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Women's Rights, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation

Bahrain passed a unified family law in July 2017, but it continues to discriminate against women's rights to marry, divorce, and inherit on an equal basis to men. Women are required to obey their husbands as the head of the household. The 1963 Citizenship Act prohibits women from conferring their nationality to their children from a non-Bahraini father.

Although no law explicitly criminalizes same-sex relations, authorities have used vague penal code provisions against "indecent" and "immorality" to target sexual and gender minorities.

In December 2018, Bahrain amended its labor law to ban discrimination based on sex, origin, language, or creed, and sexual harassment in the workplace, but the law does not refer to sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or age.

Key International Actors

In July, US President Joe Biden met Bahrain's King Hamad in Jeddah and underscored "the United States' appreciation for the longstanding strategic partnership with Bahrain, including its hosting of the US Navy Forces Central Command/5th Fleet."

The United Kingdom government funded Bahrain-led and owned reform and capacity-building programs involved in egregious human rights violations through the Gulf Strategy Fund (GSF). The GSF has supported Bahrain's Ministry of Interior and the Special Investigations Unit and other security bodies implicated in the abuses of at least eight men currently on death row.

The European Union's Joint Communication on a partnership with the Gulf failed to highlight the poor human rights situation in Bahrain and made no attempt to link progress in bilateral relations to specific human rights benchmarks.

Serbia extradited a Bahraini political dissident to Bahrain on January 24 despite an order by the European Court of Human Rights that specifically prohibited his extradition pending more information. Bahraini authorities had previously subjected the dissident, Ahmed Jaffer Muhammad, 48, to torture and ill-treatment. Serbia initiated extradition proceedings after Interpol, the international police body, issued a Red Notice alert at Bahrain's request.

Bangladesh

Following the US Global Magnitsky human rights sanctions against Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and some of its top commanders in December 2021, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances dropped dramatically, indicating that authorities have the ability to bring security force abuses under control. However, instead of taking steps toward reform, authorities launched a campaign of threats and intimidation against human rights defenders and families of victims of enforced disappearances. Campaign of threats and intimidation against human rights defenders and families of victims of enforced disappearances.

Bangladesh continues to host about 1 million Rohingya refugees, but authorities have intensified restrictions on their livelihoods, movement, and education. International attention has waned and the 2022 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis remained severely underfunded at time of writing.

Starting in August, there were increasing attacks against political opposition members, raising concerns about violence and repression ahead of upcoming parliamentary elections.

In March, Bangladesh ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 138 on child labor, making Bangladesh party to all ILO Fundamental Instruments.

Attacks on Human Rights Defenders

Following the US sanctions, victims' families reported that officers came to their homes, threatened them, and forced them to sign false statements that their relative was not forcibly disappeared and that they had intentionally misled the police. Security forces also ramped up surveillance of human rights activists and harassment of human rights organizations. United Nations rights experts urged the government to end reprisals.

The Foreign Ministry reportedly prepared a list of dissidents abroad who are committing "anti-state" activities, and authorities increasingly targeted relatives of expat dissidents. In September, officers from the Detective Branch arrested

the brother of London-based news editor Shamsul Alam Liton after he published an editorial critical of the ruling party and organized protests in Britain against disappearances. The same month, police arrested Abdul Muktedir Manu, the brother of another London-based correspondent for the same newspaper. Nusrat Shahrin Raka, sister of US-based journalist Kanak Sarwar, received bail after nearly six months in detention.

The government also increasingly targeted human rights organizations. A leaked government circular signed on January 25 appeared to show that the Finance Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office were tasked in response to the US sanctions with monitoring foreign funding to several human rights organizations.

On June 5, the Non-Governmental Organization Affairs Bureau sent a letter to Odhikar, one of the country's most prominent human rights organizations, denying the group's renewal of registration. The decision was upheld by the Prime Minister's Office on September 1. Odhikar's secretary, Adilur Rahman Khan, and director, ASM Nasruddin Elan, were additionally facing ongoing trials as part of longstanding harassment to punish the organization for reporting extrajudicial killings by Bangladesh security forces in 2013. reporting extrajudicial killings by Bangladesh security forces in 2013.

Disappearances and Extrajudicial Killings

Despite a temporary drop in abuses following the announcement of US sanctions, security forces showed signs of returning to old practices, targeting the ruling Awami League's political opponents and critics. The government dismissed the allegations that led to sanctions, saying they were "false and fabricated." In January, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina awarded two sanctioned RAB officials prestigious police medals for their "bravery and service to the country."

On August 14, Netra news—which is blocked in Bangladesh—published a whistleblower report revealing that Bangladesh officials were allegedly holding and torturing victims of enforced disappearance at a secret detention site. revealing that Bangladesh officials were allegedly holding and torturing victims of enforced disappearance at a secret detention site.

The torture and death in custody of Indigenous activist Nabayan Chakma Milon shed light on security force abuses in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, including extra-

judicial killings, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, and land-grabbing, with little redress.

Freedom of Expression

Authorities continued to arrest critics under the draconian Digital Security Act. The government ignored pleas from the UN and international partners to suspend and reform the abusive law. In July, the government released the draft Data Protection Act, which experts say could increase surveillance and violate the rights to privacy.

Covid-19

At time of writing, Bangladesh reported over 440,000 new confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 1,300 deaths in 2022. However, at time of writing, the positive test rate was above 27 percent, indicating that transmission rates are likely higher than is reported. Schools fully reopened in July after almost 18 months of Covid-19-related school closure, one of the longest in the world. Children's rights advocates raised concerns that tens of thousands of students were not returning to school and instead that many of these children were pushed into child labor amid the economic fallout during the pandemic.

Women and Girls' Rights

According to Bangladeshi human rights organization Ain o Salish Kendra, as of October 1, 193 women and girls were reportedly murdered by their husband or husband's family in 2022. Women in Bangladesh continue to have little recourse to seek protection, services, or access justice in case of domestic violence. Bangladesh continues to have one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world..

Following widespread protests and advocacy by women's rights activists, the cabinet approved a draft amendment to section 155(4) of the Evidence Act, removing aspects that allowed the defense to denigrate the character of women if they pursue criminal charges for sexual violence.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Same-sex conduct is criminalized in Bangladesh with penalties from 10 years to life in prison. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and advocates faced violence and threats without adequate protection from the police.

Disability Rights

In September, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities published concluding observations in its review of Bangladesh, expressing concern over discrimination that creates barriers to education, health care, and justice, especially for women and girls with disabilities.

In September, Human Rights Watch interviewed people with disabilities and their families following the flash floods in Sylhet in May that displaced almost 9 million people and killed hundreds. Interviewees described a lack of warning systems that would have enabled them to prepare and seek shelter. After the floods, people with disabilities faced additional hurdles accessing toilets, food, water, and medicines, putting their lives and health at increased risk.

Rohingya Refugees

In the Rohingya refugee camps, Bangladesh officials closed community-led schools, arbitrarily destroyed shops, and imposed new obstacles on movement, including threats, frequent curfews, and harassment at checkpoints. The government allowed humanitarian actors in the camps to begin teaching the Myanmar curriculum but continues to deny refugee children any accredited education.

Authorities moved about 8,000 Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char, bringing the total to around 28,000 refugees living on the remote silt island where they face severe movement restrictions, food, and medicine shortages, and abuses by security forces. Despite the involvement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), many continue to be transferred without full, informed consent, and have been prevented from returning to the mainland.

In January, the Bangladesh government and Myanmar junta announced joint plans to “expeditiously complete the verification process” for repatriation, even though conditions do not exist for voluntary, safe, and dignified returns.

Increased fighting between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army ethnic armed group in Rakhine State has spilled across the border, endangering Rohingya refugees and Bangladesh civilians.

Climate Change Policies and Actions

Bangladesh is among the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, despite having contributed little to the greenhouse gas emissions causing rising temperatures. Due to climate change, cyclones will become more intense and frequent, posing a growing threat to tens of millions of people living along the country’s low-lying coastline. In June, an estimated 7.2 million people in Bangladesh were affected by record level flooding in the northeast.

An ongoing buildout of coal and gas projects in Chattogram, if constructed, will emit greenhouse gases equivalent to five years of Bangladesh’s annual greenhouse gas emissions, as well as air pollution that threatens the health of local populations and biodiversity. In June, the government announced that it cancelled plans to build the controversial Matarbari 2 coal plant, following the loss of Japanese investment. But the government now plans build a liquified natural gas (LNG) power plant instead, continuing to lock Bangladesh into decades of greenhouse gas emissions.

Key International Actors

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, during her three-day visit to Bangladesh in August, called on the government to protect rights and establish an independent mechanism to “investigate allegations of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings”. She offered her office’s support to create a special mechanism in line with international standards. She also warned that as “the biggest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN peace-keeping missions, Bangladesh should ensure it has a robust system in place for the careful human rights screening of security personnel.”

On March 3, the UN urged the Bangladesh government to provide information on the implementation of the recommendations regarding allegations of torture reported during a 2019 review of its obligations under the Convention against Torture, which it has ignored for over two years.

In March, a European Union monitoring mission travelled to Bangladesh to assess the human rights situation, and urged progress in the context of the enhanced engagement process under the Everything But Arms (EBA) scheme. Further talks were held in May. Also in March, undersecretary for political affairs at the US Department of State, Victoria Nuland, met with Bangladesh officials during the US-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue, during which she called for accountability for security force abuses.

Bangladesh attempted to balance a strategic relationship between China and India, and both failed to publicly back calls from the US, UK, and Japan to ensure free and fair elections.

Belarus

In 2022, Belarusian authorities continued to purge independent voices, including through bogus prosecutions and harassment of human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, opposition politicians, and activists. At time of writing, at least 1,340 people were behind bars on politically motivated charges and not a single human rights organization could operate in Belarus legally.

As of February 24, the Belarusian government has been letting Russian forces use the country's territory in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Belarusian authorities prosecuted critics of the Russia-Ukraine war and brutally dispersed anti-war protests.

Authorities failed to conduct effective investigations into the widespread allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of peaceful protesters by law enforcement officers in August 2020 following the manipulated presidential vote.

Governmental Crackdown on Peaceful Protests and Dissent

According to the prominent Belarusian human rights organization Viasna, at least 3,458 people faced criminal prosecution in connection with the 2020 mass protests between November 2021 and October 2022, and more than 3,148 people faced administrative sanctions.

Authorities increasingly used charges of "dissemination of extremist materials" to prosecute people for sharing publications from independent news outlets and Telegram channels the government designated "extremist."

On February 27, the Belarusian authorities held a referendum on constitutional amendments which, among other things, cancelled Belarus's nuclear weapon free status and exempted former presidents from accountability for actions committed during their term in office. Human rights defenders deemed the referendum non-transparent and illegitimate.

On the day of the referendum, peaceful demonstrations took place across the country protesting Russia's military invasion of Ukraine. Police detained hundreds of protesters and subjected them to beatings and other ill-treatment.