



Discussion Meeting on the Convention against Torture and the Optional Protocol

Mymensingh Division



On 29 November 2025, Odhikar, in collaboration with the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), convened a public dialogue in Mymensingh focusing on torture by law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh. The dialogue examined both the country's international obligations and the prevailing ground realities. Notably, Bangladesh ratified the Convention against Torture (CAT) in 1998 and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) on 17 July 2025. In addition, the country has enacted the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013.

The programme gathered more than sixty participants, representing survivors of torture, law enforcement and prison authorities, political actors, the media, academia, civil society, legal professionals and youth. The meeting was moderated by Odhikar's Advocacy Director, **Taskin Fahmina** and was supported by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The dialogue focused on raising awareness of Bangladesh's obligations under CAT and OPCAT and on the roles of state institutions, political leaders, and civil society in preventing torture and ensuring accountability. Taskin Fahmina began by highlighting that torture is strictly prohibited under all circumstances and stressed the State's responsibility to protect survivors and uphold justice.



After the introductory round with the participants, **Md. Korban Ali**, representing Odhikar, delivered an extensive presentation on Bangladesh's key obligations under the Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol, highlighting the need for criminalisation, independent

investigations, victim compensation and preventive safeguards. He pointed out gaps in implementation, despite Bangladesh's accession to CAT and the 2013 Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act. He also discussed systemic drivers of custodial torture, along with existing complaint and medical documentation procedures. Finally, he explained Bangladesh's accession to OPCAT in 2025 and stressed the need for an effective National Preventive Mechanisms and meaningful reforms in detention and prison oversight. The forum then heard statements from survivors of torture, whose accounts reflected longstanding patterns of abuse and systemic vulnerabilities.



Survivor Statements

Obaidur Rahman Tutul, Joint Organising Secretary of Mymensingh South District Jubo Dal (Youth Wing of BNP), recounted events from 2015, when he was picked up from his home by law enforcement personnel. He described being taken to multiple locations, held in unacknowledged detention and subjected to repeated torture over several days. His family was denied information about his whereabouts. He stated that he later faced a series of criminal cases based on allegations he denies and that the cycle of detention and torture continued even after he secured bail. Following his testimony, Taskin Fahmina reflected on how authoritarian practices develop over time and emphasised the need for vigilance to ensure such abuses never recur.



Shahidul Islam, former president of Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir, Mymensingh Mohanagar, shared his experience of being detained during the political unrest of late October 2023. He stated that he was stopped without explanation, taken into custody under orders from senior officers and subjected to severe abuse. He reported being falsely accused of involvement in violence and labeled as an "extremist". His experience reflected how remand is misused, interrogations become coercive and allegations are often constructed without basis.



Golam Mostafa, a victim of enforced disappearance, described being stopped on his way home by men in plainclothes. He stated that he was pressured to falsely identify himself as an “extremist” and offered money to do so. When he refused, he was taken away, held in secret detention for several weeks and subjected to ongoing abuse. He recalled identifying markings that suggested involvement of specific security units. He was later formally arrested on allegations he insists were fabricated. He stated that despite being released, he was detained again in 2020. He appealed for justice and accountability for the violations he endured.

Speeches from Guest Speakers

Md Manir Alam, Assistant Professor, Department of Law and Justice at Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, emphasised that torture is a grave violation under national and international law, referring to Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR) and Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). He outlined mechanisms available in international law to prevent torture and proposed several measures including implementation of the directives in the BLAST v. Bangladesh judgment, strengthening the National Human Rights Commission, immediate establishment of the National Preventive Mechanism, compensation for victims and a merit-based, depoliticized process of police recruitment.

Dr Faisal Ahmed, Deputy Civil Surgeon and Civil Surgeon (in-charge), Mymensingh, spoke about structural challenges within government service. He highlighted that although lower-ranking officials often act under instruction, they must recognise the limits of their authority and refuse to carry out unlawful or unethical directives.



Sohrowardi Hossain, Additional Superintendent of Police, Mymensingh, shared that police officers themselves want systemic reform. He stated that the police wish to work independently,

without political pressure, in order to serve the public more effectively. He echoed the need for stronger accountability but through an impartial and neutral oversight mechanism.

Mohammad Towhidul Islam, Deputy Inspector General of Prisons, Mymensingh, reflected on his 23 years of service. He highlighted chronic shortages of doctors, psychologists and other essential staff in prisons which limit proper care, including access to counselling. He described cases in which detainees arrived at prisons without medical records or information from arresting authorities, leading to confusion when health emergencies occurred. He stressed the need for better documentation, improved coordination between police and prisons and investment in basic facilities to prevent avoidable deaths and mistreatment.



After the speeches, the floor was opened for a brief discussion, during which participants shared suggestions and raised concerns regarding the prevention of torture in Bangladesh. The programme concluded with closing remarks that underscored the urgency of collective action to uphold human dignity and to prevent torture, ill-treatment, and degrading treatment in the future.

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