



# **Three-Month Human Rights Monitoring Report on Bangladesh**

**Reporting Period: April - June 2023**

**Prepared by Odhikar**

Date of Release: 10 July 2023

## Foreword

In Bangladesh, an increasingly authoritarian government has been in power for almost 15 years and has been violating human rights on a large scale and targeting human rights defenders. As a human rights organisation, Odhikar has been facing extreme state repression and harassment since 2013 while conducting its activities. Despite continued harassment and obstruction by the state, Odhikar is monitoring human rights violations in accordance with international human rights laws and standards.

Odhikar has prepared the human rights report for the month of April-June 2023 based on the reports sent by the human rights defenders associated with the Organisation from different districts of the country, and data published in various media. Due to constant surveillance and harassment by the government, Odhikar is forced to practice some level of self-censorship even in the publication of its reports.

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

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

Twitter: @odhikar\_bd

## Contents

<b>Statistics: Human Rights violations</b> .....	1
<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Repression on Opposition Parties and Disruption and Attacks on Meetings and Assemblies</b> .....	3
<i>Suppression on opposition party leaders and activists</i> .....	3
<i>Disruption and attacks on rallies and meetings</i> .....	7
<b>Criminal Activities and Acts of Violence by the Ruling Party</b> .....	12
<b>Politicisation of State Institutions</b> .....	14
<i>Election Commission and electoral system of Bangladesh</i> .....	14
<b>State Repression on Citizens</b> .....	20
<i>Enforced disappearances</i> .....	20
<i>Extrajudicial killings</i> .....	24
<i>Torture, degrading treatment, lack of accountability and custodial death by law enforcement agencies</i> .....	25
<i>Allegations of torture and death in custody</i> .....	25
<i>Human rights violations in prisons</i> .....	27
<i>The death penalty</i> .....	28
<b>Public Lynching</b> .....	29
<b>Freedom of Expression</b> .....	29
<i>The Digital Security Act, 2018</i> .....	30
<i>Freedom of the media</i> .....	32
<b>Situation of RMG workers</b> .....	34
<b>Violence against Women</b> .....	35
<i>Rape</i> .....	35
<i>Stalking/Sexual harassment</i> .....	36
<i>Dowry related violence</i> .....	37
<i>Acid violence</i> .....	37
<b>Neighbouring Countries: India and Myanmar</b> .....	37
<i>India's Interference with Bangladesh and Human Rights Violations by BSF</i> .....	37
<i>Human Rights abuses on the Rohingya Population</i> .....	39
<b>Impediments to Human Rights Work</b> .....	40
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	42

## Statistics: Human Rights violations

Statistics: January - June 2023*								
Type of Human Rights Violation		January	February	March	April	May	June	Total
Extrajudicial killings	Crossfire	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
	Tortured to death	1	0	1	0	0	2	4
	Shot to death	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>
Enforced Disappearances**		2	5	1	4	2	2	16
Death in Jail		15	6	5	10	9	13	58
Political Violence	Killed	8	4	10	13	8	6	49
	Injured	375	1144	521	349	784	438	3611
Death Penalty	Sentenced to death	25	18	50	28	50	41	212
	Execution of death sentence	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
Human rights violations by Indian BSF	Bangladeshis Killed	2	3	0	0	2	2	9
	Bangladeshis Injured	3	2	0	0	4	4	13
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>22</b>
Attacks on journalists	Killed	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Injured	21	17	16	20	10	5	89
	Assaulted	4	10	3	1	7	5	30
	Attacked	0	0	1	4	6	0	11
	Arrested	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
	Threatened	3	1	4	3	4	3	18
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>151</b>
Public lynching		6	5	4	2	6	2	25
Arrest under the Digital Security Act, 2018	For allegedly criticizing the Prime Minister, high-ranking officials of the government, their family members, for being 'anti-government' and for posts against the Indian Prime Minister	9	10	5	4	15	2	45
	For allegedly making derogatory remarks against any religion or religious groups	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>48</b>

\* Odhikar documentation

\*\* Both long and short term

## Introduction

This report sheds light on the human rights situation of Bangladesh during the period of April-June 2023. The Awami League government has taken away the voting rights of the people and remains in power through farcical elections<sup>1</sup>. A huge vacuum has been created in the country in terms of democracy, accountability and rule of law. The government suffers moral and legal crises. Its metamorphosis into an authoritarian regime is apparently complete.

The state security forces and ruling party members are recklessly violating human rights. Filing false cases, arrests and torture against leaders and activists of the opposition parties are ongoing. In addition, citizens have been subjected to various human rights violations by members of law enforcement agencies, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture. Members of law enforcement agencies enjoy impunity. The violations to rights have become so extreme that international pressure, and [sanctions](#) on RAB (by the USA) had to be made. More recently, a [new visa policy](#) had to be imposed by the USA, for any Bangladeshi individual believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh. The sanctions on RAB caused cases of enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings to [decrease](#), which indicates that such a violation does exist, despite denials by the government.

---

<sup>1</sup>Awami League unilaterally participated in the 10<sup>th</sup> National Parliament elections on 5 January 2014 despite the boycott of almost all political parties. The people were disenfranchised and 153 Members of Parliament were elected unopposed before the polling even commenced. On 30 December 2018, at the 11<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary elections, there were incidents of stamping ballot papers in favour of the ruling Awami League nominated candidates and stuffing them in boxes the night before polls, the casting of fake votes, coercing voters to vote for the ruling party candidates, occupying polling centres, and apprehending and forcibly ousting polling agents of opposition candidates, voter intimidation and other irregularities.

## Repression on Opposition Parties and Disruption and Attacks on Meetings and Assemblies

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

1. The year 2023 is considered to be an important year politically. The 12<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary election is scheduled to be held in January 2024. The Awami League government abolished the caretaker government system in 2011 and introduced an election system under the incumbent government. It is to be noted that in 1996, the then opposition party Awami League was the one who agitated for the introduction of the caretaker government system. Awami League held on to power through controversial and farcical elections in 2014 and in 2018, due to the abolition of the caretaker system. The ruling Awami League is using its party leaders and activists, as well as law enforcement agencies to suppress opposition parties across the country. During this reporting period, [acts of repression and harassment](#) by the government on the leaders and activists of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and other opposition political parties, had become widespread.<sup>2</sup>



*Sramik League (AL) leader Nazrul Islam Ledu assaults Swechchhasebak Dal (BNP) leader Abdur Rahman at Ramganj in Lakshmipur during the countrywide sit-in programme of the BNP. Photo: New Age, 9 April 2023*

2. BNP has alleged that its popular leaders, who had participated in the previous Parliamentary elections, and potential candidates from around the country are being picked up and pressurized by members of the intelligence agencies to participate in the next general elections.<sup>3</sup> After being taken away, BNP leaders were told that even if BNP did not participate in the polls, they would still have to contest. In addition, active opposition leaders who participated in the recent anti-government movements are being harassed in various ways.<sup>4</sup> The wife of a BNP leader, who has been imprisoned for four

<sup>2</sup>Prothom Alo, 9 April 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/5mkxjq9zre>

<sup>3</sup>New Age, 22 June 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/204903/>

<sup>4</sup>Prothom Alo, 22 June 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/izy6crjsqu>, Daily Star, 23 June 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/news/intel-agencies-picking-active-bnp-leaders-3353391>

months, said that her husband was active in the anti-government movement and is a potential candidate for the forthcoming Parliamentary election. Although he got bail from the court several times, he is kept in jail with new cases being filed against him. She also said that the government is pressurising BNP leaders to participate in the elections under the current government. She fears that her husband was not being released as he did not agree to participate under the incumbent government.<sup>5</sup>

3. It is also alleged that the houses of opposition party members were searched by men claiming to be members of the law enforcement agencies and furniture vandalized.<sup>6</sup>
4. On 4 April 2023, Mahbubul Alam, Organising Secretary of the Duptara Union unit Jubo Dal<sup>7</sup>, was beaten with a hammer, his eyes gouged and he was hacked to death in front of his relatives, by Swechchasebak League<sup>8</sup> leader Hashmat Ali and some of his associates in Araihasar under Narayanganj District.<sup>9</sup>
5. Cases have been filed against local BNP leaders and activists over various incidents. For example, when there was a clash between the local people and the police, based on a Facebook post of a person named Mohammad Sohel, satirizing the Prophet of Islam, police filed a report against about 2500 unknown persons and named only 28 others with Kafrul Police Station. Among the accused, there were 11 leaders and activists of BNP.<sup>10</sup>
6. Police went to the house of BNP's Dhaka Metropolitan North unit member Abul Hossain, to arrest him. The police arrested his two sons Abdur Rahman Roni and Ahadul Islam Badal after failing to find him.<sup>11</sup>
7. During this reporting period, reports have been filed against the opposition leaders and activists on [charges of 'sabotage'](#). Hundreds of leaders and activists have been accused.<sup>12</sup> Most of the reports filed by the police against opposition party members are alleged to be false and fabricated. One of the characteristics of these reports is that the police accuse a large number of 'unidentified persons', so that anyone can be picked up later and shown as arrested. Those who have no report filed against them or are on bail in other court cases, have been arrested as 'unidentified accused' in old cases.<sup>13</sup> Police

---

<sup>5</sup>Manabzamin, 23 June 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=61707>

<sup>6</sup>Manabzamin, 23 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=56802>

<sup>7</sup>Youth wing of BNP

<sup>8</sup>Voluntary wing of Awami League

<sup>9</sup>Samakal, 4 April 2023; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/2304165974/>, Daily Star, 5 April

2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/news/jubo-dal-leader-tortured-death-3289061>

<sup>10</sup>Jugantor, 6 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/682945/>

<sup>11</sup>Manabzamin, 23 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=56802>

<sup>12</sup>Daily Star, 2 April 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/clash-cops-over-800-bnp-men-sued-khulna-3287111>; Samakal, 2 April 2023; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/230416527/>

<sup>13</sup>Manabzamin 23 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=56802>



reports have also been filed implicating deceased persons and people already in prisons. According to the police, on 30 April 2023 at around 5:30 am, hundreds of BNP leaders and activists gathered with weapons at the FDC area of Dhaka's Tejgaon near the railway line. They threw crude bombs at the police. On 1 May 2023, sub-inspector Sohel Rana of Tejgaon Industrial Police Station filed a report against BNP leaders and activists, among whom was Shah Alam, General Secretary of Dhaka Metropolitan North's 26 Ward unit BNP, saying he was involved in this incident. Shah Alam had died on 21 December 2022. The traders at a fish market near the place of incident said that there were no crude bomb explosions or attacks on the police in that area that day.<sup>14</sup> The police not only filed a report against (deceased) Shah Alam but also against BNP leaders and activists who are either abroad or detained in jail.



*BNP leaders and activists clashed with the police during a rally in Khulna. Later the police arrested some people. Photo: Samakal, 2 April 2023*

8. Gazi Afsar Uddin (45), a member of Khulna Metropolitan unit BNP, who was already incarcerated in Khulna District Jail in a 'sabotage' case, has been made an accused in a police report filed on the night of 1 April 2023 on charges of attacking the police and obstructing government work.<sup>15</sup>
9. On 28 May 2023, Sub Inspector Lutfar Rahman filed a report with Chandgaon Police Station, citing the names of 36 BNP leaders-activists and 600 'others' as accused for the attack on police in Baddarhat of Chittagong. Accused person no. 1, Ali Mortuza, Senior Assistant Secretary of Chittagong Metropolitan Swechchasebak Dal<sup>16</sup> and accused no. 6, Shah Imran, Relief and Rehabilitation Affairs Assistant Secretary of Chittagong Metropolitan unit Swechchasebak Dal, were already incarcerated in Chittagong Central Jail at the time of the said incident.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Samakal, 4 May 2023; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/2305170657/>

<sup>15</sup>Prothom Alo, 4 April 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/fixg7bur5m>

<sup>16</sup>Voluntary wing of BNP

<sup>17</sup>Prothom Alo, 30 May 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/4qrkifppgr>



10. Courts do not grant bail to the accused, even in blatantly false cases.<sup>18</sup> Members of the ruling party are filing cases in multiple places on the same incident, in order to harass opponents. Courts are granting remand when the police seek remand for the accused. It is established that the police extract confessions through torture and inhumane treatment during remand. Leaders of Awami League have alleged that at a rally on 19 May, Rajshahi BNP leader Abu Saeed Chand threatened to kill Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. In this incident, 20 cases were filed against Chand in nine districts and he was taken into remand several times.<sup>19</sup> On 22 June, BNP leader Suruzzaman was arrested by the police while he was putting up a poster in Rajshahi Districts Bagha Town, demanding the release of Abu Saeed Chand.<sup>20</sup> In addition, many people were re-arrested from the jail gate after they were released on bail. Azizur Rahman Musabbi, General Secretary of the Dhaka Metropolitan North unit Swechchasebak Dal, was arrested three times from the jail gate after being released on bail by the High Court Division of the Supreme Court.<sup>21</sup>



*Rajshahi District BNP Convener Abu Saeed Chand was arrested from a sit-in programme and taken into police custody. Photo: Samakal, 1 April 2023*

11. Ruling party members reportedly sexually assaulted Nadia Nusrat, a female Chhatra Dal<sup>22</sup> leader for attending a BNP rally. Instead of arresting the perpetrator, police arrested the victim. On 18 June 2023, Chhatra Dal leader Nadia Nusrat (21) was returning home on a CNG-run three-wheeler from BNP's divisional rally in Chittagong, when local Chhatra League<sup>23</sup> leaders and activists, led by Pavel, son of No. 6 Ichakhali Union Parishad Chairman Nurul Mostafa of Mirsarai Upazila, and his associate Kamrul, stopped her vehicle, dragged her out and physically harassed her. Nusrat was then taken to an abandoned house nearby and sexually assaulted. When Nusrat sought

<sup>18</sup>Jugantor, 1 April 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/660988/>

<sup>19</sup>Samakal, 7 June 2023; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/2306176891/>

<sup>20</sup>Jugantor, 24 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/689634/>

<sup>21</sup>Manabzamin, 1 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=53425>

<sup>22</sup>Student wing of BNP

<sup>23</sup>Student wing of Awami League

help from Jorarganj Police Station via cell phone, she was not given any assistance. Later, Chhatra League members called the police and handed Nusrat over to Jorarganj Police Station. Nusrat was showed as arrested in an explosives case filed in December 2022 and sent to jail through the court.<sup>24</sup>

12. Ruling party members also attacked<sup>25</sup> opposition party leaders and activists, vandalized their houses and BNP offices. On 7 April 2023, a group of miscreants wearing masks attacked the BNP office in Nandigram under Bogura District and set it on fire with petrol. On the same day, Chhatra League and Jubo League activists attacked and vandalized the BNP office in Rangabali under Patuakhali District.<sup>26</sup> On 5 May, the ruling party leaders led by Abdur Rahman, attacked and vandalized the house of Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher, former Member of Parliament and central leader of Jamaat-e-Islami.<sup>27</sup>
13. After obstructing and attacking rallies and meetings of the opposition party, the police and the ruling party members filed reports against the BNP leaders and activists. As a result, thousands of opposition party leaders and activists are fleeing from their homes across the country to avoid (wrongful) arrest, harassment, possible torture and incarceration. According to reports, about 112,000 cases have been filed against BNP leaders and activists since Awami League came to power in 2009. In these cases, a total of 3,978,481 members and supporters, starting from central leaders (including BNP Secretary General Fakhru Islam Alamgir) to the grassroots levels of BNP, have been accused.<sup>28</sup> The number of 'anonymous' accused persons is several times more than this. Charge sheets have been submitted in most of the cases. Meanwhile, leaders of the opposition parties and their lawyers have expressed apprehension that a quick judgment may be given and many incarcerated, before the upcoming Parliamentary elections.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Disruption and attacks on rallies and meetings***

14. In the last 14 years, the ruling Awami League party has carried out extensive acts of repression. However, in recent times, due to international pressure, and the sanctions on RAB and the new visa policy (both imposed by the USA), the Bangladesh government has allowed opposition parties to hold meetings and rallies. Nonetheless, miscreants belonging to the ruling party and the police, have attacked such rallies and meetings and those attending

---

<sup>24</sup>Manabzamin, 19 June 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=61048>

<sup>25</sup>Manabzamin, 1 April 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=49238>

<sup>26</sup>Samakal, 9 April 2023; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2023-04-09/15/3312>

<sup>27</sup>Prothom Alo, 6 May 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/tm1pdzaakc>

<sup>28</sup>Jugantor, 9 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/683822/>

<sup>29</sup>Jugantor, 9 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/683822/>

them.<sup>30</sup> In many cases, the police and Awami League-backed Chhatra League jointly conducted these attacks.<sup>31</sup> Leaders and activists of Awami League also attacked journalists who went to cover the meeting.<sup>32</sup>



*Injured journalist at Goalanda Upazila Health Complex. He had been taking photos of attacks by Awami League activists. Photo: Prothom Alo, 8 April 2023*

15. On 25 May 2023, Awami League activists attacked and vandalized the motorcade of BNP Vice Chairman Abdullah Al Noman in front of the Awami League office, while he was on his way to attend a BNP rally in Khagrachhari. Five leaders and activists of BNP were also injured.<sup>33</sup>
16. Another ploy used by the Awami League is the calling of a rally on the same date, time and place as a BNP programme, which had been approved earlier. This leads to the issuing of [Section 144](#) of the Code of Criminal Procedure by the local administration and the barring of the BNP rally. On 8 April 2023, in Khagrachari town, Swechchasebak Dal organised an Iftar party for the leaders and activists of Chittagong and Cumilla Divisions. Later Awami League affiliated organisation Jatiya Sramik League<sup>34</sup>, announced a rally and iftar distribution programme at the same place and time. As a result, Khagrachari District Commissioner Mohammad Shahiduzzaman issued Section 144 of the Cr.PC at that place.<sup>35</sup>
17. On 1 May 2023, [police baton charged](#) the procession of the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal<sup>36</sup> in Khulna<sup>37</sup> and demolished a stage set up by Sramik Dal to hold a rally in Kishoreganj on the occasion of International Labour Day.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Daily Star, 8 April 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/news/bnp-leader-alfat-hossains-motorcade-attacked-patuakhali-3292051>; Prothom Alo, 8 April 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/asl72rb8hl>

<sup>31</sup>Samakal, 9 April 2023; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2023-04-09/16/3148>

<sup>32</sup>ProthomAlo, 8 April 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/nmc6c5ambi>

<sup>33</sup>Manabzamin, 28 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=57635>

<sup>34</sup>Labour wing of Awami League

<sup>35</sup>Dhaka Tribune, 7 April 2023; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/politics/2023/04/07/section-144-imposed-in-khagrachhari-over-awami-league-bnp-iftar-party>; Samakal, 7 April 2023; <https://samakal.com/uk/article/2304166557/>

<sup>36</sup>Labour wing of BNP



*Police baton charge a Sramik Dal rally in Khulna. Photo: Manabzamin, 1 May 2023*

18. On 19 May 2023, as part of BNP's road march programmes, BNP leaders and activists brought out a procession in front of the Khulna Press Club. When the police barred it, a clash ensued between them. The police baton charge and hurled tear gas shells at the BNP activists and fired rubber bullets and used shotguns. At least 15 people were injured.<sup>39</sup> BNP activist Ali Hossain was admitted to a hospital with 59 shotgun pellets lodged in his back. On 23 May, when a team of the Detective Branch of the Police went to the hospital to look for him, fearing arrest, Ali Hossain was forced to flee from the hospital and went into hiding despite serious physical problems.<sup>40</sup>



*BNP activist Ali Hossain was shot during the clash between BNP leaders and activists with the police. Photo: Manabzamin, 24 May 2023*

19. On the night before the road march programme on 19 May, 50 BNP leaders and activists were injured when the ruling party members attacked them in different parts of Feni.<sup>41</sup> It is to be noted that while the police obstruct the

<sup>37</sup> Manabzamin, 1 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=53422>

<sup>38</sup> Jugantor, 3 May 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/670608/>

<sup>39</sup> Prothom Alo, 19 May 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/local-news/91ii8ldrp5>

<sup>40</sup> Manabzamin, 24 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=56992>

<sup>41</sup> Samakal, 20 May 2023; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2023-05-20/1/6138>



processions and gatherings of the opposition party, they do not obstruct the processions and gatherings of the ruling party.

20. On 22 May 2023, Awami League Member of Parliament from Chittagong-16 (Banshkhali) Constituency, Mostafizur Rahman Chowdhury, led a procession with a pistol visible in his hand.<sup>42</sup>



*Chittagong-16 (Banshkhali) Constituency Member of Parliament Mostafizur Rahman Chowdhury holding a pistol in an AL procession. Photo: Prothom Alo, 23 May 2023*

21. On 25 May 2023, when the Awami League attacked a BNP procession in South Keraniganj, Dhaka, at least 50 leaders and activists, including BNP's central leader Nipun Roy Chowdhury, were injured in the clash. However, the police filed a report against more than [500 leaders and activists of BNP](#), including Nipun Roy Chowdhury.<sup>43</sup>



*Injured BNP leader Nipun Roy Chowdhury. Photo: Manabzamin, 27 May 2023*

22. On 25 April, Upazila unit Jubo Dal organised an Eid reunion programme in Barabkund Union under Sitakunda Upazila in Chittagong District. Approximately 50 policemen, led by Sitakunda Police Station Officer-in-

<sup>42</sup>Prothom Alo, 23 May 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/politics/zo2ynbvrq8>

<sup>43</sup>Manabzamin, 28 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=57635>

Charge Tofail Ahmed, attacked those gathered. At least 15 people, including BNP leader Nazmun Nahar, were injured.<sup>44</sup>

23. Leaders and activists of Awami League [obstructed and attacked the road march programme](#) of the coalition Ganatantra Mancha, that was moving from Dhaka towards Dinajpur and had commenced on 4 June.<sup>45</sup> Awami League members even attacked the hotel where the leaders of the Ganatantra Mancha were staying for the programme.<sup>46</sup>
24. On 8 June 2023, police and ruling party members attacked the [BNP sit-in programmes](#) in front of power offices across the country that had been called to protest against loadshedding and corruption in the power sector.<sup>47</sup>
25. In addition to the opposition political parties, the government also barred and attacked the meetings and rallies of organisations protesting various injustices.<sup>48</sup> On 4 June 2023, Protibondhi Nagorik Somaj, an organisation for persons with disabilities, held a rally at Shahbagh, Dhaka, which was [barred by police](#). At that time, a person with a physical disability was thrown from his wheel chair and others were kicked and injured.<sup>49</sup>



*Police baton charge on persons with disabilities. Photo: Prothom Alo, 4 June 2023*

26. Police reports have also been filed against the opposition party leaders and activists for holding indoor meetings, for allegedly planning to carry out 'sabotage' and 'conspiracy'. On 7 April 2023, the Detective Branch of the police arrested eight Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and activists from a house in Bashundhara Residential Area under Bhatara Police Station of Dhaka, alleging that they had held a secret meeting with the aim of 'anti-state conspiracy' and 'sabotage'.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile on 6 June, [police arrested 10 leaders](#)

<sup>44</sup>Manabzamin, 26 April 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=52585>

<sup>45</sup>Jugantor, 5 June 2023; ; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/682542/>

<sup>46</sup>Prothom Alo, 5 June 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/868ht25sjc>

<sup>47</sup>Prothom Alo, 9 June 2023;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=9665a57691&imageview=1&epedate=09/06/2023>

<sup>48</sup>Prothom Alo, 3 April 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/1uxwvno9b8>

<sup>49</sup>Prothom Alo, 9 June 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/nddgsqafam>

<sup>50</sup>Prothom Alo, 8 April 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/politics/7tpptimhzp>

and activists of Banani Police Station unit Jamaat-e-Islami and Chhatra Shibir<sup>51</sup> from a restaurant at Wireless Gate area in Dhaka on the charges of planning 'sabotage'.<sup>52</sup>

## **Criminal Activities and Acts of Violence by the Ruling Party**

27. Corruption, criminal activities and violence by leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League and its affiliated organisations, continue to take place across the country. In most cases, the accused are not arrested or held accountable for their crimes, thus they enjoy impunity.<sup>53</sup> People involved in serious criminal activities such as rape, murder and drug peddling have even been included in committees at various levels of the ruling party.<sup>54</sup> A leader of the ruling party accused in a murder case, has been appointed as an administrative officer in an university.<sup>55</sup>
28. During this period, there were several allegations against the Awami League activists, of various forms of violence and criminal activities, including extortion, bribing of poor women for a government shelter project, rape, helping an accused escape from the police, killing opponents by hiring killers, extortion in the transport sector, stabbing a businessman, encroachment of government land, embezzlement of money in the name of shelter projects, attacks on leaders and activists of opposition student organisations and on protesting students, kidnapping<sup>56</sup>, beating students after apprehending them for donations, ousting students from the dormitory after beating them, beating students on suspicion of being Shibir members and handing them over to the police, mugging and looting. Women leaders of Awami League affiliated organisations are also allegedly involved in various types of criminal activities, including oppression of students.<sup>57</sup> There have been allegations of large-scale organised drug trading under the shelter of the ruling elite and due to political influence, proper legal action was not taken against the accused. The Directorate of Narcotics Control recovered MDMA from the house of Education Minister Dr. Dipu Moni's Personal Assistant (politically appointed as APS) Mofizur Rahman at the Sangsad Bhaban Residential Area. Three people, including the APS's brother-in-law Ibrahim

---

<sup>51</sup>Student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami

<sup>52</sup>Jugantor, 7 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/683280/>

<sup>53</sup>Prothom Alo, 11 June 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/xnr7ula9az>

<sup>54</sup>Jugantor, 4 May 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/671011/>

<sup>55</sup>Samakal, 15 May 2023; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2023-05-15/3/4661>

<sup>56</sup>Manabzamin, 28 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=57599>

and Daily Sun, 27 May 2023; <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/691635/2-BCL-leaders-arrested-for-abduction-robbery-at-Dhaka-College->

<sup>57</sup>Jugantor, 8 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/683472/>



Kibria, were arrested in this incident. Later, the Directorate of Narcotics Control was forced to show that it had recovered *ganja* instead, to divert the matter and lessen the offence.<sup>58</sup>



*An armed man, wearing helmet, is seen holding a gun in a clash between two factions of Awami League in Chouddagram of Cumilla. Photo: Prothom Alo, 11 June 2023*

29. The ruling Awami League leaders and activists have been engaged in clashes with each other over conflicts related to establishing supremacy in areas and over vested interests. During this period, they were also seen using local weapons and firearms and exploding crude bombs.<sup>59</sup> Both Awami League members and ordinary people have been killed and injured in these incidents. On 30 May, a cook of a restaurant, Billal Hossain Howladar, was shot during a clash between Jubo League and Chhatra League in Rupganj under Narayanganj District.<sup>60</sup> He died in Dhaka Medical College Hospital while under treatment.<sup>61</sup>
30. **From April to June 2023, political violence left at least 27 people dead and 1,571 people injured. During this reporting period, 52 incidents of internal conflict in the Awami League and six in the BNP, have been recorded. In the internal conflicts of Awami League, six people were killed and 447 people were injured and in the internal conflicts of BNP, two persons were killed and 45 people were reported to have been injured.**

<sup>58</sup>Prothom Alo, 18 May 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/qw8nqma81m>; Jugantor, 18 May 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/675780/>

<sup>59</sup>Manabzamin, 1 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=53307>

<sup>60</sup>Naya Diganta, 31 May 2023; Prothom Alo, 31 May 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/q6wlrow84w>

<sup>61</sup>Daily Star, 1 June 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/restaurant-worker-shot-during-jubo-league-bcl-clash-dies-3335391>; Naya Diganta, 3 June 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/752577/>

## Politicisation of State Institutions

31. Ever since the Awami League-led government came to power in 2009, various government, constitutional and autonomous institutions, including the Election Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission and the National Human Rights Commission, have been used to implement the government's political agenda. There are allegations that the government is also controlling the Judiciary.<sup>62</sup> In this situation people have lost confidence in all state institutions. Dr. Kamaluddin, Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, has commented that the human rights situation in the country is good – despite the reality being otherwise.<sup>63</sup> It is alleged (and reported) that the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is being used to suppress the opposition and is flexible towards the ruling party. The ACC is also being used against dissenting individuals and institutions.<sup>64</sup> On 30 May 2023, the ACC filed a case against 13 people, including Dr. Muhammad Yunus, Chairman of Grameen Telecom, for embezzling money from its workers' welfare fund.<sup>65</sup> It is to be noted that the current government is allegedly annoyed with Dr. Yunus over political issues. It is quite obvious that the Awami League government has politicised the state institutions, and is using employees of the Republic to implement its political agenda. In the last two controversial Parliamentary elections, 'reliable' and 'trusted' employees of the Republic have been used on behalf of the ruling party. At present there are 16 under-contract Secretaries at various levels of the administration, however trusted officials of the ruling Awami League are also being appointed on a contractual basis, keeping in focus the upcoming national elections. These 'reliable persons' are also being placed in important positions of the district administration. Such a decision by the government is costing huge sums of money from the Treasury of the State.<sup>66</sup>

## *Election Commission and electoral system of Bangladesh*

32. The National Parliament and free, fair, participatory elections are very important for a democratic state. However, the incumbent Awami League government has destroyed the fair electoral system and introduced an

---

<sup>62</sup>Manabzamin, 23 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=56798>

<sup>63</sup>Samakal, 7 May 2023; <https://samakal.com/world-australia/article/2305171200/>

<sup>64</sup> In 2013, the ACC commenced acts of harassment on Odhikar as part of the government's crackdown against the Organisation. After several long months of asking for files and audits that had already been submitted to it by Odhikar, answering queries already answered, and combating unrealising demands, the ACC investigation ultimately closed due to lack of findings against Odhikar.

<sup>65</sup>New Age, 30 May 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/202939/acc-prosecutes-yunus-12-others>; Samakal, 30 May 2023; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/2305175404/>

<sup>66</sup>Prothom Alo, 14 June 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/aocs4nnxnp>

extremely oppressive rule, which is contrary to the Constitution<sup>67</sup> and international law<sup>68</sup>. The electoral system of Bangladesh is now such that it has disenfranchised the people through opaque, controversial and farcical national elections in 2014<sup>69</sup> and 2018<sup>70</sup>. The Election Commissions created in the last 14 years have lost public trust and credibility, and have become dysfunctional institutions showing biasness in favour of the ruling Awami League in all elections. In addition to the national elections, the Awami League nominated candidates have ‘won’ in the local government elections through the employment of various irregularities, including vote rigging.<sup>71</sup> The Awami League nominated candidate was elected unopposed in Sialkathi Union Parishad election of Kaukhali Upazila under Pirojpur District, as the opposition party and independent candidates did not submit their nominations due to the threats from a ruling party leader.<sup>72</sup> The Election Commission did not intervene.

33. The Election Commission (EC) has announced that the 12<sup>th</sup> National Parliament elections will be held in January 2024. As a result of the bitter experience of previous elections held under the Awami League government, most of the political parties in the country have declared that they will not participate in any elections under the incumbent government. In the meantime, a former bureaucrat and beneficiary of this government, Kazi Habibul Awal, has been appointed the Chief Election Commissioner.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, on 4 July 2023, the Parliament passed the Representation of the People’s Order (Amendment) Bill, 2023 (RPO) with an amendment that lessens the power of the Election Commission. The Bill was approved by the Cabinet on 18 May and placed before the Parliament on 5 June by the Law Minister. Through this amendment, the EC’s authority to scrap an entire constituency’s vote has been curtailed. As per the new provision, the EC has been authorised only to postpone or cancel the voting or results of one or more polling stations at any time during balloting (polling day) over

---

<sup>67</sup>According to Article 11 of the Constitution, “the Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed, and in which effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured.”

<sup>68</sup> Article 25(b) states that “Every citizen shall have the right to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.” Bangladesh is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Such an organised and contentious electoral process is a violation of the ICCPR.

<sup>69</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary election on January 5, 2014 was held unilaterally despite the boycott of almost all political parties. The parliamentary elections were not only farcical (153 out of 300 MPs were elected unopposed before the polls), but were also marked by looting of ballot boxes, occupation of polling stations and intimidation of voters.

<sup>70</sup>In this election, the ruling Awami League nominated candidates stamped ballot papers and stuffed them into boxes the night before the polls, cast fake votes, intimidated and forced voters to vote for the ruling party’s candidate openly, occupied the polling centres and ousted polling agents of the opposition nominated candidates. Such incidents were unprecedented.

<sup>71</sup>Jugantor, 8 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/683483/>

<sup>72</sup>Jugantor, 20 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/687579/>

<sup>73</sup>Manabzamin, 26 February 2022; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=317328&cat=1/>

malpractice, coercion and violence. However, the previous law (section 91A of RPO) stated that the EC could stop elections at any polling station or even an entire constituency at any stage of the election for the same reasons.<sup>74</sup>

34. On 25 May 2023, the Election Commission approved a [policy](#) involving the local administration and police officials in determining the polling stations for the forthcoming 12<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary Elections.<sup>75</sup> The Election Commission used to decide where the polling stations will be set. In the current repressive political situation, if the police and local administration are involved in the work of strategising and determining the polling stations, there is a possibility that this will be done to favour the ruling party during the elections.
35. All the elections held under the Election Commission led by Kazi Habibul Awal for the vacant seats in the local government and National Parliament, are being boycotted by the main opposition BNP and other political parties, including leftist parties. Although the opposition political parties did not participate in the elections, [violations of the election Code of Conduct](#), violence and irregularities took place in the elections held under the current Commission.<sup>76</sup> In the face of severe criticism from most of the political parties and civil society, the Election Commission withdrew from the decision to use Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) in the upcoming national Parliamentary elections. However, the decision to use EVMs in five city corporation elections of the country was taken.
36. On 28 April 2023, by-elections of Chittagong-8 constituency were held with almost no voters. Only 14.55 percent votes were cast. An Awami League nominated candidate won this election and the security deposit of four other candidates who contested with him was forfeited. In a press conference after the election, S U M Abdus Samad, candidate of Bangladesh Islami Front, said that before the election, supporters of the Awami League nominated candidate went from house to house and threatened opposition leaders, activists and polling agents. He also said that only 5 to 7 percent of the voters actually voted in this election.<sup>77</sup>
37. The police filed reports against supporters of rival candidates of Awami League nominated mayoral candidates in various city corporations and arrested them prior to the city corporation elections held from 25 May. Although BNP did not participate in the city corporation elections, police arrested BNP leaders and activists ahead of the Sylhet City Corporation election.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup>New Age, 5 July 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/205742/ec-loses-power-to-scrap-entire-constituencys-vote>

<sup>75</sup>Prothom Alo, 26 May 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/spioca0p43>

<sup>76</sup>Prothom Alo, 8 June 2023;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=86afe378d8&imageview=1&epedate=08/06/2023>

<sup>77</sup>Jugantor, 29 April 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/669420/>

<sup>78</sup>Prothom Alo, 7 May 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/local-news/46hkt5lug7>

38. Supporters of the ruling Awami League nominated candidate in the Gazipur City Corporation elections allegedly [attacked](#) independent candidate Zayed Khatun's election campaign four times. Zayed Khatun's son Jahangir Alam alleged that some people from the administration visited his mother's supporters at their homes and also threatened them over phone.<sup>79</sup> It has been alleged that the police picked up Zayed Khatun's supporters and BNP activists, arresting them in fabricated cases and conducted various kinds of harassment, including searches, at their houses.<sup>80</sup> Kamal Hossain, a supporter of Zayed Khatun, was picked up by plainclothes police from his home in Tongi on 20 May 2023 at approximately 11:00 pm. Later he was found in Dhaka Central Jail. He was shown as arrested in a case under the Explosives Act filed with Turag Police Station in Dhaka. On the same day, Rusel, member of Tongi East Police Station unit Swechchasebak Dal<sup>81</sup>, and Mustafa Haider Kamal, President of No. 57 Ward unit BNP, were picked up by men claiming to be members of the Detective Branch (BD) of the Police. Later it was learnt that they were incarcerated in Narayanganj District Jail.<sup>82</sup> It is to be noted that similar incidents took place in the past before the Gazipur City Corporation elections held on 27 June 2018. At that time, BNP participated in the elections. On the evening of 26 June 2018, the day before polling, plainclothes police picked up 10 activists of the BNP nominated mayoral candidate Hasan Uddin Sarkar from Dhirashram and Samantapur areas of the city. They were then detained in Keraniganj Central Jail in Dhaka.<sup>83</sup>
39. During the Gazipur City Corporation elections on 25 May 2023, allegations were found against the Awami League nominated mayoral candidate, of entering the polling booth at Chandana High School and College polling station and coercing voters. At that time, supporters of the Awami League nominated candidate also asked the voters to vote on the 'boat' symbol<sup>84</sup> for the post of Mayor.<sup>85</sup>
40. On 25 May, by-elections were held for the position of Chairman of Sandwip Upazila Parishad in Chittagong. During this election, supporters of Awami League nominated Chairman candidate, led by Kalapani Union unit Chhatra League President Mahfuzur Rahman Sumon, and Kalapani Union Parishad Chairman Alimur Reza, barred the voters from going to the polling stations. They forcibly ousted the polling agents of independent candidate (rebel candidate of Awami League) Rafiqul Islam from several polling centres.

---

<sup>79</sup>Samakal, 19 May 2023; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/2305173514/>

<sup>80</sup>Prothom Alo, 21 May 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/hpioirlyvy>

<sup>81</sup>Voluntary wing of BNP;

<sup>82</sup>Jugantor, 23 May 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/677659/>

<sup>83</sup>Prothom Alo, 28 June 2018; [www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1520161/](http://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1520161/)

<sup>84</sup>The boat is the election symbol of the Awami League.

<sup>85</sup>Jugantor, 25 May 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/678639/>



Furthermore, a group of government supporters led by the municipal mayor and Awami League leader Muktedir Mawla, threw out the agents of independent candidates from several polling centres of the municipality and cast fake votes. Rafiqul Islam alleged that the Awami League nominated candidate cast fake votes on the 'boat' symbol after expelling his agents from 49 polling centres. The Awami League nominated candidate 'won' in this election and after the announcement of the results, Awami League members attacked the houses belonging to supporters of the independent candidate.<sup>86</sup>

41. On 1 June 2023, at least 10 persons were shot in a clash between supporters of Awami League nominated candidates and independent candidates before the 12 June elections in the Tarakanda Upazila Parishad in Mymensingh. After the incident, supporters of Awami League candidate Fazlul Haque staged a protest by burning tires at the bus stand area of the city. Independent candidate Nuruzzaman Sarkar Bakul alleged that the Awami League candidate attacked his supporters, injuring 10 people.<sup>87</sup> Independent candidate Nuruzzaman Sarkar Bakul came on Facebook Live at 2:00 pm during the polls on 12 June and alleged that his agents were thrown out from the polling stations by supporters of the ruling party nominated candidate. He said that he did not receive any help from the administration in this regard despite repeatedly seeking assistance.<sup>88</sup>
42. In Barisal City Corporation elections, Jatiya Party nominated mayoral candidate Iqbal Hossain Taposh made allegations that on 12 June, Awami League supporters forced all female voters of Kazipara under (municipal) Ward No. 22 to leave the polling centre sat 7:00 am on election day. They were told that there was no need to vote.<sup>89</sup> Standing beside the booth of the polling centre at Chahatha Government Primary School, Awami League supporters told the voters that they should vote on the 'boat' symbol only.<sup>90</sup> Supporters of the Awami League nominated candidate attacked the Dargabari Government Primary School premises and ousted supporters of rival candidate Syed Faizul Karim (representing Islami Andolon with electoral symbol 'hand-fan'), from the polling centre. At Sabera Khatun School polling centre, Awami League activists attacked and injured Syed Faizul Karim, and in front of the police and magistrate in various centres attacked his supporters.<sup>91</sup> A young man wearing a badge of 'boat' symbol around his neck, cast votes by pressing the button for mayoral candidate on the EVM after entering ballot booth number four at Hafezia Madrasa polling centre of

---

<sup>86</sup>Jugantor, 26 May 2023; ; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/678797/>

<sup>87</sup>New Age, 1 June 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/203166/10-injured-in-pre-polls-violence-in-mymensingh>

<sup>88</sup>Samakal, 12 June 2023; <https://samakal.com/international/article/2306177802/>

<sup>89</sup>Naya Diganata, 12 June 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/barishal/754860/>

<sup>90</sup>Prothom Alo, 12 June 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/local-news/nee4hjn67a>

<sup>91</sup>Manabzamin, 13 June 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=60160>

Kaunia Branch Road in Barishal. The polling officials failed to remove him from. Rafiqul Islam, who was elected unopposed as councillor, entered the ballot booth at Ashmat Ali Khan Government Primary School polling centre and instructed the voters to vote on 'boat'. In this incident, mayor candidate ('hand-fan') Faizul Karim took Rafiqul Islam to the Presiding Officer and complained about such incident, but the Presiding Officer did not take any action in this regard.<sup>92</sup>

43. Khulna City Corporation elections were held on 12 June 2023. Many voters turned back unable to vote, due to the failure of the electronic voting machines (EVMs).<sup>93</sup> Jatiya Party nominated mayoral candidate Mohammad Shafiqul Islam alleged that there was no fair voting environment. His polling agents were forced out from the polling centres. Supporters of candidates other than those belonging to the 'boat' camp were not allowed to enter the polling stations.<sup>94</sup> Islami Andolon nominated candidate Abdul Awal, said at a press conference that after the election, voters were not allowed to enter the polling centres. He also alleged that when voters voted on the symbol 'hand-fan' through EVM, their vote went to the symbol of 'boat'. He claimed that the [EVMs were rigged](#). Although a written complaint was submitted in this regard, the election officials did not take it into consideration.<sup>95</sup>
44. Awami League nominated candidate Sundar Ali was accused of forcing voters to vote on the 'boat' symbol by occupying polling centres and monitoring the ballot booth in Araiহার Municipality elections under Narayanganj District held on 12 June 2023. Araiহার Upazila unit Chhatra League president Safiqul Islam assaulted four voters for not voting on 'boat' at Nagerchar Madrasa polling centre. Later, Municipality unit Jubo League leader Shamim Mia with his supporters occupied the polling centre and forced voters to vote on the 'boat' symbol. At Krishnapura NIB Swapnadana Academy Women's polling centre, agents of 'boat' entered the polling booth and forced voters to vote on the boat symbol. Agents of other candidates complained to the presiding officer Mohammad Shahjahan but nothing was done.<sup>96</sup>
45. Sylhet and Rajshahi City Corporation elections were held on 21 June. The two mayoral candidates nominated by Awami League won through a one-sided election as the BNP did not participate and the Islami Andolon boycotted Sylhet and Rajshahi City Corporation elections after the Barishal City Corporation election, over allegations of widespread irregularities.

---

<sup>92</sup>Samakal, 13 June 2023; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/2306177908/>

<sup>93</sup>Jugantor, 13 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/685363/>

<sup>94</sup>Naya Diganta, 12 June 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/khulna/754881/>

<sup>95</sup>Jugantor, 12 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/685192/>

<sup>96</sup>Prothom Alo, 13 June 2023;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=1364fabf091&imageview=1&epedate=13/06/2023>



Meanwhile, Awami League leaders and activists were seen influencing the voters inside and outside the polling stations in the Sylhet City Corporation elections.<sup>97</sup>In some booths they even voted for others. At that time the presiding officers did not seek the cooperation of the administration or the police. The Election Commission was also silent. Jatiya Party mayoral candidate Nazrul Islam Babul rejected the election after the polls in the Sylhet City Corporation election ended. In the Rajshahi City Corporation elections, voters suffered a lot due to complications with EVM voting.<sup>98</sup>

46. On 21 June, the Gopaldi Municipality election in Narayanganj was held amid various irregularities. The Awami League nominated mayoral candidate 'won' by influencing the polling stations, beating polling agents of rival candidates and forcing them out of the polling stations and monitoring the polling booths.<sup>99</sup>

## **State Repression on Citizens**

### ***Enforced disappearances***

47. The government has used enforced disappearances as a tool to suppress political movements and silence dissenting voices, creating a fearful atmosphere in the country. Most of those who went missing are known to be opposition party activists and dissidents. In cases of enforced disappearance, the police usually refuse to register complaints or reports and instead harass the victim's family. During this period, some persons were released after being kept disappeared and many were handed over to the police, and/or produced before the court after being detained in unknown places. This has become a common pattern of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh.
48. BNP leader Salahuddin Ahmed, who was a victim of enforced disappearance in 2015, was later incarcerated in Meghalaya Jail in India. In an interview with German media outlet Deutsche Welle Bangla, he alleged that he was handcuffed and blindfolded at gun point and was abducted from the house of a friend in Dhaka. He was confined to a secret place for 61 days before he discovered himself in India.<sup>100</sup> Extensive anti-disappearance campaigns have reduced the tendency to hold victims in unknown locations for long periods of time after disappearing them. Although cases of disappearance have been proven, the government repeatedly denies the use of enforced disappearance, at national and international forums. The families of the disappeared persons are under constant surveillance, harassment and threats. It is to be noted that

---

<sup>97</sup>Jugantor, 22 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/688762/>

<sup>98</sup>Jugantor, 22 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/688761/>

<sup>99</sup>Prothom Alo, 22 June 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/cq22m4gzy6>

<sup>100</sup>New Age, 13 June 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/204102/bnp-leader-salahuddin-gets-travel-pass>

there are also allegations that some people are being disappeared by labelling them 'Islamic militants' and in the name of the global 'war on terror'. During this reporting period, a man along with his entire family was allegedly taken away and disappeared.

49. On 9 April 2023, Ashraf Uddin Chowdhury Apu, joint convener of Dhaka's Hatirjheel Thana unit BNP, went to a relative's house in Eskaton for Iftar. He left after receiving a phone call after Maghrib prayer and later there was no trace of him. On 10 April, when Apu's family went to Hatirjheel and then Badda Police Stations to file a General Diary, the police refused to register it. His family members searched for him at the Detective Branch of Police and RAB offices, but could not find any information about Apu.<sup>101</sup> BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, in a statement on 10 April, claimed that Apu was picked upon 9 April, and his whereabouts were unknown until he was shown as arrested on 14 April, in a matter filed under the Digital Security Act on 12 April.<sup>102</sup>
50. On 30 April 2023, madrasa teacher Mohammad Ikramul Haque Milon (who had studied at Deoband Madrasa in India) went missing along with his family. According to other family members, on 30 April at around 4:30 pm, Milon, with his wife Dewan Faria Afrin Anika and their 6-month-old child Mohammad Abdullah Aqeel, were on their way to his in-laws' house at SA Sarkar Road in Sankipara of Mymensingh Town. On their way by rickshaw, at approximately 6:30 pm, when they reached the Sankipara Nayanmony Market, a microbus with police stickers stopped their rickshaw. Two men and a woman in plainclothes got out and forced Milon and his wife and child into the vehicle. When their relatives went to the Sankipara Nayanmony Market to look for them, witnesses told them that some people had picked them up. Later that night, when they went to Mymensingh Kotwali Model Police Station to file a General Diary (GD), the Officer-in-Charge Shah Kamal Akand, refused to register it. The family searched for them at various places, including police stations, DB and RAB offices. However, no agency acknowledged their arrest. A month after their disappearance, on 30 May, the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Unit showed Mohammad Ikramul Haque Milon, his wife and child as arrested as members of the banned Ansar Al Islam (Bangladesh branch of Al-Qaeda). On 31 May, a report was registered against them at Sabujbagh Police Station in Dhaka. Milon and his wife Anika are currently detained in jail.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup>Samakal, 12 April 2023 <https://samakal.com/beauty/article/2304167478/>

<sup>102</sup>New Age, 26 April 2023 <https://www.newagebd.net/article/200247/>

<sup>103</sup>Report sent by human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Mymensingh. Daily Star 4 July 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/couple-baby-forcibly-disappeared-3360251>

51. On 5 May 2023 at around 10:45 pm, a group of seven men, claiming to be members of the Detective Branch of the police, picked up Yusuf Ali Mollah, Hatirjheel West Thana unit Amir (president) of Jamaat-e-Islami, from his house at Moghbazar in Dhaka. When Yusuf Ali' wife went to Hatirjheel Police Station to search for her husband, the police denied arresting him.<sup>104</sup> Two days after his disappearance, on 7 May 2023, Yusuf Ali Mollah was produced before a Dhaka court.<sup>105</sup>
52. Rajshahi District unit Chhatra Dal Joint Secretary SM Salauddin Ahmed Shamim, was picked up from his cousin's house at Kadamtoli area of Dhaka on 22 May 2023 at around 3:00 pm, by approximately 20 men claiming to be members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police. Shamim's mother, Shamsunnahar, said that her son went to one of their relative's houses in Dhaka on 21 May. The next day, she learned that her son had been picked up by the DB police. On 24 May, when the family went to Kadamtoli Police Station to file a complaint, the police forced them out of the police station instead. Shamim's uncle, Tipu Sultan, said that after 3:00 pm on 22 May, he repeatedly called Shamim's cell phone and at one point, a person received the phone call and said that he was from Dhaka DB office, and informed him that Shamim has been arrested. Later the cell phone was switched off. After that, they searched for Shamim in different places, including police stations, DB office, RAB office in Dhaka for a few days. However, no agency has acknowledged Shamim's detention. After being unable to file a General Diary (GD) in Dhaka, they went to Bagha Police Station in Rajshahi to lodge a GD on 25 May. The police at Bagha Police Station told them that since the incident took place in Dhaka, if they want to file a GD in Rajshahi, they would have to file it as a missing person's report. They were forced to report Shamim as missing. On 27 May, Shamim was produced in a Dhaka court. He was shown as arrested in a matter filed with Paltan Police Station of Dhaka in 2020 under the Explosive Substances Act, 1908.<sup>106</sup>
53. On 8 June 2023 at approximately 6:00 pm, Terokhada Upazila unit Chhatra Odhikar Parishad President Saiful Islam, was taken away from the playground of Terokhada Harikhali Secondary School in a microbus by approximately 10 men. Witnesses, along with Saiful's elder brother Bayezid Sheikh, saw Sub Inspector (SI) Anup Kumar of Terokhada Police Station on a motorbike accompanying the microbus. Bayezid Sheikh and other witnesses immediately contacted the Terokhada Police Station but the police told them that they did not know anything about the matter. Later when SI Anup

---

<sup>104</sup>Naya Diganta, 6 May 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/incident-accident/745783/>

<sup>105</sup>Information gathered by Odhikar

<sup>106</sup>Report sent by human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Rajshahi. Manabzamin, 24 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=56994>

Kumar was contacted, he said that Saiful was taken away by members of the Counter Terrorism Unit. On 9 June, family members of Saiful Islam went to the Office of the Superintendent of Police to search for Saiful. However, the officials of the Police Superintendent's office informed them that they did not arrest anyone named Saiful Islam. Meanwhile Saiful's elder brother Bayezid Sheikh informed Odhikar that on 10 June, a person from Dhaka called him on his cell phone and said that Saiful was shown as arrested in a matter filed with Ramna Police Station under the Digital Security Act, 2018.<sup>107</sup>

54. During the International Week of the Disappeared, the family members of the victims of enforced disappearances were allegedly intimidated and harassed by members of the intelligence agencies. On 27 May 2023, a field officer of the National Security Intelligence (NSI) of Rajshahi, Aminul Islam, called Jamila Akhtar, the wife of Abdul Kuddus Pramanik, who went missing from Baghmara area of Rajshahi, and asked for various kinds of information. The same person called Saiful Islam Sagar, son of another disappeared victim of Baghmara, Murshidul Islam, on 30 and 31 May respectively and asked him to go to the Rajshahi NSI office. On 30 May, Aminul Islam also called Parveen Nesa, the younger sister of disappeared victim Mohammad Abdul Quddus, and asked for information about her brother. On 1 June, the same NSI officer went to Baghmara area and asked these three families various questions, mostly relating to the whereabouts of the missing persons.<sup>108</sup>
55. On 29 May 2023 at around 11.50 pm, two policemen led by Sub Inspector (SI) Saiful Islam of Pallabi Police Station, went to the house of disappeared victim Noor Alam, Pallabi Thana unit Jubo Dal General Secretary, and interrogated his wife Reena Begum and son Al Amin Alam Plabon. Then on 30 May, SI Saiful Islam went to Noor Alam's house again with about 10 members of the DB police. The police collected National Identity cards and other documents from the family members. The DB police took Plabon along with them and went to Plabon's uncle's and cousin's house and interrogated them. Members of the DB police also went through messages, pictures and the call lists in the cell phones of Plabon and his brother Rubel Alam.<sup>109</sup>
56. On 18 June 2023, SI Salim Reza of Dattapara Highway Police Station under Lakshmipur District, went to the house of the disappeared Alamgir Hossain and asked for his death certificate from his wife Taslima Begum. Taslima Begum has been searching for her missing husband for nine years. It is to be noted that the families of the disappeared have provided all information to the police and various intelligence agencies many times before, but the

---

<sup>107</sup> Report sent by human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Khulna. New Age, 10 June 2023;

<https://www.newagebd.net/article/203833/chhatra-adhikar-parishad-leader-abducted-allegedly-by-law-enforcers>

<sup>108</sup> New Age, 27 June 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/205347/repeated-visits-by-police-nag-families>

<sup>109</sup> New Age, 27 June 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/205347/repeated-visits-by-police-nag-families>

members of the intelligence agencies have repeatedly harassed the families under the guise of seeking information. Law enforcement agencies claim that the families are hiding their relatives. Victims' families are under immense stress due to such behaviour from law enforcers and members of the intelligence agencies.<sup>110</sup>

57. **A total of eight persons were allegedly disappeared after being picked up by members of law enforcement agencies, according to data gathered by Odhikar between April and June 2023. Among them, four were disappeared by police, three by DB Police, and one was disappeared by men claiming to be members of law enforcement agencies. All of them later resurfaced alive.**

### ***Extrajudicial killings***

58. During the three months of April-June 2023, there were incidents of 'crossfire' and 'gunfights' and allegations of persons being tortured to death in the custody of law enforcers. Such killings are considered to be extrajudicial executions. Furthermore, four Rohingya refugees (allegedly members of ARSA) were reportedly killed in a clash between 'ARSA' and Armed Police Battalion (APBn) at the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar. Odhikar demands an impartial investigation into these incidents. There are allegations against APBn members of extortion, arbitrary arrest and harassment of Rohingyas.<sup>111</sup>
59. It has been reported that Ekramul Hossain Ershad (35), who was detained in Kurigram District Jail, died in Kurigram General Hospital on 3 June 2023, after being tortured by the police. Ekramul's family alleged that Ekramul was healthy at the time of arrest and after the arrest on 31 May, Bhurungamari Police Station Officer-in-Charge Nazrul Islam demanded a bribe of Tk 200,000 from his family. Since his family was unable to pay the money, police tortured Ekramul on the night of his arrest and he died as a result. Abu Shayem, Jailor of Kurigram District Jail said, 'physical torture' was mentioned in the medical certificate from Bhurungamari Upazila Health Complex, which was with Ekramul when he was sent to prison from the police station.<sup>112</sup>
60. Alaluddin, caretaker of a building in Turag, died in hospital after being picked up by Detective Branch (DB) police on 6 June in a murder investigation. A housewife named Fatema Akhter (33), had been killed on 5 June 2023 in Baunia area of Dhaka and her husband Saiful Islam was arrested for her murder. The DB police also picked Alauddin up and did not give any

---

<sup>110</sup> New Age, 27 June 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/205347/repeated-visits-by-police-nag-families>

<sup>111</sup>HRW Report, 17 January 2023; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/17/bangladesh-rampant-police-abuse-rohingya-refugees>

<sup>112</sup>Prothom Alo, 4 June 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/local-news/qikuinbkhd>



reasons to his family. His family did not know where he had been taken.<sup>113</sup> After 10 days of detention, his family was called on 16 June at around 10:00 pm from the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases, and informed of his death. After receiving this news, when his family went to the hospital, they were not allowed to see the body. Alaluddin's wife Parveen Akhtar alleged that Alaluddin suffered grievous injuries due to torture in DB custody and he died as a result.<sup>114</sup>

61. **Between April and June 2023, a total of two persons were reportedly killed extra-judicially. Of these two people, one was allegedly tortured to death by the police and another one was tortured to death by the DB police.**

### ***Torture, degrading treatment, lack of accountability and custodial death by law enforcement agencies***

62. The government is using law enforcement agencies to suppress political opponents, government critics and dissidents. Many members of law enforcement agencies enjoy impunity despite being involved in human rights violations and unlawful activities. Despite widespread acts of torture and degrading treatment, very few such incidents are made public. On many occasions, such incidents are covered up through intimidation of the victims and forceful compromises. During this period, there have been various allegations against members of the law enforcement agencies of abuses, including [inhumane treatment](#) of citizens, [kidnapping and ransom](#), [extortion by threatening](#) to sue, [taking bribes](#)<sup>115</sup>, [arresting an innocent person](#), and [releasing a person accused](#) of rape from the police station. It has also been shown in previous subsections of this report, that victims of enforced disappearance are also tortured and receive degrading treatment.

### ***Allegations of torture and death in custody***

63. Due to lack of proper implementation of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013, acts of torture continue with blanket impunity. Due to lack of faith in police investigations, victims of torture or degrading treatment, or their family members, usually file complaints in the court instead of filing reports at the police station<sup>116</sup>. As per the law, the court will then order the law enforcement agencies to investigate the matter. Given the

---

<sup>113</sup>New Age, 18 June 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/204604/family-plans-to-sue-db-men-on-custodial-death>

<sup>114</sup>Prothom Alo, 19 June 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/city/y8178jdnzx>

<sup>115</sup>Prothom Alo, 24 April 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/xs8wgnmvgg>

<sup>116</sup> The Act itself also contains provisions by which assistance from the court can be sought, in section 4 of the Act of 2013. See <http://www.humanrights.asia/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Torture-CustodialDeath-ActNo50of2013-English.pdf>

current, unfortunate state of the criminal justice system it is alleged that such investigations are not carried out impartially either.

64. A young man named Mohammad Mustakim, who was arrested and tortured by the police of Panchlaish Police Station while protesting the increase in the cost of medical dialysis in Chittagong, filed a case under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 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 report<sup>117</sup> 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 Azizbe be acquitted from the case.<sup>118</sup>



*Mohammad Mustakim, in the midst of police, while protesting the increase in the cost of dialysis in Chittagong.  
Photo: Prothom Alo, 15 May 2023*



*Mohammad Mustakim was arrested and tortured by the police. He shows torture marks on his legs five days after his release on bail. Photo: Prothom Alo, 15 May 2023*

<sup>117</sup> 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.

<sup>118</sup> Prothom Alo, 15 May 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/nrc7r252eh>



65. In the evening of 25 April 2023, a truck driver's assistant named Alamgir Miji (45) died in the custody of Khankhanapur Police Station in Rajbari. He was arrested by police and brought to the police station that morning.<sup>119</sup>

### ***Human rights violations in prisons***

66. BNP leaders and activists have been detained in prison under allegedly false and fictitious matters, due to conducting anti-government movements during the three months of April-June 2023. Furthermore, it is alleged that many innocent people have been detained as well. BNP leaders-activists were sent to jail instead, after seeking interim bail from the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, in fabricated cases of 'sabotage' filed against them.<sup>120</sup> Prisons in Bangladesh are usually overcrowded, and such political arrests only add to the oppressive conditions. In addition, when members of the opposition political parties are ordered to be released from jail after obtaining bail, it is alleged that the jail authorities stall their release on various pretexts.<sup>121</sup> There have been cases of non-release from jails even after the completion of the sentence. A Supreme Court lawyer Bibhuti Tarafder, filed a Writ Petition on 29 May 2023, seeking directions to produce Alauddin Gazi of Shariatpur before the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, as he had remained (wrongly) incarcerated for an additional seven and a half years, after serving his term of life imprisonment. The Home Secretary, Inspector General of Prisons and Jailer of Barisal Central Jail have been made defendants in this case.<sup>122</sup>

67. There have been allegations of torture and ill-treatment of inmates in prisons across the country and allegations of widespread corruption and irregularities within the prison system. The government is not taking any action against those responsible. In addition, there are allegations that some of the prisoners are dying due to the inadequacy of doctors and lack of medical facilities and the negligence of the prison authorities. Acts of committing 'suicide' have also occurred in prisons.

68. An allegation of torture on an under-trial prisoner Runa Laila (38) in Kashimpur Women's Central Jail, was made on 25 June 2023. After being released from jail on bail Runa Laila claimed that she was beaten and seriously injured by chief jail guard Shamima, Matron Fatema, jail guards Hafiza and Shahida; and former Jubo League leader Shamima Noor Papia, along with some female inmates, inside the prison on 19 June. Runa Laila was

---

<sup>119</sup>Prothom Alo, 26 April 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/uknyoyifmv>

<sup>120</sup>Prothom Alo, 9 May 2023; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=951d28656d&imageview=1&epedate=09/05/2023>

<sup>121</sup>Jugantor, 20 April 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/politics/667434/>

<sup>122</sup>Samakal, 30 May 2023; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2023-05-30/6/10068>

admitted to the Shahid Tajuddin Ahmed Medical College Hospital in Gazipur with severe injuries<sup>123</sup>



*Injured Runa Laila in hospital. Photo: Samakal, 27 June 2023*

69. In the three months between April and June 2023, a total of 32 persons reportedly died in prisons. Among them, 31 persons died due to ‘illness’ and one allegedly committed suicide.

### ***The death penalty***

70. The death penalty is still in force in the prevailing criminal laws of Bangladesh. In many cases, death sentences are being imposed on the basis of confessions obtained through torture.<sup>124</sup> A review on the issue of the death penalty shows that despite the existence of alternative sentencing systems, a tendency of the courts to impose the maximum sentence has increased significantly. Death row inmates languish in the condemned cell for years due to very slow appeal hearings. It is unjust and a violation of human rights to keep death row convicts in condemned cells till the final disposal of the case.<sup>125</sup> On 2 April 2023, a bench consisting of Justice Mahmudul Haque and Justice Mahmud Hasan Talukdar of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court issued a Rule asking why the death penalty should not be declared unconstitutional as the only punishment for causing death for dowry.<sup>126</sup>
71. From April to June 2023, a total of 119 persons were sentenced to death.

<sup>123</sup>Jugantor, 27 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/690741/>

<sup>124</sup>Jugantor, 22 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/688772/>

<sup>125</sup>Challenging the legality of keeping the accused in the condemned cell before the finalization of the death sentence through the judicial and administrative forum, three accused persons who were sentenced to death filed a Writ Petition in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court in 2021.

<sup>126</sup>Section 11 (a) of the Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act states that the provision of punishment for causing death over dowry demands shall be punishable with death penalty for causing death or life imprisonment for attempting to cause death and in both cases shall be punished with fine in addition to the said penalty. Jugantor, 2 April 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/661392/>

## Public Lynching

72. Ordinary people are taking the law into their own hands due to the dysfunctional criminal justice system and lack of trust in law enforcement agencies, resulting in public lynching. The most dangerous aspect of such incidents is the possibility of using people to harm or even kill political opponents or opposition party leaders by identifying them as criminals in public places.
73. On 2 April 2023, Marma Prakash Usha (25), an activist of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF, Prasati Khisa Group), was apprehended and lynched in Kalapani area under Manikchari Upazila in Khagrachari on allegations of 'extortion'. UPDF said that when Marma Prakash went to the area for organizational work, a group of miscreants beat him to death.<sup>127</sup>
74. On 3 May 2023, a mentally challenged man named Surjaman (62) was beaten on suspicion of stealing betel leaves in Kaliganj under Jhenaidah District. He died on 4 May at the Upazila Health Centre.<sup>128</sup>
75. **In the three months between April and June 2023, 10 persons lost their lives as a result of public lynching.**

## Freedom of Expression

76. During this reporting period, the government violated the freedoms of speech, thought, conscience and opinion of the citizens and carried out various acts of oppression, including arresting and sentencing them in order to prevent the free flow of information. Nafiz Mohammad Alam was picked up by the police of Bhatara Police station from his house in Bashundhara Residential Area of Dhaka and showed as arrested on 9 April 2023. German media Deutsche Welle had aired a documentary called '[Death Squad: Inside Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion](#)' on 3 April 2023. The documentary highlighted extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances committed by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). Nafiz Mohammad Alam had been a victim of enforced disappearance and had given an interview which was part of that documentary.<sup>129</sup>
77. On 16 June 2023, Sirajganj District unit BNP Assistant Secretary Rashidul Hasan Ranjan loudly chanted slogans against the Prime Minister and the ruling party, in a public meeting organised by BNP in Sirajganj. Sirajganj District unit Chhatra League general secretary Abdullah Bin Ahmed filed a case against Rashidul Hasan Ranjan under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009,

---

<sup>127</sup>Samakal, 3 April 2023; <https://samakal.com/sahos/article/2304165709/>

<sup>128</sup>Manabzamin, 5 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=53919>

<sup>129</sup>Prothom Alo, 10 April 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/7a6ikkews1>

claiming that the Prime Minister had been threatened with death. As a result, the police arrested Ranjan.<sup>130</sup>



*Arrested BNP leader Rashidul Hasan Ranjan was sent to jail through the court. Photo: Prothom Alo, 18 June 2023*

## ***The Digital Security Act, 2018***

78. During this reporting period, the law enforcement agencies and people associated with the ruling party lodged reports and complaints under the repressive Digital Security Act (DSA), 2018 against those criticizing high-ranking individuals or leaders of the government and ruling party, including the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Cases have also been filed against journalists under the DSA for publishing ‘negative’ news. Cases have been filed under the DSA against leaders and activists of opposition parties for speaking at public meetings and a large number of ‘anonymous persons’ have been accused with them – facilitating future arrests. Since the law came into force in October 2018, till February 2023, 40 percent of the cases filed under this law are for making ‘derogatory comments’ against the Prime Minister, her family members, ministers, and leaders and activists at different levels of the ruling party, including Jubo League and Chhatra League.<sup>131</sup>
79. According to a non-governmental organization DRIK, from January 2020 to December 2022, 34 cases have been filed under the DSA against approximately 68 children and adolescents in different districts of the country. Most of the accused children and teenagers are between the ages of 12 and 17.<sup>132</sup> The Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) analyzed data from 1,295 cases filed under the Digital Security Act between October 2018 and 11 April 2023. Among the cases filed under this law, most were filed against politicians. The number of accused politicians was 403 and the number of

---

<sup>130</sup>Prothom Alo, 17 June 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ieio7kkrq0>

<sup>131</sup>Samakal, 4 May 2023; <https://samakal.com/capital/article/2305170680/>

<sup>132</sup>Samakal, 4 May 2023; <https://samakal.com/capital/article/2305170680/>

journalists was 355.<sup>133</sup> Despite the constitutional right to get bail, the accused under the DSA remain in jail for long periods. Khadijatul Kubra, a student of Jagannath University, was arrested on 17 September 2022, on charges of disseminating anti-government statements online and ‘tarnishing’ the country's image by hosting a discussion on a YouTube channel. On 16 February 2023, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court granted bail to Khadijatul Kubra, but the Chamber Judge of the Appellate Division suspended the Order. She is suffering from kidney complications while incarcerated.<sup>134</sup>

80. On 29 May 2023, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Olivier De Schutter, at a press conference after a 12-day visit to Bangladesh, recommended that the DSA be suspended until qualitative changes are made to this law. He said that human rights defenders, students, activists, journalists, opposition politicians and academics have been [harassed and detained under this law](#) for exercising their right to freedom of expression and, in some cases, allegedly tortured in custody – resulting in death.<sup>135</sup>
81. In the night of 22 May 2023, police arrested Gaibandha District unit Chhatra Dal<sup>136</sup> General Secretary Mohammad Tarequzzaman Tareq, Vice President Imam Hossain Dulal, Joint General Secretary Mohammad Mirajuzzaman, Sadar Thana unit Chhatra Dal Convener Mohammad Imam Hasan Alal, and District unit Jubo Dal<sup>137</sup> Senior Vice President Shafiqul Islam and Jubo Dal leader Mohammad Kenan Haqqani. On 23 May, SI Mohammad Golam Azam filed a report with Gaibandha Sadar Police Station under the Digital Security Act against 200-250 unknown people and the six men arrested, for allegations of propaganda against former President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, tarnishing the image of the state, hurting religious values and sentiments, and attempts at abetting in the deterioration of law and order.<sup>138</sup> On 25 May, the police arrested Jubo Dal leader Masud Akhand and on 26 May, Jubo Dal leader Monirul Islam Ratan in this case.<sup>139</sup> On 27 May 2023, 19 leaders and activists who came to attend a BNP rally in Gaibandha were arrested by the police from a hotel in the city.<sup>140</sup> Among those arrested, five leaders of Juba Dal and Chhatra Dal were shown as arrested in a case filed on 23 May 2023, under the Digital Security Act, 2018.<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup>Prothom Alo, 1 May 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/25gmp6eun3>

<sup>134</sup>New Age, 16 April 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/199302/>

<sup>135</sup>Prothom Alo, 30 May 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/n49xcxloda>

<sup>136</sup>Student wing of BNP

<sup>137</sup>Youth wing of BNP

<sup>138</sup>Samakal, 23 May 2023 <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/2305174215/>

<sup>139</sup>Information gathered by Odhikar

<sup>140</sup>Samakal, 27 May 2023 <https://samakal.com/golf/article/2305174926/>

<sup>141</sup>Information gathered by Odhikar



82. On 27 May 2023, Noakhali District's Senbagh Thana unit BNP Joint Secretary Abdur Rahman was arrested by the police from a hotel in the Paltan area of Dhaka. It is alleged that Abdur Rahman made derogatory remarks about Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a meeting of Swechchasebak Dal<sup>142</sup> in Senbagh on 25 May. Based on this complaint, a report had been filed against him under the Digital Security Act with Senbagh Police Station, according to Mohammad Iqbal Hossain, Officer-in-Charge of Senbagh Police Station. Later, three more persons were arrested, including Abdur Rahman's son Nazmul Hasan Hridoy.<sup>143</sup>
83. On 27 May, police arrested Ismail Mollah, Joint Convener of Gopalganj Government College unit Chhatra Odhikar Parishad<sup>144</sup>, for publishing allegedly false and fabricated news on Facebook, about President Shahabuddin's visit to Gopalganj. Sub-Inspector Rasel Ahmed filed a case against him under the Digital Security Act with Gopalganj Police Station.<sup>145</sup>
84. It has been seen on various occasions that the DSA is being imposed and punishments continue to be given also on charges of hurting 'religious sentiments'. Ishrat Jahan Reili Begum, a student of Badrunnessa College in Dhaka, was sentenced to two years and seven months of imprisonment on 10 May 2023, by Dhaka's Cyber Tribunal Judge AM Zulfiker Hayat, for insulting Islam on Facebook. She was arrested by RAB on 6 November 2020 and was detained in jail after failing to obtain bail.<sup>146</sup>
- 85. From April to June 2023, a total of 21 people were arrested under the Digital Security Act, 2018. All were arrested for online posts/comments criticizing the Prime Minister, high-ranking persons of the government and/or their family members and for making 'derogatory' or 'anti-government' comments.**

### *Freedom of the media*

86. Journalists in Bangladesh are working in a very insecure environment due to the imposition of the repressive Digital Security Act, and in the face of attacks and threats. In this situation, in many cases, journalists are said to be exercising self-censorship. Bangladesh ranked 163<sup>rd</sup> out of 180 countries in the [2023 World Press Freedom Index](#) published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) on World Press Freedom Day on 3 May 2023. In the 2021 index,

<sup>142</sup>Voluntary wing of BNP

<sup>143</sup>Daily Star, 29 May 2023, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/noakhali-bnp-leader-arrested-over-derogatory-remark-pm-3331931>, Dhaka Post, 4 June 2023; <https://www.dhakapost.com/country/198850>

<sup>144</sup>Bangladesh Chhatra Odhikar Parishad (Bangladesh Student Rights Council) was established on 18 February 2018 through the Quota reform movement.

<sup>145</sup>Information gathered by Odhikar

<sup>146</sup>Dhaka Tribune, 11 May 2023; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/court/2023/05/11/woman-in-dhaka-jailed-for-hurting-religious-sentiment>

Bangladesh's position was 152<sup>nd</sup> and it has slipped 10 places to 162<sup>nd</sup> position in the 2022 index.<sup>147</sup>

87. Supporters of Rupganj Municipal unit Awami League General Secretary Golam Rasul Koli, seriously injured Bangla TV correspondent Sohel Kiran in Rupganj of Narayanganj District on 4 April 2023 over the publication of a piece of news.<sup>148</sup>



*Injured journalist Sohel Kiran at hospital. Photo: 5 April 2023*

88. On 8 April 2023, Moinul Haque Mridha of Bangla Tribune and Mozammel Haque of Dainik Inqilab were injured and admitted to hospital when Awami League members attacked the journalists while they were taking photographs of attacks on BNP by Awami League leaders and activists during the BNP central programme at Goalanda in Rajbari.<sup>149</sup>
89. On 4 May 2023, Jamuna TV journalist Aminul Islam was attacked and seriously injured by Chhatra League and Jubo League activists in Sunamganj over the publication of a piece of news.<sup>150</sup> A group of miscreants led by Awami League leader Azharul Islam Azhar tried to attack Bhuapur Press Club in Tangail on 4 May and threatened to lock the press club due to the publication of a piece of news.<sup>151</sup>
90. Golam Rabbani, Bakshiganj Upazila (under Jamalpur District) correspondent of the daily Manabzamin was killed for publishing some news. At around 10:00 pm on 14 June 2023, when Golam Rabbani was returning home, a group of miscreants stopped his motorbike at the Pathati intersection and dragged him into the darkness. Another group of miscreants, already waiting there, started brutally beating him reportedly on the instructions of General Secretary of Sadhurpara Union unit Awami League and Union Parishad Chairman Mahmudul Alam Babu. Mahmudul Alam Babu's son Fahim Faisal

<sup>147</sup>Dhaka Tribune, 3 May 2023; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2023/05/03/bangladesh-slips-one-notch-in-world-press-freedom-index>

<sup>148</sup>Manabzamin, 5 April 2023 <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=49879>

<sup>149</sup>Prothom Alo, 8 April 2023 <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/nmc6c5ambi>

<sup>150</sup>Jugantor, 4 May 2023 <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/671256/>

<sup>151</sup>Samakal, 4 May 2023 <https://www.samakal.com/sahitto-o-sangskriti/article/2305170809/>



hit Golam Rabbani with a brick.<sup>152</sup>He was admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital with serious injuries and died on 15 June.<sup>153</sup>



*Deceased journalist Golam Rabbani. Photo: Manabzanin 15 June 2023*

91. On 20 June 2023, a group of miscreants attacked and vandalized the office of the local daily Desh Songjog newspaper and threatened to kill the editor for publishing reports on gambling, drug peddling and other illegal activities in residential hotels in Khulna City.<sup>154</sup>
92. **From April to June 2023, one journalist was killed, 35 were injured, 13 were assaulted, 10 were attacked, 10 were threatened and 13 were sued while carrying out their professional duty.**

## Situation of RMG workers

93. The Readymade Garment (RMG) Industry is one of the major sources of foreign exchange earnings for Bangladesh. Although the owners of the RMG factories flaunt huge wealth, there is no improvement in the lives of the workers. The government and factory employers have deprived workers from their rights. Their [safety and security, health](#), wages, medical care, maternity leave, and right to form trade unions are not ensured. Some factory owners are allegedly forming bogus trade unions with their own people. According to the [2023 ITUC Global Rights Index](#), Bangladesh is one of the 10 worst countries in the world for working people. From April- June 2023, the [closure of the factory](#) without notifying the workers and the [non-payment of wages](#) on time<sup>155</sup> led to workers' unrest and a [labour leader was killed](#).
94. On 23 May 2023, a garment factory named Fashion Forum in Ashulia, Dhaka, was declared closed for an indefinite period. When the workers protested, police baton charged them, resulting in the injury of 12 workers.<sup>156</sup>On 25 June

<sup>152</sup>Prothom Alo, 16 June 2023 <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/5aqkncwyt/>

<sup>153</sup> Daily Star, 16 June 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/journo-dies-after-being-assaulted-over-report-3347086>Manabzamin, 15 June 2023 <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=60559>

<sup>154</sup>Samakal, 20 June 2023 <https://samakal.com/international/article/2306179368/>

<sup>155</sup>Jugantor, 15 May 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/674686/>

<sup>156</sup>Jugantor, 24 May 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/678223/>

2023, Mohammad Shahidul Islam, President of Gazipur District Committee of [Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers Federation \(BGIWF\)](#) in Tongi area of Gazipur, along with his two colleagues, went to Prince Jacquard Sweater Limited to negotiate with the owners to collect the workers' salaries before Eid-ul-Adha. When the owners did not accept their demands, Shahidul Islam and his colleagues decided to go to the [Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments \(DIFE\)](#). This infuriated the factory owners and Shahidul and his colleagues were attacked. Shahidul was killed. The workers claimed that Shahidul was killed with the connivance of the owners and the police were trying to divert the matter.<sup>157</sup>



*Labour leader Shahidul Islam, who was killed after an assault at a garment factory. Photo: The Guardian, 28 June 2023*

95. Women workers associated with the RMG industry are also constantly subjected to discrimination, physical and mental oppression, gender based harassment and violence. During this reporting period, a woman worker was raped by a garment factory owner called Aminul Haque, who was later arrested by police.<sup>158</sup>

## Violence against Women

96. There are allegations of various forms of oppression and violence against women and girls in the months of April-June 2023. During this reporting period, leaders and activists of the ruling party were reportedly involved in such violence.

### *Rape*

97. Between April and June 2023, women and children were victims of rape and gang-rape. Some women and children who had been raped were [killed](#) and some [committed suicide](#) after being raped. During this period, there was a

---

<sup>157</sup>The Guardian, 28 June 2023; <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/jun/28/shahidul-islam-bangladeshi-labour-leader-shahidul-islam-beaten-to-death-wages-dispute>

<sup>158</sup>Samakal, 11 April 2023; <https://samakal.com/opinion/article/2304167272/>

complaint against the police over the releasing of an person accused of rape.<sup>159</sup> Apart from this, there are also allegations of covering up reports and complaints of rape, made against the ruling Awami League leaders and local influential people.<sup>160</sup>

98. In the late night of 14 May 2023, Shakib Miah, President of Basail Municipality unit Chhatra League of Tangail, raped a bride. Hearing the screams of the bride, the locals came and apprehended Shakib. Shakib's armed associates came to the scene and freed him. The bride and her husband were threatened with death if this incident was made public. When the bride and her husband went to Basail Police Station to file a report, the police refused to register it. Later, they filed a complaint at the District Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal.<sup>161</sup>

### ***Stalking/Sexual harassment***

99. Girls are being harassed by miscreants on their way to and from schools and private tuition and/or when they step out of the house for any reason. Apart from this, female students studying in colleges and universities and working women are also constantly being sexually harassed on public transport and in public places. Miscreants in groups are sexually harassing women, youth and adolescents of different ages in front of educational institutions, entertainment centres, other public places and market areas. Meanwhile, under the shelter of the ruling party, criminal gangs of juveniles have been formed all over the country, including Dhaka. 'Kishoregang'<sup>162</sup> members have been widely accused of harassing women.<sup>163</sup>
100. A schoolgirl of Dinajpur's Birganj was molested by a youth named Hriday Islam Babu, and her family members protested. Due to this, on 26 April 2023, a group of criminals led by Hriday Islam Babu attacked the house of the school girl, injured her parents and set the house on fire with petrol.<sup>164</sup>
101. On 10 May 2023, a young man named Polin was hacked to death by two criminals named Abdullah and Faisal for protesting the sexual harassment of his wife at Chankhanarpool area in Dhaka.<sup>165</sup>
102. Sabuj Khan, nephew of Saidul Islam Raja, President of Sayedabad Union unit Awami League of Sirajganj Sadar Upazila, used to harass Juthi Khatun, a ninth-grade student, on her way to school. When Juthi's family informed Sabuj's family about this, on 17 May a group of criminals led by Sabuj

---

<sup>159</sup>Manabzamin, 13 April 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=51027>

<sup>160</sup>Jugantor, 17 April 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/666212>

<sup>161</sup>Manabzamin, 16 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=55810>

<sup>162</sup>Gang of juvenile delinquents

<sup>163</sup>Prothom Alo, 9 June 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/n8s4dv18lx>

<sup>164</sup>Jugantor, 28 April 2023 <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/669409/>

<sup>165</sup>Jugantor, 11 May 2023 <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/673545/>

attacked Juthi's father Zakaria with a hammer and an axe, causing serious injuries. The victim's family went to file a report with Sirajganj Sadar Police Station, but the police refused to register it.<sup>166</sup>

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

103. Acts of dowry-related violence continue to occur in the country despite the fact that receiving, and giving dowry is a criminal offense under the [Dowry Prohibition Act, 2018](#).
104. On 18 April 2023, a pregnant housewife named Tahmina Jannat was beaten to death by her husband Ujjal Mahmud and her in-laws, for not paying dowry in Jamalpur Sadar Upazila. Ujjal Mahmud married Jannat in February 2023. At the time of wedding, about Tk. 600,000 cash and jewellery and a motorbike were given to her in-law's family as dowry. Jannat was physically and mentally abused by Ujjal and his family members for more dowry.<sup>167</sup>

### ***Acid violence***

105. Acid violence continues due to lack of proper implementation of the [Acid Control Act, 2002](#) and related laws. Victims are deprived from justice as cases remain pending for years.
106. On 1 May 2023, a housewife named Rekha Begum was attacked by her husband Anwar Hossain and his family members, who tried to kill her by forcefully pouring acid down her throat in Ulipurunder Kurigram District.<sup>168</sup>
107. On 14 May 2023, a young man named Lal Chan Bauri threw acid on a young woman in Rajnagar Upazila of Moulvibazar as she refused his marriage proposal. Police arrested him on 15 May.<sup>169</sup>

## **Neighbouring Countries: India and Myanmar**

### ***India's Interference with Bangladesh and Human Rights***

#### ***Violations by BSF***

108. According to reports and analysis, the Indian regime supported the controversial elections of 2014 and 2018 with the intention of dominating Bangladesh. With this unethical support, India played an important role in destroying the democratic system of Bangladesh, and at present, the political crisis in Bangladesh has become acute, leading to a further deterioration of the

---

<sup>166</sup>Manabzamin, 20 May 2023 <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=56371>

<sup>167</sup>Jugantor, 19 April 2023 <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/667082/>

<sup>168</sup>Samakal, 4 May 2023 <https://samakal.com/tp-upakhantho/article/2305170737/>

<sup>169</sup>Jugantor, 17 May 2023 <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/675489/>

political and human rights situations in the country.<sup>170</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> National Parliament elections are likely to be held in January 2024. There have been allegations that India is once again attempting to influence the upcoming parliamentary elections.<sup>171</sup> The Awami League government is creating further opportunity for India to dominate Bangladesh. Due to this, the killing, torture and abduction of Bangladeshi citizens by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) continue along the Bangladesh-India border. At various times, the BSF claimed that Bangladeshi nationals have been shot dead while smuggling cattle. However, in the charge sheet of a case related to cow smuggling in West Bengal in India, India's Directorate of Enforcement claimed that BSF is directly connected with cow smuggling in Bangladesh.<sup>172</sup>

109. On 1 April 2023, a Bangladeshi citizen named [Rabiul Islam](#) at the Shamsernagar border under Patgram Upazila in Lalmonirhat; on 13 April, a Bangladeshi citizen named [Sadikur Rahman](#) at the Chakpara border under Shibganj Upazila in Chapainawabganj; on 16 May, a Bangladeshi farmer named [Manjurul Islam](#) at the Shahpur Kamarpara border under Chirirbandar Upazila in Dinajpur; on 21 May, a Bangladeshi labourer named [Palash Hossain](#) at the Tentulia border in Panchagarh; on 5 June, a Bangladeshi citizen named [Yusuf Ali](#) at the Patgram border in Lalmonirhat; on 10 June, a Bangladeshi citizen named [Jinnat Ali](#) at the Ranishongkail border in Thakurgaon were all shot dead by the BSF.
110. On 9 May 2023, a Bangladeshi named Mohammad Yunus Hossain Antor (15) went to the Parashuram border area in Feni, for grazing his goats. At that time, BSF members entered Bangladesh and caught Antor and tortured him, detaining him for four hours and left him at the border with serious injuries.<sup>173</sup>



*Seriously injured Mohammad Yunus Hossain Antor. Photo: Manabzamin, 11 May 2023*

<sup>170</sup> [www.dw.com/bn/wbe@vPb-bv-n#j-#gšjev#i-Divb-n#e/a-17271479](http://www.dw.com/bn/wbe@vPb-bv-n#j-#gšjev#i-Divb-n#e/a-17271479)

<sup>171</sup> Ananda Bazar, 10 June 2023 <https://www.anandabazar.com/world/india-wants-to-send-a-message-during-narendra-modis-visit-in-usa-about-dhakas-concerns/cid/1436442>

<sup>172</sup> Manabzamin, 6 May 2023 <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=54100>

<sup>173</sup> Manabzamin, 11 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=54892>



111. On 6 June 2023, BSF personnel entered the territory of Bangladesh under the pretext of chasing smugglers, at Kasba border in Brahmanbaria. Arjon Ali, a Bangladeshi citizen who was grazing cows, and Iqbal Hossain, who was feeding fish in a pond, had an argument with the BSF members. The BSF members then opened fire on them. The two injured men were sent to Cumilla Medical College Hospital.<sup>174</sup>
112. **From April to June 2023, four Bangladeshis were killed and eight were injured by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). Among those who were killed, all were gunned down. Among the eight persons who were injured, seven were shot, and one was tortured.**

### ***Human Rights abuses on the Rohingya Population***

113. A delegation of 27 members, representing the Rohingya refugees and the Bangladesh government, went to Myanmar on 5 May to monitor the situation in the Rakhine state, as part of the Chinese-mediated repatriation of the Rohingyas. Upon their return, the Rohingya members of the delegation said that there was no situation conducive to commence repatriation.<sup>175</sup> Mohammad Taher, a Rohingya members of the delegation, said that their houses had been burnt in the area where they had lived before fleeing and that the delegation had not been taken to that place.<sup>176</sup> Army and police barracks, outposts and checkpoints have been built in places of the Rohingyas' homesteads.<sup>177</sup> The Rohingyas also met with a 14-member delegation that came from Myanmar on 25 May. After the meeting, the delegation of Myanmar said that the Rohingyas will first be given various facilities, including National Verification Cards (NVC) after their arrival in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. However, the Rohingya refugees said that they would not return to Myanmar unless they were resettled in their villages, and their citizenship rights restored.<sup>178</sup> It was learnt that the UNHCR was not involved with this process or the meetings.<sup>179</sup>
114. On 8 June 2023, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Myanmar, Tom Andrews, said that Rohingyas' lives and freedom of movement are still at risk in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. He said, Bangladesh must "[immediately suspend](#)" a pilot repatriation project for Rohingya refugees to return to Myanmar, where they face "serious risks" to their lives and freedom.<sup>180</sup> The situation in Myanmar is not conducive to the permanent and voluntary

<sup>174</sup>Daily Star, 6 June 2023 <https://bangla.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news-485346>

<sup>175</sup>Prothom Alo, 26 May 2023 <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/5whieyu1eu>

<sup>176</sup>Samakal, 7 May 2023 <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/2305171214/>

<sup>177</sup>Prothom Alo, 7 May 2023 <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/hh1wfa8mzl>

<sup>178</sup>Prothom Alo, 26 May 2023 <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/5whieyu1eu>

<sup>179</sup>Prothom Alo, 7 May 2023 <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/hh1wfa8mzl>

<sup>180</sup>UN News, 8 June 2023; <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1137457>

repatriation of the Rohingyas in a safe and dignified manner. Bangladesh is forcing Rohingya refugees to return to Myanmar through “misleading” and “forceful” measures. Bangladesh authorities initially included 1,140 Rohingya refugees for deportation. Another 6,000 Rohingyas are expected to be sent back by the end of this year. Bangladesh authorities have reportedly threatened arrest, confiscation of documents, and other forms of retaliation against those who resist the government’s plans.<sup>181</sup>

115. A Human Rights Watch [report](#) released on 18 May 2023, stated that the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar are organizing returns of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar’s Rakhine State without consulting the community or addressing the grave risks to their lives and liberty. The report has drawn the attention of the Bangladesh government to the reasons why Rohingyas became refugees and that the situation in Myanmar’s Rakhine state has not changed yet. Although Bangladesh bears a huge burden as the host of Rohingya refugees, sending refugees back to Myanmar under the brutal regime of the military junta will cause more violations to their rights and may well set off another episode of devastating exodus.<sup>182</sup>
116. Some members of Myanmar’s Rohingya Muslim community [testified in person](#) for the first time on 8 June 2023 against the Myanmar Army in Buenos Aires, as part of an Argentinian judicial investigation into alleged crimes committed by the Myanmar military.<sup>183</sup>

## Impediments to Human Rights Work

117. The government’s crackdown on Odhikar continues. In 2013, Odhikar Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan were picked up and detained under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amended 2009) for publishing an investigative report on extrajudicial killings. The case, after being heard at the Cyber Tribunal of Dhaka, was transferred by the Tribunal on 15 May 2023, to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, after the former granted an application for further investigation.<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>181</sup> Prothom Alo, 8 June 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/71k72zysn2>

<sup>182</sup> Human Rights Watch, 18 May 2023; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/18/bangladesh-new-risks-rohingya-refugees>

<sup>183</sup> Prothom Alo, 9 June 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/world/dhjo7ceevm>

<sup>184</sup> On 14 February 2021, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court (AD) dismissed the application for dismissal of the case filed against the Secretary and Director of Odhikar and directed that the case be referred to the Cyber Tribunal for hearing. Subsequently, a review application was filed with the AD seeking reconsideration of Odhikar’s application for dismissal of the case. While the review application was pending before the AD, the first hearing of the case commenced on 12 September 2021 at the Dhaka Cyber Tribunal. The lawyer for Odhikar’s Secretary and Director informed the Tribunal of the application for review (Review Petition No. 8/2021, dated 04/04/2011), which was pending in the Appellate Division (AD), and appealed to the Tribunal to take necessary steps after the review hearing in the AD. However, the Tribunal did not grant the prayer and fixed 05 October 2021 as the date for taking evidence and examining witnesses for the Prosecution (PW) of the Cyber case No. 1/2013. The Tribunal then proceeded to take evidence and examined witnesses for

118. Odhikar and human rights defenders associated with it have never stepped back from the movement to protect human rights, despite being subjected to human rights abuses by state machineries. During this reporting period, human rights defenders associated with Odhikar have been under intelligence surveillance and have faced restrictions while organising meetings and gatherings against human rights violations and for engaging with victims' families. In addition to the refusal of the renewal of Odhikar's registration by the NGO Affairs Bureau, the government and pro-government activists have carried out malicious propaganda against Odhikar in various media. Odhikar is also forced to impose self-censorship in the publication of its reports due to the government's repression on free expression.

---

the Prosecution on 09 November and 24 November 2021. On 15 December the PW was not present, so the next date for examination was set for 20 January 2022. On 20 January, the PW appeared before the Tribunal and made his statement regarding the seized items. On 20 February, the PW to be examined was absent, and the same thing occurred on the next given date 28 March. On 08 May, a PW was examined but on the next given date, 09 June 2022, it was learnt at the Tribunal, that the PW who was to be examined that day, had passed away several months ago. The Tribunal fixed 13 July 2022 as the next date. The PW was not examined on 13 July as the witness did not come. The PW who was to be examined on 03 August had also passed away. The PW who was to be examined on 22 August had also passed away. However, the defendants still had to appear at the Tribunal on those days. The PW was examined on 05 and 26 September, 17 October and 27 November respectively. The Tribunal fixed 15 January 2023 as the next date. As the government witness did not appear on 15 January, the court fixed the next date on 29 January. Cyber Tribunal Judge AM Zulfiqar Hayat also ordered that the government's evidence be taken on every working day from the next hearing. On 29 January, two government witnesses testified. Since the testimony of the investigating officer of this case, Police Inspector Mohammad Ashraful Islam, had not been completed, the court fixed 1 February as the day for taking his remaining testimony. The Tribunal fixed 20 February as the next date for taking evidence. No witness appeared in court on 20 February. On that day, the evidences seized by the Intelligence and Crime Information Department (North) DMP, under General Diary No.268, dated 10/08/2013, was produced by P.W.-18, and the defendant appealed to exclude from producing the seized evidences in the said case, as they were not under the GD which was the basis of the trial. However, the court rejected the appeal. The court fixed 02 March as the day for examining the witness. Again, the witness did not appear and the court fixed 19 March as the next date of hearing. As the witness did not appear on 19 March, the court fixed 05 April for the next date of hearing. On 05 April, as no witness for the State appeared, the Tribunal declared the taking of evidence closed and fixed 30 April for the examination of the accused under Section 342 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898. On 30 April, the Tribunal fixed 3 May as the next date without examining the accused under Section 342. As the Tribunal was not ready on 03 May, the next date was fixed on 10 May. On 10 May, a written objection was filed on behalf of the defendants when the Public Prosecutor applied for further investigation on behalf of the State. The Tribunal fixed 15 May as the date of hearing on the plea for further investigation. On that day, the Tribunal granted the plea for further investigation and sent the case to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court and directed the CID, Dhaka to conduct further investigation. 1 June was fixed as the date for submission of supplementary charge sheet by CID. As the CID failed to submit the supplementary charge sheet that day, the Metropolitan Magistrate's Court fixed the next date of the case on 09 July.

## Recommendations

1. Immediate efforts should be made to establish democracy by forming an accountable government through free, fair and participatory elections under a neutral interim government.
2. The UN Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) must adopt a new mandate on Bangladesh to collect evidence of gross human rights violations. All cases of extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance, torture and degrading treatment should be investigated by setting up an impartial commission of inquiry under the United Nations. The concerned members of the law enforcement agencies and others involved in these incidents must be held accountable.
3. The right to freedom of assembly must be protected and guaranteed. Filing cases against 'anonymous persons' should be stopped. Harassment and arrest of opposition party members and dissidents must be stopped. All political prisoners, including protestors arrested during protests in Bangladesh should be released immediately.
4. The Government's interference on constitutional and state institutions must stop. Political violence and criminalisation must cease. Political interference on the Judiciary and judicial system must cease.
5. All human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment of prisoners, must cease. The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 must be implemented effectively and the High Court and Appellate Division directives contained in the matter of BLAST and Others vs. Bangladesh and Others (2003) must be followed to control and prevent violations. The government must ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.
6. All victims who still remain disappeared must be returned to their families. The government must accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. A domestic law should be enacted criminalising enforced disappearance as a punishable offense and those involved in disappearances should be prosecuted.
7. The Government's interference on freedom of expression and media must cease. All cases filed against human rights defenders, including journalists, must be withdrawn. Fair and impartial investigations into the attacks on them must be made, and the actual perpetrators brought to justice. The targeted ban on print and electronic media should be lifted.
8. All repressive laws, including Special Powers Act 1974, Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (Amendments 2009 & 2013), Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009 (Amendments 2012 & 2013), Digital Security Act, 2018

and its Rules should be immediately repealed. The cases filed under these laws must be withdrawn.

9. To curtail acts of violence against women and children, perpetrators must be impartially investigated and prosecuted as per prevalent laws. Relevant laws need to be amended as well and mass social awareness programmes initiated on issues such as sexual harassment.
10. India's invasive and aggressive behaviour towards Bangladesh must stop. All kinds of human rights violations, including killing and torture by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on Bangladeshi citizens at the border areas must cease.
11. The governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar must ensure voluntary, dignified and safe repatriation of the Rohingya people by establishing and guaranteeing their full civil and political rights, including restoration of Myanmar citizenship.
12. Persecution, surveillance and harassment of human rights organisations and human rights defenders must cease. Odhikar's registration must be renewed and the case filed against Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and its Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan, under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amended in 2009) must be withdrawn.

----

**Email:** [Odhikar.bd@gmail.com](mailto:Odhikar.bd@gmail.com), [Odhikar.documentation@gmail.com](mailto:Odhikar.documentation@gmail.com)

**Website:** [www.Odhikar.org](http://www.Odhikar.org)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/Odhikar.HumanRights>

**Twitter:** [@odhikar\\_bd](https://twitter.com/odhikar_bd)

**Notes:**

1. Odhikar seeks to uphold the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the people.
2. Odhikar documents and records violations of human rights and receives information from its network of human rights defenders and monitors media reports.
3. Odhikar conducts detailed fact-finding investigations into some of the most significant violations, with assistance from trained local human rights defenders.
4. Odhikar is consistent in its human rights reporting and is committed to remain so.