

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

|                                    |                                 |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Bilagsnr.:</b>                  | <b>192</b>                      |
| Land:                              | Bangladesh                      |
| Kilde:                             | Amnesty International           |
| Titel:                             | Annual Report 2013 – Bangladesh |
| Udgivet:                           | 23. maj 2013                    |
| Optaget på<br>baggrundsmaterialet: | 20. november 2013               |



# Amnesty International Annual Report 2013 - Bangladesh

Publisher [Amnesty International](#)

Publication Date 23 May 2013

Cite as Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Annual Report 2013 - Bangladesh*, 23 May 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/519f51b22a.html> [accessed 4 November 2013]

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Head of state: **Zillur Rahman**

Head of government: **Sheikh Hasina**

**Some 30 extrajudicial executions were reported. State security forces were implicated in torture and other ill-treatment and at least 10 enforced disappearances. Political violence resulted in the death of at least four men. Women continued to be subjected to various forms of violence. The government failed to protect Indigenous communities from attack by Bengali settlers. At least 111 workers died in a factory fire, some allegedly because officials refused to let them leave the premises. More than 20 Buddhist temples and monasteries, one Hindu temple and scores of Buddhist homes and shops were set on fire during a communal attack. One person was executed and at least 45 people were sentenced to death.**

## Background

In January, the Prime Minister stated that no human rights violations had been committed in the country.

Political violence escalated in December, when opposition parties tried to impose day-long general strikes. At least four people died and dozens of strikers and police sustained injuries. Jamaat-e-Islami demanded the release of their leaders currently being tried on war crimes charges. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) demanded that the forthcoming general elections be held under a caretaker government. Members of a group affiliated with the governing party attacked opposition members, beating and stabbing one bystander to death.

National and international concern about allegedly high levels of corruption were echoed in June when the World Bank cancelled US\$1.2 billion credit for the construction of Padma bridge in central Bangladesh, due to the government's insufficient response to allegations of corruption. An inquiry by the Anti-Corruption Commission remained open.

The authorities continued to raise concerns with India over killings of Bangladeshis by Indian border control forces. More than a dozen Bangladeshis were killed by Indian forces while crossing the border into India.

### **Extrajudicial executions**

At least 30 people were victims of alleged extrajudicial executions. Police claimed they had been killed in gun battles with security forces. Families said they had been killed after being arrested by people in plain clothes identifying themselves as Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) personnel or other police. No one was brought to justice for these killings.

- RAB personnel allegedly shot dead Mohammad Atear Rahman (also known as Tofa Molla), a farmer, in Kushtia district on 12 September. RAB said he was killed in "crossfire", although Atear Rahman's family and other witnesses said RAB had arrested him at his home the previous evening. His body reportedly bore three gunshot wounds, two in the back.

### **Torture and other ill-treatment**

Torture and other ill-treatment were widespread, committed with virtual impunity by the police, RAB, the army and intelligence agencies. Methods included beating, kicking, suspension from the ceiling, food and sleep deprivation, and electric shocks. Most detainees were allegedly tortured until they "confessed" to having committed a crime. Police and RAB allegedly distorted records to cover up the torture, including by misrepresenting arrest dates.

### **Enforced disappearances**

At least 10 people went missing throughout the year. In most cases the victims were never traced. Those bodies that were recovered bore injuries, some caused by beatings.

- Ilias Ali, Sylhet division secretary of the opposition BNP, disappeared together with his driver Ansar Ali on 17 April. The government promised to investigate the case but provided no information by the end of the year.

### **Violence against women and girls**

Women continued to be subjected to various forms of violence. These included acid attacks, murder for failing to pay the requested dowry, flogging for religious offences by illegal arbitration committees, domestic violence, and sexual violence.

- Aleya Begum and her daughter were arrested without a warrant on 9 September and were allegedly tortured at Khoksa police station in Kushtia district. After two days they were transferred to Kushtia city police station and kept in a dark room. The daughter, a college student, was separated from her mother at night and sexually abused by police officers. The two women were released on 18 September, after appearing in court. Aleya Begum and her daughter shared their story with the media, and were arrested and jailed again on 26 September.

### **Indigenous Peoples' rights**

As in previous years, the authorities failed to settle Indigenous Peoples' claims to land that had been seized from them during the internal armed conflict (1975-1997), or recently occupied by increasing numbers of Bengali settlers. Tension between the two communities and the failure of the security forces to protect local Indigenous people against attacks by Bengali settlers led to several clashes and injuries on both sides.

- At least 20 people were injured in a clash between Indigenous people and Bengali settlers in Rangamati on 22 September. Local people said security forces came to the scene but failed to stop the violence.

### Workers' rights

Trade union leaders supporting garment factory workers' rallies against low pay and poor working conditions were harassed and intimidated. One man was killed.

- Trade union leader Aminul Islam went missing on 4 April. He was found dead a day later in Ghatail town, north of Dhaka. His family saw evidence of torture on his body and believed he had been abducted by security forces. He had previously been arrested and beaten by members of the National Security Intelligence for his trade union activities.
- At least 111 workers died from burns and other injuries, some allegedly because factory officials refused to open the gates to let them escape a fire that broke out at Tazreen Fashion in Savar town, north of the capital Dhaka, in November.

### Communal violence

Attacks against members of minority communities took a new turn in late September. Thousands of people protesting against an image posted on Facebook of the Qur'an, which they considered derogatory, set fire to more than 20 Buddhist temples and monasteries, one Hindu temple and scores of homes and shops in the southern cities of Cox's Bazar and Chittagong.

### Death penalty

At least 45 people were sentenced to death. One man was executed in April.

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