

Training on Torture and Violence Monitoring in the Context of Elections



Historically, almost all general elections in Bangladesh have been marked by violence. Moreover, during more than fifteen years of Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian rule, all parliamentary and local government elections were widely viewed as farcical. Following the July uprising, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was deposed and fled to India, and an interim government assumed office on 08 August 2024. One of the most critical responsibilities of the interim government is to conduct a free, fair, and transparent general election. The 13th parliamentary election is scheduled for 12 February 2026.

In this context, it is noteworthy that Odhikar's human rights defenders and youth volunteers trained by Odhikar will monitor electoral violence in 50 constituencies during the upcoming 13th Parliamentary Elections.



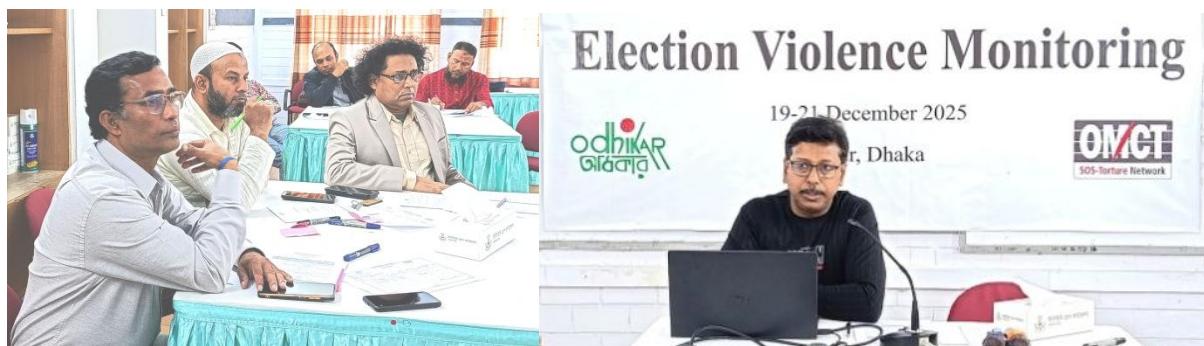
To prepare for this task, a three-day training programme on Torture and Violence Monitoring in the Context of Elections was held from 19–21 December 2025 at the Hope Center in Savar, Dhaka. The training was jointly organized by Odhikar and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), aimed at enhancing participants' understanding what factors

contribute to acts of torture and violence during the ‘election season’ and strengthening their practical skills in observing, verifying, and reporting incidents in a neutral, ethical, and secure manner.



Fifteen human rights defenders and youth participants from 14 districts across Bangladesh took part in the training, representing a broad geographical spread. The training was highly participatory, combining interactive discussions, presentations, role plays, and practical exercises.

The sessions on understanding electoral-related human rights violations, including torture, were led by Md. Sazzad Hussain, Member of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, who has expertise in election violence monitoring. He discussed the patterns and causes of electoral violence in Bangladesh and neighboring countries, highlighting factors such as intense political competition, weak institutions, abuse of power, and the lack of accountability. He emphasized that due to the fact that law enforcement are controlled by the political party in power and are rewarded with impunity, there is a risk of human rights violations such as unlawful detentions and torture increasing prior to elections, against those perceived as political threats.



Dr. Abdul Alim, an Elections Specialist, conducted sessions on election-related laws in Bangladesh, with particular emphasis on the Electoral Code of Conduct for observers and candidates. He underscored that the role of elections as a peaceful democratic process essential for political stability. He discussed that free and fair elections are not just a process for the polling day but the trend needs to be present prior to the polls - during the nomination process and the campaigns. He said that it is during the pre-election period the false cases against opposition candidates, arrests, torture and other human rights violations are all done to disrupt the fairness of the election process. He noted that these actions undermine electoral integrity. His session highlighted the role of the Election Commission in ensuring accountability, and outlined preventive measures related to ethical campaigning, use of state

resources, campaign finance, hate speech, misuse of religion, social media conduct, and penalties for violations.

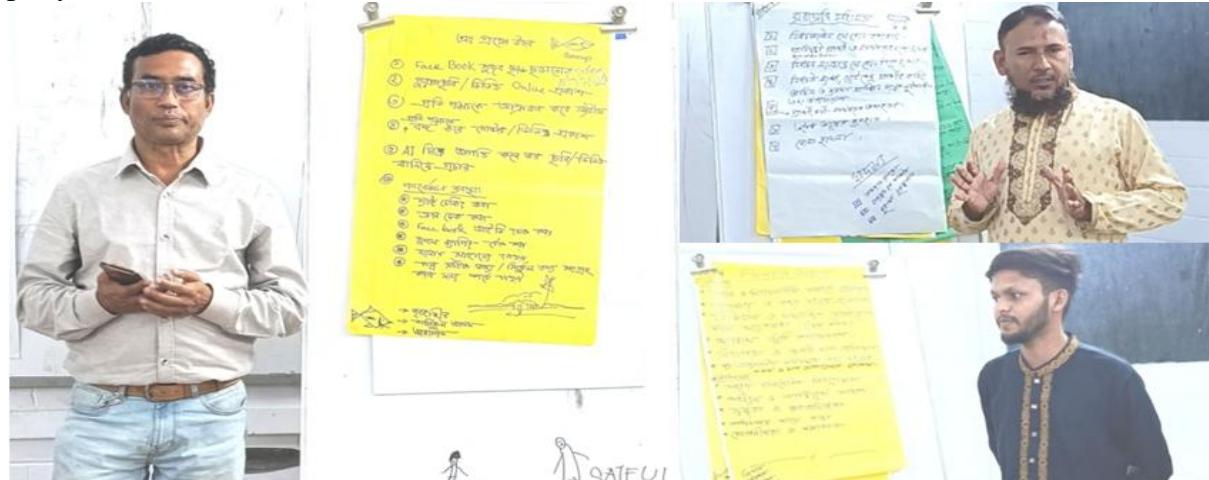


A session on local government elections and associated violence was facilitated by ASM Nasiruddin Elan, Director of Odhikar. He discussed common patterns of violence, including polling center capture, group clashes, and post-election retaliation.



He also addressed challenges related to administrative neutrality, especially law enforcement, and the heightened vulnerability of minority communities, and women providing guidance on identifying high-risk areas. He observed that when the violence and violations occur, it is usual for law enforcement to either stand by as observers or join in the violence and arrest not the violators but the victims.

Participants from districts such as Chittagong, Khulna, Feni, Magura, Lakshmipur, Panchagarh, Patuakhali, Bhola, and Sirajganj shared their field experiences, highlighting challenges faced during observation past elections and lessons learned. They observed that there is a risk that when they are covering the violence they may be targeted by political activists perpetrating the violence, and arrested by the police loyal to that particular political party.



Another session, conducted by Korban Ali, focused on observer guidelines for the upcoming 13th Parliamentary Elections. This session discussed the contents of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, the processes that need to be carried out to report on incidents of torture, how to write a report and also how to adherence to ethical standards such as confidentiality and informed consent, the “do no harm” principle, and thorough risk assessment to ensure safe and credible monitoring.



The training concluded with a closing ceremony led by ASM Nasiruddin Elan, who thanked the participants for their active engagement and encouraged them to apply the knowledge and skills gained to strengthen election violence monitoring and human rights documentation across Bangladesh. Certificates were distributed to participants to mark the successful completion of the programme.



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