16</sup> Prothom Alo, 7 January 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/o0pyt5vhjm>



from the Election Commission and the administration.<sup>17</sup> Two people were also killed in clashes on election day.<sup>18</sup>



*Two children photographed in a polling centre of Dhaka-1 constituency had come to 'cast their vote' in the National election. Photo: Jugantar, 8 January 2024*



*Ballot papers already stamped, in East Nasirabad Government Boys High School polling centre of Chittagong-10 Constituency. Photo: Prothom Alo, 7 January 2024*

4. Along with the destruction of the democratic system in the country, a new rich class has emerged due to rampant corruption and lack of accountability. This rich class significantly influenced the 12<sup>th</sup> National Parliament elections. About 67 percent of the MPs who became parliamentarians through this so-called 'election' are businessmen and about 90 percent of them are billionaires.<sup>19</sup>
5. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) reported that the 12<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary elections were one-sided and rigged.<sup>20</sup> Citizens for Good Governance (Sujan) has termed the election a 'one-sided, seat-sharing election'. The Election Commission claimed an average of 41.8 percent votes were cast in 300 constituencies, but in reality, it was far less.<sup>21</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, in a statement about the election, observed that thousands of leaders and activists of the opposition parties have been arbitrarily detained or intimidated in the past few months

<sup>17</sup> Jugantar, 8 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/others/760538/>

<sup>18</sup> Jugantar, 8 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/760546/>

<sup>19</sup> Samakal, 24 January 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/219484/>

<sup>20</sup> Jugantar, 18 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/764274/>

<sup>21</sup> Prothom Alo, 27 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/opinion/column/nbopri7osf>

- ahead of the polls. Moreover, violence and repression of opposition candidates and supporters were committed by the ruling party on election day.<sup>22</sup>
6. International and regional election monitoring organisations refrained from observing this farcical election on 7 January. The Election Commission invited foreign individuals with no experience in election observation, as election observers at the public's expense as an attempt to certify the acceptability of this one-sided and dummy election. 80 foreign 'observers' from 12 countries were accommodated in a five-star hotel in Dhaka and all their expenses were met from the state treasury.<sup>23</sup>
  7. The post-election period saw widespread violence across the country, which continued till March 2024.<sup>24</sup> Such violence spread in 39 of the 64 districts of Bangladesh.<sup>25</sup> Incidents of explosions caused by hand-made bombs, use of local weapons and firearms<sup>26</sup>, looting and setting fire to houses, took place across the country as part of the post-election violence.<sup>27</sup> Six people were killed and hundreds were injured in the violence.<sup>28</sup>
  8. During this reporting period, there have been attacks on the citizens of the Hindu community in different parts of the country. Their houses, businesses and places of worship were vandalized. In a meeting, the National Citizen Coordination Cell for the Implementation of the Transfer of Property Act, said that at least 13 incidents of attacks on minority communities occurred in 10 days (between 4-13 January 2024) before and after the January 7 parliamentary elections. All these incidents were election-centric. One person from the minority community was killed and 37 were injured in these incidents.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Local government elections***

9. Local government elections, including Cumilla and Mymensingh City Corporation elections, were held in various parts of the country, under the current Election Commission. While the main opposition BNP and other political parties boycotted these local elections, Awami League decided to conduct them openly without giving out party symbols in the polls. There have been allegations of various irregularities, including intimidation of voters, in these elections.<sup>30</sup> Before the elections, supporters of the ruling party attacked the election campaign meetings of independent candidates. Like in the national elections, the ruling Awami League caused attacks and vandalism

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<sup>22</sup> Jugantor, 9 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/763012/>

<sup>23</sup> Manabzamin, 3 January 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=91315>

<sup>24</sup> Jugantor, 9 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/760996/>

<sup>25</sup> Samakal, 19 January 2024; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/218705/>

<sup>26</sup> Samakal, 14 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/227594>

<sup>27</sup> Prothom Alo, 14 January 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/zwxqjzw9o>

<sup>28</sup> Manabzamin, 16 January 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=93333>

<sup>29</sup> Prothom Alo, 3 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/rfrn0j6w9t>

<sup>30</sup> Manabzamin, 9 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=100906>, Jugantor, 9 March 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/782786/>, Jugantor, 9 March 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/782780/>, Samakal, 9 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/226777/>



and human casualties due to their own internal party conflicts during the local government elections.<sup>31</sup>



*Hridoy Bhuiyan was shot dead in electoral violence. Photo: Samakal, 10 March 2024*

## Acts of Violence and Criminalization of the ruling Awami League

10. After the Awami League (AL) took power for a fourth time through an unacceptable and farcical election on 7 January, the ruling party's leaders and activists have become more reckless. In the first three months of 2024, there have been allegations of widespread violence and criminal activities, against the leaders and activists of the Awami League and its affiliated organisations, including Chhatra League<sup>32</sup> and Jubo League<sup>33</sup>. Local leaders of the AL are allegedly supporting 'top terrorists' in different areas of Dhaka and are also accused of supplying firearms to them.<sup>34</sup> Apart from this, there has been an emergence of 'Kishore gangs'<sup>35</sup>, across the country with patronization of the ruling party leaders.<sup>36</sup> The members of 'Kishore gangs' are involved in various crimes, including murder, robbery, rape and sexual harassment, land grabbing and extortion. The ruling Awami League leaders have also held the transport sector hostage and this sector is riddled with irregularities and corruption. As a result, passengers are not getting the expected services and workers are being deprived from their fair dues. There are allegations of extortion amounting to Tk 10.6 billion annually from the transport sector.<sup>37</sup> During this period, allegations were made against AL activists and affiliates over various offences, including the rape of women activist of the party<sup>38</sup>, acts of extortion, drug trade and the setting up torture cells for terrorist activities<sup>39</sup>, seizing

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<sup>31</sup> Prothom Alo, 10 March 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/9r2abypung>, Samakal, 10 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/226863/>

<sup>32</sup> Student wing of Awami League.

<sup>33</sup> Youth wing of Awami League.

<sup>34</sup> Jugantor, 19 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/776117/>

<sup>35</sup> Criminal gangs made up of adolescents and teenagers.

<sup>36</sup> Prothom Alo, 13 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/y4sngprpy9>, Jugantor, 3 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/770469/>, and Jugantor, 18 March 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/785876/>

<sup>37</sup> Jugantor, 6 March 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/781543/>

<sup>38</sup> Manabzamin, 9 February 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=96939>

<sup>39</sup> Prothom Alo, 15 January 2024;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=151651f9b68&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=15/01/2024&sedId=1> and Jugantor, 20 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/776355/>

tender bids<sup>40</sup>, grabbing of government<sup>41</sup> and ordinary citizens' land<sup>42</sup>, public displays of local weapons<sup>43</sup> and the breaking of bones of a farmer who did not vote for the ruling party in the 12<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election<sup>44</sup>. Leaders and activists of the ruling party clashed among each other over establishing supremacy and openly brandished and used various weapons, including firearms.<sup>45</sup> Ordinary people and Awami League members have been killed and injured in these incidents.<sup>46</sup>

11. In 2024, Chhatra League leaders and activists committed violence in various areas and in educational institutions under the shelter of the leaders of the ruling AL<sup>47</sup> and due to this shelter, they are enjoying impunity. It has been reported that the Vice-Chancellor of Chittagong University is to withdraw a case filed against 14 people, including 12 Chhatra League leaders and activists who had been charged with vandalism and destruction of property<sup>48</sup>. In accordance with the Vice-Chancellor Shireen Akhtar's instructions, an application has been made to the Chittagong Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court on 23 March 2024.<sup>49</sup> During this reporting period, women leaders and activists of Chhatra League also committed various kinds of violence upon students.<sup>50</sup> Workplaces have not been spared either. On 4 March 2024, former Chhatra League leader and Sirajganj Shaheed M. Mansur Ali Medical College teacher, Dr. Raihan Sharif shot Arafat Amin, a student of the same college, with an illegal weapon following an argument during class. Students said that Raihan Sharif used to give indecent proposals to female students and he always carried a pistol in his pocket. The police arrested him.<sup>51</sup> Various other allegations have been found against Chhatra League leaders and activists for offences, including 'seat trading' in the educational institutions, tender-bidding<sup>52</sup>, selling drugs in dormitories<sup>53</sup>, extortion on campus<sup>54</sup> and on goods vehicles<sup>55</sup>, mugging<sup>56</sup>, and physical violence for not getting subscriptions<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Manabzamin, 19 January 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=93696>

<sup>41</sup> Manabzamin, 19 February 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=98315>

<sup>42</sup> Jugantor, 9 March 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/782749/>

<sup>43</sup> Jugantor, 27 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/767598/>

<sup>44</sup> Jugantor, 28 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/779166/>

<sup>45</sup> Prothom Alo, 16 March 2024;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=16309bbd8c2&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=16/03/2024&sedid=1>

<sup>46</sup> Prothom Alo, 16 March 2024;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=16309bbd8c2&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=16/03/2024&sedid=1> and Samakal, 16 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/227991/>

<sup>47</sup> Samakal, 17 February 2024; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2024-02-17/1/5921>

<sup>48</sup> On the night of 7 September 2023, the Chittagong University Vice-Chancellor's residence, transport office, police box and teachers' club were vandalized in protest of an accident caused by Chittagong University's shuttle train. On 9 September 2023, Acting Registrar of the University KM Noor Ahmed and security officer Sheikh Mohammad Abdur Razzak, filed a lawsuit accusing 14 people, including 12 leaders and activists of Chhatra League and 1,000 unknown people.

<sup>49</sup> Samakal, 23 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/229225/>

<sup>50</sup> Prothom Alo, 9 March 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ixi4yd0mw6>

<sup>51</sup> Manabzamin, 5 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=100349>, Prothom Alo, 5 March 2024;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=5382667cca&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=05/03/2024&sedid=1>

<sup>52</sup> Samakal, 18 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/223482/>

<sup>53</sup> Samakal, 7 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/221727/>



Activists seen in masks and helmets carrying machete and sticks during clashes between various groups of Chhatra League in Chittagong University. Photo: Samakal, 17 February 2024

12. A party led by former general secretary of Kalapara Chhatra League in Patuakhali District, Ashiq Talukder, has stopped the Payra Port development work due to non-payment of a three-million-taka monthly subscription, as demanded by him. Chhatra League leaders-activists have, at various times, attacked the people of the contractor company involved in the development of Payra Port, injured five people, including an engineer and vandalized their office.<sup>58</sup>
13. In addition, Chhatra League leaders and activists clashed with each other in various places, including educational institutions over dominance in those places.<sup>59</sup> In these incidents, the administration of the educational institutions did not take any action against the accused Chhatra League leaders and activists.<sup>60</sup>



Chhatra League activist Naeem Arafat holding a machete in front of Shahjalal hall of the Chittagong University. Photo: Prothom Alo, 19 February 2024.

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<sup>54</sup> Prothom Alo, 8 March 2024;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=8318588992&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=08/03/2024&sedld=1>

<sup>55</sup> Samakal, 8 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/221930/>

<sup>56</sup> Prothom Alo, 16 March 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ms11ciaq3v>

<sup>57</sup> Prothom Alo, 2 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/l6pqc1bi2j>

<sup>58</sup> Dhaka Tribune, 6 March 2024; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/341158/>

<sup>59</sup> Samakal, 17 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/223286/>

<sup>60</sup> Prothom Alo, 19 February 2024;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=1923607c823&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=19/02/2024&sedld=1>

14. Between January and March 2024, political violence has left at least 45 people killed and 2,142 people injured. During this reporting period, 185 incidents of internal conflict between Awami League have been recorded. In the internal conflict of Awami League 16 people were killed and 1,143 people were injured. It is to be noted that during the 12<sup>th</sup> National Parliament election, there were clashes between the nominated and independent candidates of Awami League. Since most of the independent candidates were associated with the AL, there have also been incidents of internal conflict within the party.

### ***Repression on opposition party leaders and activists***

15. The government filed false cases against opposition leaders and activists and arrested thousands of leaders and activists in connection with the 'election' on 7 January. It has been alleged that the arrested BNP leaders and activists were treated inhumanely by the police and prison administration.
16. On 10 January 2024, Barishal Metropolitan unit BNP convener Moniruzzaman Farooq was brought to court in fetters.<sup>61</sup> On 13 January 2024, police brought Mohammad Nazmul, joint convener of Mirzaganj Upazila unit Chhatra Dal<sup>62</sup>, who was released on parole, to his father's funeral in fetters in Mirzaganj under Patuakhali District. Even during the burial of his father, his fetters were not removed. A writ was filed in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court in this regard. The High Court said the authorities cannot use fetters to restrain prisoner unless they are notorious criminals or militants. The court observed that if such practice continued then we might be considered 'uncivilized'.<sup>63</sup>
17. BNP leaders and activists across the country went into hiding during the (police) arrest operation before the elections. After the elections, many leaders and activists were attacked by the ruling party after returning from hiding. Apart from this, opposition leaders and their family members were subjected to police arrests, harassment and torture. It has been alleged that ruling party members attacked the family members of BNP leaders and activists after they could not find the latter at home. Despite getting bail from the High Court Division, a BNP leader was arrested in another case and the police allegedly extracted a 'confession' from him through torture.<sup>64</sup>
18. On 19 January 2024, supporters of Chanpara Awami League Acting General Secretary Shamsar Ali attacked BNP leader Harun Miyaji's house in Rupganj under Narayanganj District. When Harun Miyaji was not found, his wife and children were attacked and seriously injured.<sup>65</sup>
19. Sheikh Imam Hossain, Member Secretary of Khulna Metropolitan unit BNP, was arrested by the police on his way home from Dhaka on 5 February, after receiving interim bail for eight weeks from the High Court Division of the

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<sup>61</sup> Manabzamin, 11 January 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=92549>

<sup>62</sup> Student wing of BNP

<sup>63</sup> The Daily Star, 31 January 2024; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/fetters-only-militants-top-criminals-hc-3532436> Prothom Alo, 15 January 2024; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/d2wckae7b9>

<sup>64</sup> Naya Diganta, 8 February 2024; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/812438/>

<sup>65</sup> Jugantor, 20 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/765182/>



Supreme Court. He was arrested in a case filed under the Special Powers Act, 1974 in connection with setting fire to the Dakshinpara Government Primary School polling centre on the night before the January 7 election. After his arrest, Sheikh Imam Hossain was allegedly tortured by the police and forced to confess his involvement in the incident.<sup>66</sup>

20. A BNP leader named Mohammad Musa in Raujan of Chittagong secretly came home on the night of 15 February 2024, fearing an attack by Awami League leaders and activists. On 16 February, when Musa came out of a local mosque after Friday prayers, around 10-12 activists led by Awami League leader Shahjahan Iqbal, attacked him. Locals rescued the badly injured Musa and took him to the Upazila Health Complex, where the doctor declared him dead.<sup>67</sup> When Musa's family wanted to file a case with the police station the police did not take the case. Later they filed a case with the Chittagong court on 13 March. Enraged by this, the miscreants of the ruling party attacked the house of the deceased Musa on 15 March and locked the house after forcibly ousting the women out.<sup>68</sup>
21. On 13 March 2024, senior joint secretary of Natore District unit BNP, Farhad Ali Dewan Shaheen, was beaten and seriously injured by Awami League activists, who broke his left arm, when he was returning home after appearing in court. The miscreants shot him and left him on the street for dead. After getting the news, BNP leaders and activists rescued Shaheen and sent him to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.<sup>69</sup>



*BNP leader Farhad Ali Dewan Shaheen, was beaten up and injured by AL in Natore.  
Photo: Manabzamin, 14 March 2024*

22. In 2023, the police failed to find BNP leader Hamid Bhuiyan and arrested his wife Hafsa and charged her with sabotage. Her daughters, Noorjahan (4) and Aklima (7) lived with relatives, as Hafsa had been detained in jail for five months. The lower court had repeatedly denied Hafsa's bail applications. On 4 March 2024, Noorjahan and Aklima along with their grandmother, came to the High Court Division of the Supreme Court for their mother's bail hearing. A

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<sup>66</sup> Naya Diganta, 8 February 2024; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/812438/>

<sup>67</sup> Manabzamin, 16 February 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=98103>

<sup>68</sup> Manabzamin, 16 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=101910>

<sup>69</sup> Manabzamin, 14 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=101552>

- High Court Division bench consisting of Justice Mohammad Ruhul Quddus and Justice AKM Rabiul Hassan granted Hafsa bail.<sup>70</sup>
23. BNP leaders and activists have been illegally detained in jail for extra days after getting bail from the court. Members of the defence intelligence agency – Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), Special Branch of Police (SB) and National Security Intelligence (NSI) – have been present in prisons to obstruct the release of opposition leaders and activists after they get bail from the courts; which is an obvious violation of the law. On 4 November 2023, BNP’s organizing secretary Syed Imran Saleh Prince was arrested by the Detective Branch of Police (DB). He was granted bail in all cases filed against him and the bail documents reached the jail on 5 February 2024. However, he was released on 10 February from Kashimpur Central Jail in Gazipur six days after receiving the bail order.<sup>71</sup>
  24. BNP leaders and activists are not getting their belongings returned to them after being released on bail. At the time of their arrest, members of the law enforcement agencies took away their belongings, such as motorcycles, cell phones, laptops, watches, wallets and cash, but later they deny taking the items.<sup>72</sup>
  25. There are allegedly more than two hundred cases filed against Rajib Ahsan, General Secretary of Swechchasebak Dal<sup>73</sup>. He has been convicted and imprisoned for eight and a half years in four cases. More than three hundred cases were filed against Mamun Hasan, a senior vice-president of Jubo Dal<sup>74</sup>. He has been convicted and imprisoned for 13 and a half years in five cases. Earlier the police arrested Mamun’s wife, sister and two nieces when Mamun was not found at home.<sup>75</sup>
  26. At least 1,724 opposition leaders and activists were sentenced from 1 August to 31 December 2023 when their trials were expedited in political cases, with the aim of implementing the agenda of one-sided elections. Most of them were BNP leaders and activists.<sup>76</sup> Even in 2024, opposition party leaders and activists are being punished. On 1 January, 18 leaders and activists of BNP and its affiliated organisations were jailed for three years by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Begum Afsan Sumi in Dhaka.<sup>77</sup>

### ***Perpetuation of the repressive Speedy Trial Act***

27. On 29 January 2024, a Cabinet meeting decided to make the Law and Order Offenses (Speedy Trial) Act, 2002 permanent.<sup>78</sup> On 5 March, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal introduced the Speedy Trial Act (Amendment) Bill

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<sup>70</sup> Prothom Alo, 5 March 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/1fmn9hdmqi>

<sup>71</sup> New Age, 13 March 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/227819/>

<sup>72</sup> Samakal, 23 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/224306>

<sup>73</sup> Voluntary wing of BNP

<sup>74</sup> Youth wing of BNP

<sup>75</sup> Samakal, 23 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/219332/>

<sup>76</sup> New Age, 19 December 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/220585/>

<sup>77</sup> Prothom Alo, 3 January 2024;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=31389b1a6b&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=03/01/2024&sedl d=1>

<sup>78</sup> New Age, 30 January 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/224122/speedy-trial-act-to-become-permanent>



in the National Parliament and it was passed by a unanimous voice vote.<sup>79</sup> Earlier, the term of this law has been extended in phases. In 2002, the BNP government enacted this law. At that time, the opposition Awami League said that this law was enacted to suppress the opposition. After the Awami League came to power, instead of repealing this law, it extended its term in different phases.<sup>80</sup>

## ***Hindrance to and attacks on rallies and meetings of the opposition***

28. In 2024, the government cracked down on various opposition political parties and dissidents and restricted citizens' right to freedom of assembly. The government has made it mandatory that police permission has to be obtained for holding any meetings or processions, which is contrary to Article 37 of the Constitution of Bangladesh and Article 21 of the ICCPR. During this reporting period, the police and Awami League leaders and activists attacked peaceful rallies and processions of BNP and other opposition political parties, ordinary students and several organizations agitating for various demands. Even during the holy month of Ramadan, discussion meetings and iftar gatherings were attacked by the ruling party members, and the police stopped a programme organised to help the destitute people.<sup>81</sup>
29. On 30 January 2024, the police attacked and dispersed the black flag march organised by Gono Odhikar Parishad which was demanding the cancellation of the illegal Parliament, against the rise in commodity prices, demanding the release of BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia and for the withdrawal of false and fictitious cases. At least 15 leaders and activists were injured in this attack.<sup>82</sup>



*The black flag procession of the Gono Odhikar Parishad was obstructed by the police. Photo: Manabzamin, 30 January 2024*

30. On 19 February 2024, leaders and activists of the Awami League-backed Chhatra League attacked and stopped a programme titled "People's Signature for Democracy" organised by Nagorik Okkya at Khamarbari in Dhaka. Police

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<sup>79</sup> Naya Diganta, 5 March 2024; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/parliament/819016/>

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Samakal, 15 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/227845/>

<sup>82</sup> Manabzamin, 30 January 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=95555>

were stationed there during the attack by Chhatra League but did not take any action. Nagorik Okkya leader Shakib Anwar was seriously injured.<sup>83</sup>

31. On 24 February 2024, when leaders and activists of the 12-party alliance went to hold a rally under the banner of 'India Out, Boycott India' in front of the National Press Club, the police snatched away their banner and festoons. The rally of the 12-party alliance broke down in the face of police obstruction.<sup>84</sup>



*Police taking away the banner of the 12-party alliance rally. Photo: Jugantar, 25 February 2024*

32. On 28 February 2024, at least 40 persons, including Zonayed Saki, Coordinator of Gonotantra Mancha, were injured when the police attacked a Gonotantra Mancha demonstration marching towards the Secretariat to protest against the rise in commodity prices, bankruptcy and money laundering.<sup>85</sup>



*Police barricade and baton charge a rally organised by Gonotantra Mancha. Photo: Manabzami, 29 February 2024*

33. On 13 March 2024, Shahbag Chhatra League leaders and activists attacked a Ramadan discussion meeting held by ordinary students of the Law Department of Dhaka University in a mosque at the University campus, resulting in five students being injured.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Naya Dignata, 20 February 2024; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/815443/>

<sup>84</sup> Jugantar, 24 February 2024; <https://www.jugantar.com/politics/778034/>

<sup>85</sup> Manabzamin, 29 February 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=99611>

<sup>86</sup> Samakal, 14 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/227555/>

34. On 18 March 2024, leaders and activists of Chhatra League attacked and stopped the mass iftar programme organised by general students at Feni Government College. At least eight students were injured in this attack.<sup>87</sup>
35. On 26 March 2024, when BNP leaders and activists went to pay tribute to the martyrs' monument on Independence Day in Daulatpur Upazila under Manikganj District, a group of leaders and activists led by Daulatpur Upazila unit Chhatra League joint convener Raju, attacked them. Around eight BNP leaders and activists were injured.<sup>88</sup>

## **Prevalence of Corruption and the Anti-Corruption Commission**

36. Ever since the current government came to power 15 years ago through controversial elections, corruption has taken firm root in every sector in Bangladesh due to lack of transparency and accountability. A research report by Transparency International (TI) stated that Bangladesh has dropped another two places in the global corruption index. In 2022, Bangladesh was ranked 12<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries according to the hierarchy (from worse to better). In 2023, the position of Bangladesh was 10<sup>th</sup>.<sup>89</sup> Corruption has led to uncontrollable price hikes, which have severely affected people's livelihoods and has created a perilous income disparity. The number of ultra-rich and ultra-poor families have increased in the country.<sup>90</sup> During this reporting period, the ruling party leaders<sup>91</sup>, Members of Parliament, ministers and government supporters have been occupied acquiring illegal wealth and money.<sup>92</sup> In the last 15 years, the wealth of many members of the ruling party, elected in the 12<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary elections, has increased enormously.<sup>93</sup> It has also been alleged that a large portion of illegally earned money has been laundered abroad. According to a report by Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), money laundering has increased alarmingly in the last two years due to political unrest.<sup>94</sup> According to a report of Bloomberg on 18 February 2024, the current Member of Parliament and former Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury bought more than 350 properties in the UK with 200 million British pounds (which is 27.7 billion Bangladeshi taka). As per the law of Bangladesh, no citizen of the country can take more than 12 thousand US dollars out of the country in a year.<sup>95</sup>
37. The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), as an independent and impartial institution<sup>96</sup>, does not function, despite a terrible state of corruption in the country. The ACC is a subservient agency of the government, since the ruling

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<sup>87</sup> Naya Diganta, 19 March 2024; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/chattagram/822312/>

<sup>88</sup> Manabzamin, 27 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=103362>

<sup>89</sup> Jugantor, 31 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/769122/>

<sup>90</sup> Samakal, 10 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/222240/>

<sup>91</sup> Manabzamin, 6 February 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=96539>

<sup>92</sup> Samakal, 5 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/226017/>

<sup>93</sup> Samakal, 24 January 2024; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/219484/>

<sup>94</sup> Jugantor, 21 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/776680/>

<sup>95</sup> Samakal, 20 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh-others/article/223848/>

<sup>96</sup> Section 3 (2) of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 (Amended) 2016 states that, 'This commission shall be an independent and impartial commission'.



party appoints people of their choice in its top positions. Before the one-sided and farcical 12<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary elections, information about unusual wealth acquired in the name of various ministers, leaders and members of parliament belonging to the ruling party, came to the media. However, the ACC was not seen to take any action in this regard.<sup>97</sup> In some cases, Awami League parliamentarians and influential politicians and bureaucrats have been publicly investigated for corruption, but the results of most these investigations have not seen the light. Many of the corruption probe files remain under lock and key at the ACC.<sup>98</sup> For example, the ACC has not arrested the former bank chairman, Sheikh Abdul Hai Bachchu, who is the main accused in 58 cases filed for embezzlement of Tk 45 billion from the state-owned BASIC Bank.<sup>99</sup>

## Extrajudicial Killings

38. The commissions of 'crossfire', 'gunfight', and 'shootout' drastically came down when the United States Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and some of its former and current officials on 10 December 2021, over serious charges of human rights violations. However, cases of torture and extrajudicial killings continue.
39. It has been alleged that Farooq Hossain, who was in the custody of Bangshal Police Station, died in Dhaka Medical College Hospital after being tortured on 15 January 2024. [Farooq's wife Ima Akhtar Happy complained](#) that on 12 January, when Farooq went out to work, from his house in old Dhaka, he was detained and tortured by the police of Kayetuli Outpost. After getting the news, Happy went to the police outpost and requested Sub Inspectors Imdadul Haque, Masud Rana, Bulbul Ahmed and others present there to release her husband. SI Imdadul Haque demanded a bribe of one hundred thousand Taka for releasing Farooq. When Happy pleaded with the police, the police asked her to pay fifty thousand Taka and offered Happy an indecent proposal. As Happy did not agree to the proposal, the police tied Farooq to a chair and beat him in front of her. Later Farooq was taken from the outpost to Bangshal Police Station. The next day, a case was filed against him for possession of 150 grams of *Ganja* and he was sent to court. At the court's custody cell, Farooq told Happy that he had been tortured. Farooq was sent to Dhaka Central Jail from the court. On 15 January, a person from Dhaka Medical College Hospital called Happy and informed her that Farooq had passed away. She went to the hospital morgue and found her husband's body. Farooq had injury marks on his neck, chest and back. On 30 January, Happy filed a case against five people, including the OC of Bangshal Police Station with the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge Court and on 31 January, the

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<sup>97</sup> Samakal, 5 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/226017/>

<sup>98</sup> Jugantor, 21 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/776678/>

<sup>99</sup> Samakal, 23 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/224314/>

court ordered the Detective Branch of Police to investigate the death of Farooq Hossain.<sup>100</sup>

40. On 20 February, Purabi Palit, wife of a deceased prisoner, filed a case with the Chittagong Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 regarding the death of her husband Rubel Dey in prison, due to torture. On 3 March, Judge Jebunnesa ordered the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) to conduct a preliminary investigation of the case against 16 people, including Chittagong Central Jail Senior Jail Superintendent Manjur Hossain and Boalkhali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Achhab Uddin. Purabi Palit alleged that after the arrest of Rubel in connection to a drug case, on 27 January, police demanded a bribe of two hundred thousand Taka from them. The next day, when Rubel was produced in court, the court ordered him to be sent to jail.<sup>101</sup> Rubel's cousin Rajib Dey said that they met Rubel in the court on 28 January. Rubel was well then, but when the family members went to meet Rubel on 2 February, he was brought in a wheelchair, in critical condition. Rubel later died in prison on 5 February. His body bore the marks of multiple injuries. The family alleged that Rubel was physically assaulted by police during his arrest and later the jail officials also tortured him, leading to his death in jail.<sup>102</sup>
41. **In the first three months of 2024, it is alleged that two people have been victims of extrajudicial killings. It is to be noted that both were allegedly tortured to death by police.**

## **Torture, Degrading Treatment, Lack of Accountability and Death in Custody**

42. The government uses law enforcement agencies to persecute the main opposition BNP and other party leaders and activists and dissidents, to sustain its authoritarian regime. As a result, members of the law enforcement agencies are enjoying impunity. Members of the law enforcement agencies attacked the BNP's grand rally on 28 October 2023 in a planned manner to facilitate the holding of a one-sided 12<sup>th</sup> Parliament election in 2024. Since then, members of the law enforcement agencies across the country have carried out various types of repression on the leaders and activists of the opposition parties, including arbitrary arrests and detentions.<sup>103</sup> In addition, the police have arrested poor and orphan children and teenagers on suspicion of being supporters of the opposition party and tagged them in various criminal cases by increasing their age. As a result, children and adolescents are confined with adult inmates in prisons.<sup>104</sup>
43. The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 is not properly implemented due to all the impunity, resulting in the continued perpetration

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<sup>100</sup> Jugantor, 1 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/769543/>, Dhaka Tribune, 31 January 2024; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/338233/death-in-custody-5-policemen-of-banshal-police>

<sup>101</sup> Manabzamin, 4 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=100143>

<sup>102</sup> The Daily Star, 6 February 2024; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/custodial-death-16-cops-jail-officials-sued-3549011>

<sup>103</sup> Bangla Outlook.com, 28 February 2024; <https://www.banglaoutlook.com/interview/2024/02/28/231524>

<sup>104</sup> Samakal, 2 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/225504/>

of torture and custodial death by law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, several cases have been filed against torture victims due to their filing of cases against the police for torture.

44. On 18 July 2017, Khalishpur police in Khulna gouged out the eyes of a vegetable vendor Shahjalal Howladar with a screwdriver, as he was unable to pay the demanded extortion money after his arrest. In this incident, Shahjalal's mother Renu Begum filed a case against Khalishpur Police Station OC Nasim Khan and 13 policemen and associates on 7 September 2017 in the Khulna Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court. The police have been intimidating and threatening the family members, including Shahjalal and his father Zakir Hossain in various ways to withdraw the case. In early February 2024, a plain clothed team of Khalishpur police in Khulna went to Shahjalal's in-laws' house in Nayabati Railway Line Basti Colony and searched for Shahjalal. As Shahjalal was not there, his family members were told that Shahjalal was a listed criminal and they had come to arrest him. They said that Shahjalal has a total of nine cases against him in Pirojpur, Kaukhali, Dumuria, Sonadanga, Khulna Sadar, Khalishpur and pending in courts. At that time Shahjalal's wife Rahela Begum informed the policemen that her husband Shahjalal was made blind and for this reason they filed a case against the police. After hearing this, the policemen said that Shahjalal must be present in person at the Khulna Metropolitan Police Headquarters. When Shahjalal appeared there on 18 February 2024, a senior police officer questioned him on various issues. He was pressured to settle the case with the police. In the name of providing him with financial assistance, the police took a thumb impression from him in an application letter titled 'Help for eye treatment' in which it was mentioned that in 2017, his eyes were 'accidentally spoiled'.<sup>105</sup>
45. On 16 February 2024, a young man named Tanvir Hossain Turki was arrested by police of Satkania Police Station from a playground at Satkania in Chittagong, and accused in a false case under the Arms Act and tortured. Turki's family alleged that the police arrested Turki at the behest of the winning candidate in the last parliamentary elections.<sup>106</sup>
46. In addition, there are a large number of allegations against members of the law enforcement agencies, including for extortion from the transport sector<sup>107</sup>, robbery<sup>108</sup>, unethical offers and demands of bribes to rape victims<sup>109</sup>, coercion of illicit relations through blackmail<sup>110</sup>, extortion of money by threatening death in crossfire<sup>111</sup>, filing a false case against victim<sup>112</sup>, acquiring enormous wealth through scams.<sup>113</sup> Despite wide-ranging criticisms against members of the law enforcement agency, they have enjoyed impunity and rewards for their brutal crackdowns on political opponents, government critics and dissidents. On 27

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<sup>105</sup> Report sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Khulna.

<sup>106</sup> Samakal, 19 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/chittagong/article/223663/>

<sup>107</sup> Jugantor, 15 March 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/784826/>

<sup>108</sup> Prothom Alo, 3 January 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/ln00i6jev8>

<sup>109</sup> Jugantor, 10 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/761527/>

<sup>110</sup> Jugantor, 2 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/758188/>

<sup>111</sup> Jugantor, 1 March 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/779719/>

<sup>112</sup> Jugantor, 5 March 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/781208/>

<sup>113</sup> Samakal, 29 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/225204/>



February 2024, 400 policemen were awarded the 'Bangladesh Police Medal (BPM)' and 'President's Police Medal (PPM)' in recognition of their work.<sup>114</sup> Among the medal recipients, 80 policemen have been given medals for disrupting opposition meetings and suppressing labour unrest.<sup>115</sup>

47. Among the law enforcement agencies, (apart from the police), there were allegations of repression made against Ansar<sup>116</sup> members. On 16 March 2024, when a sick child, Abraham Sihan was taken to the emergency department for treatment at Dhaka Shishu Hospital, on duty Ansar members Noor Hossain and Mohammad Kashem at the gate of the emergency department demanded Tk 1,000 to allow him to enter. When Abraham's family members refused to pay the bribe, they had an argument with the Ansar members. The Ansar men beat the mother of Abraham and other members of his family and threw them out. In this incident, Abraham's grandmother Shahnaz Begum filed a complaint in Sherebangla Nagar Police Station and the police arrested both Ansar members.<sup>117</sup>

## Enforced Disappearances

48. Before and after the two controversial elections held under the Awami League government on 5 January 2014 and 30 December 2018, opposition party leaders-activists and dissidents were disappeared. Similarly, incidents of enforced disappearance occurred before the farcical 12<sup>th</sup> National Parliament elections on 7 January 2024. Among the recent victims, Mohammad Rahmatullah has not been returned. On 12 February 2024, Rahmatullah's family held a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity and said that on 29 August 2023, people wearing both RAB uniform and in plainclothes, picked up Rahmatullah from his home.<sup>118</sup> Rahmatullah was not found at the time of publication of this report.



*Rahmatullah's family organised a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity demanding his return. Photo: Manabzamin, 13 February 2024*

<sup>114</sup> Prothom Alo, 28 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/3x1c0x4bjz> Dhaka Tribune, 23 February 2024; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/340171/record-400-get-bpm-ppm-awards-this-time>

<sup>115</sup> New Age, 28 February 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/226541/>

<sup>116</sup> Auxiliary forces

<sup>117</sup> Manabzamin, 17 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=102030>

<sup>118</sup> Manabzamin, 12 February 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=97449>

49. On 22 March 2024, Akter Hossain Prakash, a salt trader of Maheshkhali Upazila under Cox's Bazar District, was picked up by members of RAB-15 and handed over to the police station after being kept disappeared for 12 days. Akhtar Hossain's wife Minuara Begum said that her husband left the house at 9:00 am on 22 March to sell salt. The family later received news that a group of men in plainclothes had taken her husband. Later, on further query, she came to know that the men were members of RAB-15. When they went to Cox's Bazar RAB-15 office to find Akhtar Hossain, RAB denied arresting him. The family then went to Maheshkhali Police Station to file a General Diary (GD) in this regard but the police refused to record it. On 2 April, RAB-15 handed Akter Hossain over to Chakaria Police Station as they alleged that a large quantity of weapons were recovered from him. Minuara Begum said that when she went to see her husband at Chakaria Police Station, her husband told her that he was beaten and given electric shocks. Akter Hossain was sent to Cox's Bazar District Jail.<sup>119</sup>

## Provision of the Death Penalty and Human Rights

50. The existing criminal laws of the country contain provisions for capital punishment- and not just for the 'most serious of offences'. A large number of accused are being sent to the condemned cells due to the indiscriminate passing of the death sentence by the lower courts. On 31 January 2024, Jaipurhat Additional Sessions Judge-2 Court sentenced 11 people to death in a murder case.<sup>120</sup> Women inmates serving a death penalty have been imprisoned with their children in condemned cells.<sup>121</sup> On 6 December 2023, a Writ Petition was filed in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court challenging the provision of the death penalty contained in the Code of Criminal Procedure. The Writ sought directions to frame a policy for the imposition of capital punishment. It is said in the petition that the provision of death penalty is in conflict with Articles 32 and 35 of the Constitution. After the hearing on this writ on 30 January, a bench consisting of Justice Mustafa Zaman Islam and Justice Mohammad Atabullah of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court issued a Rule asking why the provision of death penalty as a punishment in the criminal law should not be illegal without the formulation of a policy.<sup>122</sup>

51. **In the first three months of 2024 (January-March), 111 persons have been sentenced to death by the lower courts.**

## Human Rights Violations in Prisons

52. In the first three months of 2024, most prisons in the country remained overcrowded. The capacity of the 68 prisons in the country is 42,888 inmates. However, as of 18 February, there were 74,103 inmates in the prisons. Due to this, prisoners are suffering from scarcity of food, accommodation, toilet

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<sup>119</sup> Report sent by human rights defender associated with Odhikar, from Cox's Bazar.

<sup>120</sup> Jugantor, 1 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/769477/>

<sup>121</sup> Prothom Alo, 21 January 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/41xss2ucn3>

<sup>122</sup> Samakal, 30 January 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/madek6memd>

facilities, baths and treatment. This situation has prevailed in the prisons for a long time but no action has ever been taken.<sup>123</sup> Corruption in prisons is widespread. For example, recently released inmates have complained of rampant corruption in Barishal Central Jail. They said prisoners were forced to stay next to the bathroom if they do not pay bribe as demanded by the prison authorities. The price of food inside the prison is three or four times higher than outside. Furthermore, the quality of food is also substandard. Even though the quality of food is bad, the prisoners have to buy food from the prison canteen at a high price. They also said that intoxicants like Yaba and Ganja are freely available in Barishal Central Jail.<sup>124</sup>

53. There have been allegations of torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners in jails across the country.<sup>125</sup> During this period, unwell BNP leaders and activists were kept in the prison hospital in fetters.<sup>126</sup> In 2023, 10 BNP leaders and activists died in prison. In 2024, BNP leaders died in jail too. On 2 January 2024, Jubo Dal leader Kamal Hossain died in Bagerhat District Jail<sup>127</sup>, on 28 January, BNP leader Abdus Sattar died in Satkhira District Jail<sup>128</sup> and on 8 February, Gangachara Upazila BNP leader Monowarul Islam died in Rangpur Central Jail due to alleged torture and negligence of the prison authorities.<sup>129</sup> On 11 February, BNP-backed lawyers filed a Writ Petition at the High Court Division bench consisting of Justice Mustafa Zaman Islam and Justice Md. Atabullah, requesting the formation of a committee including internationally recognized human rights activists, to investigate the death of 13 BNP leaders and activists in prisons and to submit the investigation report to the court.<sup>130</sup>
54. There is a scarcity of doctors and medical facilities in prisons and when inmates are seriously ill, they have to go through a lengthy process to get better treatment. As a result, many prisoners are dying. Ordinary, poor prisoners do not get hospital admission even if they are seriously ill. However, the healthy rich prisoners are living comfortably in prison hospitals in exchange for money.<sup>131</sup> Jagannath University student Khadijatul Kubra, detained under the Digital Security Act, 2018 was released from jail after serving 14 months.<sup>132</sup> While in prison, Kubra fell ill with various diseases, including a kidney ailment. Kubra's mother alleged that Kubra was also suffering from problems in her legs and spine, however, the prison authorities did not arrange for her treatment.<sup>133</sup>
55. In addition to prisons, there are allegations of torture and ill-treatment of children in Child Rehabilitation Centres. On 14 February 2024, it was alleged that a teenager named Maruf Ahmed (16) died due to torture at the Child

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<sup>123</sup> Manabzamin, 19 February 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=98348>

<sup>124</sup> Jugantor, 12 March 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/783722/>

<sup>125</sup> Naya Diganta, 29 February 2024; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/last-page/817629/>

<sup>126</sup> Jugantor, 16 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/763426/>

<sup>127</sup> New Age, 4 January 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/221926/9th-bnp-activist-dies-in-prison>

<sup>128</sup> Jugantor, 6 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/771237/>

<sup>129</sup> Naya Diganta, 8 February 2024; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/rangpur/812567/>

<sup>130</sup> Prothom Alo, 11 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/6rdo7khsrt>

<sup>131</sup> Samakal, 30 January 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/220464/>

<sup>132</sup> Prothom Alo, 29 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/gr10jsa0zi>

<sup>133</sup> Manabzamin, 18 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=102156>

Rehabilitation Centre in Tongi, Gazipur. Maruf's father Rafiq Ahmed said that a few children had a fight with a puffed rice seller in Khilkhet area of Dhaka. Although Maruf was not involved in the altercation, he was picked up by the police and sent to the rehabilitation centre through court order. Later the police filed a robbery case against Maruf. Rafiq also said that on 12 February, he was informed by the Child Rehabilitation Centre that Maruf was ill and had been admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. There he found Maruf lying unconscious. Maruf's body had injury marks in various places. He was informed of Maruf's death on the morning of 14 February. Rafiq Ahmed alleged that his son died due to torture inflicted by the officials of the Centre. Sub Inspector Sanarul Haque of Shahbagh Police Station said that the inquest report showed that Maruf had scars on both hands and left elbow and swelling in various parts of his legs.<sup>134</sup>

56. **From January to March 2024, 41 inmates died in prison due to 'illness'. Among them, three were leaders and activists of BNP.**

## Public Lynching

57. A dysfunctional justice system, impunity of law enforcement agencies and corruption have eroded public trust in state institutions. As a result, people have taken the law into their own hands and deaths due to public lynching continue.
58. On 5 January 2024, a group of thieves allegedly tried to steal cows in Shahnagar Village of Bhangura under Pabna District. Local people gave chase and while the thieves were fleeing, news spread via megaphone and the villagers surrounded them and beat them. As a result, three people were killed.<sup>135</sup>
59. On 17 March 2024, the movement of some strangers caused suspicious in Baghri Village of Kanchpur union under Sonargaon Upazila in Narayanganj District. Locals announced through a mosque's megaphone that 'robbers had arrived'. The villagers then surrounded the men, who jumped into the lake to escape. Local people caught some of them and beat them, and three people died on the spot. On receiving information, police rescued the other two and sent them to a hospital, where one more of the men died.<sup>136</sup>
60. **In the first three months between January and March 2024, 18 persons were killed in public lynching.**

## Freedom of Expression

61. In the first three months of 2024, the authoritarian government has continued to violate citizens' freedom of speech, thought, conscience and expression.
62. On 3 February 2024, Chhatra League leaders and activists raped a woman after holding her husband hostage in Jahangirnagar University campus.<sup>137</sup> In

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<sup>134</sup> Samakal, 16 February 2024; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2024-02-16/2/5615>

<sup>135</sup> Jugantor, 6 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/759861/>

<sup>136</sup> Prothom Alo, 17 March 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/g6304bmbmj>

<sup>137</sup> Samakal, 5 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/221378/>



protest of this incident, two students of the University and Chhatra Union<sup>138</sup> – president Amartya Roy and general secretary Riddha Anindya Ganguly – removed the mural of former President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that was on the wall outside the new Arts building of the university, and painted an anti-rape mural on it. Due to this, the university authorities expelled the two students for one year and filed a case against them.<sup>139</sup>

### ***Repressive Cyber Security Act, 2023***

63. The Cyber Security Act (CSA), 2023 contains many elements that undermine freedom of speech and expression, freedom of the media, personal privacy and civil liberties. It contains a number of repressive provisions, which have previously been used to stifle the voices of free journalism and human rights defenders. Eighteen cases have been registered under the Act since its enactment till 27 February 2024, in which 10 journalists and eight politicians have been charged.<sup>140</sup> On 26 February, Justice Sheikh Hasan Arif of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court said that Sections 22, 23, 25, 27 and 28 of the CSA are extreme obstacles to independent journalism and that these clauses can create serious problems in the professional work of journalists.<sup>141</sup>
64. On 14 January 2024, Mohammad Ruhul Amin, Deputy Assistant Officer of Karaibaria Union Land Office under Taltoli Upazila in Barguna District, filed a case against Naeem Islam Hairaj, Taltoli Upazila correspondent of the daily Kalbela, in Barisal Cyber Tribunal due to publication of the news. The court directed the Officer-in-Charge of Taltoli Police Station to investigate the case.<sup>142</sup>
65. On 18 February 2024, poet and cultural activist Shamim Ashraf was arrested by the police under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure for spreading false propaganda against the Mayor of Mymensingh City Corporation through a poster. Shamim Ashraf was released on bail the next day. On 19 February, Mymensingh City Corporation's administrative officer Kanchan Kumar Saha filed a case against Shamim Ashraf under Sections 17, 19, 25, 26, 27, 29 and 32 of the Cyber Security Act in Mymensingh Cyber Tribunal. The court directed the Police Bureau of Investigation to investigate the matter.<sup>143</sup>
66. Even if the much-criticized Digital Security Act 2018 (DSA) is repealed, the ongoing cases filed under this Act will not be withdrawn as per the Attorney General AM Amin Uddin.<sup>144</sup> As a result, the charge sheets filed in the court and the trial proceedings continue in the cases filed under the DSA.
67. On 13 February 2024, DB police Inspector Daud Hossain submitted a charge sheet against Sultana Ahmed, the former general secretary of Jatiyatabadi

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<sup>138</sup> Student wing of the Communist Party of Bangladesh

<sup>139</sup> New Age, 23 February 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/226166/2-chhatra-union-leaders-sued-for-anti-rape-graffiti-over-mujibs-portrait-at-ju>, Samakal, 24 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/capital/article/224470/>

<sup>140</sup> Manabzamin, 28 February 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=99472>

<sup>141</sup> The Daily Star, 27 February 2024; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/cyber-security-act-5-sections-can-put-journos-trouble-3553511> and Jugantor, 28 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/779043/>

<sup>142</sup> BDnews24.com, 14 January 2024; <https://bangla.bdnews24.com/samagrabangladesh/cs4k5m9570>

<sup>143</sup> Prothom Alo, 21 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/oe0658toti>

<sup>144</sup> Prothom Alo, 14 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/8qdt4ch4ek>

Mahila Dal<sup>145</sup>, in a case filed under the Digital Security Act. It is to be noted that during a programme of BNP on 1 September 2022, Sultana Ahmed made 'provocative and offensive' remarks against the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in front of media activists. On 6 November 2022, Abdul Hamid, former president of Gopalganj District unit Chhatra League, filed a case against her under the DSA.<sup>146</sup>

68. Judge AM Zulfiker Hayet of Dhaka Cyber Tribunal dismissed the case filed under the Digital Security Act with Kalabagan Police Station on 28 January and Newmarket Police Station on 29 February 2024, against Jagannath University student Khadijatul Kubra. A case was filed against Khadijatul Kubra in 2020 on charges of defaming the image of the country, including spreading anti-government statements online. Kubra was below 18 years old as per her birth certificate at the time of filing the case. In 2022, the police filed a charge sheet against Kubra in the court. Then the police arrested her from her residence on 27 August of the same year. Her bail plea was rejected twice by the lower court while she was in jail. Kubra was granted bail by the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, but the chamber judge stayed her bail. After serving 14 months of imprisonment, Kubra was released from prison on 20 November 2023 when the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court upheld the bail given to her by the High Court Division on 16 November 2023.<sup>147</sup>

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

69. Journalists are often forced to practice self-censorship as freedom of expression is restricted. During this reporting period, journalists were attacked and harassed by pro-government miscreants while carrying out their professional duties. Many journalists are worried about the security of their lives in the face of threats from members of the ruling party.<sup>148</sup>
70. According to the 2023 report of [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\)](#), which works on press freedom, Bangladesh has fallen one step behind in the World Press Freedom Index. Bangladesh is ranked 163<sup>rd</sup> among 180 countries.<sup>149</sup>
71. The [Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\)](#) said that 18 journalists were attacked and harassed on 7 January 2024, during the 12<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections, while collecting information on various irregularities, including the forceful occupation of polling stations on behalf of the candidates nominated by the ruling Awami League.<sup>150</sup> For example, Prothom Alo correspondent Mosharraf Shah was beaten up by Awami League members in front of the police, for taking pictures of the incident of stuffing ballot boxes with papers on which the Awami League election symbol 'boat' was stamped, by capturing the Nashirabad Government Boys High School polling centre in Chittagong-10 constituency.<sup>151</sup> Supporters of Awami League nominated candidate encircled

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<sup>145</sup> Women wing of BNP

<sup>146</sup> Jugantor, 14 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/774287/>

<sup>147</sup> Prothom Alo, 29 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/gr10jsa0zi>

<sup>148</sup> Prothom Alo, 9 January 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/o7u1e3ahpm>

<sup>149</sup> Samakal, 19 January 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/218833/>

<sup>150</sup> The Daily Star, 28 January 2024; <https://www.thedailystar.net/election-2024/news/news/18-journalists-attacked-while-covering-polls-violence-cpj-3529911>

<sup>151</sup> Prothom Alo, 7 January 2024; 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/htz9dta75s>



independent candidate Ataur Rahman and were casting fake votes at East Sardubi Primary School polling centre in Lalmonirhat-1 constituency. Hearing this news, when Ananda TV's Lalmonirhat District correspondent Abdur Rahim, journalist Minhaj and Masud Babu reached there, Awami League leaders and activists attacked them. At that time miscreants broke the cameras of the journalists and beat them up, seriously injuring them. Three injured journalists were admitted to Hatibandha Upazila Health Complex.<sup>152</sup>



*Three journalists were attacked while taking pictures of the casting of fake votes in Lalmonirhat. Photo: Naya Diganta, 7 January 2024*

72. On 7 March 2024, Shafiuzzaman Rana, a correspondent of the daily Desh Rupantor, filed an application under the Right to Information Act to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Sadia Ummul Banin in Sherpur District, asking for information regarding the purchase of computers and laptops under the ADP project. Despite his right to seek information, the police were called and he was arrested. After setting up a mobile court, Executive Magistrate Mohammad Shihabul Arif convicted journalist Shafiuzzaman Rana to six months imprisonment under sections 188 and 509 of the Penal Code on charges of obstructing government work, creating disorderly situation and misbehaviour with a woman government official.<sup>153</sup>
73. Mohipur Haji Mohsin College unit Chhatra League General Secretary Mahmudul Hasan was forcibly cutting the soil with an excavator in violation of the law, on the land of the ethnic minority Mahata community in Panchbibi under Joypurhat District. While covering this news on 16 March, Al Mamun, District Correspondent of Maasranga Television; Jewel Sheikh, District Correspondent of Dainik Bangladesh Samachar; Abdur Razzak, District correspondent of Banglar Doot; and Babul Hossain, Panchbibi Upazila correspondent of Sangbad Sarabela, were attacked by a group of miscreants led by Mahmudul Hasan with local weapons, leaving them wounded. The local people rescued the journalists and admitted them to the Upazila Health Complex. Later they were shifted to Joypurhat General Hospital.<sup>154</sup> In this

<sup>152</sup> Naya Diganta, 7 January 2024; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/rangpur/804470/>

<sup>153</sup> Prothom Alo, 8 March 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/1bzmffocsm>

<sup>154</sup> Prothom Alo, 17 March 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/zc3w5kgqwk>

incident, when journalists filed a case against Chhatra League activists, a counter case was filed against the journalists accusing them of extortion.<sup>155</sup>



Four journalists injured in an attack while collecting news in Joypurhat. Photo: Prothom Alo, 17 March 2024

74. According to data collected by Odhikar, from January to March 2024, 51 journalists were injured, six were assaulted, four were attacked, one was arrested, three were sued and 20 were threatened during the performance of their professional duties.

## Violence against Women

75. In the first three months of 2024, violence against women was rampant across the country. Due to a dysfunctional justice system and allegations of political patronage, perpetrators of violence against women go unpunished in most cases and victims are denied justice.

### Rape

76. In the first three months of 2024, there were several reported incidents of rape. During this period women and children were also raped and killed.<sup>156</sup> The dysfunctional criminal justice system, weak enforcement of the laws and non-cooperation of the police are among the reasons behind the non-prosecution of rape. During this reporting period, leaders and activists of the ruling party were also accused of committing rape.<sup>157</sup>
77. On 27 January 2024, a physically disabled housewife was forcibly picked up by Sramik League leader Mohammad Jobair Hossain from the road on her way home and taken to the Sramik League office and allegedly raped, in Ramgati under Lakshmipur District.<sup>158</sup>
78. On 4 February 2024, International Affairs Secretary of Chhatra League Mohammad Mostafizur Rahman and his associate Mamunur Rashid raped a woman after keeping her husband locked up in Jahangirnagar University. Murad Hossain, one of the leaders of the University unit Chhatra League, helped to hold the victim's husband and Shah Paran and Mohammad Sabbir Hasan, two leaders of the University unit Chhatra League, helped the accused

<sup>155</sup> Prothom Alo, 17 March 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/fhdthz1q97>

<sup>156</sup> Samakal, 23 January 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/219433/>

<sup>157</sup> Manabzamin, 4 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=100178>

<sup>158</sup> Manabzamin, 30 January 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=95410>

to escape.<sup>159</sup> Chhatra League leader Mohammad Mostafizur Rahman has already been involved in many crimes in the university campus. Mustafizur's room in the dormitory was used as a torture cell. Many were detained here for extortion or ransom and were subjected to violence.<sup>160</sup> Although the Chhatra League leaders committed misdeeds repeatedly, the university authorities did not take any action against them. Police arrested Mostafizur Rahman, Sagar Siddiqui, Hasanuzzaman and Sabbir Hasan on rape charges.<sup>161</sup>

79. On 29 March 2024, Golam Kibria Alias Boro Moni, elder brother of Tangail District Awami League Vice President and Awami League Member of Parliament for Tangail-2 Constituency Tanveer Hasan, forcibly raped a college girl in Dhaka. The victim filed a case against Golam Kibria. It is to be noted that on 5 April 2023, Golam Kibria raped a 17-year-old woman in Tangail. Later this woman gave birth to a child. On 18 November 2023, the police recovered the body of the victim from her house in Betka Village under Tangail Sadar Upazila.<sup>162</sup>



*Golam Kibria alias Boro Moni. Photo: Samakal, 31 March 2024*

## **Sexual Harassment**

80. The first three months of 2024 saw many incidents of stalking and sexual harassment of women and girls. Women and girls have been victims of sexual harassment by men from different classes of society. There have been widespread allegations of sexual harassment against teachers, in educational institutions too.<sup>163</sup> During this reporting period, teachers and students stood in protest against sexual harassment in four universities.<sup>164</sup> Despite widespread allegations of sexual harassment in educational institutions, the administration did not take any action against the accused. Jahangirnagar University's Assistant Professor of Public Health and Informatics Department and former president of Chhatra League, Mahmudur Rahman Jony has been accused in several incidents of sexual harassment; however, the Vice-Chancellor of the University Professor Nurul Alam has kept pending the trial process of the charges brought against Mahmudur Rahman Jony.<sup>165</sup> Assistant Professor Sajan

<sup>159</sup> Samakal, 5 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/221378/>

<sup>160</sup> Jugantor, 5 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/770893/>

<sup>161</sup> Samakal, 5 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/221378/>

<sup>162</sup> Samakal, 31 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/230384/>

<sup>163</sup> Jugantor, 12 February 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/773324/>

<sup>164</sup> Manabzamin, 13 February 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=97564>

<sup>165</sup> Samakal, 7 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/dhaka/article/221724/>

Saha has been accused of sexually harassing a student of Jatiya Kabi Nazrul Islam University in Trishal under Mymensingh District. However, it has been alleged that the University authorities are trying to cover up the matter without taking any action against the accused teacher.<sup>166</sup> On 15 March 2024, Jagannath University law student and member of the university debating society, Fairuz Sadaf Abantika committed suicide at her home after accusing classmate Amman Siddiqui and teacher Deen Islam of sexual harassment on her Facebook status.<sup>167</sup>

81. People have been attacked and killed in various parts of the country for protesting against acts of sexual harassment. On 9 February 2024, local miscreants killed an SSC candidate named Nirab Hossain for protesting against the sexual harassment of a girl in front of Kazi Fazlul Haque High School in Srinagar of Munshiganj.<sup>168</sup>
82. There are also widespread allegations of sexual harassment against the leaders and activists of Awami League and its affiliated organisations. On 17 March 2024, a student of Agorwala Women's College was forcibly picked up onto a vehicle, by Kushtia Sadar Upazila unit Chhatra League President Adipuzzaman Sangram while she was returning home after shopping from Harinarayanpur market in Kushtia. Adipuzzaman Sangram had been proposing love to that college girl for a long time and had been refused by her.<sup>169</sup>

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

83. During this reporting period, women were burned, beaten, and strangled to death for non-payment of dowry. Some of the victims of dowry violence were pregnant.
84. On 7 January 2024, Chhatra League leader Arif was accused of killing his wife named Shanta Islam (22) and hanging her body for non-payment of dowry at Bandar under Narayanganj District. It is to be noted that Arif was jailed earlier for burning his first wife Panna Akhtar to death.<sup>170</sup>
85. On 19 February 2024, a housewife named Nishi Akhter was beaten up by her husband Al Amin and scalded with hot water in Jamalpur over dowry demands of five hundred thousand Taka. Injured, Nishi was also locked in the house for five days.<sup>171</sup>

### ***Acid violence***

86. Most of the victims of acid violence in the first three months of 2024 were women and children. Among them, one was a pregnant woman. As per the Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2002, the cases are supposed to be completed within 90 working days, but in reality, remain pending for years. As a result, victims are deprived of justice.

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<sup>166</sup> Samakal, 14 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/mymensingh/article/227545/>

<sup>167</sup> Manabzamin, 17 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=102032>

<sup>168</sup> Prothom Alo, 10 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/0gad257duc>

<sup>169</sup> Manabzamin, 19 March 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=102285>

<sup>170</sup> Naya Diganta, 8 January 2024; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/dhaka/804839/>

<sup>171</sup> Prothom Alo, 29 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/qdcdt1odk0>



87. On 26 January 2024, one-and-a-half-year-old baby Jannati, her parents Riaz Howladar and Khadija Begum were burnt with acid thrown by miscreants due to a land dispute in Barishal Sadar Upazila. The injured have been admitted to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in Barishal.<sup>172</sup>
88. On 25 February 2024, Shariful Islam Manik threw acid on 8-month pregnant Mili Akhtar in Sujatpur Village under Matlab Upazila in Chandpur District after she rejected his love proposal. Mili's mother Rasheda Begum was also burnt in the same incident. Both were admitted to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in Dhaka. Police arrested Manik.<sup>173</sup>

## **Policies of the Indian government and Human Rights Violations on the Bangladesh-India border by Indian BSF**

89. The Indian government is largely responsible for the undemocratic system created in Bangladesh, including the collapse of the electoral system. This interfering attitude of India has been widely observed since 2009. Before the controversial and fraudulent elections on 5 January 2014, the then Foreign Secretary of the Government of India, Sujata Singh, came to Bangladesh and it was widely reported that this visit influenced the elections.<sup>174</sup> The Indian ruling party also gave all kinds of support to the incumbent government of Bangladesh to facilitate the holding of a one-sided 12<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary election on 7 January 2024.<sup>175</sup> Despite widespread criticism in Bangladesh, the Awami League government concluded a power purchase agreement with the Adani Business Group, which is known to be very close to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.<sup>176</sup> The current government has made many other agreements with Delhi against the interests of Bangladesh. Among the deals, Bangladesh allowed India to use its ports (Chittagong and Mongla) for the first time.<sup>177</sup> Despite the protests of the people of Bangladesh, India has built an open coal-mine power plant in Rampal. Due to the construction of this power plant, the biodiversity of Bangladesh's Sundarbans and its surroundings is threatened. India has been depriving Bangladesh of its equitable right to water during the dry season for a long time. Although the Teesta Treaty is very important for Bangladesh's water rights, the Indian government has not executed this Treaty with the Bangladesh government. The Padma basin is already in dire straits due to the Farakka dam. By opening the sluice gates of the Farakka and Gazaldoba dams during the monsoon, the Indian government continues to violate international law by artificially creating floods in Bangladesh, for which there is no remedy. In addition, Bangladesh has emerged as the fourth largest source of remittance for India. It is reported that more than one million Indian nationals are working illegally in Bangladesh and laundering huge

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<sup>172</sup> Jugantor, 28 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/768044/>

<sup>173</sup> Samakal, 28 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/index.php/bangladesh-others/article/225007/>

<sup>174</sup> BBC Bangla, 16 November 2018; <https://www.bbc.com/bengali/news-46237664>

<sup>175</sup> Prothom Alo, 17 March 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/1w0z1a73m5>

<sup>176</sup> Naya Diganta, 4 February 2024; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/first-page/811449/>

<sup>177</sup> Samakal, 1 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/international/article/220770/>

amounts of foreign currency from Bangladesh to India through illegal channels.<sup>178</sup>

90. In recent times, India's unwanted role in the internal affairs and diplomacy of neighbouring countries in South Asia, has been protested by the people of those countries. In Bangladesh too, an 'India Out, India Boycott' campaign has been strengthened by some online activists and some social organisations and political parties.<sup>179</sup> The people of Bangladesh are responding positively to this struggle against the hegemony of the Indian ruling class and it has spread through social media.
91. In the first three months of 2024, the killing and torture of Bangladeshi citizens continued by members of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). On 22 January 2024, Indian BSF shot and killed Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) member Constable Mohammad Raishuddin at Benapole border in Jashore.<sup>180</sup> In this incident, India has only expressed regret without taking any action against the responsible BSF personnel. Without protesting the incident, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh also informed the media that the Indian government was only expressing its formal grief.<sup>181</sup> State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury has commented that this killing of a BGB member by BSF was an isolated incident.<sup>182</sup> Raishuddin's family has demanded justice and punishment of BSF personnel involved in the killing.<sup>183</sup> In addition to killing BGB members, BSF has killed ordinary Bangladeshi citizens, including children and teenagers during this reporting period.
92. On 28 January 2024, Bangladeshi citizen Rabiul Islam Tuku was shot dead by BSF members at Patgram border in Lalmonirhat District.<sup>184</sup> On 17 February 2024, Jahangir Alam, a Bangladeshi national, was shot by BSF members while fishing in the Mahananda River at Poladanga border of Bholahat in Chapainawabganj, and was seriously injured.<sup>185</sup> On 17 March 2024, two Bangladeshi nationals named Parvez Hossain Saddam (15) and Siddiq Mia took cows for grazing on the Bangladesh side of Shikaria border in Kulaura under Moulvibazar District. At that time Saddam was killed and Siddiq was injured when BSF personnel fired at them from the Magurauli area of Tripura state in India.<sup>186</sup> On 26 March 2024, BSF personnel shot and killed a Bangladeshi youth named Al Amin (32) at Porsha border in Naogaon District and took his body away.<sup>187</sup> On the same day, BSF personnel shot and injured a Bangladeshi youth named Liton (19) at Durgapur border of Aditmari in Lalmonirhat District. The BSF members then dragged the seriously injured Liton inside India. Later that night when Liton died, BSF handed over his body

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<sup>178</sup> Daily Industry, <https://dailyindustry.news/bangladesh-becomes-4th-largestremittance-source-for-india/>

<sup>179</sup> Manabzamin, 2 February 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=95965>

<sup>180</sup> Prothom Alo, 24 January 2024;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=241aedd62bf&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=24/01/2024&sedId=1>

<sup>181</sup> Samakal, 1 February 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/220848/>

<sup>182</sup> Jugantor, 23 January 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/766377/>

<sup>183</sup> New Age, 24 January 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/223701/>

<sup>184</sup> Samakal, 28 January 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/220200/>

<sup>185</sup> Prothom Alo, 17 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/g2lry1t9y3>

<sup>186</sup> Samakal, 17 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/228209/>

<sup>187</sup> Samakal, 27 March 2024; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/229700/>



to BGB at Jhowrani border under Kaliganj Upazila. On 29 March 2024, some Bangladeshi citizens, including Muruli Chandra, went to the area adjacent to the main pillar number 913 at Burirhat border under Lalmonirhat District. At that time, three of the Bangladeshi nationals were shot and injured by members of the 75 BSF Battalion under Sitai Police Station in Cooch Bihar District of India. Meanwhile, Muruli Chandra, who was seriously injured, later succumbed to his injuries.<sup>188</sup>

93. **From January to March 2024, six Bangladeshis were reported killed and five were injured by the Indian BSF. All those who had been killed were gunned down. All five who were injured, were shot.**

## **Impediments to Human Rights Activities and State Repression on HRDs**

94. Human rights defenders associated with Odhikar are subjected to various forms of intimidation, harassment and violence for exposing and speaking out against human rights violations and communicating with members of the victims' families.
95. A Malaysian company called Techlin had signed a five-year contract to rent the land of some poor local people for the Matarbari Coal-fired Power Plant project in Maheshkhali Upazila under Cox's Bazar District. Even after the expiry of the contract, they remained in occupation of the said land. Rakiutullah, a human rights defender associated with Odhikar and Maheshkhali correspondent of the daily Kalbela, published a report on this issue on 15 February 2024. Due to this reason, the security officer of Sumitomo Corporation representing the Matarbari Coal-fired Power Plant, Major (retd) Moshir Rahman called Rakiutullah on 18 February and beat him after locking him in a room and also threatened to kill him.<sup>189</sup>
96. On 1 January 2024, Nobel Peace Prize winner and founder of Grameen Bank Dr. Muhammad Yunus was sentenced to six months in prison.<sup>190</sup> Muhammad Yunus is facing judicial harassment and intimidation for almost a decade of the Awami League regime and is facing 174 cases filed on charges of money laundering, corruption etc. The government is harassing Dr. Yunus in other ways too. On 15 February, Dr. Muhammad Yunus held a press conference in Dhaka and alleged that eight companies, including Grameen Telecom, located in Mirpur Telecom Bhawan, had been 'grabbed' by Grameen Bank. Dr. Yunus said that he did not get any remedy even after going to the police about the matter.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> The Business Standard, 26 March 2024; <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/bsf-kills-1-noagaon-injures-another-lalmonirhat-border-regions-816031> and Samakal, 31 March 2024; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2024-03-31/2/10274>

<sup>189</sup> Report sent by human rights defender associated with Odhikar, from Chittagong

<sup>190</sup> Prothom Alo, 1 January 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/rmulny6aqc>

<sup>191</sup> Prothom Alo, 15 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/6eky8jcioa>

## Recommendations

1. Restoration of democracy in Bangladesh requires an immediate election under a non-partisan interim government and with the participation of all political parties.
2. The Government interference with constitutional and state institutions must cease. Political corruption and violence must stop. Rule of law must be restored under an independent judiciary and equitable justice system.
3. Members of law enforcement agencies involved in extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and inhuman or degrading treatment must be held accountable and prosecuted.
4. The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 should be properly and impartially implemented and the directives of the High Court and Appellate Division in the case of BLAST v. Bangladesh should be followed to stop torture in remand. The government must ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture.
5. Disappeared persons must be returned to their families immediately. Bangladesh must accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and a domestic legislation must be enacted criminalizing enforced disappearances.
6. Allegations of irregularities, negligence, and corruption by prison officials should be investigated and legal action should be taken and all human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment of prisoners must be stopped.
7. The Government should refrain from repressive, unconstitutional activities. The people must be able to exercise their right to freedom of assembly without fear of persecution or violence. Harassment and arrest of opposition political activists and dissidents must be stopped. All political prisoners should be released immediately.
8. The Government interference on freedom of expression and media must cease. All cases filed against human rights defenders, including journalists, must be withdrawn and the perpetrators must be brought to justice, subject to a fair and impartial investigation. Bans imposed by the government on print and electronic media should be withdrawn.
9. All repressive laws, including Special Powers Act-1974, Information and Communication Technology Act-2006, Anti-Terrorism Act-2009 and Cyber Security Act-2023 must be repealed immediately.
10. To stop violence against women and children, all perpetrators should be prosecuted and punished. Informal or out of court arbitration for perpetrators of violence against women, including rapists, should be banned by law and the police should properly investigate and arrest the accused and bring them to justice.

11. All kinds of human rights violations, including killing and torture of Bangladeshi citizens at the border by the Indian BSF, must be stopped and compensation must be given to the victims. India has to abide by the border related agreements and MoU signed between Bangladesh and India. India's influence and aggressive behaviour towards Bangladesh must cease.
12. Persecution, surveillance and harassment of human rights organisations and human rights defenders must cease. The government must reinstall Odhikar's registration.

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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.