

THE USE OF ABUSE

*A Brief Report on the
Continual use of Torture in Bangladesh*



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List of Acronyms

APT	Association for the Prevention of Torture
ASI	Assistant Sub Inspector
BGB	Border Guard Bangladesh
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPC	Crime Prevention Company
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CTTC	Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crimes
DB	Detective Branch
DGFI	Directorate General of Forces Intelligence
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICPPED	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
IRCT	International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims
NCP	National Citizen Party
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NPM	National Preventive Mechanism
NSI	National Security Intelligence
OC	Officer-in-Charge
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMCT	World Organization Against Torture
OPCAT	Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion
SB	Special Branch
SI	Sub Inspector
SPT	Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture
TFIC	Taskforce for Interrogation Center
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNCAT	United Nations Convention against Torture

OVERVIEW

Objective

In 2019, Odhikar and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) published *Cycle of Fear*, which analysed patterns of torture in Bangladesh based on cases documented between 2009 and 2017.¹ This report builds on that earlier research by documenting cases recorded by Odhikar between January 2018 and June 2026, providing an updated analysis of the prevalence, patterns, institutional characteristics and legal implications of torture and other ill-treatment in Bangladesh.

The period covered by this report spans significant political developments. It includes the final years of the Awami League government, the mass protests of July and August 2024, the establishment of the Interim Government and subsequently an elected government. Despite Bangladesh's obligations under the Convention against Torture (CAT), the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), and the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act 2013,² the evidence presented in this report demonstrates that torture and other ill-treatment have remained persistent features of law enforcement throughout the reporting period.

Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach combining legal analysis, documentary research, qualitative case study analysis, and quantitative examination of documented incidents of torture and custodial deaths in Bangladesh. The study is primarily based on secondary data and documentary evidence, supplemented by qualitative information obtained through human rights documentation conducted by Odhikar. The research examines both the legal framework governing the prohibition of torture and empirical evidence demonstrating patterns of torture, custodial deaths, and related human rights violations.

The research draws upon multiple categories of sources in order to ensure a comprehensive assessment. These include:

- International human rights treaties and standards, including the United Nations Convention against Torture (CAT), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- Domestic legal instruments, including the Constitution of Bangladesh, the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013, the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Penal

¹ World Organization against Torture,
https://www.omct.org/files/2019/07/25475/cycleoffear_bangladesh_report_omct.pdf

² The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act 2013.

Code, the Police Act, and relevant judicial decisions of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

- Reports and findings published by international and regional human rights mechanisms, including United Nations treaty bodies, Special Procedures, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances.
- Publications of national and international human rights organizations, including Odhikar, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Transparency International Bangladesh, the Asian Legal Resource Centre, and other credible civil society organizations.
- Official government documents and publicly available statistical information.
- Reports published by national and international media (that were cross-checked with other available sources before being used).

Analysis of Documented Cases

A central component of the research is the analysis of documented cases of torture, custodial deaths, arbitrary detention, and related abuses. The study examines cases documented by Odhikar through its long-standing human rights monitoring programme. The selected cases represent different geographical regions, law enforcement agencies, victim profiles, and forms of torture in order to illustrate recurring patterns. The report does not seek to establish criminal liability but assesses allegations against applicable domestic and international human rights standards.

Quantitative Analysis

The research also incorporates descriptive quantitative analysis of documented torture-related deaths occurring between 2018 and June 2026. Data were compiled from Odhikar's human rights documentation and analysed to identify trends over time, agency-wise patterns, geographical distribution, and institutional characteristics. The quantitative analysis focuses on descriptive statistics rather than inferential analysis and is intended to identify recurring patterns that may indicate systemic practices rather than isolated events.

Legal Analysis

The research employs legal analysis to assess Bangladesh's compliance with its obligations under international human rights law and domestic legislation. Relevant constitutional provisions, statutes, judicial precedents, and international legal standards were examined to evaluate the adequacy of existing legal protections against torture and custodial abuse.

The analysis further identifies gaps between the normative legal framework and its practical implementation, including issues relating to accountability, investigation, victim protection, access to remedies, and institutional oversight.

Verification and Triangulation

Where possible, information was verified through triangulation using multiple independent sources. Allegations were compared with available court records, official statements, medical information, media reports, and documentation produced by national and international human

rights organizations. The study distinguishes between verified facts, official accounts, and allegations made by victims or witnesses where independent verification was not possible.

Ethical Considerations

The research follows fundamental principles of human rights documentation, including accuracy, impartiality, confidentiality, and the principle of "do no harm." Particular care was taken to avoid unnecessary disclosure of sensitive personal information that could expose victims, witnesses, or family members to retaliation. The report presents allegations as reported unless independently established through judicial findings or other reliable evidence.

Limitations

The study acknowledges some limitations. Many incidents of torture remain undocumented because victims fear reprisals, lack access to legal remedies, or choose not to report abuses. Official information concerning custodial practices is often unavailable or incomplete, and access to detention facilities remains restricted. In many cases, allegations could not be independently verified because of the absence of effective investigative mechanisms or restricted access to official records. Consequently, the documented cases should not be interpreted as representing the full scale of torture in Bangladesh but rather as indicative of broader patterns and systemic concerns.

Chapter-I:

International Legal Framework against Torture and trends in Bangladesh

Every state has a legal interest in ensuring that torture is prevented and punished wherever it occurs. Nothing justifies torture, and the absolute nature of this prohibition has been repeatedly affirmed by international and regional human rights bodies and courts, which have emphasized that no exceptional circumstances may be invoked to justify torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.³

At least twelve major treaties—seven international and five regional—explicitly prohibit torture and ill-treatment. At the universal level, key instruments include the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, all of which contain provisions prohibiting torture and establishing state obligations to prevent and punish it.⁴

Beyond these core instruments, numerous international declarations, protocols, and resolutions have been adopted to strengthen the global framework against torture and ill-treatment. These include instruments that address specific vulnerable groups. For example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)⁵ prohibits torture and other forms of violence against children, while the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁶ has been interpreted to require states to prevent gender-based violence, including acts that may amount to torture or ill-treatment.⁷

International and regional courts, as well as quasi-judicial human rights bodies, have consistently affirmed the absolute and non-derogable nature of the prohibition of torture. Bodies such as the International Court of Justice, the Human Rights Committee, and regional human rights courts have reinforced the principle that torture can never be justified and that states bear a duty to prevent, investigate, and punish such acts wherever they occur.⁸

³ United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, art. 2(2); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 7; United Nations Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 20 (1992).

⁴ United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Geneva Conventions; Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

⁵ Ratified by Bangladesh on 3 August 1990.

⁶ Acceded by Bangladesh on 6 November 1984.

⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 37; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) and No. 35 (2017).

⁸ International Court of Justice, *Questions relating to the Obligation to Prosecute or Extradite (Belgium v. Senegal)* (2012); United Nations Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 20; European Court of Human Rights, jurisprudence under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

International Treaties

Bangladesh is a party to all seven of the principal universal treaties that prohibit torture, including CAT, ICCPR, ICPPED, the four Geneva Conventions, and the Rome Statute. Through these, Bangladesh has undertaken binding obligations to prevent torture, to criminalize torture, investigate allegations, prosecute perpetrators, and provide remedies for victims.⁹ In 2013, the Parliament passed the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act.

In July 2025 the Interim Government acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) and enacted the National Human Rights Commission Ordinance on 9 November 2025, replacing the flawed NHRC Act from 2009.¹⁰ The new NHRC Ordinance also contained provisions establishing a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM). The interim government further reconstituted the five-member NHRC, appointing former High Court justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury (previously the president of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances) as the new Chairperson.¹¹ The 2026 elected government did not adopt into law the NHRC Ordinance but presented its own NHRC draft act. The proposed NHRC Act is a worrying regression from the protections and safeguards contained in the NHRC Ordinance, 2025, and the NHRC remains empty to date.¹² Furthermore, there seems to be no eagerness from the government to establish a National Preventive Mechanism against torture, as mandated by the OPCAT.

Bangladesh: Factors relating to torture

Torture is a longstanding practice and widespread problem in Bangladesh. It is a routinely used by law enforcement agencies for a variety of purposes including to obtain statements or confessions, to obtain information, to intimidate or punish perceived government critics, dissidents, and perceived political opponents, or to extort money. Torture and ill-treatment are perpetrated by law enforcement officials, including various branches and units of the police; intelligence agencies- National Intelligence Agency (NSI), Special Branch (SB), Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI); paramilitary groups, like the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Coast Guard; and the armed forces like Army and Navy.

Under Bangladesh's Code of Criminal Procedure, the police can take an accused into custody with the permission of the judge, for questioning for the purpose of investigation. Unfortunately, such 'investigation' relies heavily on statements made by the accused - thus this remand procedure is used to perpetrate torture on detainees in custody. The accused are tortured in remand for two other reasons: extortion of money with threats of further torture; and torture in remand as a way to harm dissenters and political opponents. Police are in the habit of filing false and fabricated cases and carrying out mass arrests against opposition leaders and activists during the anti-government protests.

⁹ United Nations Treaty Collection, Status of Treaties: Bangladesh ratification records.

¹⁰ Khan S, Ensuring Rights in a New Bangladesh, The Daily New Age, 09 August 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/post/opinion/242118/ensuring-rights-in-new-bangladesh>

¹¹ Government reconstitutes NHRC, Dhaka Tribune, 06 February 2026, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/government-reconstitutes-nhrc-4099391>

¹² Joint statement by 13 organisations. 22 June 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/06/22/the-national-human-rights-commission-bill-2026-a-setback-for-human-rights>

Several methods of torture have been documented by Odhikar and other human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, the OMCT and Human Rights Watch. These include beatings with iron rods, belts, and sticks; hammering of nails into toes; drilling of holes in legs with electric drills; using electric shocks on ears and genitalia; water-boarding; hanging detainees from rings in ceilings and beating them; ‘ice torture’; finger piercing; deliberately shooting to maim, including knee-capping; forcing prolonged exposure to loud music and sounds; deprivation of sleep; and deprivation of food and drink.

The persistence of torture and ill-treatment is closely linked to structural factors that facilitate its continued use. Torture and ill-treatment have become institutionalized through repressive laws, social structures and mechanisms of governance that are in place. There are repeated allegations that members of the law enforcement agencies arrest and torture members of the opposition and their family members, in order to suppress anti-government movements.

One of the root causes of the continuation of torture is the culture of impunity.¹³ The lack of accountability and impunity enjoyed by members of the law enforcement agencies, continues to foster against citizens. Acts of torture and degrading treatment persist due to lack of implementation of laws, absence of independent investigation mechanism and dysfunctional judicial systems, biased investigation and delayed prosecution.¹⁴ International concern regarding the doncut of Bangladeshi security forces was further reflected in December when the United States Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and seven of its (then) current and former top officials for widespread allegations of serious human rights abuses in Bangladesh, including extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances – both of which included acts of torture.¹⁵

The persistence use of torture must also be understood in the broader context of corruption within law enforcement agencies. Reports have documented the involvement of members of law enforcement agencies in extortion, bribery and the acquisition of illicit wealth.¹⁶ In 2025, the national household survey on corruption conducted by Transparency International Bangladesh, found that law enforcement agencies were implicated in 69.4% of reported corruption cases, ranking fourth among the most corrupt institutions.¹⁷

¹³ The Daily Star, 4 October 2022; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/errant-cops-leniency-lends-them-impunity-3134656>

¹⁴ New Age, 30 March 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/198056/independent-inquiry-of-death-in-rab-custody-a-must>

¹⁵ Riaz A. US Sanctions on Bangladesh’s RAB: What Happened? What’s Next? <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/us-sanctions-on-bangladeshs-rab-what-happened-whats-next/>

¹⁶ Prothom Alo, 21 March 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/8kjm3mugy> see also

¹⁷ Corruption in Service Sectors: National Household Survey 2025, TIB; <https://ti-bangladesh.org/en/articles/research/7503>

Chapter-II:

Domestic Legal Framework against Torture

The domestic legal framework for preventing and combating torture in Bangladesh has evolved gradually, particularly in response to the country's obligations under the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), which Bangladesh ratified in 1998. Today, the framework comprises constitutional guarantees, criminal legislation, procedural safeguards and judicial oversight. However, despite these legal protections, significant gaps remain both in the legal framework itself and in its implementation, limiting its effectiveness and preventing torture and ensuring accountability. This chapter examines the principal legal safeguards, identifies shortcomings and assesses their implementation in practice.

Constitutional and Legislative Framework

The domestic legal framework for preventing torture is rooted in the Constitution. Prior to accession to the CAT in 1998, torture was only expressly prohibited under the Constitution. Article 35(5) of the Constitution of Bangladesh explicitly states that “no person shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment or treatment.” This provision establishes a clear normative commitment against torture and reflects international human rights standards. Again, in order to protect against arbitrary arrest, Article 33 of the Constitution mandates that no person who is arrested shall be detained in custody without being informed of the grounds for such arrest and shall give the right to consult with a lawyer in order to defend himself. Moreover, the same Article states that a police officer must present and arrestee before a Magistrate within 24 hours of the arrest. In addition to the constitutional guarantees, several legislative measures govern arrest, detention and the criminalisation of torture.

Under Article 167 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, police are allowed to take the detainee into their custody (remand) for further questioning, with the permission of the court. This is sought when an investigation cannot be completed within 24 hours. It is clear from various sources, research papers and victim statements that police remand is one of the principal contexts in which allegations of torture and ill-treatment arise. The fact that abuse in police custody is so well recognized is evident from the fact that there have been cases where the court might order that the arrestee be sent to jail custody instead of police custody, and that the police will then have to question or interrogate him at the jail gate office.

Judicial safeguards have also sought to limit abuse in police custody. The guidelines to prevent torture and abuse in police custody, given in the 2003 judgment of *Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Vs. Bangladesh and Others*¹⁸, were never implemented by the government of the time. Much later, in 2025, the Interim Government promulgated the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025 and introduced safeguards on arrest and remand. The Ordinance entered in the official gazette on 10 August 2025 in part, and partially reflects

¹⁸ BLAST Vs. Bangladesh, 55 DLR (2003) 363.

the Supreme Court's guidelines in *BLAST Vs. Bangladesh*.¹⁹ The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2026, was passed by the Parliament on 7 April 2026, which makes it mandatory to inform the family within 12 hours of arresting a person.²⁰

The cornerstone of Bangladesh's anti-torture framework is the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act 2013, which was introduced to domestically criminalize torture and custodial deaths.²¹ The law defines torture broadly to include physical and psychological harm inflicted by public officials, or individuals acting with their consent or acquiescence. It provides penalties including imprisonment and fines for those found guilty and establishes provisions for compensation to victims. The Act also allows victims or their families to directly file complaints before the courts²², bypassing the need to go to the police station and the wait for government sanction²³ that often impedes accountability in cases involving public officials.²⁴ In theory, this legislation represents a significant alignment of domestic law with international standards under CAT and constitutes one of the most explicit anti-torture statutes in South Asia.²⁵

Shortcomings of the Legal Framework

Several substantive and procedural shortcomings continue to undermine the effectiveness of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act 2013. The definition of torture in the Act fails to incorporate the elements enshrined in Article 1 of the UN Convention against Torture. It includes “mental or psychological torture” without defining such acts. The law lacks an adequate system to protect victims, aggrieved families, and witnesses. Furthermore, the Act relies on the police for registering complaints and investigating cases of torture - despite persistent allegations that police investigations into offenses committed by fellow officers lack independence and impartiality. The 2013 enactment does provide for complaints of torture being taken straight to the court instead of to the police – however, the investigations will, at the end of the day, be carried out by the police. The absence of an independent investigative mechanism remains one of the principal weaknesses of the current framework.

Other legislative shortcomings include:

- The Act does not specify the action to be taken when investigations are not completed within the given time under Section 8 (investigation to be completed within 90 working days from the day of recording the complaint. Any extension is to be determined by the court within 30 days after hearing the victim/aggrieved persons).

¹⁹ The Daily Star, 16 August 2025; https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/blast-welcomes-safeguards-arrest-introduced-code-criminal-procedure-3963481?utm_source=chatgpt.com

²⁰ JS amends CrPC, passes 13 other bills, The Daily Star, 8 April 2026, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/families-must-be-told-within-12-hours-arrest-4146216>

²¹ Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torture_and_Custodial_Death_\(Prevention\)_Act,_2013](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torture_and_Custodial_Death_(Prevention)_Act,_2013)

²² Sections 4 and 5 of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act of 2013.

²³ Under Section 197 of the [Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898](#) (CrPC) in Bangladesh, no court can take cognizance of an offense committed by a judge, magistrate, or certain protected public servants while acting in the discharge of their official duties without the previous sanction of the government.

²⁴ Section 4(1) of the Torture and Custodial Death Prevention Act, 2013. Dhaka Courier, *Legal Dissection of the Custodial Torture & Death in Bangladesh*. 10 April 2020; <https://dhakacourier.com.bd/news/Society/Legal-Dissection-of-the-Custodial-Torture-%26-Death-in-Bangladesh/2322>

²⁵ The Daily Star, *Custodial deaths and the gaps in our law*. 09 September 2025; <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/custodial-deaths-and-gaps-our-law-3982236>

- As per Section 14(2) a trial must be completed within 180 days since the registration of a complaint. The Court shall be given another 30 days to complete the trial if the court is unable to finish the trial within the stipulated time as mentioned under Subsection (ii) on the basis of reasonable ground. However, it does not mention what happens if the trial is not completed even after 30 additional days.
- Under Section 15 if a person is found guilty under Subsection (i) of Section 13 of this Act, he shall be punished with a minimum of five years rigorous imprisonment or a monetary penalty of minimum fifty thousand Taka or both. The formulation in Section 13 allows imprisonment to be replaced by a fine. Likewise, the Act treats compensation as discretionary rather than mandatory..
- Cases of police torture are to be filed before the magistrate and the burden of proof should lie on the police. There is a lack adequate protection for the victims. This needs to be amplified and the Act should be renamed as ‘Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013’.
- Mehiter the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act 2013, nor any other legislation provide for any victim or witness protection,

The effectiveness of this framework depends heavily on institutional reforms, independent oversight of law enforcement agencies, protection for victims and witnesses, and a stronger culture of accountability within the criminal justice system. Without these complementary measures, the domestic legal framework risks remaining largely symbolic rather than serving as an effective mechanism for the prevention of torture.

Implementation of the Legal Framework

Although Bangladesh has established a legal framework prohibiting torture, its implementation remains limited in practice. Sturctural barriers within the criminal justice system continue to undermine accountability, while victims face significant obstacles in seeking justice.

The effectiveness of the domestic framework remains contested.²⁶ Structural barriers such as the reluctance of police to register complaints against fellow officers,²⁷ intimidation of victims and witnesses, and lengthy judicial processes continue to undermine the implementation of the 2013 Act.²⁸ In many instances, allegations of torture are addressed under general criminal provisions of the Penal Code 1860 rather than through the specific

²⁶ Asian Legal Resource Centre. *Bangladesh: Justice institutions need fundamental change to address torture.* <https://alrc.asia/article2/bangladesh-justice-institutions-need-fundamental-change-to-address-torture/>

²⁷ Human Security Centre. *Corrupt Enforcement: Bangladeshi Police and Security Forces Still Not Held Accountable.* <https://www.hscentre.org/asia-and-pacific/corrupt-enforcement-bangladeshi-police-security-forces-still-not-held-accountable-torture-arbitrary-detainment/> Civil Society Follow-Up Report to the UN Committee Against Torture; https://adpan.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/07.08.2020-Follow-up-on-CAT-Report_Bangladesh_FINAL.pdf

²⁸ The Daily Observer. *Dreadful scenario of custodial torture and death.* <https://www.observerbd.com/news/309760>

anti-torture legislation, which weakens the intended deterrent effect of the law.²⁹ Moreover, provisions in other laws governing arrest and detention, such as the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, provide safeguards—such as requirements to produce detainees before a magistrate within 24 hours—but these protections are not consistently applied in practice.³⁰

Judicial intervention has also played a role in shaping the anti-torture framework in Bangladesh. Landmark decisions by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh have attempted to regulate police conduct and custodial practices.³¹ For instance, the 2003 judgment in Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) v. Bangladesh³² addressed the misuse of arrest and remand powers and set out guidelines to protect detainees from torture and ill-treatment during interrogation. Such judicial directives underscore the judiciary's role in reinforcing constitutional safeguards where legislative and institutional implementation remains weak.

These implementation failures are reflected in the very limited use of the 2013 Act. Despite numerous allegations of torture and custodial deaths only a small number of complaints have been filed under the act. The lack of a public awareness of the law, coupled with victims' fear of reprisals have been cited as the primary reasons for this low number.³³ To date, there has been only one conviction under the Act. In September 2020, following five years of legal proceedings, a Dhaka Session Court found three police officers guilty of the custodial torture and death of a man in February 2014 and sentenced them to life imprisonment.³⁴ Two police informers were also sentenced to seven years in prison. Two of the convicts are in absconding and one of them fled the country after the verdict.³⁵ The family members of the victim are still fighting for justice and compensation. In September 2023, the Bangladesh government reported to the UN Human Rights Council that 24 cases had been filed under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act 2013³⁶.

Moreover, victims of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment often face harassment and intimidation after filing cases against alleged perpetrators and are frequently coerced or threatened into withdrawing their complaints.³⁷ There are also

²⁹ The Daily Star. *How long will victims of torture wait for justice?*

<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/how-long-will-victims-torture-wait-justice-3929226>

³⁰ Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights analysis discussing the role of CrPC provisions such as police remand under

<https://rfkhumanrights.org/our-voices/bangladesh-accountability-is-a-must-for-ending-torture-and-impunity/>

³¹ The Daily Star, *SC upholds ruling over arrest on suspicion*. 24 May 2026;

<https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/sc-upholds-ruling-over-arrest-suspicion-1228552>

³² *Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust and Others Vs. Bangladesh* (55 DLR 2003, 363)).

<https://www.blast.org.bd/content/judgement/pil-judgement-54-matter.pdf>

³³ Odhikar, 'Civil Society Joint Alternative Report on Bangladesh Submitted to the Committee against Torture' (22 July-9 August 2019); <http://odhikar.org/civil-society-joint-alternative-report-on-bangladesh-submitted-to-the-committee-against-torture/> accessed 17 September 2019

³⁴ The Daily Star, 28 September 2020; <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/jonnys-custodial-death-case-lessons-learned-the-verdict-1969413>

³⁵ New Age, 8 February 2022; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/162240/si-leaves-country-after-conviction>

³⁶ Bangladesh: National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Forty-fourth session 6–17 November 2023; [g2317807.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/pdf/g2317807.pdf)

³⁷ Joint Statement on Bangladesh: End torture and ensure justice for victims, 25 June 2022;

<https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/bangladesh-end-torture-and-ensure-justice-for-victims>

allegations that the police often exert influence over medical examination reports in order to suppress evidence of torture.³⁸

Furthermore, as per the 2013 anti-torture legislation, the power to investigate allegations of torture have been given to the police. This means that in the absence of an independent investigation committee, all incidents of torture and custodial death are being investigated by the police. As a result, there are allegations that the investigations are not conducted in an impartial manner.

The events surrounding the July 2024 Mass Uprising further illustrated these structural weaknesses.³⁹ According to the OHCHR Fact-Finding Report, members of several law enforcement and intelligence agencies, including the DGFI⁴⁰, NSI⁴¹, and Detective Branch of police, obstructed access to lifesaving medical care by interrogating injured patients in hospitals, arresting wounded individuals, and intimidating medical personnel. Prosecutorial authorities and the judiciary failed to take meaningful action to prevent arbitrary detention and torture or to hold those responsible accountable. The DGFI also worked alongside the Police to intimidate victims, their families, and legal representatives in an effort to silence them.⁴²

³⁸ Joint Statement on Bangladesh: End torture and ensure justice for victims, 25 June 2022;

<https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/bangladesh-end-torture-and-ensure-justice-for-victims>

³⁹ The July 2024 student led mass uprising which ended on 05 August 2024 with the 15-year regime of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina collapsing.

⁴⁰ The armed forces intelligence unit.

⁴¹ National Security Intelligence.

⁴² OHCHR Fact Finding Report, 12 February 2025,

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/bangladesh/ohchr-fftb-hr-violations-bd.pdf>

Chapter-III:

Anatomy of Documented Cases Related to Torture and Custodial Deaths

In Bangladesh, documented physical forms of torture include beating and assault; electric shocks; suspension from the ceiling by the wrists; or upside down by the ankles; waterboarding; burning with cigarettes, heated metal, or chemicals, inserting chili powder in eyes; tearing out nails with pliers, inserting needles under nails or uplifting nails; deprivation of food, water, or sleep for prolonged periods; crushing or mutilation of body parts. These methods are often used during interrogations in detention facilities or secret detention centres⁴³.

Psychological forms of torture include threats of death, rape, or harm to the victim or family members; mock executions; prolonged solitary confinement; blindfolding, isolation, darkness; sleep deprivation; humiliation and degrading treatment; forced witnessing of torture of others; constant interrogation and intimidation. Psychological torture targets the victim's mental stability, emotions, and sense of security rather than causing visible physical injury. It may cause long-term trauma, including conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Victim narratives reveal that torture practices ranged from relatively “routine” forms of physical assault to extremely brutal methods designed to break the will of detainees. Psychological torture was ubiquitous: detainees frequently reported being blindfolded for extended periods, held in solitary confinement, threatened with death, or forced to listen to the screams of other detainees.⁴⁴

Analysis of the Cases

Documented (by Odhikar) cases over the years reveal a consistent pattern of human rights violations that can be grouped into several major legal categories. The most dominant among these is custodial torture and coercion, where individuals—whether lawfully or unlawfully detained—were subjected to physical and psychological abuse. Such treatment was often aimed at extracting confessions, forcing statements, or punishing dissent. Alongside this, a significant number of cases demonstrate extortion-driven abuse, where law enforcement officials used detention as leverage to demand money, seize valuables such as cash or gold, or threaten victims with “crossfire” killings or fabricated cases. This indicates a troubling shift from lawful investigation to exploitation of authority for personal gain. Politically motivated repression also emerges as a major category, with opposition activists, protestors, journalists, and human rights defenders being disproportionately targeted, suggesting a pattern of suppression rather than impartial law enforcement.

⁴³ Several secret detention centers were exposed after the student led July 2024 mass uprising. See <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/yunus-visits-secret-detention-centres-3822366>, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly6lp567r8o>

⁴⁴ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture* (2004).

Furthermore, many victims were subjected to fabricated or false cases, including false allegations of involvement in drugs, militancy, or arms, often accompanied by forced confessions under torture and delayed formal arrest records to conceal prior illegal detention. Border force abuses, particularly involving cross-border security agencies, include arbitrary detention, severe torture, and lack of due process.

Although fewer in number, cases of gender-based and sexual violence in custody remain deeply alarming, involving sexual abuse and humiliation of detainees. Even in cases not resulting in death, torture has frequently led to permanent injuries such as amputations, organ damage, and long-term disabilities

Case Study: *In the late hours of 2 June 2024, Afroza Begum (42), a resident of Abhaynagar Upazila in Jashore, was arrested during a police raid at her home. According to her family, the arrest followed a false allegation orchestrated by a local police informant after Afroza refused to pay extortion money related to the construction of her house. Her family further alleged that drugs were planted during the raid to justify her arrest.*

Eyewitnesses, including Afroza's two sons, Md. Sabbir Molla and Md. Arif Hossain Munna, alleged that police officers physically assaulted her during the search and subjected her to torture before taking her into custody. They claimed that her hair was tied to a ceiling fan and that she was repeatedly beaten. The following morning, while in police custody, Afroza's health condition rapidly deteriorated. She died on 3 June 2024.

The emergency department doctor (Medical Officer), Dr. Hasib Md. Ali Hasan, said that Afroza Begum was already dead before she was brought to the hospital. Her postmortem had been conducted but, according to him, no signs of physical torture were found.

Police authorities denied the allegations of torture, stating that Afroza had been arrested with narcotics and died from complications related to high blood pressure and cardiac arrest. However, her family alleged that they faced intimidation and threats when attempting to pursue legal action against those responsible. Additional Superintendent of Police Jahidul Islam said that an inquest was conducted under the supervision of an Executive Magistrate in order to avoid any suspicion. The inquest report stated that no abnormal signs were found. An unnatural death (UD) case had also been filed regarding her death. He also added that a three-member inquiry committee had been formed, headed by Additional Superintendent of Police Nur E Alam Siddiqui, to investigate the allegations.

An analysis of the political affiliation of victims further highlights a pattern of selective targeting. A substantial proportion of victims were linked—either directly or by perception—to opposition political groups, including student wings and affiliates of major opposition parties. At the same time, many victims were ordinary civilians, including students, journalists, businesspersons, farmers, and individuals accused of minor offenses. Human rights defenders and media professionals were particularly vulnerable, often facing reprisals when exposing misconduct. While not all victims were politically affiliated, the notable concentration of opposition-linked individuals suggests the possible misuse of state mechanisms to exert political control and suppress dissent.

Case Study: *On 10 January 2023, Syed Mohammad Mustakim, a student, participated in a peaceful demonstration outside Chittagong Medical College Hospital, where relatives of dialysis patients and members of the public demanded a reduction in dialysis fees. Protesters argued that the increasing cost of dialysis had become unaffordable for low-income patients and their families.*

As police attempted to disperse the demonstrators, a confrontation occurred, during which Mustakim was arrested. He was subsequently accused of leading the protest and named as the principal accused in a criminal case filed against him, together with 50–60 unidentified individuals.

According to Mustakim, after being taken to Panchlaish Police Station, he was subjected to physical and psychological torture while in custody. He alleged that police officers interrogated him about his role in the protest and beat him with their fists and batons. As a result of the alleged abuse, he suffered physical injuries and severe psychological trauma. Following his arrest, Mustakim was produced before a court and sent to prison, where he received medical treatment at the prison hospital for injuries sustained during his detention.

Seeking justice, he filed a case under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 against the then Officer-in-Charge of Panchlaish Police Station, a Sub-Inspector, and several unidentified police officers in the Court of the Chittagong Metropolitan Sessions Judge Begum Jebunesa on 20 February 2023. The court directed the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to investigate the incident. The investigating officer of the case, CID Chittagong Zone Special Superintendent of Police, Mohammad Shahnewaz Khaled, submitted the final report⁴⁵ of the case to the court on 15 May. In the report, it was recommended that the Officer-in-Charge of Panchlaish Police Station, Nazim Uddin Majumdar and Assistant Sub-Inspector Abdul Aziz be acquitted from the case.

Case Study: *On 18 February 2020, Yasmin Begum reportedly died after being subjected to torture while in the custody of members of the Detective Branch (DB) of police in Gazipur. According to her family, a team of DB officers raided her residence in the Bhawal area of Gazipur in an attempt to arrest her husband, Abdul Hai. When they failed to locate him, the officers allegedly forced open the collapsible gate, entered the house without presenting a warrant, and detained Yasmin Begum instead. Family members alleged that she was physically assaulted after resisting the officers' attempt to take her away.*

Police later claimed that Yasmin Begum was involved in drug trafficking and that 100 Yaba tablets had been recovered during the raid. However, her son, Yasin Arafat, strongly rejected these allegations, maintaining that his mother had no involvement in any drug-related activities and that no narcotics were recovered from their home. He stated that upon learning of the raid, he rushed home and witnessed police taking his mother away. When he later called her mobile phone, an unidentified person answered using abusive language while he could hear his mother crying and screaming in the background. At approximately 11:00 pm, someone using Yasmin Begum's phone instructed him to go to the DB office. From there, he was directed to Gazipur Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital, where he was informed that his mother had died.

The family alleged that Yasmin Begum was arbitrarily detained on fabricated drug charges and subjected to severe physical torture while in DB custody, resulting in her death.

According to Odhikar's analysis, geographically, the incidents of torture are concentrated primarily in urban policing zones, with the highest number occurring in Dhaka. Within the capital, abuses are frequently reported in facilities such as Detective Branch offices, police stations, and detention facilities, indicating the institutionalization of torture within formal custody settings. Secondary clusters are observed in regions such as Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Rajshahi, and the Jessore–Khulna belt. In contrast, border areas—including Naogaon, Satkhira, and Rajshahi—are marked by abuses involving border guards, where violence tends to be more militarized and less subject to oversight. This geographical pattern suggests a dual

⁴⁵ A final report is submitted by the police to the court at the end of an investigation when there is no evidence that an offence had occurred or when there is no evidence that the person accused committed the alleged offence.

reality: systematic custodial abuse in urban centers and less accountable, force-driven violence in peripheral border areas.⁴⁶

The types of torture employed across the cases show a disturbing level of consistency. Physical torture methods include beatings with rods or batons, suspension from structures, kicking of sensitive body parts, shooting in the legs, and deliberate fracturing of limbs. More extreme forms of torture involve the ripping out of finger or toe nails, electric shocks, waterboarding, application of chili powder to the eyes, blindfolding, and prolonged assaults. Psychological torture is also widespread, with victims facing threats of extrajudicial killings, being labeled as militants, forced memorization of statements, and deprivation of basic necessities such as water, sleep, and medical care. Sexual torture and humiliation, including abuse targeting genital areas and sexual violence against women detainees, further underline the severity of violations. In addition, economic coercion is frequently used, with detainees being forced to pay for their release or surrender valuables under duress.

These patterns collectively point to deeper institutional issues within the law enforcement and justice system. Torture is frequently associated with remand periods, indicating that interrogation practices are a key site of abuse. At the same time, impunity remains a persistent problem, as many cases are subject to internal investigations that yield limited accountability or consequences. Finally, there is a recurring misuse of legal frameworks, where laws—particularly those related to digital security, drugs, or arms—are applied in ways that facilitate arbitrary detention and justify abusive practices. Together, these systemic failures reinforce a cycle in which violations are normalized, accountability is weak, and victims are left without effective remedies.

Case Study: *On 29 December 2020, a 30-year-old trainee lawyer Rezaul Karim Reza was allegedly arrested without a warrant by three plainclothes officers of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police from Hamid Khan Road in Barishal, in front of his father, Yunus Munshi. According to his father, the officers assaulted Reza during the arrest before taking him to the DB office.*

The following day, when Reza was produced before the court, he told his brother that he had been subjected to severe torture throughout the night by DB officers, including Sub-Inspector Mohiuddin. He stated that he had been repeatedly beaten with a ruler, denied food, and tortured so brutally that he lost control of his bladder and urinated due to the pain. Despite these allegations and his visibly deteriorating condition, he was remanded to jail custody.

On the night of 1 January 2021, Reza's health rapidly worsened as a result of the injuries he had sustained. Prison authorities transferred him to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital, where his family found him bleeding from his injuries and writhing in pain. He died later that night.

The case drew public attention, and on 3 March 2021, the High Court ordered a judicial inquiry into Reza's custodial death. However, despite the passage of several years, there has been little to no meaningful progress in ensuring accountability or delivering justice to his family.

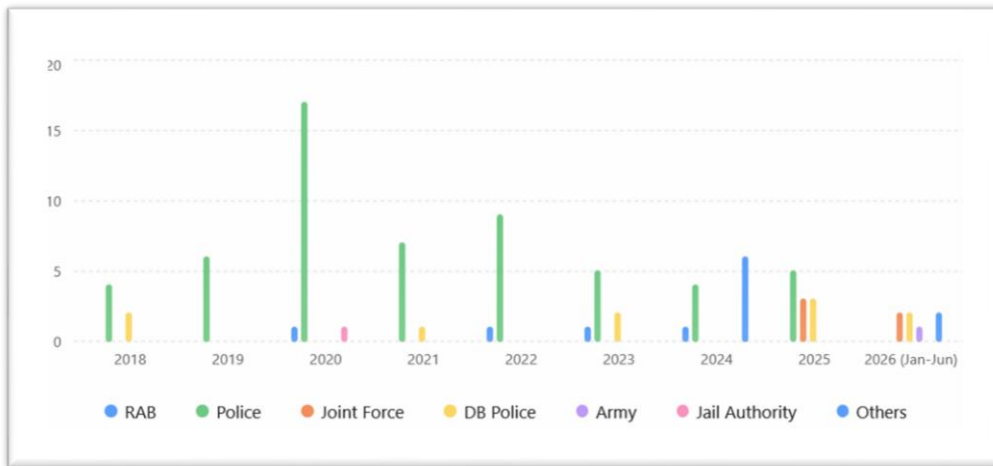
During a meeting organised by Odhikar, Reza's father, Md. Yunus, shared the devastating impact of losing his son. Carrying two photographs—one showing Reza before his arrest and another depicting his lifeless body—he described the brutality of the torture and the family's continuing struggle for justice. With deep grief, he stated: "Police tortured and killed my son. I want a fair investigation and justice."

⁴⁶ Analysis based on Odhikar's fact-finding and documentation.

Below is a chart representing the documented cases of deaths due to torture and the law enforcement agencies responsible, between January 2018 and June 2026.

Tortured to Death by Security Forces in Bangladesh: January 2018 - June 2026								
Year (s)	RAB	Police	Joint Force	DB Police	Army	Jail Authority	Others	Grand Total
Jan-June 2026	0	0	2	2	1	0	2	7
2025	0	5	3	3	0	0	0	11
2024	1	4	0	0	0	0	6	11
2023	1	5	0	2	0	0	0	8
2022	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	10
2021	0	7	0	1	0	0	0	8
2020	1	17	0	0	0	1	0	19
2019	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
2018	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	6
Total	4	57	5	10	1	1	8	86

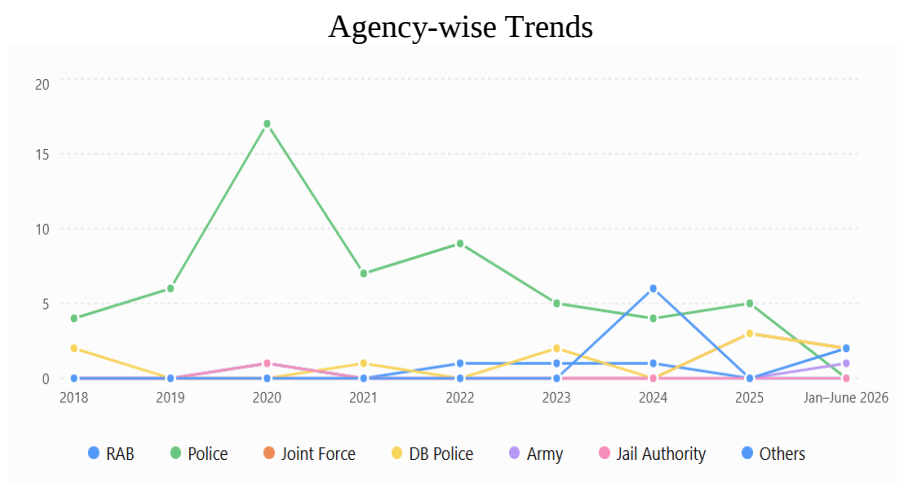




The data on torture-related deaths in Bangladesh between 2018 and 2026 reveals a pattern of fluctuation rather than consistent progress or decline. In the initial years, 2018 and 2019, the number of recorded deaths due to torture remained stable at six cases per year, indicating a persistent but relatively contained level of abuse. However, this pattern changed dramatically in 2020, when the number of deaths surged to nineteen—the highest in the dataset.

The sharp spike of deaths due to torture in 2020, suggests a period of heightened enforcement or weakened oversight mechanisms, while subsequent declines indicate temporary corrections rather than sustained reform. In the years that followed, from 2021 to 2023, the number of persons tortured to death declined within a range of eight to ten cases annually. While this reduction may point to temporary corrective measures or increased scrutiny, due to sanctions imposed by US Department of the Treasury and State Department on Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) for serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances. However, the subsequent rise to eleven cases in both 2024 and 2025 indicates that such improvements were not sustained. Overall, the absence of a steady downward trend highlights the persistence of structural issues within the system.

Agency-wise pattern analysis



The second graph (above) compares the involvement of key law enforcement agencies—Police, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), and Detective Branch (DB) Police—in cases of

custodial death due to torture. The data demonstrates that the Police account for the overwhelming majority of documented cases, indicating a systemic reliance on abusive custodial practices rather than isolated incidents. If Police and DB Police are considered together, they account for 67 cases out of 86, or approximately 80% of all cases. This validates that law-enforcement agencies, particularly the police and its specialised Detective Branch, constitute the principal institutional category associated with the cases documented in this dataset. Overall, the pattern suggests that torture is institutionally embedded within law enforcement practices, particularly during arrest, detention, and interrogation.

Police

The Police emerge as the dominant actor, being implicated in 57 of the 86 documented cases, representing approximately 67 percent of the total. Police involvement is recorded consistently throughout the reporting period, with a significant spike in 2020, when 17 cases were documented. This sustained pattern indicates that torture and other forms of ill-treatment are not occasional or exceptional practices but are deeply rooted in routine policing methods, especially during custodial interrogation and criminal investigations.

RAB (Rapid Action Battalion)

The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) is linked to four documented cases during the study period. Although the number is comparatively lower than that of the Police, RAB's recurring involvement across multiple years suggests the continued use of coercive practices. The relatively small number of reported cases should not be interpreted as evidence of lower levels of abuse. Instead, it may reflect differences in operational patterns, underreporting, or variations in the classification and documentation of violations involving the force.

DB Police (Detective Branch)

The Detective Branch (DB) Police are implicated in 10 documented cases, with their involvement appearing sporadic across the reporting period. However, a noticeable increase in cases during 2025 suggests a growing role in incidents involving torture and custodial abuse. DB Police appear to be more frequently associated with targeted operations and high-profile investigations, where coercive interrogation methods may be employed to obtain confessions or information. The recent increase warrants closer scrutiny to determine whether it reflects changing enforcement practices or an expansion of investigative responsibilities accompanied by abusive methods.

A closer examination of agency-wise involvement shows that the police are overwhelmingly the primary actors in these incidents. Accounting for approximately 67 percent of the total cases, police involvement is evident in every year of the dataset. The most notable spike occurred in 2020, when police were linked to seventeen out of nineteen deaths. This consistent dominance suggests that custodial torture is not an isolated phenomenon but rather embedded within routine policing practices, particularly during detention and interrogation. Other agencies, such as the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), appear less frequently in the data, though their presence across multiple years indicates continued engagement in coercive practices. Similarly, the Detective Branch (DB Police) shows intermittent involvement, with a noticeable increase in 2025, suggesting their role may be more case-specific or targeted.

Case Study: Sultana Jesmin, a 45-year-old assistant at the Chandipur Union Land Office in Naogaon, died on 24 March 2023 while receiving treatment at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, two days after being detained by members of RAB-5. Her death raised serious concerns regarding arbitrary detention, custodial torture, violations of due process, and accountability of law enforcement agencies. In the morning of 22 March 2023, plain-clothed RAB members intercepted Sultana Jesmin near Mukti Mor in Naogaon, identified themselves, and forcibly took her away in a microbus. According to her family, no case or formal complaint had been filed against her at the time of her detention.

The detention reportedly stemmed from a verbal complaint made by Md. Enamul Haque, Director (Joint Secretary) of the Rajshahi Divisional Local Government Office, who alleged that Jesmin had hacked his Facebook account and used it to defraud people by promising government jobs. A formal case under the Digital Security Act was filed with Rajpara Police Station in Rajshahi on 23 March—approximately one day after her detention and just one day before her death.

According to RAB, Jesmin became ill immediately after being taken into custody and was transported first to Naogaon Sadar Hospital and later to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital. Hospital authorities stated that Jesmin was brought to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital unconscious with a head injury. A CT scan of brain revealed intracranial hemorrhage (internal bleeding in the brain), which ultimately caused her death.

According to Dr. Kafil Uddin, Head of the Forensic Department and Chairman of the Autopsy Board, Jesmin died from shock resulting from bleeding in her brain. The subsequent post-mortem examination found two external injuries—a 2.5-centimetre injury on the left forehead and a 2-centimetre injury on the inside of the right elbow—but concluded that neither injury caused her death. The autopsy board attributed the fatal hemorrhage to the rupture of a blood vessel caused by a sudden increase in blood pressure and stated that there were no signs of torture.

According to a physician known to the family, an injury was observed on the left side of Jesmin's head near the neck. When questioned about the injury, RAB personnel reportedly claimed it could have resulted from the movement of the ambulance. The family also stated that RAB controlled all aspects of her medical treatment, prevented relatives from approaching her, and withheld information about her condition.

Victim's younger brother, Sultan Mahmud Hossain, said that the family was denied access to her while she was under treatment and that all medical procedures were conducted under RAB supervision. Following her death, he alleged that RAB officials warned him and his nephew not to file any complaint or publicly discuss the incident, threatening serious consequences if they did.

Because of these threats and their financial vulnerability, the family did not file a criminal case. They further stated that although they were told the post-mortem described the death as natural, they were never provided with a copy of the report. Jesmin's son, Sahed Shahriar Soikat, asserted that his mother was the victim of a conspiracy and died as a result of torture while in RAB custody.

The data also points to emerging patterns involving other security actors. In 2024, there is a significant increase in cases categorized under 'Others', (such as the Forest Department, Narcotics Department, Industrial Police, etc) and in 2025, the appearance of joint force involvement marks a shift toward multi-agency operations. These developments may indicate a diversification of enforcement practices, potentially leading to a diffusion of accountability. When multiple agencies are involved, it often becomes more difficult to assign responsibility, thereby increasing the risk of impunity. This trend also raises concerns about the growing militarization of law enforcement functions.

Case Study: Md. Ansar Hossain, son of Meher Ali from Keruntali village under Hoanak Union under Maheshkhali Upazila in Cox's Bazar, alleged that he was arbitrarily detained and tortured by members of the Bangladesh Navy on 9 July 2025. While travelling from his home to Cox's Bazar to attend a scheduled court hearing, he was reportedly apprehended by individuals in plain clothes at Gorakghata Bazar. Shortly afterwards, a Bangladesh Navy vehicle allegedly transported him to a temporary Navy camp located at Leadership University College.

According to Ansar Hossain, he was subjected to severe physical assault and psychological torture during his detention. He alleged that naval personnel attempted to coerce him into confessing to possessing illegal weapons. As no criminal case or arrest warrant reportedly existed against him, he was later handed over to Maheshkhali Police Station and allegedly warned not to disclose the incident before being released.

Following his release, Ansar Hossain received medical treatment for injuries allegedly sustained during the assault. At a press conference held at his residence, he publicly described the torture he claimed to have suffered and displayed visible injuries. He called for an impartial investigation into the incident and demanded accountability for the responsible Navy personnel.

Case Study: On 19 December 2025, Sheikh Mohammad Shahid Imam Tamim, a 13-year-old Class VIII student from Kadamtali village in Hoanak Union of Maheshkhali Upazila, Cox's Bazar, was allegedly subjected to torture during a joint operation conducted by members of the Bangladesh Coast Guard and Bangladesh Navy.

According to the victim and his family, the security forces raided their home in search of Tamim's father, Imam Hossain Mintu. When they failed to locate him, they allegedly detained Tamim and subjected him to severe physical abuse.

Tamim said that at approximately 5:40 a.m., he was awakened from sleep, blindfolded, and restrained by members of the joint force. He alleged that he was repeatedly beaten with batons, kicked with military boots, and physically assaulted while being questioned about his father's whereabouts. The assault was so severe that he lost consciousness. After regaining consciousness, Tamim alleged that he was forced to state that the Coast Guard and Navy had not tortured him. He further claimed that a firearm was pointed at his head and that his mother was compelled to record a video stating that her son had not been tortured.

Following his release, family members rescued Tamim and took him to Maheshkhali Health Complex, where he received medical treatment. Visible marks of injuries were reportedly found on different parts of his body. After receiving medical treatment, Tamim returned home. Through his video statement, he has called for justice and demanded that those responsible for the alleged torture be investigated and held accountable. At the time of reporting, no information was available regarding any official investigation or action against the alleged perpetrators.

What Needs to be Strengthened

Several key themes emerge from this analysis. First, the persistence of torture-related deaths across all years demonstrates that such practices are entrenched rather than incidental. Second, the occurrence of sharp spikes, particularly in 2020, suggests that broader political or security contexts may influence the frequency of abuses. Third, the concentration of cases within a single agency—the police—highlights the need for targeted institutional reform. Finally, the lack of a consistent decline over time points to weak accountability mechanisms and the absence of effective deterrence.

The five Special Procedures mandate holders of the UN Human Rights Council (on torture, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, the right to peaceful assembly and truth, justice, reparation and the guarantee of non-repetition) sent a joint letter to the Government of Bangladesh on 27 July (reference: OL BGD 5/2026), offering collective observations and recommendations on how to best address some of the legal deficiencies and structural and underlying conditions that have allowed torture and other abuses to persist. The letter is divided into seven sections—international legal obligations, weaknesses in the existing legal framework, reform of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), establishment of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), police reform, draft law on the prevention of enforced disappearances, and rehabilitation of victims of the July 2024 mass uprising.⁴⁷

Dr Alice Edwards, the United Nations special rapporteur on torture, in an interview, observed that the prevention of torture involves ensuring proper safeguards in police custody. Alleged persons must have access to a lawyer, medical examinations, and audio-video recordings. They must be brought before a judge speedily. She also said that judges are not exempt; they have obligations not to ignore torture or send people to overcrowded prisons known for violence. She stressed the need to have independent bodies to investigate instances of custodial torture. Investigations have to be prompt and impartial. This means they must be at ‘arm’s length’ from the perpetrators. Torture is a unique crime. “There is an intimate relationship between corruption -- both political and financial -- and the abuse of power. Torture is at the extreme end of the abuse of power,” said Dr Edwards.⁴⁸

Independent oversight mechanism

These findings. Recommendations and observations underscore deeper structural challenges within the governance and justice systems. A culture of impunity appears to prevail, where law enforcement personnel are rarely held accountable for abuses. Oversight mechanisms, whether judicial or administrative, seem insufficient to prevent or respond effectively to violations. Additionally, the data suggests that law enforcement practices may be influenced by political considerations, with periods of heightened activity corresponding to broader state priorities. Despite recurring incidents, there is little evidence of meaningful institutional reform, further reinforcing the cyclical nature of the problem.

Strengthening accountability and police reform

Addressing these issues requires comprehensive and sustained policy interventions. Strengthening legal accountability is essential, including the rigorous enforcement of existing anti-torture laws and the establishment of fast-track judicial processes for custodial death cases. An independent oversight body with the authority to investigate and publicly report on such incidents would significantly enhance transparency and accountability. Police reform is also critical, particularly in relation to custodial practices; measures such as mandatory video recording of interrogations and ensuring access to legal counsel could help reduce abuse.

⁴⁷ “UN Special Envoys’ letter to the Bangladesh government”, BDDiGET, 31 July 2026; <https://en.bddigest.com/un-special-envoys-letter-to-the-bangladesh-government-call-for-legal-reforms-to-prevent-torture-and-enforced-disappearances-in-bangladesh/>

⁴⁸ “Bangladesh lacks ‘A-status’ NHRC to curb torture”, The Daily Star, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/bangladesh-lacks-status-nhrc-curb-torture-4162521>

Furthermore, the regular publication of disaggregated data on custodial deaths would promote transparency and enable more effective monitoring.

Capacity building and international engagement

In addition, institutionalizing human rights training for law enforcement officials can help shift practices toward non-coercive methods of investigation. Providing compensation and support to victims' families is another important step in ensuring justice and redress. Finally, aligning national practices with international standards, including the United Nations Convention Against Torture and its Optional Protocol, would reinforce Bangladesh's commitment to preventing torture and upholding human rights.

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that torture-related deaths in Bangladesh are not isolated incidents but reflect systemic, persistent, and institutionalized practices, particularly within policing structures. While there have been periods of decline, the overall trend shows persistence and recurrence, highlights deep-rooted structural failures in accountability, oversight, and reform. Without comprehensive institutional changes and sustained efforts to address these underlying issues, torture is likely to remain a recurring feature of the criminal justice system rather than an exception.

Chapter-IV:

Torture in the Context of Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh

During the autocratic regime of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League led government⁴⁹, enforced disappearances became so common that after her fall on 05 August 2024⁵⁰, the interim government⁵¹ set up a Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (the Commission)⁵² and acceded to the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons against Enforced Disappearance⁵³. After extensive fact findings, collection of testimonies and verifications of information, the Commission published its findings. While individual cases received periodic domestic and international attention, the findings of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances reveal the existence of a much broader architecture of repression. During its 16-month long tenure, the Commission documented over 1900 Cases of enforced disappearance, investigated 400 and verified 1546 cases.

Victims of enforced disappearance often experience multiple forms of torture along with the disappearance. Victims are not only deprived of their liberty but are also subjected to prolonged uncertainty, isolation, and fear, often accompanied by physical and psychological abuse. In Bangladesh, the practice of enforced disappearance has been intrinsically linked with a widespread and systematic culture of torture. Rather than being exceptional or incidental, torture appears to have become normalized within certain security operations, as evidenced by consistent patterns in survivor testimonies collected across different regions and time periods.⁵⁴

According to the Commission, victims of enforced disappearance were frequently tortured while being held in secret, unacknowledged detention. The absence of legal oversight created conditions in which torture could be carried out without interruption. Perpetrators often delayed presenting detainees before courts until visible injuries had healed. In some cases, victims were provided ointments and hidden from public view until bruises and wounds faded.⁵⁵

Torture was closely connected to interrogation concerning alleged political activities, opposition affiliations, militant links, or criticism of the government. Victims were pressured to confess, implicate others, or adopt pre-prepared narratives before being formally shown as arrested.

⁴⁹ January 2009 – 05 August 2024.

⁵⁰ On 05 August 2024, Sheikh Hasina fled the country during a student-led mass uprising and on 08 August 2024 an interim government was sworn in.

⁵¹ The Interim Government took oath on 08 August 2024.

⁵² 5-member commission formed to detect victims of forced disappearance, Prothom Alo, 27 August, 2024, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/zdjt6l36cr>

⁵³ See https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg_no=iv-16&chapter=4

⁵⁴ Odhikar, *Annual Human Rights Reports on Bangladesh 2024*; see also reports of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances regarding Bangladesh.

⁵⁵ Final report of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, <https://coied.portal.gov.bd>

Torture emerged as one of the most consistent features across the documented cases of enforced disappearance. Survivors described prolonged periods of blindfolded detention, repeated interrogations, physical assaults, electrocution, waterboarding, suspension, sexualized violence, and psychological abuse. Many detainees reported to the Commission that torture occurred daily or near-daily throughout their detention.

The Commission concluded that enforced disappearance and torture were intrinsically linked.⁵⁶ Victims were deliberately removed from legal protection and held incommunicado, creating conditions in which torture could be inflicted without judicial oversight, family contact, legal representation, or public accountability.

Torture as a Systematic Practice

The Commission found that torture was embedded within the operational structure of secret detention facilities. Survivors described torture methods, interrogation techniques, and detention infrastructure, indicating a highly institutionalized system rather than isolated acts of abuse. Specialized interrogation rooms, torture instruments, soundproofed chambers, and dedicated detention infrastructure existed in numerous facilities. Investigators discovered evidence consistent with survivor testimonies, including rotating torture chairs, pulley systems used for suspension, “jom tupi” hoods used during interrogation, and remnants of soundproofing designed to conceal victims’ screams.⁵⁷

A distinction emerged between facilities managed by civil law-enforcement agencies and those controlled by military authorities. In facilities operated by the Detective Branch of Police (DB) and Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime⁵⁸ (CTTC) Unit, torture was often integrated into daily office activities, with detainees reporting that officers continued routine work while torture occurred nearby. In contrast, military-controlled facilities, including those operated by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), maintained specialized torture infrastructure and equipment designed specifically for inflicting physical and psychological suffering.⁵⁹

The Commission further documented efforts to destroy evidence after August 2024, including the dismantling of torture chambers and removal of torture instruments such as rotating chairs, electric-shock devices, thermal torture equipment, whips, knives, and soundproofing materials.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, <https://coied.portal.gov.bd/pages/publications/final-report-69662bc77746b8be8ee26287>

⁵⁷ The Business Standard, 13 January 2026; <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/final-report-enforced-disappearances-released-read-full-document-1333366>

⁵⁸ Under the Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

⁵⁹ Enforced disappearances: Commission finds 16 secret detention centres, The Daily Star, 4 June 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/enforced-disappearances-commission-finds-16-secret-detention-centres-3911761>

⁶⁰ Final report on enforced disappearances released: Read the full document, The Business Standard, 13 January 2026, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/final-report-enforced-disappearances-released-read-full-document-1333366>

Principal Methods of Torture

According to testimonies of survivors of enforced disappearance, methods of torture have been revealed as well as which forces were involved and what type of torture equipment were used. The methods have often been associated with interrogation, punishment, forced confessions, extortion, intimidation, and political repression.

1. Sensory Deprivation and Lack of Privacy

Victims were routinely subjected to prolonged blindfolding, solitary confinement, constant surveillance, sleep deprivation, and degrading detention conditions. Many detainees remained blindfolded continuously for weeks or months. In several facilities, CCTV cameras monitored detainees even during toilet use. Torture rooms frequently used loud music to mask screams and intensify psychological distress.

For male victims, the lack of privacy inside the cells was particularly brutal. The cells, small and confined, were designed with built-in low pans (floor-level toilets). However, due to the lack of dividing walls, when victims lay down, their bodies would end up on top of the pans, subjecting them to the unhygienic conditions of dirt, urine, and faeces.

The situation for female victims was only slightly better. Although there was usually a short wall, it was insufficient to provide full privacy, leaving the upper part of their bodies exposed. The discomfort of being constantly watched while performing bathroom functions, with no personal space or dignity, was compounded by the physical discomfort of the conditions themselves. Additionally, some women victims reported feeling distressed due to not being allowed to wear the ‘orna’ (long scarf) whilst in custody.

For example, (former) Ambassador M. Maroof Zaman, who remained disappeared for 15 months, recalled that there were continuous screams of people being tortured, the loud noise of machinery and lights being kept on, preventing sleep⁶¹.

2. Beatings

Beatings were among the most common forms of torture reported. All the survivors described being beaten with fists, sticks, rods, and other objects over extended periods. Some victims reported torture sessions lasting many hours, while others described repeated beatings over weeks or months. Victims frequently suffered permanent injuries, including damage to knees, arms, and other body parts. The Commission found that beatings occurred consistently across detention facilities throughout the country.

Barrister Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, currently Member of Parliament from Jamaat-e-Islami, experienced severe physical and psychological torture during his eight years of being disappeared and held in secret at the Taskforce for Interrogation Center (TFI)⁶².

Again, Humayun Kabir, a blogger and BNP leader, who was picked up by RAB and forced into a microbus, blindfolded, and handcuffed, was subsequently taken to an undisclosed

⁶¹ As said to Odhikar during an interview.

⁶² As said to Odhikar during an interview.

location. There, he was subjected to relentless torture. He was hung upside down, beaten, and electrocuted, including on his ears and genitals. Needles were inserted underneath his toenails, and one of them was uprooted⁶³.

3. Electric Shocks

Electric shock was identified as one of the most prevalent torture methods. Survivors described electric shocks administered to various parts of the body, including hands, feet, chest, and genitals. Numerous victims reported losing consciousness during electrocution sessions. Electric shocks were often used alongside beatings and suspension techniques to compel confessions or extract information.

The Commission documented repeated accounts of genital electrocution, including threats of impotence and long-lasting physical injuries. These accounts emerged from multiple victims across different facilities and years, indicating a recurring and institutionalized practice.

A 19-year-old youth was abducted by RAB in 2021 and disappeared for 1 year 10 months. He was severely torture during interrogation. His hands were handcuffed behind his back, and eyes were blindfolded. RAB members would tie him to a chair. After tying him up, about four or five of them would stand around him. They gave him electric shocks. Whenever they gave him electric shocks, he would lose consciousness⁶⁴.

4. Waterboarding

Victims reported being subjected to waterboarding, where cloth was placed over the face and water repeatedly poured over it, creating sensations of drowning and suffocation. Survivors described extreme panic, inability to breathe, and repeated cycles of interrogation interspersed with waterboarding sessions. Some victims lost consciousness during the process.

A 27-year-old, was abducted by RAB 10 in 2017 and was disappeared for 39 days. During his captivity, he was taken into a room several times for interrogation, where he was forced to lay down. Then a bamboo pole was interwoven between his arms and under his neck. Another one was placed underneath the legs, below thighs, and another one above the thighs. Some men then stood on the bamboo poles. This caused excruciating pain in both his arms and legs. When his limbs became numb, a thin wet towel (gamcha) was placed over his face and the men kept pouring water over it. He felt like he could no longer breathe. Then they removed the gamcha and said, "Tell us, what have you done?" When he said, "Sir, what can I say? You tell me what you want to know. Why have you brought me here?" Then they said, "No, it's not working. Put the gamcha back on. Pour water again." They poured water over his face four times in this way⁶⁵.

⁶³ Odhikar documentation.

⁶⁴ Odhikar documentation. Victim's name has been withheld for security reasons.

⁶⁵ Odhikar fact finding. Victim's name had been withheld for security reasons.

5. Rotating Devices and Mechanical Torture

The Commission found evidence of specialized mechanical torture devices, particularly rotating chairs and restraint systems. Victims were strapped to these devices with belts securing the head, torso, arms, and legs before being spun, inverted, or rotated. Survivors reported severe disorientation, pain, and physical injury. Investigators recovered evidence of such devices at facilities operated by NSI and RAB. Additional mechanical torture methods included suspension from pulleys, hanging detainees by their arms, and stretching devices designed to inflict intense pain⁶⁶.

A 28 year old man who was abducted by DGFI and RAB 2 in 2017, was disappeared for 208 days. During his captivity, according to his testimony, he was tortured in different methods, including bring given electric shocks while spinning on rotating chair. Once, he was forced onto some sort of machine and was tied to it from around his head, hands, knees and legs. He was kept standing straight. After the machine was switched on, he felt as if all his bones were coming apart. The machine could be rotated. Sometimes they could turn him upside down. It could also be adjusted so that one can lying flat. While he was there, they struck him on the knees. At the same time, they were asking, “What conspiracies are you plotting against the government?”⁶⁷

6. Sexualized Torture

Sexualized torture was reported less frequently due to victim reluctance and stigma, but the Commission found credible and repeated evidence of such abuse. Torture commonly targeted victims’ genitals through electrocution, physical assault, threats of impotence, and humiliation. Female detainees also reported gender-based humiliation, sexual harassment, and degrading treatment by male officers.

30 year old man, who was abducted by RAB Intelligence and RAB 12 in 2014; disappeared for 39 days. After he was forced into the vehicle, the men blindfolded him, took off his pants and attached a clip to one of his testicles. After that, they began giving him electric shocks. According to him, he was given electric shocks for about 15 to 20 minutes. The next morning, they took him into a room where RAB officers asked him a few questions and when they did not get any answers, they tied both his hands with a rope and hung him up from the ceiling. While he was hanging, they stripped him completely naked. They attached an electric clip to one of his hands and began giving him electric shocks – while also beating him with a cane⁶⁸.

Consequences for Victims

Torture has resulted in severe and long-lasting physical and psychological consequences for survivors. Reported impacts include permanent injuries to limbs and joints, vision impairment and retinal damage, chronic pain, and reduced mobility. Many survivors also face sexual and reproductive health complications. In addition to physical harm, victims commonly experience deep psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression, and

⁶⁶ One of the implements was left in a secret detention centre.

See <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/government/ohk04zflw8>

⁶⁷ Odhikar fact finding report. Victim’s name has been withheld for security reasons.

⁶⁸ Odhikar documentation. Victim’s name has been withheld for security reasons.

symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The effects often extend into social and economic life, leading to social isolation, loss of livelihood, and a persistent fear of engaging with state institutions or participating in public life. The Commission emphasized that these harms frequently persist for years after release, underscoring the need for sustained rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and comprehensive long-term care for survivors.⁶⁹

Command Responsibility

The Inquiry Commission concluded that the scale, organization, and persistence of torture demonstrated that it could not have occurred without authorization, acquiescence, or deliberate indifference from senior officials.⁷⁰ The existence of specialized facilities, procurement of equipment, training of personnel, and maintenance of detention infrastructure indicated institutional support extending beyond individual perpetrators. Responsibility therefore extends to commanding officers and senior officials who enabled, tolerated, or failed to prevent such practices.⁷¹

The findings of the Commission indicate that torture was a central component of the enforced disappearance system operating in Bangladesh between 2009 and July 2024. The evidence reveals a widespread, systematic, and institutionalized pattern of abuse carried out in secret detention facilities by multiple security agencies. Torture was facilitated by enforced disappearance, protected by secrecy and impunity, and sustained through specialized infrastructure, organizational support, and command structures. Accountability, reparations for victims, and structural reforms remain essential to ensuring justice and preventing recurrence.

⁶⁹ The final report of the Inquiry Commission, titled "Unfolding the Truth: A Structural Diagnosis of Enforced Disappearance in Bangladesh", <https://coied.portal.gov.bd/pages/publications/final-report-69662bc77746b8be8ee26287>

⁷⁰ First Interim Report on the Inquiry Commission, titled "Unfolding the Truth: A Structural Diagnosis of Enforced Disappearance in Bangladesh" <https://objectstorage.ap-dcc-gazipur-1.oraclecloud15.com/n/axvjbnqprylg/b/V2Ministry/o/office-coied/2024/12/55d9a77f912d44e780c91f1891b70f62.pdf>

⁷¹ Ibid

Chapter V

Torture and Extra Judicial Killings during the July 2024 Uprising

During her tenure, the deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina continued rewarding members of law enforcement agencies, for using brute force against political opponents, critics of the government and dissidents. On 27 February 2024, 400 members of the police force were awarded the Bangladesh Police Medal (BPM) and the Presidential Police Medal (PPM).⁷² 80 members of the police were rewarded for foiling public rallies of the opposition party, repressing the dissidents, and quelling the protests of factory workers who were demanding realistic wages amidst high inflation and a safer workplace, especially for the female workers.⁷³ During the mass uprising that began with the student-lead ‘anti-quota’ movement⁷⁴ the country’s security forces and the law-enforcement agencies, including the police and RAB, indiscriminately fired bullets at unarmed protesters, killing many to quell the protests.

On 1 July 2024, various universities across the country, including Dhaka University, organised student rallies, demanding the reinstatement of the circular that cancelled the (controversial) job quota system. From 4 July, after the Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan refused to suspend the quota system, the protests gained momentum among students nationwide⁷⁵. Students joined the movement spontaneously and called for strikes. From 6 July, students from different universities and educational institutions across the country, organised several programmes, including demonstrations, exam boycotts and student rallies. On 7 July they declared a shutdown of the whole country. On 10 July, the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement declared a Bangla Blockade from morning to evening. On 11 July, in several regions of the country, police attacked students with sticks and fired tear gas and rubber bullets at them, leaving at least 40 people injured.⁷⁶ On 14 July during a press conference, the former Prime Minister, responding to a (pro-regime) journalist’s question, remarked, “If the grandchildren of freedom fighters do not receive quota benefits, should the grandchildren of *rajakars*⁷⁷ receive them?” That intensified the movement. Many Dhaka University students, across campus and several residence halls, protested against the former Prime Minister’s remarks, which they considered highly derogatory.

⁷² Prothom Alo, 28 February 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/3x1c0x4bjz>

⁷³ New Age, 28 February 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/226541/>

⁷⁴ This movement began primarily on 17 February 2018. At this time, students (under the banner of “Bangladesh General Students’ Council.”) held rallies to demand a reform to the quota system that existed in government jobs. Afterwards, the government disrupted the peaceful rallies by using the police, who attacked the student protesters with sticks, pellet guns, tear gas, and hot water cannons. Members and activists of Chhatra League, and Awami League supporters, joined the police to attack protesters, just as they did again in 2024. At one point, when the protests spread across the entire student population, the Prime Minister was forced to announce the cancellation of the quota at the National Parliament and through a government circular. Then in 2021, some people identifying themselves as children of freedom fighters, filed a writ petition with the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, demanding this circular to be cancelled.

⁷⁵ See <https://www.tbsnews.net/features/panorama/anti-quota-protests-intensify-following-new-court-verdict-1180776>

⁷⁶ The Daily Star 12 July 2024; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/quota-protests-heat-govt-mulls-hard-line-3654791>

⁷⁷ The label “Rajakar” was given to associates and collaborators of the Pakistani military in 1971.

On 15 July the then government, in efforts to suppress the peaceful protests, let loose members of its various wings, such as Chhatra League, Jubo League, and Swechchasebak League. These ruling party organizations joined the law enforcement agencies and security forces to attack the student protesters, leaving over 300 of them injured. Chhatra League activists also indiscriminately attacked female students, many of whom were physically assaulted and seriously injured.⁷⁸

On 16 July 2024, a police Sub-Inspector named Yunus Ali shot and killed Abu Sayeed, a student at Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur⁷⁹. After Abu Sayeed's death, students across the country took to the streets and the protests intensified. The police, members of the Chhatra League and Jubo League continued unrelenting violence on the students.⁸⁰ The government also used the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), and specialized forces such as SWAT, against the protesters.⁸¹ The perpetrating forces were seen using Armored Personal Carriers (APC) with UN insignia, to quell the protests.⁸² As brute force was increasingly used against the protesters, mainly students and young people, members of the general population started joining the movement, including workers and even rickshaw pullers.⁸³ Members of law enforcement agencies and ruling party leaders and activists shot indiscriminately at the protesting masses.

At different points during the July-August 2024 mass uprising, the government shut off internet services in the country and continued their mass killing spree. Members of law enforcement agencies shot at student protesters from helicopters.⁸⁴ Police were seen throwing the bullet-riddled body of Yeamin, a student protester, from an APC across a road divider. Several students died from gunshot wounds on their way to hospitals as the police and leaders and activists of the Awami League blocked the way.⁸⁵ From 19 July onwards, 105 children were killed by indiscriminate firing of law enforcement agencies, including 11-year-old Samir, 4-year-old Abdul Ahad, 6-year-old Riya Gop and 15-year-old Md. Rasel. In Dhaka's Ashulia, police killed protesters, loaded their dead bodies onto a vehicle, and set it on fire.⁸⁶

Law enforcement agencies have been accused of torturing people to death, shooting and maiming civilians, and filing fabricated cases against victims who lost their eyesight due to police violence during the mass uprising. The police threatened and intimidated victims to force them to withdraw cases filed against police officers.⁸⁷

According to the draft list created by the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement and the National Citizens' Committee, 1,581 people were killed⁸⁸ and over 18,000 were injured⁸⁹ in

⁷⁸ Prothom Alo English 16 July 2024; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/city/kxvjs84138>

⁷⁹ See <https://www.newagebd.net/post/country/269916/abu-sayeed-murder-deliberate-extrajudicial-killing>

⁸⁰ Prothom Alo English 2 August 2024; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/5jvl0xye5l>

⁸¹ Samakal, 19 July 2024; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2024-07-19/1/6379>

⁸² DW News, 23 July 2024; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMF9dWjg8P0>, BBC News Bangla, 25 July 2024; <https://www.bbc.com/bengali/articles/c0w42xq6w6lo>

⁸³ Prothom Alo, 3 August 2024; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/5f2383k13v>

⁸⁴ Jugantor, 22 July 2024; <https://www.jugantor.com/tp-bangla-face/833728>

⁸⁵ Prothom Alo, 12 August 2024; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/912lftqs3i>

⁸⁶ Manabzamin, 1 September 2024; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=125464#gsc.tab=0>

⁸⁷ Report sent in by a human rights defender affiliated with Odhikar, based in Khulna.

⁸⁸ Prothom Alo English 28 September 2024; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/pm7kcggunmb>

⁸⁹ Prothom Alo English 7 September 2024; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/1qyly6muhk>

the July-August 2024 student and mass movement. According to the report from the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, a total of 834 people, including children, have been killed.⁹⁰

Odhikar documented 542 extrajudicial killings in July-August 2024. It is estimated that the actual numbers of fatalities are much higher. Among the bullet-ridden are students, factory workers and day labourers. At least 550 people have lost their vision.⁹¹ Many survivors underwent amputation of limbs due to severe gunshot injuries that lacked appropriate or timely treatment. According to the police headquarters, 44 members of the police were killed during the protests.⁹² The mass killings perpetrated in July-August 2024 are the largest in Bangladesh's history of repression during protests. Alongside the mass killings, members of law enforcement agencies also disappeared, arrested, and tortured student protesters.

Acts of enforced disappearance during the July 24 uprising

The authoritarian Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina used enforced disappearance as an instrument of state oppression, to prolong and retain their power. They disappeared several members and activists of opposition parties and dissidents and created an atmosphere of fear in the country. During the July-August 2024 mass uprising, 10 people were disappeared and tortured. Among them, front line student leaders who led the movement were victims of enforced disappearance, illegal detention and torture.

On 13 July, Shakil Ahmed, a Swechchasebak Dal⁹³ leader, was picked up by a group of men in plain clothes from Ruposhi road, near Dhaka's Kafrul Police Station. When Shakil's family members contacted DB police, DGFI, various DMP police stations, and the RAB office in hopes of finding him, they all denied arresting Shakil.⁹⁴

On 19 July, Nur Nabi, a coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Student movement and student of Jagannath University, was picked up from in front of the University's Proctorial Body building by Additional Deputy Police Commissioner (ADC) Badrul. Nur Nabi states that he was taken to the Mintu Road DB office, where he was stripped naked, thrown onto the ground, and beat mercilessly. He was told that Chhatra League broke one of his arms, and the police would break the other.⁹⁵ He was finally released on 6 August, after enduring extreme torture at the DB office.⁹⁶

On 19 July Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan, one of the key coordinators of the movement (and former Adviser under the interim government), was picked up at night from Mohanagar Residential Area, Hatirjheel, Dhaka, by the DB police. He was given an injection that rendered him unconscious, and whenever he regained consciousness, he was given an

⁹⁰ New Age, 16 January 2025; <https://www.newagebd.net/post/country/255515/gazette-of-834-july-uprising-martyrs-Published>

⁹¹ The Daily Star, 19 August 2025; <https://bangla.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news-606761>

⁹² Daily Star, 18 August 2024; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/police-hq-releases-names-and-details-slain-cops-3680371>

⁹³ Voluntary wing of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

⁹⁴ Report collected by Odhikar

⁹⁵ Dhaka Tribune 9 August 2024; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/education/354228/jnu-coordinator-describes-brutal-police-torture>

⁹⁶ Dhaka Tribune 17 August 2024; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/355031/jnu-student-movement-coordinator-steps-down>

injection to sedate him again. Around 11 am on 24 July, the DB police dropped him off at Mohanagar Project in Rampura, with his eyes blindfolded. He stated that he was disappeared and tortured to pressure him into suspending the protests.⁹⁷ Another coordinator of the movement, Abu Baker Majumder, was picked up from Dhanmondi in Dhaka, by DB police on 19 July, in order to force him to release a statement calling off the protests. When Baker refused, he was locked in a dark room for five days and released on 24 July.⁹⁸

Around midnight on 20 July, Nahid Islam, one of the key coordinators of the movement (currently Convener of the National Citizen Party-NCP and Chief Whip of the Opposition), was picked up from a home in Nandipara, Khilgaon by men claiming to be members of security forces. After he got into their car, he was blindfolded and handcuffed. He was taken to a house, where he was asked questions about the movement and tortured physically and mentally. At some point during the torture Nahid lost consciousness. Those who disappeared him, left him under a bridge in Purbachal, Dhaka, on 22 July. He was admitted to Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital in Dhaka.⁹⁹

Illegal detentions, mass arrests, torture

During the protests of July-August, the government began country-wide mass arrests, of opposition party leaders and activists as well as student protesters. The police launched campaigns and indiscriminately arrested people without warrants, not only from the homes of opposition party members, but also from the homes of regular citizens.¹⁰⁰ In police stations all over the country, police and government supporters were plaintiffs in cases filed regarding the movement. Police indiscriminately arrested children, teenagers, youth, and labourers during this time.¹⁰¹ Lower courts granted remand following the mass arrests, and relatives and lawyers of victims alleged that people were being tortured after being remanded.⁷³ members of law enforcement agencies did not follow the directives from the High Court with regards to investigations after arrests and remand. Even when instances of human rights violations, including torture, came to the court's attention, there were no consequences.¹⁰²

Law enforcement agencies all over the country, especially in Dhaka, conducted “block raids,” arresting opposition party members, students, and people from different classes and professions.¹⁰³ On 26 July, Nahid Islam, Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan, and Abu Baker Majumder, three coordinators of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement, were picked up from Dhaka's Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital (where they were being treated) by DB Police for “security” reasons.¹⁰⁴ Using the same excuse, DB Police picked up Sarjis Alom

⁹⁷ Jagonews24.com, 9 August 2024; <https://www.jagonews24.com/country/news/960044>

⁹⁸ Prothom Alo English 25 July 2024; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/dz51fhhcw6>

⁹⁹ New Age 22 July 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/post/country/240695/quota-protest-coordinator-nahid-reappears-injured>

¹⁰⁰ Prothom Alo English 30 July 2024; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/jf0izqcw38>

¹⁰¹ New Age 23 July 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/post/country/240514/boy-with-disability-not-spared-in-wholesale-arrest>

¹⁰² New Age 27 August 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/post/country/241026/sc-guidelines-largely-ignored-in-wholesale-arrests-remand>

¹⁰³ The Daily Star July 28 2024; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/block-raids-unnerve-city-residents-3663396>

¹⁰⁴ Samakal English 27 July 2024; <https://en.samakal.com/bangladesh/170831586/-coordinators-of-quota-protesters-are-in-db-custody>

and Hasnat Abdullah, two more coordinators of the Movement, from the Science Laboratory area on 27 July, and Nusrat Tabassum from Mirpur on 28 July. They were all illegally detained at Dhaka's DB Police Headquarters, but later released on 1 August under pressure from protesters.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Prothom Alo 1 August 2024; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/p5yj72kys4>

Chapter VI:

Divisional Public Advocacy Dialogues on Implementation of UNCAT and OPCAT in Bangladesh

This section of the report presents an analysis of five public advocacy dialogues organized by Odhikar in Barishal, Chattogram, Khulna, Mymensingh and Rajshahi between August 2025 and March 2026. The events brought together participants, including torture survivors, law enforcement officials, prison authorities, political representatives, civil society actors, academics, and journalists. Drawing upon survivor testimonies, stakeholder statements, and institutional responses documented during these dialogues, the paper examines the gap between Bangladesh's formal commitments under international law and the lived realities experienced by victims of torture. The discussions underscore the urgent need for the establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), institutional reform, victim rehabilitation, and accountability mechanisms consistent with CAT and OPCAT standards. The dialogues conclude that meaningful implementation of CAT and OPCAT—particularly through the establishment of an independent National Preventive Mechanism and stronger accountability mechanisms—is essential to address the entrenched culture of torture in Bangladesh.



Divisional level public advocacy dialogue organized by Odhikar in Chattogram.

The findings reveal recurring patterns of custodial torture, enforced disappearance, political persecution, extortion, fabricated criminal cases, denial of medical care and systemic impunity. The discussions also highlight institutional weaknesses, including inadequate investigations, lack of victim protection mechanisms, and structural problems within policing and detention systems. Drawing on comparative experiences from countries implementing OPCAT, participants emphasised the importance of independent detention monitoring through a NPM. The discussion concludes that meaningful implementation of CAT and OPCAT obligations—particularly through institutional reforms, independent monitoring, and victim support mechanisms—is essential for addressing the entrenched culture of torture and impunity in Bangladesh.



Divisional level public advocacy dialogue organized by Odhikar in Barishal.

Findings

Survivor Testimonies and Patterns of Abuse

One of the most important features of the dialogue was the opportunity provided to torture survivors to publicly share their experiences. Several survivors described being abducted by individuals identifying themselves as law enforcement officials, often operating in plainclothes and using unmarked vehicles. Victims reported being blindfolded, detained in undisclosed locations, and subjected to severe physical and psychological torture during interrogation.

Testimonies described torture methods including severe beatings, electric shocks, waterboarding, shooting injuries leading to amputation, and prolonged secret detention.



Divisional level public advocacy dialogue organized by Odhikar in Mymensingh.

For example, survivor Shahjalal described how he was tortured in police custody after his family failed to pay extortion demands, leaving him permanently blind. Other survivors reported severe injuries including amputations, ruptured eardrums, and long-term disabilities.

These accounts demonstrate the long-term consequences of torture, including permanent physical disability, psychological trauma, economic hardship, and social marginalization.

Political Context and Alleged Use of Torture

Participants in the dialogues frequently linked torture and ill-treatment to broader political dynamics. Several speakers suggested that opposition political activists were disproportionately targeted by law enforcement agencies during periods of political repression. Some survivors reported being implicated in multiple criminal cases following torture, which they alleged were fabricated to justify their detention or silence political dissent.

Political representatives participating in the dialogue also acknowledged that human rights defenders and organizations documenting abuses had faced harassment and repression during earlier political regimes. The discussions highlighted concerns regarding the politicization of law enforcement institutions and their alleged use to suppress political dissent.

Institutional Challenges and Accountability Gaps

Participants identified several systemic challenges that hinder accountability for torture.

First, weak investigations and political interference often prevent effective prosecution of perpetrators. Participants emphasized that the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013, although progressive in principle, has not been effectively implemented due to institutional resistance and investigative failures.

Second, structural challenges within detention facilities were highlighted. Prison officials acknowledged shortages of medical staff and mental health professionals, which significantly affect detainee welfare and contribute to preventable deaths in custody.

Third, the absence of comprehensive victim protection and rehabilitation mechanisms was identified as a major concern. Many survivors reported severe economic hardship following their injuries and expressed frustration at the lack of compensation or state support.



Divisional level public advocacy dialogue organized by Odhikar in Khulna.

Prospects for Reform

Despite the challenges, the dialogues also identified potential avenues for reform. Participants emphasized the importance of implementing the OPCAT through the establishment of an independent National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) with unrestricted access to places of detention.

Law enforcement officials participating in the forums acknowledged the need for greater accountability and public oversight of police conduct. Several speakers stressed that sustainable reform would require both institutional changes and strong political commitment.

Civil society representatives also emphasized the need to strengthen victim rehabilitation services, ensure effective implementation of existing laws, and promote greater transparency within policing and detention systems.

The findings of the dialogues reveal a significant gap between Bangladesh's international human rights commitments and the realities experienced by detainees and torture survivors.

The persistence of allegations of custodial torture and fabricated prosecutions with trumped up charges suggests systemic weaknesses in oversight mechanisms and accountability structures. At the same time, the dialogues demonstrated the importance of public forums in documenting abuses, amplifying survivor voices, and facilitating dialogue between civil society and state institutions.

While the adoption of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act and the accession to OPCAT represent important legal steps, implementation remains limited. Without independent monitoring mechanisms and effective accountability systems, the prohibition of torture risks remaining largely symbolic.

Bangladesh's accession to OPCAT presents an important opportunity to strengthen torture prevention through independent monitoring mechanisms. However, meaningful implementation will require political will, institutional independence, and adequate resources.



Divisional level public advocacy dialogue organized by Odhikar in Rajshahi.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from these dialogues, several policy recommendations can be formulated:

1. **Establish an Independent National Preventive Mechanism (NPM):** Bangladesh should establish an NPM with functional independence, adequate resources, and unrestricted access to all detention facilities.
2. **Strengthen Investigative Mechanisms:** Independent investigations into torture allegations should be ensured under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act.
3. **Improve Detention Oversight:** Regular inspections of police stations, prisons, and other detention facilities should be conducted.
4. **Ensure Victim Rehabilitation and Compensation:** Comprehensive medical, psychological, and economic support programs should be developed for torture survivors.
5. **Promote Transparency and Public Accountability:** Government agencies should publish reports on detention conditions and implementation of torture prevention measures and OPCAT obligations

Conclusion

The analysis of the dialogues highlights the continued challenges in preventing torture and ensuring accountability in Bangladesh. Survivor testimonies documented severe physical and psychological harm caused by alleged custodial abuse, unlawful detention, politically motivated persecution and institutional impunity. Participants also identified structural weaknesses in investigations, detention oversight, and victim protection and rehabilitation mechanisms. Addressing these challenges requires the effective implementation of Bangladesh's obligations under CAT and OPCAT.

Bangladesh's accession to OPCAT provides an important opportunity to strengthen torture prevention through independent monitoring and institutional reform. Establishing a credible National Preventive Mechanism and ensuring effective implementation of existing laws will be critical steps toward addressing the entrenched culture of torture and impunity.

Chapter VII:

National Consultation on the Prevention of Torture and the Implementation of UNCAT and OPCAT

Under the OMCT-Odhikar project, on the 25 and 26 of April 2026, Odhikar organised a national level consultation on torture and the importance of the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment (UNCAT) and its Optional Protocol (OPCAT) at Hotel Pan Pacific Sonargaon, Dhaka. The consultation was attended by 100 participants representing lawyers, journalists, university students, human rights activists, survivors and representatives of the UNHCHR, UNDP and embassies. The occasion was graced with the presence of Dr. Alice Jill Edwards, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Dr. Marie Brasholt of Dignity – who is also the UN Vice Chair of the Sub Committee on the Prevention of Torture and Ms. Ameera Naeem the Director of the National Preventive Mechanism, Maldives. The event was inaugurated with a keynote address from the UNSRT and speeches from Mr. Michael Miller, Ambassador of the European Union in Bangladesh and Chief Guest, Mr, Mohammad Asaduzzaman, Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. The event was part of an ongoing project the Odhikar is conducting with the World Organization against Torture.

The ‘*National Consultation on the Prevention of Torture and the Implementation of International Human Rights Obligations under UNCAT and OPCAT*’, as the event was titled, covered the impacts and repercussions of torture in Bangladesh and reasons why torture prevailed – including why cases failed. These were discussed on the first day. On the second day international mechanisms and their impacts were discussed, including the work of National Preventive Mechanisms under OPCAT. This report covers the salient features of both days and the recommendations that were made.

Discussions of Day One: 25 April 2026

The first day of the national consultation commenced with the participation of distinguished national and international experts, policymakers, legal practitioners, human rights defenders and survivors of torture. The first day focused on the State’s responsibility, the lived realities and impacts of torture, and the structural and legal challenges to ensuring justice and accountability.



Inaugural Session: The State's Responsibility and Commitments for Combating Torture

The inaugural session was moderated by **Dr. Saira Rahman Khan**, Secretary of Odhikar, who formally opened the consultation. She set the tone by highlighting the gap between Bangladesh's international commitments and the persistence of torture and related human rights violations. She also referred to the government's decision to allow the National Human Rights Commission Ordinance to lapse, and voiced her concern over the reversion to a National Human Rights Commission created under the old Act, which she termed an 'apathetic law'. She commented that such a NHRC had never stood up for human rights defenders or survivors and victims of human rights violations. An introductory overview of Odhikar's work and its partnership with OMCT was also provided by her.,

Dr. Alice Jill Edwards, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, delivered the keynote address, underscoring that the fight against torture must go beyond formal commitments to ensure genuine implementation. She emphasized the importance of preventive safeguards, institutional reform and accountability. Referring to recent events, she expressed concern over the suppression of freedom of expression, restrictions on public assemblies and allegations of excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies. She highlighted that the over-reliance on confessions was a critical risk in many justice systems, including in Bangladesh. When investigators are rewarded for confession-based outcomes, prosecutors depend heavily on such evidence, and courts fail to scrutinize how it is obtained, coercion can become normalized. She further stressed the need for independent investigative mechanisms, improved prison oversight and the effective implementation of existing laws, including the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013.

She emphasized that the new government's priorities remain uncertain, institutional capacity is uneven, and public trust in law enforcement is deeply strained. She remarked that overcrowded prisons, a congested criminal justice system, and persistent impunity underscore the scale of reform needed. She stressed that prevention requires more than laws—it demands robust systems, trained officials, clear procedures, independent oversight, effective complaints mechanisms, and institutional cultures that reject violence and enforce accountability.

Dr. Edwards opined that the proposed Police Commission is a positive step, but without genuine independence and effective powers, advisory bodies cannot deliver meaningful reform. Institutional redesign must be backed by real authority, public confidence, and visible accountability for abuse. Allegations of torture and ill-treatment must be investigated promptly, impartially, independently, and effectively, with full protection from political interference and reprisals.

She further stressed that all investigations should follow the Istanbul Protocol, while deaths in custody or involving public officials must be examined under the Minnesota Protocol. Witnesses and complainants must be protected, courts empowered to act, and state institutions required to cooperate fully. With these structural, legal, and cultural reforms, the outcomes could be substantial: stronger institutions, restored public trust, reduced hostility, greater political stability, broader economic opportunity, and a justice system that effectively serves its people¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁶ Full Speech of the SR, Torture is contained in the annex of this document.

Mr. Michael Miller, Ambassador and Head of Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh, reaffirmed the European Union's commitment to supporting Bangladesh in strengthening human rights protection. He emphasized the importance of victim-centered justice, access to effective remedies, and the role of documentation in ensuring accountability. He also highlighted the need for an independent and functional National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and preventive mechanisms to address torture.

Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury, former Chairperson of the (2025) NHRC and former President of the Inquiry Commission on Enforced Disappearances, reflected on systemic weaknesses in law enforcement and the judicial processes. He noted the prevalence of confession-based investigations, procedural irregularities and inadequate safeguards against arbitrary detention and custodial abuse. He emphasized that international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), UNCAT and ICCPR, collectively reinforce the absolute prohibition of torture and called for stronger institutional adherence to these principles.

Justice Chowdhury stressed that the NHRC must strengthen its monitoring mechanisms, enhance cooperation with law enforcement agencies, and ensure that victims have access to justice and remedies. He noted that the State is both a duty-bearer and a potential violator of human rights. He further emphasized the importance of building awareness among both duty-bearers and the public, so that the prohibition of torture becomes deeply embedded in our institutional and social fabric.

Dr. Mahmudur Rahman, Editor of *The Daily Amar Desh*, stated that the core problem is not the absence of laws but the weakness of institutional mechanisms in enforcing them effectively. He emphasized the need for strong political will, judicial oversight, and responsible investigative practices to prevent abuse and ensure accountability. He further noted that his neutral journalism and commitment to truth led the then government to view *the daily Amar Desh* as anti-government. Referring to the current political context, he observed that the former opposition (BNP) is now in power, which he described as a positive development. However, he added that the current government also considers *Amar Desh* to be aligned with the present opposition (Jamaat-e-Islami) and critical of the administration.

Dr. Rahman remarked that in Bangladesh, honest and impartial journalism often comes at a significant cost. He mentioned the state persecution he faced under the Awami League regime and the torture he suffered. Noting that the current government has been in office for only two months, he said it is too early for a definitive assessment and that a final judgment should be reserved for later.

Referring to the Prime Minister's own experience as a former victim of torture, he described the present administration as having a "unique context" and expressed hope that it would govern more positively than in the past 15 years. Citing cases of human rights violations, he proposed four measures to prevent torture: strong political commitment, an independent and effective judiciary, modern training in interrogation techniques, and compensation and rehabilitation for victims.

Mr. Md. Asaduzzaman, Honorable Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, delivered his speech as a Chief Guest at the consultation. He acknowledged the challenges in implementing existing laws and emphasized the government's commitment to addressing human rights violations. He referred to the enactment of the 2013 Torture and Custodial

Deaths (Prevention) Act and earlier judicial guidelines, while noting practical limitations in enforcement. He emphasized the need to eliminate a culture of violence and expressed commitment toward gradual reform, including considerations related to victim compensation and legal safeguards.

The Law Minister said, custodial torture has also been drastically reduced since the post-August transition, and observed that these are significant developments in our legal culture, our jurisprudence and our national conscience. He stressed that the government was committed to addressing all forms of torture, extrajudicial killings, custodial deaths, and enforced disappearances. Referring to his career as a lawyer, the minister said that 90 per cent of cases filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act were later found to be false and fabricated. He also observed that citizens of Bangladesh also need to change their views on retribution and move away from the idea that accused persons need to be tortured as a punishment for what they did.



After the inaugural session, several plenary sessions were held on different themes. Panelists discussed key issues, highlighting the multidimensional impacts and consequences of torture, as well as the challenges in securing justice, reparation, and rehabilitation, and the effective implementation of CAT and OPCAT in Bangladesh. Each plenary session featured three speakers from diverse professional backgrounds and areas of expertise.

Plenary I: Torture and its Impacts and Consequences

The first plenary session on Torture and its impacts and consequences was moderated by **Professor Md. Shariful Islam**, former Commissioner of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). This session examined the multidimensional impacts of torture on individuals and society. In his opening remarks, he emphasized that torture is not confined to formal detention settings but often occurs beyond visible spaces, particularly in contexts of political unrest, referencing the recent July movement as a backdrop for understanding current realities.



Ms. Santana Kundu, a Psychologist and Project Manager at Gonoshasthya Kendra, highlighted the profound psychological consequences experienced by survivors, noting that torture often results in long-term trauma, fear, anger, and social isolation. She emphasized that when torture is perpetrated by the state, victims are left without avenues for protection or redress, intensifying their vulnerability. Referring to victims of recent political events, she pointed out that many continue to suffer from untreated mental health conditions, often manifesting as frustration and emotional distress. She further stressed the need to recognize and address the deep psychological harm caused by such practices.

Dr. Kai Li Chung, an Associate Professor in Forensic Psychology at the University of Nottingham Malaysia, provided an analytical perspective on torture, explaining that its use undermines the integrity of the legal system and violates non-derogable human rights. She noted that information obtained through coercion is inherently unreliable and increases the risk of wrongful convictions, while also eroding public trust in law enforcement institutions. She identified multiple actors involved in the perpetuation of torture, including political authorities, law enforcement agencies, and, at times, other actors within the justice system.

Dr. Chung further explored the motivations behind the use and acceptance of torture, including retributive attitudes, moral disengagement, and the dehumanization of victims. She explained how institutional normalization and obedience to authority contribute to the continuation of such practices, particularly in high-pressure environments. Importantly, she highlighted that the consequences of torture extend not only to victims but also to perpetrators, who may experience long-term psychological harm, including guilt, depression, and moral injury. She concluded that ethical and lawful investigative practices are essential to protect both individuals and institutional integrity.

Dr. Marie Brasholt, Deputy Director and Medical Director from DIGNITY – Danish Institution Against Torture, and Vice Chair of the UN Sub Committee on Prevention of Torture, emphasized the role of medical professionals in documenting torture and providing crucial evidence for accountability. She discussed the long-term physical and psychological consequences faced by survivors, including chronic pain, trauma-related disorders such as PTSD, and enduring emotional distress. She also highlighted the broader socio-economic impact on families, noting that torture often results in loss of income, increased caregiving burdens, and social disruption, thereby affecting entire communities.

Plenary II: Litigation – The Battle for Justice for Torture

Moderated by Dr. Saira Rahman Khan, this session addressed the barriers to justice faced by those who seek legal recourse against torture, and structural challenges in pursuing justice for torture cases.



Mr. Mohammed Rakinul Hakim Alvi, Legal and Operations Adviser at BLAST, presented findings from extensive documentation of torture survivors. He identified a significant gap between survivors' desire for justice and their willingness to engage in litigation, often due to concerns over safety, financial constraints, and limited confidence in legal outcomes. He outlined the constitutional and international legal protections available, including safeguards against arbitrary detention and the right to compensation under international human rights law. Referring to the landmark "Jony case," he demonstrated that accountability under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 is possible but remains rare in practice. The case highlighted both progress and systemic limitations, including delays in judicial processes, enforcement challenges, and inadequacies in compensation mechanisms.

Mr. Alvi also emphasized the need to adopt a broader understanding of redress, incorporating not only financial compensation but also rehabilitation and recognition of the full extent of harm suffered. The session further identified key structural barriers, including weak documentation at the initial stages of arrest and detention, evidentiary challenges, and the absence of a comprehensive witness protection framework, all of which significantly hinder access to justice.

Mr. Imtiaz Hossain Rocky, a survivor and petitioner, and the brother of Jony, whose case was discussed by Mr. Alvi, shared his personal experience, providing a compelling account of how he was tortured and the obstacles faced by victims in seeking legal remedies.

Mr. Mohammad Shishir Munir, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, emphasized the critical importance of proper documentation in torture cases. Drawing from his professional experience handling numerous criminal cases, including those involving capital punishment, he cautioned against the growing reliance on confession-based evidence. He highlighted that such practices increase the risk of coercion and undermine the fairness of the justice system, advocating instead for a shift toward evidence-based investigations.

Plenary III: Statements from Survivors

This segment was facilitated by Ms. Taskin Fahmina, Director of Advocacy, Odhikar, provided a platform for survivors to share their lived experiences, bringing a human dimension to the discussions. Taskin Fahmina has documented incidents of torture at Odhikar for a number of years and is responsible for the psycho-social activities Odhikar carries out for family members of enforced disappearance and survivors of torture.



Mr. Shahialal Howladar recounted severe custodial torture by police that resulted in the loss of his eyesight. According to his statement, he had gone outside to purchase milk for his eight-month-baby when police officers randomly detained him and took him to the police station. The officers allegedly demanded BDT 150,000 from his family in exchange for his release. At night, he was taken to the station, his hands were tied and he was subjected to brutal torture. He reported that a screwdriver was used to inflict injuries to his eyes, causing permanent blindness. Afterward, he was abandoned at a hospital by the police. Subsequently, a false robbery case was filed against him. He was later transferred to a hospital in Dhaka and eventually released on bail. His mother filed a case before the Khulna Chief Metropolitan Court; however, even after one year, there had been no progress in the proceedings.

Following these events, he returned to his village home. After the political changeover due to July mass uprising, he came back again and revived the case. However, he alleged that the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) pressured them to withdraw the case. He highlighted the absence of effective remedies and his continued pursuit of justice. He remains uncertain about where to seek justice. He stated that Odhikar has been the only organisation supporting him consistently from the beginning until now.

Mr. Humayun Kabir, a blogger and online activist, described his experience of arbitrary arrest followed by enforced disappearance, underscoring the fear and uncertainty faced by victims and their families.

On 27 October 2018, while traveling from Dhaka to Pirojpur, he was speaking with Italian nationals when an unidentified person called him by his nickname, “Jhulbhan.” Immediately afterward, four individuals approached him, identified themselves as members of an intelligence agency, and forcibly placed him into a microbus. He was blindfolded with a cloth and the vehicle traveled for approximately 30 minutes. Upon arrival, he was made to stand, during which he felt that photographs were being taken. He was then instructed to sit in a

specific location. When he requested to perform prayers, they allowed him to wash and briefly removed his blindfold. He observed that the place appeared to be a well-maintained, high-standard environment, leading him to believe that he was inside a law enforcement facility. He was beaten severely, to the extent that he began bleeding. During interrogation, he was repeatedly asked whether he was affiliated with Shibir and questioned about internal matters of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). He denied any political affiliation. He noted that the interrogators already had detailed knowledge about him, which led him to conclude that they belonged to an intelligence agency. After his release, he was implicated in approximately four fabricated cases, followed by an additional fourteen false cases, all of which he was forced to contest. Although he filed a case seeking justice, he remains uncertain whether justice will ultimately be achieved.

Ms. Shaju Akhtar's case illustrates the permanent physical and psychological consequences of excessive use of force by law enforcement authorities. She stated that police officers came to arrest her brother in 2014. When they took him away, she attempted to follow the police vehicle. At that moment, the police opened fire and shot her in the leg. As a result of the gunshot injury, she lost a limb. This incident caused permanent physical disability and significant psychological trauma. Her family has suffered greatly as a consequence of this incident. She is now reliant on pain medication and is unable to walk without a crutch.

Mr. Muhammad Habibur Rahman, a madrasa teacher, reported being subjected to enforced disappearance, torture, and a subsequent false prosecution. He had been teaching since 2014 at Jamia Karimiyya Madrasa, located in front of Rasul Bagh Mosque in the Purba Isdair area under Fatullah Police Station in Narayanganj. On 20 August 2017, at approximately 8:00 am, after having breakfast and while entering the madrasa, he was approached by an individual who began questioning him. Shortly thereafter, 4–5 unidentified men arrived in a microbus and forcibly abducted him from in front of the mosque. His hands, feet, and eyes were tied, and he was taken to an unknown location. The perpetrators, who referred to their team leader as "Ostad," initially demanded ransom, stating that he would be released upon payment. He was kept in continuous movement throughout the day and later taken to a room where he was subjected to severe torture. Methods included repeated beatings, the insertion of pens between his fingers followed by pressure causing extreme pain, electric shocks, and waterboarding. During interrogation, he was questioned about alleged militant training and the whereabouts of an individual named "Abdul Momin." The perpetrators insisted that he himself was Abdul Momin from Feni and attempted to force him to confess to that identity, which he consistently denied.

Mr. Rahman was held in enforced disappearance for 110 days. Upon release, he was instructed to tell others that he had been away on religious activities. However, shortly thereafter, he was stopped by members of the RAB, who searched his belongings and claimed to have found materials suggesting involvement in militancy. He was then handed over to the police and formally charged. He was later shown as arrested in a staged incident by members of RAB-10 from Dhalpur, reportedly from the Jatrabari area. Although he eventually secured bail and the case was dismissed after a few months, he spent approximately eight months in jail in connection with the fabricated charges. He further alleged serious procedural irregularities during the trial, including the court's record stating that no witnesses had appeared despite their presence.

These testimonies reflected the profound and lasting impact of torture, including physical suffering, psychological trauma, social stigma, and significant barriers to accessing justice.

The session reinforced the urgent need for effective legal, institutional, and policy responses to address such violations.

Plenary III: The Use of Force During Arrest and Crowd Control

Moderated by **Mr. ASM Nasiruddin Elan**, Director (Finance and Administration) at Odhikar, this session focused on the regulation of force by law enforcement agencies and the importance of aligning practices with international human rights standards.



Mr. Neil Corney, Senior Researcher at the Omega Research Foundation, joined the meeting online. He emphasized that coercive and confession-driven policing practices are ineffective and undermine both justice and public trust. He advocated for a shift toward professional interviewing techniques aimed at obtaining reliable and accurate information, supported by legal and procedural safeguards. He highlighted that torture often occurs during interrogation processes and stressed the importance of preventive frameworks, including independent monitoring mechanisms such as National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) under OPCAT. He further noted that OPCAT promotes a system of continuous improvement through dialogue and cooperation rather than condemnation, and that independent oversight contributes to better detention conditions, more effective institutions, and increased public confidence.

Mr. Baharul Alam, Former Inspector General of Police, outlined ongoing efforts to reform policing practices in Bangladesh. He emphasized the importance of minimizing the use of force, avoiding lethal weapons, and promoting professionalism and restraint among law enforcement personnel. He also highlighted the need to ensure institutional independence from political influence and to rebuild public trust in policing institutions.

Mr. Abdullah Al-Amin, a Member of Parliament from the National Citizen Party (NCP), recalled the time he was arrested and tortured during the July 2024 Uprising. He stressed the necessity of strengthening institutional accountability, particularly through ensuring the independence and effectiveness of the National Human Rights Commission. He emphasized that the NHRC must be empowered to conduct independent investigations into allegations of human rights violations to maintain credibility and ensure accountability.

Overall Observation of Day One:

The first day of the consultation revealed a significant disconnect between Bangladesh's formal commitments under international human rights law and the realities of poor implementation. While legal frameworks exist, challenges persist in enforcement, accountability, and victim support.

Speakers consistently emphasized the need for:

- Strengthening implementation of existing laws and safeguards
- Ensuring independent and effective investigation mechanisms
- Reducing reliance on confession-based evidence
- Enhancing victim protection, compensation, and rehabilitation
- Promoting institutional accountability and political commitment

The discussions underscored that combating torture requires not only legal provisions but also structural reform, institutional integrity, and a sustained commitment to upholding the rule of law.

Discussions of Day Two: 26 April 2026

The second day of the consultation focused on in-depth deliberations among national and international experts, policymakers, legal practitioners, and human rights defenders. Building on the discussions of the opening day, the sessions focused on the practical implementation of state obligations, operationalization of OPCAT, the effectiveness of preventive mechanisms such as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), institutional accountability, and the critical role of documentation and advocacy in combating torture. The second day's discussion was essentially themed on five plenary sessions.

Plenary I: UNCAT and Bangladesh's Obligations: A Critical Analysis

The first plenary session on the second day of the consultation, moderated by **Mr. Kamal Ahmed**, Consulting Editor of The Daily Star, examined Bangladesh's legal and institutional obligations under the Convention against Torture, other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment, critically assessing the gap between formal commitments and actual practice.



Dr. Nicole Buerli, Senior Human Rights Adviser at the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), provided a comprehensive overview of the UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT) and the responsibilities of State Parties. She emphasized that while states are required to submit periodic reports to the United Nations, effective implementation is often constrained by domestic political realities. She highlighted that the concept of torture has evolved to include both physical and psychological dimensions, requiring a more holistic legal and institutional response. Referring to Bangladesh, she noted delays in reporting and persistent concerns regarding the lack of effective implementation despite existing legal frameworks. She stressed that laws alone are insufficient without independent oversight mechanisms and an enabling civic space.

Mr. Md. Tajul Islam, Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and Former Chief Prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal, addressed the structural challenges in ensuring accountability for torture and related violations. Drawing from practical experience, he identified key barriers, including denial of detention by law enforcement agencies, reluctance to register cases, and inadequate investigations. He emphasized the need to move away from confession-based justice, particularly where confessions are obtained through coercion. He further called for the establishment of a robust legal framework addressing enforced disappearances and torture, strengthening investigative capacity, and ensuring equal application of the law irrespective of status or influence.

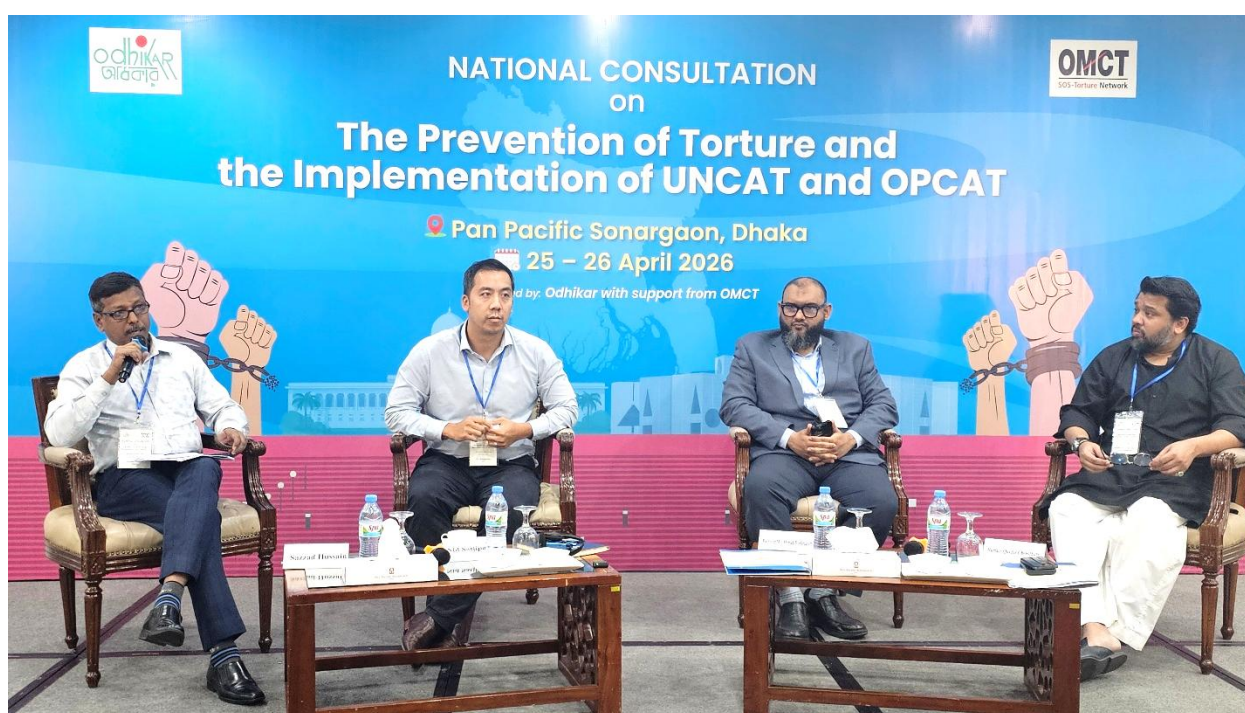
Mr. Islam expressed concern over the lapse of key Ordinances promulgated by the interim government, particularly those relating to the NHRC, enforced disappearances, the Supreme Court Secretariat, and judicial appointments, emphasizing that these must be enacted into legislation by Parliament. He further stressed that the government must demonstrate full respect and a positive commitment to human rights, international law, and ensure overall compliance with the state's obligations under ratified treaties.

Mr. Akhtar Hossain, a Member of Parliament from the NCP, acknowledged concerns about the misuse of law enforcement agencies for political purposes and noted that parliamentary mechanisms can play an important role in initiating legal and policy reforms. He also shared his personal experience of being subjected to three consecutive, baseless, and arbitrary

arrests, as well as detention and torture, at an early stage of his university life, under the autocratic government of Sheikh Hasina. Furthermore, he expressed concern over the lapse of key Ordinances in Parliament, describing it as a clear indication of the current government's apathetic attitude toward human rights, including issues of enforced disappearances and torture.

Plenary II: OPCAT: Its Significance in Combating Torture

The second plenary session, moderated by **Mr. Sazzad Hussain**, Director (Programme) at Odhikar, focused on the preventive framework established under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) and its relevance to Bangladesh in efforts to eradicate torture.



Mr. Nid Satjipanon, Senior Adviser at the Association for the Prevention of Torture (ATP), traced the historical development of torture prevention mechanisms and explained that torture often occurs in closed and inaccessible environments. He highlighted key provisions of CAT, particularly the obligation of states to prevent torture under all circumstances and to prohibit cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

Mr. Satjipanon also presented global OPCAT trends from 2003 to 2025, along with developments in National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) worldwide. He explained that OPCAT is implemented through two key components: NPMs and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT), a UN body mandated to prevent torture and ill-treatment through regular, proactive visits to all places of detention—including prisons, police stations, psychiatric hospitals, juvenile correction homes, and safe houses. During these visits, the NPM and SPT assesses conditions, interviews detainees, and provides recommendations to strengthen human rights protections.

Explaining OPCAT, he described it as a cooperative framework designed to assist states in fulfilling their obligations through preventive oversight rather than confrontation. He elaborated on the role of National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs), which must function as independent bodies with the authority to conduct unannounced visits to places of detention, publish findings, and engage in constructive dialogue with authorities. He emphasized that the effectiveness of OPCAT relies on continuous monitoring and close collaboration between national institutions and international mechanisms, particularly the SPT.

Barrister Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, Member of Parliament from Jamaat-e-Islami, shared his personal experience as a victim of enforced disappearance and torture, recounting the severe physical and psychological toll of his eight-year captivity at the Taskforce for Interrogation Center (TFI). Overcome with emotion, he described a period marked by pervasive human rights violations, where fear silenced any attempt to speak out.

He welcomed the interim government's ratification of OPCAT but expressed concern about its apparent indifference toward broader human rights issues. Questioning the depth of the government's commitment to fulfilling its obligations under UNCAT, OPCAT, and the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances, he underscored the urgent need for institutional reforms. These include establishing an independent National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), strengthening the independence of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and ensuring a transparent process for appointing its members.

Mr. Humam Quader Chowdhury, Member of Parliament from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and a survivor of enforced disappearance under the Sheikh Hasina regime, emphasized the responsibility of the government to ensure that legal frameworks effectively protect citizens and that institutional reforms are undertaken to restore public trust and accountability. As a ruling party MP, he expressed his party's willingness to work collaboratively toward building the new Bangladesh that citizens aspire to. He conveyed deep concern over the lapse of key Ordinances, noting that, as a survivor of torture under the previous autocratic regime, their annulment was particularly painful. He emphasized that these Ordinances should be enacted into law to ensure justice for victims and to prevent future human rights violations.

He further stated that the incumbent government is working to restore public trust in institutions that had been previously politicized and manipulated. Rebuilding these institutions, he noted, is essential to ensuring accountability, transparency, and effectiveness, and he called on all state actors to support this process. He concluded by affirming that the government plans to form a bipartisan committee to expedite the enactment of human rights legislation.

Plenary III: Responsibilities of the NHRC as a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)

The third plenary session of the second day consultation titled "Responsibilities of the NHRC as a National Preventive Mechanism", moderated by **Mr. Anis Mahfoud**, a Human Rights Officer at the UNOHCHR, Dhaka. This session examined the potential role of the NHRC in functioning as an effective NPM.



Ms. Ameera Naeem, Director of NPM, Maldives, presented a comparative perspective by outlining the operational structure of the Maldivian NPM. She described its core functions, including regular visits to detention facilities, advisory roles in legislative reform, educational initiatives for awareness-building, and cooperative engagement with national and international stakeholders. Her presentation highlighted the importance of independence, transparency, and sustained engagement in ensuring the effectiveness of an NPM.

While outlining the NPM's functions across four key areas, she explained that the visiting function includes conducting inspections, monitoring areas that fall short of human rights standards, documenting concerns, and interviewing survivors and the public. The advisory function focuses on issuing directives, reviewing legislation, making recommendations, and ensuring timely reporting. The educational function emphasizes training, advocacy, the introduction of anti-torture courses, the establishment of human rights clubs, and the publication of informational materials to raise awareness. Finally, the cooperative function operates at both national and international levels, facilitating constructive dialogue among stakeholders and fostering collaboration with APT, SPT, and other NPMs, while also maintaining tools such as NPM regulations, online portals, and communication platforms.

Dr. Nabila Idris, former Commissioner of both the National Human Rights Commission and the Inquiry Commission for Enforced Disappearances, highlighted the underlying factors contributing to torture and enforced disappearances. She noted that such violations often occur beyond effective oversight—not necessarily in isolated locations, but in settings that remain out of public view despite being in common areas. She pointed to systemic issues within law enforcement culture, explaining that from recruitment through training and operational practice, officials may be conditioned in ways that foster a sense of impunity.

Dr. Idris emphasized that addressing these abuses requires attention not only to victims but also to the behavior and institutional environment of security forces. She further underscored the need for a clear and unambiguous legal definition of enforced disappearance, so it can be treated and prosecuted as a distinct offence.

Ms. Romana Schweiger, Senior Advisor at UNDP Bangladesh, stressed that an effective National Preventive Mechanism depends on a strong and independent National Human Rights Commission. She cautioned against reinstating ineffective legal framework—the National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009—noting its failure to prevent human rights violations and provide adequate safeguards.

She stressed that Bangladesh urgently needs a credible and comprehensive NHRC, underscoring that both institutional strength and independence are essential. In this regard, she highlighted the importance of a transparent and robust appointment and selection process to ensure the Commission’s effectiveness and integrity, particularly in implementing the NPM under the OPCAT.

Plenary IV: The Mendez Principles as a Framework for Law Enforcement

This fourth plenary session of the second-day consultation was moderated by **Dr. Nicole Buerli**, Senior Human Rights Adviser at OMCT, and focused on reforming investigative practices to prevent torture, particularly during interrogations.



Dr. Alice Jill Edwards, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, highlighted the problem of a “confession culture,” noting that reliance on coerced confessions undermines human rights and weakens the integrity of the justice system. She observed that in Bangladesh, this culture persists alongside weak investigative practices that often depend on extracting confessional statements. She stressed that the early stages of detention are particularly vulnerable to abuse, making safeguards such as immediate access to legal counsel essential for preventing torture and ill-treatment.

Dr. Edwards introduced the Mendez Principles on effective interviewing, developed under Juan Mendez, which offer a lawful, humane, and evidence-based framework for interrogation. These principles address both physical and psychological dimensions of torture prevention and require proper training, clear guidelines, and a shift in mindset across police, prosecutors, and judges, along with strong accountability mechanisms. She concluded by urging stakeholders in Bangladesh, particularly government authorities, to adopt the Mendez

Principles and strengthen safeguards, including ensuring the inadmissibility of coerced confessions.

Mr. Nid Satjipanon, Senior Adviser, APT, elaborated on the practical application of the Mendez Principles, explaining that they aim to replace coercive interrogation methods with ethical and professional investigative techniques. He noted that effective implementation would improve the reliability of evidence, strengthen public trust, and align law enforcement practices with international standards. He also outlined the rationale and origin of the principles, developed during the tenure of Juan E. Méndez as UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, who observed that most torture occurs during interrogations aimed at extracting confessions. This led to the development of the Mendez Principles as a framework for ethical investigative interviewing.

Mr. Satjipanon emphasized the need to move away from the outdated confession-based culture, which is often coercive, unlawful, and inhuman. He further explained key procedural safeguards, including proper opening of interviews, appropriate questioning techniques, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring access to legal counsel prior to interrogation. He concluded that implementing the Mendez Principles in Bangladesh is essential to prevent torture in police custody, ensure compliance with legal and international standards, improve the quality of evidence, and enhance public trust in state institutions.

Ms. Ameera Naeem, Director of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) of Maldives, addressed the session by linking her country's experience with the Mendez Principles on Effective Interviewing as a practical framework for law enforcement reform. She emphasized that the Mendez Principles promote lawful, non-coercive, and evidence-based interviewing methods, aiming to replace confession-driven practices that often create a risk of torture.

Drawing from the Maldivian context, she highlighted key concerns surrounding legal safeguards at the time of arrest. She noted that, in principle, individuals are entitled to certain rights immediately upon arrest, including being informed of the reasons for arrest, access to legal counsel, and communication with family members. However, in practice, these safeguards are not always consistently followed. Due to geographical challenges in Maldives, detainees are sometimes transferred to locations without promptly informing their families, increasing the risk of incommunicado detention and potential abuse. She stressed that detainees should, as a rule, be taken to the nearest police station to minimize such risks.

Ms. Naeem also pointed out the absence, in some cases, of standardized interrogation environments and procedures, which can further contribute to abusive practices. Over the past 17 years, Maldivian institutions have actively advocated for the adoption of structured guidelines, including the Mendez Principles, to ensure professionalism and accountability in law enforcement. She noted that in Maldives, surveillance and monitoring systems are already operational within detention facilities, which has contributed to improved oversight. She concluded by emphasizing that the proper implementation of these safeguards not only prevents torture but also strengthens the credibility and effectiveness of the justice system.

Plenary V: The Importance and Impact of Documentation and Advocacy

The final plenary was moderated by **Mr. Shafiqul Alam**, Editor-in-Chief, The Daily Waadaa, and focused on the role of documentation and advocacy in addressing torture and ensuring accountability.



Ms. Taskin Fahmina, Director (Campaign and Advocacy) at Odhikar, underscored the critical role of systematic documentation and sustained advocacy in exposing human rights violations and driving policy reform. She highlighted Odhikar’s long-standing work since 1994 in documenting custodial torture, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, violence against women, rape, border killings, political violence, and restrictions on media freedom, alongside its broader grassroots human rights activism, including research, fact-finding, campaigns, and regular reporting.

She noted that, despite extensive experience, Odhikar has faced significant challenges, including deregistration and institutional harassment during the previous autocratic regime. Emphasizing the impact of field-level human rights work, she stressed that documentation and advocacy remain essential tools for accountability and for addressing torture and other serious violations.

Mr. Md. Zarif Rahman, Research Director at Sapran, spoke about the complexities of contemporary human rights documentation, including biased media narratives, digital misinformation, disinformation, and risks associated with emerging technologies. He emphasized the critical importance of accurate evidence collection and preservation for ensuring accountability.

Mr. Rahman briefly introduced Sapran as a research organisation working on documenting human rights violations. Drawing on findings from the July 2024 uprising, he highlighted concerns about the use of headshots, arguing that such practices raise serious questions about the use of lethal force against peaceful protests. He also questioned the justification for the use of lethal weapons in dispersing demonstrations.

He further referenced the use of pellet guns during the July movement, noting that Abu Sayeed, the first martyr of the July–August Uprising 2024, was killed by pellet gunfire. In conclusion, he outlined key documentation challenges, including biased media coverage,

normative justifications of violence, social media dilemmas, risks associated with artificial intelligence, and inconsistencies in terminology.

Mr. James Lin, Programme Coordinator at the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), highlighted the often-overlooked importance of psychological rehabilitation for torture survivors. He noted that mental health support is frequently neglected due to social stigma, despite the severe psychological consequences of torture, including trauma-related disorders. He emphasized that effective rehabilitation must address both physical and psychological needs in an integrated manner. He said that documentation of incident of torture is vital to ensure that the reach of medical and other assistance is wide.

He also introduced IRCT as a global network of organisations working to rehabilitate torture survivors by providing medical, psychological, and legal support, while promoting the right to rehabilitation under international law.

Mr. Lin observed that in Bangladesh, as in many Asian countries, psychological counselling is often deprioritised compared to physical treatment. He stressed that survivors commonly experience psychosomatic symptoms such as chronic headaches, chest pain, heart palpitations, and sleep disturbances, which are closely linked to psychological trauma, including PTSD, nightmares, stress, and anxiety. He concluded that both physical and psychological support must be given equal priority in rehabilitation services.

Overall Observations of Day Two

The discussions throughout the second day revealed a consistent and critical concern: despite Bangladesh's formal commitments under CAT and OPCAT, significant gaps remain in implementation, accountability, and institutional effectiveness. Speakers across sessions emphasized the need for:

- Establishing an independent and functional National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)
- Strengthening the independence and capacity of oversight institutions such as the NHRC
- Reforming investigative practices to eliminate coercion and confession-based justice
- Bridging the gap between legal frameworks and practical enforcement
- Ensuring comprehensive rehabilitation and support for victims, including psychological care

The sessions collectively underscored that the prevention of torture requires not only legal reform but also sustained political will, institutional integrity, and continuous monitoring.



Recommendations Emerging from the Consultation

In the closing session, Odhikar Secretary Dr. Saira Rahman Khan presented the key recommendations emerging from a two-day consultation, emphasizing the need for collective efforts to prevent torture, ensure accountability, and establish an effective National Preventive Mechanism. These recommendations are as follows:

1. Ensure the effective implementation of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013, and establish effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms to end the culture of impunity.
2. A strong National Human Rights Commission Act must be enacted to establish an independent, politically neutral, and robust National Human Rights Commission. The Commission should have the authority to investigate, monitor, and ensure the implementation of recommendations regarding human rights violations committed by law enforcement agencies and security forces.
3. Establish an independent, effective, and internationally compliant National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) capable of conducting regular and unannounced visits to all places of detention.
4. Enact and effectively implement a law in line with international standards to clearly define and prevent enforced disappearances and include the issue of command responsibility.
5. Move away from confession-based investigations and judicial processes, and ensure evidence-based investigations. Interrogations after arrest should be video-recorded, and confessions obtained through coercion must be deemed legally inadmissible.
6. Enact an effective victim and witness protection law to ensure their safety and enable them to participate in judicial proceedings without fear.
7. Establish a state fund to provide comprehensive rehabilitation for victims, including financial, psychological, and medical support.
8. Follow the Méndez Principles in investigations and interviews to replace coercive, confession-based practices used by law enforcement agencies.
9. Implement meaningful institutional reforms within the police force.

END OF REPORT

Case Studies and Analysis

Torture, arbitrary detention, fabricated criminal charges, and other forms of custodial abuse have remained persistent human rights concerns in Bangladesh, affecting individuals from diverse social, political, and professional backgrounds. Through its fact-finding missions, Odhikar has documented numerous cases involving arbitrary detention, torture, and the filing of fabricated cases against human rights defenders, as well as widespread custodial torture and deaths involving ordinary citizens, students, political activists, lawyers, journalists, teachers, businesspersons, and others, irrespective of age or gender. Women and children have also been subjected to such violations.

The documented cases further reveal recurring patterns of extortion, torture, and abuse of power by members of law enforcement agencies, alongside serious allegations of custodial torture and sexual abuse involving various state security agencies, including the Police, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), the Detective Branch, and the Bangladesh Navy. These incidents indicate systemic failures in ensuring accountability, safeguarding the rights of persons deprived of their liberty, and preventing torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. The findings underscore the urgent need for effective legal safeguards, independent investigations, and institutional reforms to ensure compliance with Bangladesh's constitutional guarantees and its obligations under international human rights law.

Case study-1

Golam Rabbani allegedly died as a result of torture while in police custody at Baniachong Police Station in Habiganj on 26 December 2023. According to the police, Rabbani had been arrested on suspicion of theft and was later found hanging inside the police station's custody cell. Police claimed that he had committed suicide.

However, Rabbani's family strongly disputed this account. His brother, Moin Uddin, alleged that police officers brutally tortured Rabbani to death and subsequently staged the incident by hanging his body to portray it as a suicide. Family members reported that Rabbani's body bore visible injury marks consistent with physical abuse.

Rabbani's mother, Fazor Chand, stated that during the tenure of the deposed Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina, her son had been summoned to the police station, where he was severely beaten by the police, leading to his death. She further alleged that the authorities prevented the family from seeing Rabbani's body immediately after his death and attempted to justify the incident by falsely portraying him as a drug addict.

Following media coverage of the incident, Moin Uddin alleged that on 28 December 2023 he received an anonymous death threat warning him not to speak publicly about the case or file a complaint. The family also alleged that police officials attempted to suppress the incident by offering Tk 500,000 to Rabbani's mother and brother.

Case study-2

At approximately 1:30 a.m. on 16 June 2021, an alleged "gunfight" reportedly took place between police and suspected criminals in the Asian Highway Link Road area under Bayezid Bostami Police Station in Chattogram Metropolitan City. According to the police, officers came under attack while conducting an operation, resulting in an exchange of gunfire during which Saiful Islam (32), sustained a gunshot injury. He was taken to hospital in critical condition, where one of his legs was amputated during treatment.

Saiful Islam and his family reject the police version of accounts. They allege that he had already been detained by police before the incident, was subjected to torture while in custody, and was intentionally shot. They claim that the authorities subsequently portrayed the incident as a "gunfight" in an attempt to justify the use of force and conceal the alleged torture and shooting.

Following the incident, numerous criminal cases were filed against Saiful Islam. According to both his family and police sources, approximately 34 cases have been registered against him. On 12 January 2026, Saiful Islam was arrested by the Chattogram Metropolitan Detective Branch (DB) Police from the Gulshan area of Dhaka and taken to Chattogram. He was shown arrested in multiple pending cases and is currently being held in district jail custody.

The case raises serious concerns regarding the alleged use of excessive force by law enforcement officials, as well as fabrication of an armed confrontation to justify the shooting. The allegations point to potential violations of the right to life, the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to liberty and security of person, and the right to due process and a fair trial. The existence of numerous criminal cases against the victim further underscores the need to ensure that all legal proceedings are conducted independently, impartially, and in full compliance with international human rights standards.

Case Study-3

On 20 January 2018, Abdul Ohab (30) and Abul Bashar (28) were reportedly killed in what police described as a "gunfight" in Shazbazzpur Uttarpara under Sorail Upazila of Brahmanbaria District. According to police, six individuals, including the two victims, had been arrested on the night of 19 January while allegedly committing a robbery. Police claimed that, during an operation to recover stolen property, associates of the detainees opened fire, prompting an exchange of gunfire in which Abdul Ohab and Abul Bashar were killed.

The families of both victims strongly disputed the official account. Abul Bashar's mother, Hena Begum, and his wife, Alusom Begum, stated that he worked as an auto-rickshaw driver and had no involvement in robbery or other criminal activities. They alleged that a police officer from Sorail Police Station demanded and accepted 20,000 taka in exchange for his release on the night of 20 January. Despite payment of the money, Bashar was subsequently killed. Similarly, Abdul Ohab's mother, Fatema Begum, stated that her son was a rickshaw-van puller with no criminal record. She alleged that police accepted 10,000 taka after assuring her that he would be released, but he too was later killed.

The case raises serious concerns regarding the alleged extrajudicial execution of two individuals who were reportedly in police custody, contradicting the official claim that they died during an armed confrontation. The allegations of extortion by law enforcement officers in exchange for promised release, followed by the deaths of the detainees, further point to possible corruption, abuse of authority, and denial of due process. If the victims were already under police control, the circumstances surrounding their deaths require heightened scrutiny.

Case study-4

Shanu Hawladar was arrested by police on the night of 23 March 2020 in connection with a murder case relating to the killing of a farmer, Ibrahim, in Paschim Kalagachhia village on 3 November 2019. According to his family, although Shanu's step-brother, Mizanur Rahman Hawladar, had been named as an accused in the case, police arrested Shanu instead. The family alleged that police detained him unlawfully and subjected him to torture while in custody to extort money.

According to family members, after Shanu's arrest, OC Abul Bashir and OC (Investigation) Manoranjan Mistri demanded Tk 300,000 in exchange for his release. Unable to pay the full amount, Shanu's son, Shakib Hossain, reportedly paid Tk 10,000 to OC Abul Bashir on 24 March 2020. Despite the payment, the family alleged that police continued to torture Shanu during interrogation. They claimed that he died as a result of the torture after refusing or failing to meet the officers' extortion demands.

On 26 March 2020, at approximately 6:15 a.m., Shanu Hawladar was found hanging from a ceiling fan in the room of the Officer-in-Charge (Investigation) at Amtali Police Station. Police claimed that Shanu had requested to use the bathroom and subsequently hanged himself from the ceiling fan in the OC (Investigation)'s room. His family rejected the police account, alleging that the suicide claim was fabricated to conceal his death following torture in custody.

Following the incident, a three-member committee was formed to investigate the custodial death. Pending the inquiry, OC (Investigation) Manoranjan Mistri and duty officer ASI Arifur Rahman were suspended from their duties. The outcome of the investigation and any subsequent accountability measures were not known.

Case Study-5

Tajul Islam, a resident of Dalal Hat–Nayatari village under Haragachh Police Station in Rangpur, died shortly after being arrested by police on allegations of possessing illegal drugs on 1 November 2021. His death sparked widespread public outrage and raised serious concerns regarding custodial torture, the use of excessive force by law enforcement, and the accountability of state authorities.

According to the police, Tajul Islam was arrested from a nearby area after allegedly being found in possession of drugs. Police claimed that he resisted arrest, attempted to escape, and later became ill while in custody, resulting in his death. Authorities further stated that an inquest conducted after his death found no visible injury marks on his body.

However, family members, eyewitnesses and local residents refuted the official account, alleging that Tajul was subjected to torture while in police custody and that the injuries

sustained during the alleged torture led to his death. The conflicting narratives fueled public suspicion regarding the circumstances surrounding his death.

News of Tajul's death triggered widespread protests. An agitated crowd gathered outside Haragachh Police Station, where protesters threw brickbats and vandalized several vehicles, including police vehicles, reflecting growing distrust of law enforcement and demands for accountability.

The High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh took suo motu cognizance of the incident. A bench comprising Justice Mamnoon Rahman and Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman directed the Rangpur police to submit a comprehensive investigation report by 11 November 2021, with a further hearing scheduled for 15 November 2021. The matter was brought before the Court following a submission by Deputy Attorney General Amit Das Gupta based on a police statement, after advocate Jyotirmoy Barua requested a judicial inquiry. In contrary, Rangpur Metropolitan Police established a four-member investigation committee headed by Additional Commissioner Mehedul Karim to independently examine the circumstances surrounding Tajul Islam's death.

Case study-6

Anwar Hossain, aged 35, died while in Cumilla Central Jail on 11 August 2022. Prison authorities stated that he died of a heart attack. However, his family refuses this official account, alleging that Anwar had been subjected to severe torture while in police custody following his arrest as a suspect in a CNG-run autorickshaw theft case. According to the family, he sustained serious injuries during interrogation before being transferred to jail, and those injuries ultimately caused his death.

The conflicting accounts regarding the cause of death raise serious concerns about the treatment of detainees in custody and the lack of transparency surrounding custodial deaths. If the allegations are accurate, the case reflects a pattern of torture and ill-treatment during police detention, followed by the failure to ensure adequate medical care and accountability. The discrepancy between the official explanation and the family's allegations underscores the importance of an impartial forensic examination and an independent investigation.

Case study-7

Mohammad Rabiul Islam, a yarn trader, was reportedly arrested without a warrant from his residence at approximately 2:00 a.m. on 14 January 2023 by Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Mahbub Hossain and ASI Nurul Islam of Bason Police Station. According to his family, the police did not provide any legal documents for the arrest.

Following the arrest, the police allegedly demanded money from the family in exchange for Rabiul's release. The family initially paid Tk 30,000 after being assured that he would be freed. Subsequently, the officers allegedly increased the demand to Tk 500,000, warning that Rabiul would not be released unless the full amount was paid.

On the evening of 17 January 2023, ASI Mahbub Hossain reportedly visited the family and instructed them to come to the police station, stating that Rabiul would be released. When Rabiul's nephew, Ashraful Islam, arrived at the station with his aunt, police officers allegedly

took Ashraful's signature on a blank sheet of paper and sent them home, again assuring them of Rabiul's imminent release.

Shortly after leaving the police station, the family was informed by police that Rabiul had died in a road accident while returning home. The family rejected this explanation and alleged that he had been tortured and killed while in police custody after they failed to meet the officers' financial demands. The incident triggered widespread public anger. Protesters blocked the Dhaka–Mymensingh highway, while an enraged crowd reportedly vandalized a police outpost and set fire to two motorcycles.

Case study-8

It is alleged that Farooq Hossain died on 15 January 2024 as a result of torture while in the custody of Bangshal Police Station. According to his wife, Ima Akhtar Happy, Farooq was detained by police from the Kayetuli Police Outpost on 12 January 2024 while on his way to work in Old Dhaka. Happy immediately went to the outpost seeking her husband's release. She alleged that Sub-Inspectors Imdadul Haque, Masud Rana, Bulbul Ahmed, and other officers demanded a bribe of BDT 100,000 for Farooq's release, later reducing the amount to BDT 50,000. She further alleged that SI Imdadul Haque made an indecent proposal to her. When she refused both the bribe demand and the proposal, police reportedly tied Farooq to a chair and beat him in her presence.

Farooq was subsequently transferred to Bangshal Police Station. On 13 January, police filed a criminal case against him, alleging possession of 150 grams of cannabis, and produced him before the court. While being held in the court custody cell, Farooq reportedly informed his wife that he had been subjected to torture in police custody. He was then sent to Dhaka Central Jail.

On 15 January, Happy was informed by Dhaka Medical College Hospital that Farooq had died. Upon identifying his body at the hospital morgue, she observed visible injury marks on his neck, chest, and back, raising serious concerns that his death resulted from torture and ill-treatment while in police custody.

Seeking justice, on 30 January 2024, Happy filed a case before the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge Court against five individuals, including the Officer-in-Charge of Bangshal Police Station. On 31 January, the court ordered the Detective Branch (DB) of Police to investigate the circumstances surrounding Farooq's death.

Case study-9

On 17 May 2024, Suraiya Khatun (52) died while in the custody of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)-14 CPC-2 Bhairab Camp in Kishoreganj. She had been accused in a dowry-related murder case concerning the death of her pregnant daughter-in-law, Rekha Akhtar, who was killed on 26 April 2024. Following Rekha Akhtar's death, her mother filed a case on 2 May 2024, which was officially recorded at Nandail Police Station on 13 May 2024. Sub-Inspector Nazmul Hasan was assigned as the investigating officer.

According to Suraiya's husband, police summoned the family to the police station on the night of 16 May 2024. He alleged that Suraiya were subsequently handed over to RAB.

While in RAB custody, Suraiya was reportedly subjected to torture, which allegedly resulted in her death.

A physician at Bhairab Upazila Health Complex stated that RAB brought Suraiya to the hospital already deceased. Following the incident, an unnatural death case has been registered, and several RAB personnel and the investigating officer have been withdrawn from duty. However, the outcome of the investigation and any subsequent legal proceedings has not been publicly reported.

Case study-10

On 19 June, Sheikh Jewel, a local activist of the BNP and an internet service provider, died while in custody at Bangara Bazar Police Station under Muradnagar Upazila in Cumilla District. According to police, Jewel was arrested along with four others during a raid conducted at the residence of a suspected drug dealer in the Bangara Bazar area. Police claimed that later that night, while in custody, he complained of chest pain and was immediately taken to Muradnagar Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared him dead.

However, Jewel's family strongly disputed the police version of events. His wife, Shilpi Begum, denied that he had any involvement in drug use or trafficking and alleged that he was subjected to torture while in police custody, resulting in his death.

The allegations of custodial torture are supported by findings recorded in the inquest report, which documented multiple visible injuries on Jewel's body. These included two half-inch scratches on the wrist of his right hand; an approximately 1.5-inch injury on the right side of his back; a three-inch scratch on the left side of his waist; blood-stained wounds on his left leg; and a three-inch scratch across his back.

The presence of multiple external injuries raises serious concerns regarding the treatment Jewel received while in police custody and warrants an independent forensic examination and impartial investigation to determine the circumstances leading to his death.

Case study-11

Md. Rashedul Islam is a human rights defender in Rajshahi associated with Odhikar. During the nationwide movement in late July 2024, he was allegedly targeted by members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police because of his perceived involvement and affiliation with the movement.

On the evening of 29 July, Md. Rashedul Islam was reportedly picked up by officers of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police without due legal process. During his detention, he was allegedly subjected to brutal torture. The following day, on 30 July, DB police transferred him to Motihar Police Station and produced him before a court in a case filed under the Explosive Substances Act. According to the allegations, the case was fabricated to justify his detention and prosecution. Following judicial proceedings, Rashedul remained in prison until he was released on bail on 7 August 2024.

Case study-12

Yunus Ali, a rickshaw puller residing in Jashore, reportedly became the victim of physical abuse allegedly carried out by members of Rapid Action Battalion-6 (RAB-6). The incident is said to have taken place during an operation in which the security personnel entered his home under the stated pretext of searching for weapons.

According to Yunus Ali's account shared with journalists at the Jashore Press Club on 24 December, members of RAB-6 entered his residence and conducted a search operation. During this operation, he was allegedly subjected to physical torture. No details of any recovered weapons or incriminating materials were reported in the available information.

Following the incident, Yunus Ali was observed walking with a limp, indicating injuries to both legs. He later publicly displayed visible marks of injury while speaking to reporters, drawing attention to his condition. After the alleged assault, Yunus Ali received medical treatment at Jashore General Hospital. Reports indicate that he sustained severe injuries to affect his mobility, particularly in both legs, requiring hospital-based care.

Case study-13

On 21 May 2022, Nasir Uddin, a nine-grade student from Sreepur under Magura District, was arrested by police on suspicion of involvement in the theft of a motorcycle. Following his arrest, he was taken to Sreepur Police Station.

According to his account, after being brought to the police station, Nasir Uddin was subjected to severe physical and psychological torture while in custody. He was handcuffed and beaten by police officers. He was allegedly suspended from window grills and further assaulted. He was taken to a nearby field where he was reportedly threatened at gunpoint and coerced to confess to the alleged crime. Nasir Uddin stated that he was tortured over a period of three consecutive nights while in custody. He further alleged that members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police also participated in his torture during detention.

On 24 May 2022, after approximately three days in police custody, Nasir Uddin was produced before the court. The allegations in this case underscore the urgent need for strict enforcement of safeguards against custodial torture, particularly for minors. They also highlight the importance of independent investigation, prompt judicial oversight, and accountability mechanisms to prevent abuse of state power and ensure compliance with human rights standards.

Case study-14

On 8 August 2021, Gopal Kanti Das, a gold trader from Chittagong, was traveling to Dhaka carrying 20 gold bars valued at approximately BDT 12.3 million. The incident allegedly took place on the Dhaka–Chittagong Highway under Feni Sadar Upazila, where members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Feni District Police intercepted his vehicle near the Fatehpur Railway Overpass. The officers allegedly seized the gold bars from him during the interception.

According to the report, a group of DB police officers from Feni District—led by Mohammad Saiful Islam and including Sub-Inspectors Motaher Hossain, Nurul Haque, and

Mizanur Rahman, along with Assistant Sub-Inspectors Abhijit Barua and Masud Rana, stopped his vehicle at the Fatehpur Railway Overpass area under Feni Sadar Upazila on the Dhaka–Chittagong Highway. It is alleged that they stopped the victim’s vehicle, took possession of the gold bars, and forcibly removed him from the scene.

The report further states that the victim was taken to a secluded location where he was physically assaulted. During the incident, he was allegedly beaten while a pistol was held to his head, and he was threatened with extrajudicial killing through “crossfire.” The officers allegedly demanded BDT 10 million from him and threatened to implicate him in a yaba-related narcotics case if he failed to comply.

Following the assault and threats, Gopal Kanti Das was reportedly transferred to another vehicle and later dropped in the Mirsarai area of Chattogram. Subsequently, Gopal Kanti Das filed a case with Feni Sadar Police Station, which led to the arrest of all six accused DB police officers named in the complaint.

Case study-15

On 2 July 2021, a woman accused in a murder case was produced before the Judicial Magistrate-3 Court in Barishal after being interrogated while on police remand. The case raises serious allegations of custodial torture and sexual violence during police custody, alongside questions regarding compliance with safeguards under Bangladesh’s legal framework for the prevention of torture.

While appearing before the court, the presiding Judge, Mahfuzur Rahman, observed that the accused was limping. Upon inquiry, the woman alleged that she had been subjected to both physical and sexual abuse by members of the police during her remand period. Taking cognizance of the allegation, the court immediately ordered a medical examination under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013. The court directed the Director of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital to examine her condition and submit a report within 24 hours, specifically documenting signs of torture and estimating the possible time of infliction.

On 3 July 2021, the hospital authority submitted its medical report to the court. The examination findings indicated that the woman had been beaten with a hard object on multiple parts of her body. The report provided medical corroboration consistent with allegations of physical abuse during custody.

Following the medical report and initial court observation, the survivor filed a formal case on 4 July 2021. The complaint was lodged against several police officials, including the then Inspector (Investigation) of Wazirpur Police Station, Mainul Islam; the Officer-in-Charge (OC), Ziaul Ahsan; Assistant Superintendent of Police of Wazirpur Circle; and three other unidentified police personnel. The case marked a formal legal challenge against law enforcement officials for alleged custodial torture and abuse of authority.

Case study-16

On the morning of 10 June 2020, a police team from Sharankhola Police Station in Bagerhat District went to arrest a garment worker, Swapan Mia, in connection with a case reportedly filed over a family dispute. The operation was led by Sub-Inspector Biswajit, accompanied by Constables Selim and Sohag.

According to accounts, police entered Swapan Mia's residence in the morning and forcibly removed him while he was sleeping. He was allegedly dragged out of bed, beaten in front of witnesses, and taken to the street in a humiliated condition. After being transported to the police station, Swapan Mia was allegedly subjected to severe physical torture. Reports indicate that the abuse continued until he became unconscious.

Following the alleged torture, Swapan Mia was admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital with serious injuries. His condition indicated significant physical trauma consistent with severe assault.

Swapan Mia's brother, Halim Mia, stated that Swapan later provided a description of the torture to the Additional Superintendent of Police, Reazul Islam. Following this interaction, police reportedly moved toward a negotiated settlement. The Officer-in-Charge of Sharankhola Police Station allegedly facilitated discussions to resolve the matter informally.

However, the police administration later claimed that there had been a "misunderstanding" during the investigation. ASP Reazul Islam stated that action was taken after Swapan Mia reportedly indicated that he had no further complaints against the police. Subsequently, the three police officers involved were "closed" at the Bagerhat Police Lines pending further administrative action.

The alleged torture of Swapan Mia highlights systemic risks of custodial abuse and weak accountability mechanisms. While administrative measures were reportedly taken against the officers involved, the case underscores the need for an independent, transparent, and judicially supervised investigation into allegations of torture, as well as stronger safeguards to prevent custodial violence in the future.

Case study-17

On 13 March 2018, Sumon Hasan, a cameraperson of DBC Television, became a victim of alleged police brutality and assault while performing professional duties. The incident occurred in Barisal when he responded to information that a close relative had been detained by the Detective Branch (DB) of Police. Upon receiving news of his relative's detention, Sumon Hasan immediately went to the location to seek clarification from the police. At the scene, an altercation reportedly occurred between him and DB police personnel.

According to the report, after learning that Sumon was a journalist, DB police allegedly attacked him. He was beaten by police officers and forcibly placed into a police van. During transportation to the DB office, he was reportedly beaten again. After arrival at the DB office, Sumon was handcuffed. The situation escalated further when other journalists arrived at the DB office upon hearing about the incident. These journalists were also allegedly subjected to physical assault by police personnel.

Subsequently, Sub Inspector Abul Bashar, Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) Swapan, ASI Akhter and Constables Masud, Russel, Hassan, Rahim and Saiful were closed for their involvement in the incident. The incident reportedly had a chilling effect on journalists present at the scene, undermining their ability to report on law enforcement actions without fear of retaliation. It also contributed to broader concerns regarding safety of media workers in situations involving police operations.

Analysis of the case studies:

The reported restrictions on family access, lack of transparency, conflicting official accounts, delayed disclosure of information, and alleged efforts to conceal abuses further raise concerns about impunity and the absence of effective accountability mechanisms. These incidents underscore the urgent need for prompt, impartial, independent, transparent, and effective investigations; the preservation of evidence; the protection of victims, witnesses, and families from intimidation or retaliation; the prosecution of those responsible; and the provision of effective remedies, including justice, reparations, and rehabilitation for victims and their families.

Together, the allegations point to potential violations of the rights to life, liberty, security of person, freedom from torture and ill-treatment, due process, access to justice, and, where applicable, the freedoms of expression, association, and the press, as guaranteed under the Constitution of Bangladesh and international human rights instruments, including the Convention against Torture (CAT) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The allegations, if verified, indicate serious breaches of Bangladesh's obligations under international and domestic human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), particularly Articles 6 and 7 on the right to life and the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as the Convention against Torture (CAT), which requires States to prevent, investigate, and punish acts of torture and ensure redress for victims. They are also inconsistent with constitutional guarantees in Bangladesh protecting the right to life, liberty, and protection from torture and ill-treatment.

In response, the cases require a coordinated set of actions centered on accountability, prevention, and victim protection. A prompt, independent, impartial, and transparent investigation must be conducted into all allegations, including arbitrary arrest, custodial violence, coercion, extortion, and any resulting death in custody. This investigation should include independent forensic and medical examination to establish the accurate cause and circumstances of death, free from institutional interference.

Where credible evidence is found, all responsible individuals must be prosecuted through due legal process, ensuring command responsibility is also examined where applicable. Parallel to this, immediate steps must be taken to safeguard the victim and/or affected family members from intimidation, retaliation, or further harm, while ensuring access to legal representation, judicial oversight, and effective complaint mechanisms.

In accordance with CAT obligations and relevant domestic law, victims and families should be guaranteed full access to effective remedies, including adequate compensation, medical care, and psychological rehabilitation. Strengthening safeguards within law enforcement and detention systems is also essential, including strict enforcement of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013, improved standards for custodial interrogation, and mandatory medical examination protocols. Collectively, these measures underscore the need to end impunity for custodial abuse, reinforce judicial vigilance, and ensure that all allegations of torture and custodial death are addressed in line with international human rights standards and Bangladesh's legal commitments.

ANNEXTURE: II

Full Text of the Speech of Dr. Alice Jill Edwards, SR, Torture

NATIONAL CONSULTATION

on Prevention of Torture and Implementation of UNCAT and OPCAT Hotel Pan Pacific Sonargaon, Dhaka, 25 –26 April 2026

REMARKS BY

Dr Alice Edwards, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Thank you for the invitation to speak today.

It is a privilege to engage with colleagues from Bangladesh’s legal profession, civil society, and justice institutions on an issue of such importance.

One of the key risks in many criminal justice systems is an over-reliance on confessions as the primary form of evidence—what is sometimes described as a “confession culture”. This is often incentivised by crime resolution quotas or promotions of officers based on such rates.

Where systems prioritise confessions above all else, this can create pressure—implicit or explicit—on investigators to secure them. In the worst cases, this leads to coercive practices, including torture or other ill-treatment, in violation of Article 1, 15 and 16 of the Convention against Torture, and implicit in Article 7, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Such practices not only violate fundamental rights such as the accused’s rights to a fair trial and the presumption of innocence, to be treated humanely and with dignity at all times in custody, and to be protected from violence, but they also undermine justice. They can lead to wrongful convictions, arbitrary detention, and a loss of public confidence in institutions.

The period immediately following arrest is especially critical. It is during these early hours that the risk of coercion or abuse is at its highest.

Preventing torture and mistreatment therefore requires attention to this moment: ensuring access to lawyers, clear procedural safeguards, and proper oversight from the outset.

It requires first and foremost that police and investigators are well trained, disciplined and subject to reprimand and accountability when infractions occur, and that they develop a human rights culture that inculcates respect for others.

Today we are here to talk about a specific practical, evidence-based alternative to interrogation.

The Principles on Effective Interviewing—also known as the Mendez Principles, named after my esteemed predecessor Mr. Juan Mendez—provide a framework for conducting interviews that are lawful, humane, and effective.

These approaches are grounded in evidence and research, including neuroscience and psychology. They show that coercion is not only unlawful—it is also counterproductive.

First, from a neuroscience perspective, imposing stressors on the brain such as by creating a coercive, pressured or violent atmosphere, can undermine mood, motivation, memory recall and cognition.

Second, from a psychology perspective, a number of important studies of convicted criminals – carried out in Australia, Canada and Sweden – showed that a substantial proportion of suspects have an intention to cooperate or to provide an accurate account or confess, when first apprehended.¹⁰⁷

However, treating suspects or witnesses badly or domineering techniques – yelling, insulting, threatening, or subjecting them to aggressive posturing or violence – has been shown that they are highly likely to close up and actually refuse to speak, or to otherwise refuse to cooperate in the process.

Let that research sink in for a moment ... that the more coercive the interview the less cooperative the suspect.

By contrast, rapport-based interviewing—built on respect, preparation, and strategic use of evidence—leads to better outcomes for investigations and for justice.

Importantly, the Mendez methods do not require significant resources. They require training, clear guidelines, and a shift in mindset across the system—from police to prosecutors to judges – and they require simply to be practiced!

Accountability is also essential. Clear rules must be accompanied by consequences when they are breached, and reinforced by strong leadership and a culture of zero tolerance for abuse.

Independent oversight and transparency further strengthen public trust and help prevent misconduct from becoming normalised.

As a first action after this conference, I would strongly recommend that two documents are translated into Bengali:

The Mendez Principles; and

The Convention against Torture Initiative's Training Module on Interviewing for Criminal Cases, which is a short guide focused on the implementation of the interviewing techniques underpinning the Mendez Principles.

I would also recommend you review the CTI's Police Resource online Toolkit, which gathers good practices from across the world on relevant topics, including arrest, custody, transport, interviewing etc.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude by encouraging all actors in Bangladesh, but in particular the Government, that in addition to adopting the Mendez Principles and methods of interrogation, that they also strengthen legal and procedural safeguards, including the inadmissibility of coerced confessions in legal proceedings.

A society is nothing without a robust rule of law and criminal legal system.

Thank you.

ENDS

¹⁰⁷ Holmberg and Christianson (2002), Swedish survey of 83 prisoners convicted of murder or sexual offences; Kebbell, Hurren & Mazerolle (2006), Australian survey of convicted sex offenders; similar findings in Snook, Brooks and Bull (2015), survey of 100 incarcerated men in Canada.