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HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT 2021

BANGLADESH

Prepared by Odhikar

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Foreword

Odhikar was established on 10 October 1994 on the initiative of a few human rights activists, lawyers and teachers who took part in the struggle against the military rule of Lieutenant General Hussein Muhammad Ershad. For the last 27 years, Odhikar has been consistently fighting for the protection of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of the people. Odhikar has always sought to raise public awareness of human rights violations committed by the state and campaign for internationally-recognised civil and political rights; and to protest against and restrain the state from violating human rights. Due to the existence of authoritarian rule in the country, human rights violations are taking place on a large scale. Odhikar has published this Annual Human Rights Report 2021 based on the monitoring of the human rights situation, reports sent by human rights defenders from different districts of the country and data published in various media.

Odhikar has been facing extreme state repression and harassment since 2013 for carrying out its human rights activities. Despite the ongoing harassment and obstruction by the state, Odhikar continues raising issues of human rights violations. Odhikar has been severely hampered by government control and interference with freedom of expression and has been subjected to self-censorship while reporting on human rights abuses.

Odhikar is grateful to local and foreign human rights defenders, like-minded organisations and well-wishers who have cooperated, supported and expressed solidarity with Odhikar. Their cooperation and solidarity have strengthened the resolve of Odhikar to continue activism against human rights violations.

To see the previous human rights reports of Odhikar, please visit www.odhikar.org

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Executive Summary

1. The main goal of the liberation struggle of Bangladesh in 1971 against the autocratic rule of Pakistan, was to establish a democratic state. That goal of constituting a democratic state is yet to be fulfilled although 50 years of Bangladesh was celebrated in 2021. An oppressive system is currently in place under the authoritarian rule, which is contrary to the principles of the 1971 liberation war- equality, human dignity and social justice.
2. The incumbent government's usurpation of power through farcical elections¹ has created a huge vacuum in democracy, accountability and rule of law in the country and created moral and legal crises. As a result, the government has chosen the path of repression to stay in power. The level of persecution has increased as state forces and leaders-activists of the ruling Awami League party have been recklessly engaged in human rights violations.
3. Due to the lack of both accountability of the government and rule of law as a result of assuming power without people's mandate and a dysfunctional justice system; citizens have been subjected to an increase of various human rights violations including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and torture since 2009 and also in 2021. The use of law enforcement agencies on behalf of the government in cracking down on political opponents, government critics and dissidents has resulted in the impunity of law enforcement agencies, and the members of these forces have become reckless as a result. During this reporting period, various allegations were found against members of law enforcement agencies, including torture to death, [extortion by threatening to kill in crossfire](#),² kneecapping of opposition political activists, robbing and arresting businessmen³, taking money by threatening to arrest⁴ or [torture](#) innocent citizens, illegal detention⁵, [demanding ransom](#) and harassment.⁶
4. In 2021, the number of inmates exceeded prison capacities. Almost all the officials and employees of the 68 prisons in the country have been accused of various kinds of irregularities and corruption, including [torture](#). The Home Ministry has also investigated the matter and found this to be true.⁷

¹ Despite the boycott of almost all political parties, the Awami League unilaterally participated in the 10th Parliamentary elections on 5 January 2014. In this controversial election, people were deprived of their right to vote and 153 members of parliament were elected unopposed before the polls. In the 11th Parliamentary elections on 30 December 2018, the ruling Awami League nominated candidates in most of the polling stations, sealed the ballot papers the night before the polls and stuffed the ballot boxes, casted fake votes, forced the voters to vote for the ruling party candidates, occupied the polling centres and arrested and ousted the polling agents of the opposition candidates and other irregularities, including intimidation of voters, were unprecedented.

² The daily Prothom Alo, 9 April 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/ক্রসফায়ারেও-দেওয়া-হতে-পারেদুই-কোটি-টাকা-রেডি-করেন>

³ The daily Prothom Alo, 12 August 2021,

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=16&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-8-12>

⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 14 July 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=6&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-7-14>

⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 1 October 2021,

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=6&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-10->

⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 20 February 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-2-20&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

⁷ The daily Samakal, 18 September 2021, <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/210977704/>

5. Due to the existence of the death penalty, a large number of accused were imprisoned in condemned cells for years.⁸ Most of the victims are poor, less educated and underprivileged.⁹ A person is confined in a condemned cell as soon as the trial court passes the death sentence. This is cruel and degrading treatment.
6. Incidents of public lynching continued in 2021. Due to a lack of trust in state institutions, there is a growing tendency for ordinary people to take the law into their own hands.
7. The Awami League government has used all the important state institutions to implement its political agenda, by making them subservient institutions through party affiliation. Due to this, various institutions including the Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and National Human Rights Commission have become dysfunctional. The independence of the Judiciary has eroded and there are allegations that the Awami League government has heavily interfered in the Judiciary.¹⁰ The Election Commission has destroyed the electoral system of the country by becoming subservient to the present government. Under such circumstances, elections (local government, City Corporation and byelections of the National Parliament) held in 2021 were marred with various irregularities, including unilateral control of polling stations and the voting process by the ruling party leaders and activists, ‘capturing’ of polling stations and expulsion of opposition polling agents. Furthermore, opposition candidates have been reluctant to contest in the elections due to their experience in the past few local and national elections. As a result, in many places the candidates of the ruling party have been elected unopposed. In the latest Union Parishad¹¹ elections, more candidates have been elected unopposed than in the past.¹²
8. Although the livelihood of the ordinary people of the country has been severely damaged due to the impact of corruption in 2021, the subservient Anti-Corruption Commission has not played an effective role in this regard. During this reporting period, allegations of looting, illegal trade, tender bidding, extortion and [embezzlement of relief](#) in the name of ‘development’, have been levelled against leaders and activists of the ruling party and pro-government individuals and government officials.¹³ There are allegations that a large amount of money has to be paid to get a job in the Ministry of Local Government.¹⁴
9. In 2021 too, the National Human Rights Commission has also been loyal to the government. As a result, NHRC has ignored serious human rights violations, such as extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and torture and it remained silent on the widespread violations of citizens’ freedom of expression.¹⁵

⁸ Shomoyer Alo, 30 January 2021, <https://www.shomoyeralo.com/details.php?id=131398>

⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 18 June 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/দেশে-মৃত্যুদণ্ডের-আসামিদের-মধ্যে-দরিদ্র-মানুষ-বেশি-গবেষণা>

¹⁰ New Age, 31 October 2021; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/153331/>

¹¹ Union Parishad (Council) is the lowest tier of the local government.

¹² The daily Prothom Alo, 21 December 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/বিনা-ভোটেই-৩৪৮-চেয়ারম্যান>

¹³ The daily Jugantor, 19 May 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/422180>

¹⁴ The daily Jugantor, 28 November 2021

¹⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 31 August 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/বন্দকযুদ্ধে-হত্যাগুণের-মতো-ঘটনা-পাশ-কাটাচ্ছে-মানবাধিকার-কমিশন>

10. Like previous years, acts of criminalisation, violence and internal strife among the leaders and activists of the ruling party continued unabated in 2021. During this reporting period, internal conflicts of the ruling Awami League were rampant, centring around the Union Parishad elections and due to conflict of interest. Many people have been killed as a result of this political violence.
11. In 2021, obstructions, attacks and persecution by law enforcement agencies and ruling party leaders and activists continued during peaceful processions and rallies, organised by opposition political parties, dissidents and other organisations. In many cases, law enforcement agencies and ruling party leaders and activists have jointly attacked dissident and opposition leaders and activists.¹⁶ Even an indoor meeting inside a house was [attacked by police](#) and leaders and activists were arrested and cases filed against them for allegedly planning a so-called ‘sabotage’.¹⁷ During this period, [police shot](#) at rallies held by the opposition and arrested opposition party leaders and activists for joining the rallies and [tortured them after taking them into police remand](#).¹⁸ At least 19 people were killed and more than 100 were injured in police and BGB¹⁹ firing during protests and strikes organised against the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh during the golden jubilee of its independence in March 2021.²⁰
12. In 2021, the authoritarian government continued to violate freedom of speech, thought, conscience and expression of citizens by preventing the free flow of information and has carried out various acts of repression, including filing cases and making arrests. Although various incidents have not been published due to the government’s pressure on the media, they have been published on social media. In this situation, the [government also brought social media under surveillance](#) and imposed the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018 extensively. In addition, the government has maintained the repressive [Information and Communication Technology Act 2006](#) (Amendment 2009 and 2013).²¹
13. In 2021 as well, journalists have been attacked by leaders and activists of the ruling party and influential people. According to the [2021 World Press Freedom Index](#), in a survey conducted by Reporters Without Borders on 180 countries, Bangladesh ranked 152nd (score 49.71), which was one step lower than last year.²²
14. In 2021, workers have been subjected to victims of various human rights violations. During this period, workers in different districts including [Dhaka](#), [Chittagong](#) and [Narayanganj](#) have suffered casualties due to the repressive policy and negligence of the government and factory authorities. A large number of child labourers are still employed in various factories and suffer casualties. Police attacked readymade

¹⁶ The daily Manabzamin, 26 March 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=267771>

¹⁷ The daily Jugantor, 5 May 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/418484>

¹⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 1 March 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/ছাত্রদের-১৩-নেতাকর্মী-রিমান্ডে>

¹⁹ Border Guard Bangladesh

²⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 8 April 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/নিহতের-সংখ্যা-কত-১৩-১৫-না-১৬>

²¹ New Age, 20 September 2021, <https://www.newagebd.net/article/149627/bnp-leader-jailed-for-7yrs-for-distorting-photos-of-hasina-manmohan>

²² The Daily Star, 20 April 2021, <https://www.thedailystar.net/world/news/world-press-freedom-index-finds-journalism-blocked-over-100-countries-2080641>

garment workers when they carried out protest rallies against the closure of factories without notice, laying off workers and delays in paying wages.

15. Various forms of persecution have continued, including the filing of cases against the unemployed youth from poorer sections of society and the leaders and activists of the opposition and dissidents. As a result, many have risked their lives by depending on human traffickers, lost their lives while traveling abroad on inaccessible roads, or are living in inhumane conditions after being detained abroad. Bangladeshi nationals seeking asylum have died after their boat sank while crossing the Mediterranean from Libya and Tunisia to Europe.²³
16. In 2021, a large number of women became victims of domestic violence, dowry violence, rape, sexual harassment and acid violence. Victims have been deprived from justice as rapists have escaped punishment due to a dysfunctional justice system. As a result, incidents of rape have increased in the country. A review of rape cases in 2021 shows that child rape rates have risen sharply.²⁴ The ruling party leaders-activists have been accused of raping and sexually harassing women and [allegations of rape against police officers](#) have also been reported during this period.²⁵ Criminals attacked protestors, when they protested against sexual harassment.²⁶ Many females, especially adolescents, committed suicide as a result of sexual harassment. Although [giving and taking dowry is a criminal offense](#) as per the [Dowry Prohibition Act, 2018](#) and dowry violence is a punishable offense under the Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act, 2000, in 2021, violence against women over dowry demands was widespread. Most of the victims of acid violence during this period were women and children.
17. In 2021, there have been killings of citizens belonging to ethnic minority groups, attacks on houses of members of the Hindu community and vandalism of places of worship. During this period, violence broke out in different districts of the country over the [placement of the Holy Quran between the feet of Lord Hanuman](#) during Durga Puja in Cumilla city.²⁷
18. India's domination on Bangladesh continued in 2021. The [Indian government has objected to the UN](#) claiming Bangladesh's rightful share to the continental shelf of the Bay of Bengal.²⁸ The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has obstructed the construction or renovation of roads or any infrastructures in the border areas of

²³ The daily Prothom Alo, 14 June 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/এক-মাসে-উদ্ধার-৫২৯-বাংলাদেশি>

²⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 12 January 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/চট্টগ্রামে-ধর্ষণের-শিকার-৬৪-শিশু-কিশোরী>

²⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 8 December 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/এসআইয়ের-বিরুদ্ধে-গভীর-রাত-হোটেলের-কক্ষে-টুকে-মেয়ের-সামনে-মাকে-ধর্ষণের-অভিযোগ>

²⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 15 April 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/উত্ত্যক্তের-প্রতিবাদ-করায়-বখাটেদের-হামলা-আহত-৭>

²⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 15 October 2021, Daily Star, 15 October 2021, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/unrest-after-cumilla-incident-security-beefed-100-held-2198526>

²⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 18 April 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/সাগরে-মহীসোপানের-দাবি-বাংলাদেশের-জাতিসংঘে-আপত্তি-ভারতের>

Bangladesh. [Killings](#), [torture](#) and [rape](#) of Bangladeshi nationals by BSF authorities also continued on the Bangladesh-India border.

19. Aung San Suu Kyi's government was [overthrown by a military coup](#) in Myanmar on 1 February 2021, when two international courts were investigating various forms of atrocities and violence, including the killings, torture, enforced disappearances, gang rape, and arson attacks on members of the Rohingya community.²⁹ Since then, the military has been pushing for a [National Verification Card \(NVC\)](#) to enrol the remaining Rohingyas in Myanmar as foreign nationals. Rohingyas in Rakhine (Arakan) continued to enter Bangladesh from Myanmar, fleeing human rights violations.³⁰ Meanwhile, the Bangladeshi government relocated Rohingya refugees to Bhasanchar island [despite objections](#) from various international human rights organisations, including the United Nations. The Rohingyas there complained that many of the promises the government had made to them before they were brought to Bhasanchar have not been fulfilled.³¹ Rohingya refugees have also fled from Bhasanchar at the risk of their lives.³²
20. The 2013 crackdown on Odhikar by the government and ruling party continued in 2021. The Cyber Tribunal started proceedings against Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and its Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amended 2009) filed in 2013. In 2014, Odhikar applied to the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) under the Prime Minister's Office for the renewal of its registration, but it is yet to be renewed. Human rights defenders associated with Odhikar are under constant surveillance for being vocal about human rights violations.

²⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 2 February 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-2-2&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

³⁰ Dhaka Tribune, 31 May 2021, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/rohingya-crisis/2021/06/12/body-of-rohingya-woman-two-children-recovered-from-naf-river>

³¹ Bangla Tribune, 31 May 2021; <https://www.banglatribune.com/683183/>

³² The daily Prothom Alo, 14 August 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ভাসানচর-থেকে-পালানোর-চেষ্টা-টলারডবিতে-২৭-রোহিঙ্গা-নিখোঁজ>

Statistics: January - December 2021*														
Type of Human Rights Violation		January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Extrajudicial killings	Crossfire	2	7	3	1	6	1	6	5	4	2	10	6	53
	Tortured to death	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	8
	Shot to death**	0	0	21	9	0	0	0	0	0	5	6	4	45
	Beaten to death	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Total	3	7	24	12	7	1	6	6	5	7	18	11	107
Enforced Disappearances		1	0	10	1	0	4	1	1	0	1	1	3	23
Death in Jail		3	4	3	6	5	7	6	15	5	7	6	5	72
Death Penalty	Sentenced to death	40	56	56	0	0	0	0	10	27	24	24	83	320
	Execution of death sentence	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	5
Human rights violations by Indian BSF	Bangladeshis Killed	1	0	1	1	0	1	3	2	1	1	4	2	17
	Bangladeshis Injured	2	2	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	4	0	12
	Total	3	2	1	1	2	2	4	2	1	1	8	2	29
Attack on journalists	Killed	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Injured	0	1	2	12	5	3	1	5	1	1	4	8	43
	Assaulted	6	3	2	4	1	0	0	1	1	2	2	4	26
	Attacked	0	6	6	2	1	2	1	1	1	10	0	0	30
	Threatened	0	0	2	4	0	0	0	2	3	3	0	0	14
	Total	6	11	12	22	7	5	2	9	6	16	6	12	114
Political violence	Killed	10	9	11	8	12	12	13	6	5	16	59	21	182
	Injured	719	600	870	382	341	536	288	231	274	689	2202	1426	8558
Dowry related violence against women	Killed	1	6	11	5	3	6	7	8	10	5	5	5	72
	Physically Abused	8	5	11	15	18	11	7	13	12	5	5	8	118
	Suicide	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	7
	Total	9	12	22	21	21	19	14	21	24	11	10	13	197
Rape	Girl under the age of 18	68	47	75	94	77	76	82	84	78	52	43	33	809
	Women	41	48	48	59	55	47	52	48	51	46	30	31	556
	Age could not be determined	2	5	0	4	3	6	5	17	2	2	0	0	46
	Total	111	100	123	157	135	129	139	149	131	100	73	64	1411
Attempt to Rape		17	18	33	28	27	37	37	30	26	17	15	10	295

Sexual harassment/Stalking of females		11	8	10	12	8	10	9	7	6	17	8	7	113
Acid violence		4	1	4	7	1	2	2	2	9	2	2	2	38
Public lynching		2	1	1	7	4	5	1	1	5	1	1	0	29
Arrest under the Digital Security Act, 2018	For allegedly posting critical post against Prime Minister, high-ranking officials of the government, their family members, anti government and the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Bangladesh in social media	2	3	10	41	5	4	6	5	4	21	8	2	111
	For allegedly making derogatory remarks on religion or religious people	0	0	4	3	1	0	0	0	1	11	2	1	23
	Total	2	3	14	44	6	4	6	5	5	32	10	3	134

* Odhikar documentation

** Shot to death includes killings by members of law enforcement agencies during anti-Modi protest, violence over demeaning Holy Quran and election related violence.

Statistics on Human Rights Violations: 2009 - 2021*															
Type of Human Rights Violation		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Extrajudicial killings	Crossfire	129	101	65	53	65	119	148	151	139	458	376	196	53	2053
	Shot to death	4	2	1	8	245	38	22	13	1	2	8	8	45	397
	Tortured to death	21	22	17	7	11	11	8	11	13	6	6	19	8	160
	Beaten to death	0	2	1	2	7	4	3	3	2	0	1	2	1	28
	Other**	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
	Total	154	127	84	70	329	172	186	178	155	466	391	225	107	2644
Enforced Disappearances		3	19	32	27	54	39	67	93	90	98	34	31	23	610
Death in Jail		50	60	105	63	59	54	51	63	58	81	60	76	72	852
Death Penalty	Sentenced to death	-	76	97	77	291	176	173	229	303	319	327	218	320	2606
	Execution of death sentence	-	9	4	1	2	0	3	6	3	0	2	2	5	37
Human rights violations by Indian BSF	Killed	98	74	31	38	29	35	44	29	25	11	41	51	17	523
	Injured	77	72	62	100	79	68	60	36	39	24	40	27	12	696
	Total	175	146	93	138	108	103	104	65	64	35	81	78	29	1219
Attack on journalists	Killed	3	4	0	5	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	16
	Injured	84	118	139	161	146	92	90	53	24	71	45	74	43	1140
	Assaulted	45	43	43	50	37	24	10	16	9	22	5	31	26	361
	Attacked	16	17	24	10	7	2	4	1	1	2	5	28	30	147
	Threatened	73	49	53	63	33	19	34	9	11	11	12	17	14	398
	Total	221	231	259	289	223	138	139	79	46	106	67	150	114	2062
Political violence	Killed	251	220	135	169	504	190	197	215	77	120	70	73	182	2403
	Injured	15559	13999	11532	17161	24176	9429	8312	9053	4635	7051	3467	2883	8558	135815
	Total	15810	14219	11667	17330	24680	9619	8509	9268	4712	7171	3537	2956	8740	138218

Dowry related violence against women	Killed	227	235	305	273	158	123	119	107	118	71	48	89	72	1945
	Physically Abused	81	122	192	535	261	103	77	94	127	69	55	106	118	1940
	Suicide	11	22	19	14	17	11	6	5	11	2	0	4	7	129
	Total	319	379	516	822	436	237	202	206	256	142	103	199	197	4014
Rape	Girl under the age of 18	243	311	450	473	452	393	479	511	553	457	737	919	809	6787
	Women	213	248	246	299	336	244	293	232	225	176	330	577	556	3975
	Age could not be determined	0	0	15	33	26	29	17	14	5	2	13	42	46	242
	Total	456	559	711	805	814	666	789	757	783	635	1080	1538	1411	11004
Attempt to Rape		-	-	-	-	-	71	97	128	81	73	149	281	295	1175
Sexual harassment /Stalking of females		-	-	672	479	357	272	191	271	242	157	189	157	113	3100
Acid violence		101	137	101	105	53	66	47	40	52	26	31	33	38	830
Public lynching		127	174	161	132	125	116	132	53	47	48	56	40	29	1240

* Odhikar documentation

** Other forms of extrajudicial killings such as suffocation, stabbing etc.

(-) Denotes that no documentation was done during that period on that specific issue.

A. State Repression, Impunity and Lack of Accountability of Security Forces

Extrajudicial killings

1. In 2021 a total of 107 persons were allegedly killed extra-judicially, as reported. Among them, 12 were Rohingyas who were killed in Bangladesh during this reporting period. Persons killed in the name of ‘gunfight’/‘crossfire’, torture and those shot and/or beaten to death by law enforcement have been incorporated under Extrajudicial Killings. Among the 107 persons killed extrajudicially, 53 were killed in “crossfire/encounters/gunfights”, eight persons were allegedly tortured to death, 45 were allegedly shot to death and one was beaten to death during this period. Among the deceased, 30 were allegedly killed by the RAB, 36 by the police, five by the DB Police, 17 jointly by police-BGB, 17 by the BGB, and two were killed by the River Police.
2. In 2021, extrajudicial killings by members of law enforcement agencies were persistent. The government has taken a stand in favour of extrajudicial killings despite it being a clear violation of Article 32³³ of the [Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh](#) and Article 6³⁴ of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#). The State Minister for Industries Kamal Ahmed Majumder said, at a meeting on 13 November, “Opposition leaders often say that people are being killed by crossfire. But I am in favour of crossfire. Millions of people lose sleep because of one criminal. That criminal has no right to survive.” There are allegations that law enforcement agencies are trying to cover up such killings by terming them as “gunfights” or “crossfire”. Upon analysing the incidents of ‘gunfight’, it is seen that the description of the incident given by the law enforcement agencies in the news is almost the same. Usually, members of the law enforcement agencies claim that they shoot in self-defence when the detainee’s accomplices attack them while they are preparing to commit a crime or during a weapons rescue operation. Only the detainee is killed in the shootings. The media usually prepare their reports based on such statements of the law enforcement agencies and the report does not contain any statement from the family members of the victims. In many cases, members of the law enforcement agency deny allegations of detention. As result such detained persons become victims of enforced disappearance and later, allegedly killed extrajudicially. Another type of extrajudicial killing is the killing of accused persons in connection with important criminal incidents in the name of ‘gunfight’ or ‘crossfire’. Because of such killings, the opportunity to know the real truth is lost.³⁵
3. On 16 August 2021, [two brothers](#), Sajib Hossain (35) and Tajul Islam (38) were shot dead by RAB in South Keraniganj under Dhaka District. According to RAB, 8/9 people including the two killed, were preparing for a robbery late at night. Sensing the presence of RAB members, they opened fire and in retaliation, RAB members fired

³³ No person shall be deprived of life and liberty except in accordance with the law.

³⁴ Every human being has an inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No person shall be deprived of life whimsically.

³⁵ The daily Jugantor, 30 November 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/492999/>

back, resulting in the deaths. Nasrin Begum, widow of Sajib Hossain, said that in the afternoon of 23 July, the two brothers were picked up from the Abdullahpur Bazar area of South Keraniganj by men claiming to be RAB. They have been missing ever since. Tajul Islam's widow Amena Begum said the same.³⁶

4. On 30 November 2021, [Mohammad Sabbir and Mohammad Sajon](#), both accused in the murder of Cumilla City Corporation Councilor Sohail and his associate Haripada, were killed in a 'gunfight' with police of Kotwali Model Police Station and of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police.³⁷

Torture, ill treatment and lack of accountability of law enforcement agencies and security forces

5. In 2021, acts of torture, degrading treatment and lack of accountability of law enforcement agencies and security forces have been widely observed. Members of these forces have been acquitted as the law enforcement agencies are used for suppressing political opponents, government critics and dissidents. They participate in ruling party programmes, sometimes actively.³⁸ As a result, the patronage of the ruling party has made them reckless. During this reporting period, various allegations were found against members of law enforcement agencies, including torturing to death, [extortion by threatening to kill in crossfire](#),³⁹ shooting in the legs of opposition political activists, looting goods by arresting businessmen⁴⁰, taking money by threatening to arrest⁴¹ innocent citizens and [torture](#), illegal detention⁴², [demanding ransom](#) and harassment⁴³. Furthermore, there were allegations of torture and death due to torture in police custody. It has been established that the police use torture and inhumane treatment in remand to obtain confessional statements. There were also allegations of [sexual and physical abuse of women in police custody](#) and sexual harassment of women who went to lodge complaints at the police station.⁴⁴ The [Torture and Custodial Death \(Prevention\) Act, 2013](#) is in force only on paper. Victims of torture and degrading treatment have been subjected to harassment and intimidation after filing cases under this law. They have been forced or threatened to withdraw their cases. It is alleged that the leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League were also involved with the members of the law enforcement agencies in

³⁶ The Prothom Alo, 18 August 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=6&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-8-18>

³⁷ The daily Jugantor, 30 November 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/492999/>

³⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 5 August 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/আলীগের-কর্মসূচিতে-ওসির-স্লোগানের-ভিডিও-ছড়িয়েছে-ফেসবুকে>

³⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 9 April 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/ক্রসফায়ারেও-দেওয়া-হতে-পারেদুই-কোটি-টাকা-রেডি-করেন>

⁴⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 12 August 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=16&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-8-12>

⁴¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 14 July 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=6&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-7-14>

⁴² The daily Prothom Alo, 1 October 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=6&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-10->

⁴³ The daily Prothom Alo, 20 February 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-2-20&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

⁴⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 9 August 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/স্বামীর-অত্যাচার-থেকে-বাঁচতে-পুলিশের-কাছে-গিয়ে-যৌন-নিপীড়নের-শিকার>

intimidation and compromises.⁴⁵ Most of the incidents of custodial death are being investigated by the police. As a result, there are allegations that the investigations are not conducted in an impartial manner. There have also been allegations that in the event of torture or death due to torture by members of law enforcement agencies, various reports, including medical reports, inquest reports and autopsy reports often go against the victims after being directed or paid by police for the same.



Akhter Hossain, OC of Sadar Palang Model Police Station, was chanting slogans while participating in a programme organised by Awami League in Shariatpur. Photo: Prothom Alo, 5 August 2021

6. On 2 May 2020, cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore was taken away from his home. Kishore complained that he was tortured several times.⁴⁶ After being released on bail, on 10 March 2021, Kishore filed a case in the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013. Following the case, Judge M Imrul Kayes on 14 March directed the Director of Dhaka Medical College Hospital to form a three-member inquiry committee. On 20 March 2021, the [Medical Board constituted by Dhaka Medical College Hospital](#) submitted a report to the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court. It was stated in the report that the physical condition of Ahmed Kabir Kishore was examined and no signs of injuries were found on his body.⁴⁷ The court also directed the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) to investigate the case. A report was submitted to the court stating that the [PBI had not found any evidence of alleged torture](#) on Kishore by the police.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore filed a *Naraji* petition (objection petition) on 24 November against the PBI's investigation report. Metropolitan Sessions Judge M Imrul Kayes has fixed 23 February 2022 as the date for hearing of the petition.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Bangladesh Protidin, 1 May 2021, <https://www.bd-pratidin.com/last-page/2021/05/01/645062>

⁴⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 5 March 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/অজ্ঞাত-স্থানে-৬৯-ঘণ্টা-রেখে-কাটুন-নিয়ে-প্রশ্ন-মারধর>

⁴⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 7 June 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/কাটুনিস্ট-কিশোরের-শরীরে-আঘাতের-চিহ্ন-পায়নি-মেডিকেল-বোর্ড>

⁴⁸ The daily Jugantor, 18 November 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/488319/>

⁴⁹ New Age, 24 November 2021; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/155575/>

7. There are allegations that members of law enforcement agencies tortured and killed people during this period. On 1 January, a [trainee lawyer named Rezaul Karim Reza](#) (30) was tortured by the DB Police in Barisal; on 29 April, Sanaul Huq Biswas (44) was [beaten to death by a DB police team](#) in Bholahat of Chapainababganj; on 1 May, a man named Abul Hossain Molla (46) was tortured to death by DB Police during remand in Faridpur⁵⁰; on 1 November, a man named [Tajul Islam was tortured to death by police](#) in Haragachh of Rangpur⁵¹; on 9 November, a young man named [Sujan Saha \(22\) was tortured to death](#) by Narsingdi police; and on 11 December, a man named [Bablu Sardar was tortured to death](#) in the custody of DB Police in Satkhira.⁵²
8. On 28 February 2021, Abu Hayat Mohammad Zulfiqar Jisan, organizing secretary of Dhaka University's Sir F Rahman Hall Chhatra Dal⁵³, was picked up by plain clothed members of the law enforcement agency from the TSC area of Dhaka University. He was later shown as arrested and tortured by police after being taken into remand.⁵⁴ Ibrahim Khalil, a Supreme Court lawyer and Media Affairs editor of BNP-backed Bangladesh Nationalist Lawyer Forum, was allegedly picked up by RAB members on 11 March 2021 from Doel Chattar in Dhaka and tortured.⁵⁵ Saiful Islam Saif, a former Deputy General Secretary of Chittagong Metropolitan unit Chhatra Dal⁵⁶ was picked up by police officers of Bayazid Police Station in Chittagong on the night of 16 June 2021 and taken to the Arefin Nagar area where he was [shot in his left leg](#). Later, doctors had to amputate his leg.⁵⁷



Wounded JCD leader Saiful Islam Saif. Photo: collected from victim's family.

⁵⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 3 May 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=3&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-5-3>

⁵¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 1 November 2021 ; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/রংপুরে-পুলিশের-পিটুনিতে-একজনের-মৃত্যুর-খবরে-থানা-ঘেরাও-ভাঙচুর>

⁵² The daily Manabzamin, 12 December 2021, <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=306380>

⁵³ Student wing of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). F Rahman Hall is a hall of residence for male students of Dhaka University.

⁵⁴ Information gathered by Odhikar; Jugantor, 2 March 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/politics/398065>

⁵⁵ Information gathered by Odhikar

⁵⁶ Student wing of BNP

⁵⁷ Information received from local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Chittagong.

Enforced disappearances

9. In 2021, a total of 23 persons were allegedly disappeared⁵⁸ after being picked up by members of law enforcement agencies. Among them, the whereabouts of four persons remained unknown, 18 persons surfaced alive and one person's (Rizwan Hasan Rakin) information was not found.
10. Commissions of enforced disappearance continued in 2021. Most of the victims are known to be opposition party activists and dissidents. The government has been using enforced disappearance as a tool to suppress political movements. Although there is evidence⁵⁹ of state forces being involved in the disappearances, the government continues to deny acts of disappearances at the national and international level. After disappearing many people, law enforcement officials have denied the allegations and their whereabouts could not be known. Police in many cases refuse to take complaints and continue to harass the victim's family. After their disappearance, victims have been extrajudicially killed and their bodies were later found while many were shown as arrested in different criminal cases and handed over to the police station. The victims of enforced disappearance who returned have not spoken out. It was learnt that incidents of disappearance also took place in 2021, but victims/family members of the victim did not speak of it due to fear of reprisals or due to threats. Furthermore, the families of those who have gone missing are under surveillance, harassment and intimidation.
11. Reviewing the disappearance situation in Bangladesh, the UN [Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances \(WGEID\)](#) said in its observation that they are receiving regular complaints about enforced disappearances. The UN Working Group is concerned about the continuing allegations of disappearances in Bangladesh over the years and the practice of impunity.⁶⁰ The WGEID sent a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh asking for the [whereabouts and fate of 34 persons](#) who have disappeared in Bangladesh at different times. Earlier, the UN Working Group had also asked the Government of Bangladesh to provide information on the whereabouts of several disappeared persons, but the Bangladesh government did not reply to the letter that was sent to them in this regard. Even though the WGEID

⁵⁸ Odhikar only documents allegation of enforced disappearance where the family members or witnesses claim that the victim was taken away by people in law enforcement uniform or by those who said they were from law enforcement agencies.

⁵⁹ On 2 March 2017, disappeared victim Mokhesur Rahman Jony's wife Jasmine Nahar Reshma filed a writ petition (No. 2833/2017) before the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. Based on this petition, on 16 May 2017 a High Court Division Bench consisting of Justice Kazi Reza-ul Huq and Justice Mohammad Ullah asked the Chief Judicial Magistrate of Satkhira to submit an inquiry report to the High Court Division by 3 July 2017 regarding the disappearance of homeopathy physician Mokhesur Rahman Jony. A Senior Judicial Magistrate of Satkhira, Habibullah Mahmud, submitted an inquiry report to the High Court Division on 4 July 2017 that found the Superintendent of Police Mohammad Altaf Hossain and former Satkhira Sadar Police Station officer-in-charge Emdadul Huq Sheikh, former Sub-Inspector Himel Hossain, were involved in the arrest of Sheikh Mokhesur Rahman Jony and his subsequent disappearance. It was mentioned in the probe report that OC Emdadul Huq Sheikh and SI Himel Hossain, were directly involved.

(<http://www.newagebd.net/article/19321/>) In another case, Narayanganj District and Sessions Judge Syed Enayet Hossain on 16 January 2017 gave a verdict on the killing of seven persons subsequent to their disappearance. 26 accused, including 16 RAB officers and commanding officer RAB-11, Lt. Col. (Retrd) Tareq Sayeed were sentenced to death. (<https://www.jugantor.com/news-archive/first-page/2017/01/17/93821/>)

⁶⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 20 February 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/জাতিসংঘের-আলোচনায়-বাংলাদেশের-দুই-গুম-প্রসঙ্গ>

wanted to visit Bangladesh to investigate the cases of enforced disappearance, the Bangladesh government did not respond. Most of the disappeared persons on the list sent by the WGEID are opposition party leaders and activists.⁶¹ Similarly, a report prepared by [WGEID at its 125th session of the UN Human Rights Council](#) which took place between 20 and 29 September, said that law enforcement agencies and intelligence agencies have reportedly been consistently using disappearances as a tool and targeting political opponents and dissidents in Bangladesh.⁶² On 16 August 2021, Human Rights Watch published a report on enforced disappearances in Bangladesh since 2009 entitled “[Where No Sun Can Enter: A Decade of Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh](#).” Human Rights Watch has investigated the cases of 86 disappeared persons over the past decade, where the whereabouts of the victims were unknown. Despite [evidence in various investigative reports](#) that members of the security forces were involved in the disappearances, the Awami League government has ignored calls from various international organisations, including the United Nations regarding this matter.⁶³

12. On 2 June 2021, Mohammad Noman, a cloth merchant; Mohammad Nasim, a madrassa student; and Shahidul Islam, an imam of a mosque, were allegedly picked up by men claiming to be members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police from Araihaazar area of Narayanganj.⁶⁴



Disappeared victims Noman, Nasim and Shahidul. Photo: Prothom Alo, 27 June 2021

⁶¹ Voice of America, 14 August 2021, <https://www.voabangla.com/a/6002127.html>

⁶² The daily Prothom Alo, 25 December 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/প্রতিপক্ষ-দমনে-গুমের-অভিযোগ>

⁶³ Human Rights Watch, 16 August 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/16/bangladesh-86-victims-enforced-disappearance-still-missing>; The daily Prothom Alo, 17 August 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/এখনো-গুম-হয়ে-আছেন-৮৬-বাংলাদেশি>

⁶⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 27 June 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/২৫-দিন-ধরে-নিখোঁজ-তিন-তরুণ-স্বজনদের-কান্না>

13. On 6 November 2021, Imam Mahady Hasan Dollar (30), a businessman from Fulbaria Upazila under Mymensingh District, took his motorcycle and went to the Bot Tola area on Chhonkanda Road to see his fishery business. On his way back home with his motorcycle, he was stopped and forcibly taken away by three plain-clothed men in a silver-coloured microbus parked on the street. Dollar's family members searched various places including the police station, DB office and RAB office, but none of them admitted to Dollar's arrest. Dollar's father Lal Mahmud lodged a General Diary with Fulbaria Police Station. Dollar's wife Mumta Hena Pinky said that Dollar used an iPhone. The last location of his phone, seen with iCloud, was next to the RAB-1 office in Uttara, Dhaka. Earlier, in the middle of the night on 28 November 2020, RAB members picked up her husband from their house and handed him over to Fulbaria Police Station two days later. The family believes that RAB has once again taken Dollar away and disappeared him.⁶⁵



Imam Mahady Hasan Dollar

Human rights violations of prisoners and death in jail

14. **A humanitarian catastrophe has been created due to overcrowding in the country's prisons. As always, most of the inmates have been deprived from proper treatment due to the shortage of doctors in the prisons and it is alleged that 72 prisoners died in the prisons in 2021. Among the deceased, 69 prisoners died due to 'illness', one prisoner committed suicide, one prisoner was found dead with a head injury allegedly caused by another prisoner; and another prisoner was found dead with a head injury and a scarf twisted around his neck.**
15. The human rights of prisoners in the country's prisons have been violated in 2021 as well. Members of the law enforcement agencies have arrested many citizens without any evidence during this period. People have been arrested without any evidence only

⁶⁵ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Mymensingh. New Age, 19 December 2021, <https://epaper.newagebd.net/19-12-2021/1>

because their names match the names of the accused.⁶⁶ Among those who were arrested were a large number of opposition leaders and activists. Many of them were tortured after being taken into remand or unlawful detention. Later, when they were sent to jail, it is alleged that they remained in jail for a long time without getting bail from the court due to the dysfunctional judicial system. In addition, many prisoners have been incarcerated for years without trial.⁶⁷

16. During this period, allegations of various kinds of irregularities and corruption, including [torture of inmates](#), have been found against many of the officials and employees in all 68 prisons of the country. The Home Ministry said in a report that irregularities and corruption in the country's 37 prisons was an "open secret". Although there are specific allegations against officers and prison guards, they are only transferred elsewhere as punishment.⁶⁸
17. There are allegations that inmates in the prisons are deprived from necessary medical treatment when they fall ill. Many of these inmates died due to illnesses. On the other hand, influential, rich and healthy prisoners live comfortably in the Hospital section of prisons in the name of 'medical treatment'.⁶⁹ For example, on 4 May 2020, author Mushtaq Ahmed was arrested under the Digital Security Act, 2018 and tortured by members of law enforcement agencies. He died on 25 February 2021, after nine-months of imprisonment, without the necessary medical treatment.⁷⁰
18. On 28 May 2021, Milon Bikash Tripura (26) died in Khagrachhari District Jail. Police informed that he was found dead with a head injury and a scar around his neck. Milon Bikash's family alleged that he was tortured to death in jail. Milon Bikash was arrested on 16 May.⁷¹
19. On 25 November 2021, Parveen Akhter, wife of a torture victim Mohammad Shamim (who was serving a life sentence), filed a case in the Chittagong Magistrate's Court against five people, including senior Prison Superintendent Shafiqul Islam Khan, for torturing her husband.⁷²

Death penalty and human Rights

20. As per Odhikar's documentation, five accused persons were executed in jail and 320 were sentenced to death by lower courts in 2021.

21. Opposition political activists and dissidents are at risk of serious human rights abuses as the country's existing criminal laws still have provisions for the death penalty due to the existence of a dysfunctional justice system. In this case, the government can, through the court, sentence to death persons considered a threat. In many cases, the police coerce the accused to give a confessional statement through torture in remand

⁶⁶ The daily Manabzamin, 9 June 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=277600>

⁶⁷ Bangladesh Protidin, 10 November 2021; <https://www.bd-pratidin.com/first-page/2021/11/10/710222>

⁶⁸ The daily Samakal, 18 September 2021, <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/210977704/>

⁶⁹ The daily Samakal, 18 September 2021, <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/210977704/>

⁷⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 5 March 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/অজ্ঞাত-স্থানে-৬৯-ঘণ্টা-রেখে-কাটুন-নিষে-প্রশ্ন-মারধর>

⁷¹ The Daily Star, 30 May 2021, <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangla/node/227445>

⁷² The daily Prothom Alo, 25 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/বন্দীকে-মারধরের-অভিযোগে-চট্টগ্রামে-জেল-সুপারসহ-পাঁচজনের-বিরুদ্ধে-মামলার-আবেদন>

and on the basis of this confession, the court often passes the maximum punishment to the accused.⁷³ Every year a large number of accused persons are being sentenced to death in the lower courts. [Death reference cases](#) from different districts of the country are constantly being submitted to the Death Reference Branch of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. The huge backlog of cases means that innumerable accused persons have been imprisoned in solitary confinement (condemned cell) across the country for years.⁷⁴ It is to be noted that most of the victims are poor, less educated and underprivileged.⁷⁵

22. On 9 June, [Abdul Huq in Dinajpur District Jail](#); on 17 June, [Sirajul Siraj in Sylhet Central Jail](#); on 15 July, [Asaduzzaman Panir, a member of the Islamic extremist organisation Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh](#) in Kashimpur High Security Central Jail in Gazipur; and on 4 October, Azizul (50) and Mintu (50) in Jessore Central Jail were executed by hanging until death.⁷⁶

Public lynching

23. In 2021, 29 persons were killed in public lynching.

24. Public lynching continued in 2021. Social instability has increased as the ruling Awami League party destroys the state and constitutional institutions, creating an environment of unaccountability and impunity in the country. As a result, a culture of impunity has been created. Due to this and the mistrust in law enforcement, there is a tendency among the ordinary people to take the law into their own hands and as a result, people are killed via public lynching, and in mob beatings as well.
25. On 15 January 2021, an autorickshaw driver Rabiullah (26), was beaten in Chandina of Cumilla District on suspicion of theft and he died on 22 January at a hospital in Dhaka.⁷⁷ On 26 September, two young women, Runa Akhter and Poppy Akhter, were beaten to death in Dhaka's Nawabganj on suspicion of theft.⁷⁸ On 26 November, Babul Mia was beaten to death in Badarganj under Rangpur District for allegedly stealing an electrical transformer.⁷⁹

B. Constitutional and State Institutions

26. The Awami League government has used various important state institutions to implement its own political agenda by turning them into subservient institutions through party affiliation. During this reporting period, various institutions, including the Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and National Human Rights Commission have become dysfunctional and the independence of the judiciary has been curtailed due to ruling party interference in the judiciary. On 15 October 2021, a

⁷³ The daily Jugantor, 31 May 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/426149/>

⁷⁴ Shomyer Alo, 30 January 2021, <https://www.shomoyeralo.com/details.php?id=131398>

⁷⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 18 June 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/দেশে-মৃত্যুদণ্ডের-আসামিদের-মধ্যে-দরিদ্র-মানুষ-বেশি-গবেষণা>

⁷⁶ The daily Jugantor, 5 October 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/472777/>

⁷⁷ The daily Naya Diganta, 22 January 2021, <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/chattagram/557645/>

⁷⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 27 September 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/চোর-সন্দেহে-ধরে-বাড়িতে-নিয়ে-গিয়ে-গণপিটুনি-তরুণী-নিহত>

⁷⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 28 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ট্রান্সফরমার-চুরির-অভিযোগে-গণপিটুনিতে-আহত-ব্যক্তির-মৃত্যু>

US-based organisation the World Justice Project (WJP) released the [Global Rule of Law Index](#), where Bangladesh ranks 124th out of 139 countries in the Rule of Law Index.⁸⁰

Election Commission and election system

27. After the Awami League came to power in 2009 with two-thirds majority, it unilaterally abolished the all-party recognised [caretaker government system](#) in 2011. The intention to abolish the caretaker government system was all too clear when the next two parliamentary elections were held on 5 January 2014 and 30 December 2018 under the Awami League government. Both elections were [controversial](#) and farcical. Through these two controversial elections, the Awami League completely usurped power by depriving the people of their right to vote. The role of the Election Commission during this period was deplorable. It became an ally of the Awami League and destroyed the country's electoral system. As a result, a government-controlled unilateral election system has been established in the country. A candidate wins the election once he gets nominated by the ruling party and a situation has been created for the candidates of the ruling party to be elected unopposed. The people have lost confidence in the Election Commission as they have been deprived of their right to vote in such elections.
28. Various elections, including by-elections, of the National Parliament and local government and Municipality and Union Parishads were held in 2021. Although the main (out of Parliament) opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Left Alliance participated in the Municipality polls and other by-elections, they later withdrew due to widespread irregularities. As a result, the Union Parishad elections were held without the participation of the main opposition party and other political parties. In these elections, the ruling Awami League and the Awami League rebel candidates and a number of independent candidates contested. In most places, by exercising their influence and power, the ruling Awami League unilaterally won due to various acts of fraud, including the forceful occupation of polling stations and the casting of fake votes.⁸¹

Municipality elections

29. In 2021, the Municipality elections were held in five phases. This election was unilateral and government party controlled. After the announcement of the election schedule, the ruling Awami League started implementing its own election plan by cornering the opposition candidates. The opposition and independent candidates were unable to campaign due to threats and intimidation from the ruling party leaders and activists.⁸² Before the polls, the ruling party leaders and activists prevented the

⁸⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 16 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/আইনের-শাসনে-বাংলাদেশের-কী-অবস্থা-জানাল-ডব্লিউজেপি>

⁸¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 31 January 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-1-31&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

⁸² The daily Prothom Alo, 1 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/সিলেটে-আলীগ-প্রার্থীর-প্রচারণায়-হামলার-অভিযোগ>, Prothom Alo, 1 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/পটুয়াখালীতে-বিদ্রোহী-প্রার্থীর-প্রচারে-বাধা-ভাঙচুরের-অভিযোগ>, Manabzamin, 1 November 2021;

submission of nomination papers of the opposition party candidates⁸³, supporters of the Awami League-nominated Mayor candidate attacked the house of the opposition BNP-nominated Mayor candidate and the opposition councillor candidates were forced to withdraw their candidacies.⁸⁴ Apart from this, the ruling party leaders also spoke openly about occupying polling stations, intimidating the voters and committing various irregularities during election campaign.⁸⁵ They attacked opposition candidates' election rallies and beat opposition activists during the election campaign. The ruling party used the law enforcement agencies for various forms of harassment, including filing cases against opposition leaders and activists.⁸⁶ Moreover, the ruling party candidates brought people from different Unions and let them cast fake votes in different places in the Municipality elections.⁸⁷ In some polling stations, voters had limited opportunity to vote for the candidate of their choice for the post of Commissioner. In most polling centres, voters were forced to cast their votes in public and put their stamp on the Awami League election symbol 'boat' for the ruling party mayor candidates.⁸⁸ During the elections, in many polling centres, the polling officials were seen stamping ballot papers (on 'boat' symbol) and stuffing ballot boxes.⁸⁹ There are allegations that members of the local administration and law enforcement agencies cooperated with the ruling party in this misdeed.⁹⁰ As a result of such unilateral elections and fraud, the results of most municipality elections were unacceptable.⁹¹

<https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=299964&cat=10>, Prothom Alo, 2 November 2021;

<https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ডাসারে-স্বতন্ত্র-প্রার্থীর-প্রচারণায়-হামলা-আহত-৩>

⁸³ The daily Prothom Alo, 11 October 2021;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=3&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-10-11>

⁸⁴ The daily Jugantor, 18 January 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/385064/>

⁸⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 19 January 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/নৌকার-প্রার্থীকে-ভোট-দিলে-কেন্দ্রে-আসবে-না-দিলে-আসার-দরকার-নাই>, Naya Diganta, 10 February 2021, <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/khulna/561844/>

⁸⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 7 January 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/সাভারে-নির্বাচনী-প্রচারণায়-বিএনপির-কর্মী-ও-সমর্থকদের-ওপর-হামলা>, Prothom Alo, 12 January 2021,

<https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/টাঙ্গাইলে-বিএনপির-মেয়র-প্রার্থীর-নির্বাচনী-সভায়-হামলা-ভাঙচুর>

⁸⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 16 January 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/নৌকায়-করে-তাঁরা-ভোট-দিতে-আসেন-চর-থেকে>

⁸⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 16 January 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/নজিপুরে-ইভিএমে-নৌকা-প্রতীকে-ভোট-দিতে-বাধ্য-করার-অভিযোগ>

⁸⁹ The Daily Star, 21 September 2021, <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangla/সংবাদ/বাংলাদেশ/অপরাধ-ও-বিচার/৪-সহকারী-প্রিজাইডিং-অফিসারসহ-৬-জনের-বিরুদ্ধে-মামলা-263451>

⁹⁰ The daily Samakal, 8 February 2021, <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/210252093/>

⁹¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 30 January 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-1-30&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>



In Kishoreganj's Kotiadi Municipality election, a group of youths came to Chariakona Government Primary School polling centre and snatched ballot papers away from all the booths. Clashes broke out between supporters of Councillor candidates Ranbir Singh and Abul Qasim. At one stage, supporters of one side were present with sticks. Photo: Prothom Alo, 31 January 2021



Two persons were present with a voter while she and other voters were casting their vote in a secret booth at Tarabo Government Primary School polling centre in Rupganj, Narayanganj. Photo: Prothom Alo, 17 January 2021



ABM Yusuf Jalal Kismat, Chairman of Sonapur Union and Organising Secretary of Raipura Upazila unit Awami League was in the women's booth of Madhupur Government Primary School polling centre during Raipura Municipality election in Laxmipur. Photo: Prothom Alo, 28 February 2021



Independent candidate Kazi Sabuj was injured in an attack by supporters of Awami League-nominated candidate Rezaul Karim Sikder. Photo: Prothom Alo, 2 November 2021

Chittagong City Corporation and other elections

30. The Chittagong City Corporation election was held on 27 January amidst various irregularities, frauds and violence. Although EVMs were used in the polls, the ruling party forced voters to cast their votes for the ‘boat’ symbol in the presence of supporters of the Awami League mayoral candidate. A man named Mohammad Alauddin was shot dead in a clash between supporters of two councillor candidates in Pahartali at the beginning of the polls.⁹²
31. The ruling Awami League-nominated candidate and Awami League’s political ally, Jatiya Party, contested the by-election in Lakshmipur-2 constituency⁹³ where BNP and other opposition parties, including the Left Alliance, boycotted this election. In the election, Awami League leaders and activists ‘captured’ all the polling stations exclusively.⁹⁴ The Jatiya Party participated in the by-election of Sylhet-3 constituency⁹⁵ held on 4 September while BNP boycotted it. Voter turnout was very low in this election.⁹⁶

⁹² The daily Manabzamin, 28 January 2021, <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=260565>

⁹³ Kazi Shahid Islam Paplu, an independent MP from Lakshmipur-2 constituency, was jailed by a Kuwaiti court on charges of human trafficking and money laundering. The Parliament Secretariat published a gazette declaring the seat vacant on 22 February as he was convicted in a criminal offense.

⁹⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 22 June 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=2&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-6-22>

⁹⁵ The seat was vacant on the death of Awami League MP Mahmud ul Samad Chowdhury.

⁹⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 5 September 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=1&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-9-5>



Polling officer watches voters in a secret booth at Eklachur Rahman Government Primary School polling centre in Bohaddarhat, Chittagong. Photo: Prothom Alo, 27 January 2021



A Village Policeman on guard in front of the empty polling center of Model Government Primary School in the eastern part of South Surma in Sylhet-3 constituency by-election. Voter turnout was very low (left). The polling officials were seen sitting idle in Hazi Mohamaad Raja Chowdhury High School polling centres. Photo: Prothom Alo, 5 September 2021(right)

Union Parishad elections

32. Union Parishad elections in 2021 were held amid [widespread violence](#). Awami League's rebel and independent candidates became the main rivals of the Awami League-nominated candidates when BNP and other opposition parties boycotted this election. It is alleged that the Awami League-nominated candidates were persons accused of crimes such as [murder, rape and corruption](#)⁹⁷ and also in a case where a chargesheet had been filed against them for attacking Hindu temples.⁹⁸ Violence erupted across the country since the announcement of the election schedule up to the election day and the ruling Awami League-nominated candidates harassed and obstructed opposition candidates and intimidated voters.⁹⁹ The Awami League leaders

⁹⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 28 November 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-11-28&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

⁹⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 14 October 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-10-14&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>, The daily Samakal 13 October 2021; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/211080796/>

⁹⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 28 November 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-11-28&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

announced that voters would not be allowed to go to the polling centres and they would face [consequences](#) if they did not vote for the ‘boat’ symbol.¹⁰⁰ In the fourth phase of the election, Thakurgaon District unit Krishak League¹⁰¹ General Secretary Pabarul Islam was given the responsibility of supervising the election in three unions by the district Awami League. However, the Election Commission appointed many Awami League leaders, including Pabarul Islam, as presiding officers.¹⁰² Candidates went to the office of the Returning Officer to inquire about the withdrawal of nomination papers in Chitalia Union Parishad elections under Shariatpur Sadar Upazila. At that time, the Returning Officer Alamgir Hossain told them that no election will be held in this Union as per instructions of ruling party MP Iqbal Hossain and that everyone will be selected.¹⁰³ Awami League leaders and activists vandalised the election offices of independent candidates across the country. A group of miscreants led by deputy leader of Parliament Sajeda Chowdhury’s private Secretary and Awami League leader, Mohammad Shafiuddin Chowdhury vandalised the election office of independent chairman candidate Kamal Hossain Mia, in Talma Union under Nagarkanda Upazila in Faridpur.¹⁰⁴



Natore District unit Awami League’s Youth and Sports Affairs Secretary Masudur Rahman Masud threatened voters of other symbols not come to the polling stations if they were not going to vote for the ‘boat’ symbol.

Photo: Kaler Kantho, 31 October 2021

33. Union Parishad elections were marred by other [irregularities](#), including [violence](#)¹⁰⁵, killings using firearms¹⁰⁶, [killing of BGB member](#) at a polling centre¹⁰⁷, forcefully

¹⁰⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 5 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/বাগমারায়-আলীগকে-ভোট-না-দিলে-হিন্দুদের-উচিত-শিক্ষা-দেওয়ার-ঘোষণা-দলীয়-নেতার>, New Age, 25 October 2021, <https://www.newagebd.net/article/152762/dont-enter-polling-centres-to-vote-against-al-jl-leader>

¹⁰¹ Farmers wing of the Awami League

¹⁰² The daily Prothom Alo, 24 December 2021;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=4&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-12-24>

¹⁰³ The daily Prothom Alo, 28 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/এমপি-স্যার-বলেছেন-চিতলিয়ায়-কোনো-নির্বাচন-হবে-না>

¹⁰⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 30 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ফরিদপুরে-সংসদ-উপনেতার-এপিএসের-নেতৃত্বে-বিদ্রোহী-প্রার্থীর-কার্যালয়ে-হামলার-অভিযোগ>

¹⁰⁵ The daily Manabzamin, 21 September 2021, <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=293859&cat=2/-> The Daily Star, 29 November 2021

¹⁰⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 22 June 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-6-22&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

¹⁰⁷ The daily Manabzamin, 30 November 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=304473>

stamping ballot papers¹⁰⁸, ballot snatching, obstruction of voters' access to polling centres, attack on election officials' vehicles and barring polling agents from entering polling stations.¹⁰⁹ The internal conflicts of the ruling Awami League escalated and many people were seriously injured or lost their lives.¹¹⁰ Violence erupted in different parts of the country after the election. Despite widespread violence and election fraud the Election Commission has claimed that the election process had been peaceful.¹¹¹



Supporters of two UP member candidates clashed at Charfakira co-ed Government Primary School polling centre in Ward 5 of Hazariganj Union under Char Fashion Upazila in Bhola. Photo: Jugantar, 22 June 2021



Abul Kalam, was shot at a polling station in Maheshkhali and died on the way to hospital. Photo: Jugantar, 21 September 2021

¹⁰⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 21 September 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-9-21&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

¹⁰⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 11 November 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ফুলগাজীতে-প্রার্থীকে-মারধর-বিভিন্ন-কেন্দ্রে-এজেন্ট-বের-করে-দেওয়ার-অভিযোগ>

¹¹⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 22 June 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-6-22&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>, Prothom Alo, 21 September 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-9-21&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

¹¹¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 22 June 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-6-22&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

Corruption and Anti-Corruption Commission

34. Although the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was supposed to function as an independent and impartial body¹¹² to prevent corruption, it has become a subservient institution like other institutions under the pressure of the ruling party. As a result, corruption has become widespread and the livelihood of the ordinary people of the country has been severely damaged. There are allegations of rampant looting in the name of ‘development’ in the country, illegal trade, tender bidding, extortion, embezzlement of relief to the poor and various other forms of corruption against ruling party leaders, pro-government individuals and government officials and employees. There are also allegations of paying bribes to get jobs in the Ministry.¹¹³ It was alleged that the money earned through all these illegal activities has been laundered abroad.¹¹⁴

National Human Rights Commission

35. The ruling Awami League government has formed a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) with its loyal bureaucrats to turn it into a subservient body of the government. The bureaucracy-dependent Commission was also accused of being loyal to the government in 2021. As a result, huge sums of money have been donated to the Commission by donors to fight human rights abuses; but no benefits were found. The NHRC sees huge success of the government in improving the human rights situation, despite horrific human rights violations continuing in the country.¹¹⁵ There are allegations that serious human rights violations, such as extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and torture have been ignored by the NHRC and the Commission remained silent on the widespread violations of citizens’ freedom of expression. In addition, the Commission has remained inactive and silent throughout the government crackdowns on human rights defenders who have spoken out against human rights abuses. In a report released in August 2021, the NHRC said extrajudicial killings and allegations of abuse against some members of law enforcement agencies had created a “somewhat image crisis” for the government. However, the government has made significant progress in improving the human rights situation. The report did not contain details of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and deaths in custody. In relation to the killing of many people in “gunfight” during anti-drug drives, the Commission said the deaths of drug dealers and injuries to law enforcement officials during the “gunfight” had raised concerns across the country. In its report, the Commission also referred to the incidents of extrajudicial killings as “so-called allegations”.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Article 3 (2) of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004 (Amended 2016) states that “This Commission shall be an independent and impartial Commission.”

¹¹³ The daily Jugantor, 28 November 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/city/492125/>

¹¹⁴ The Daily Star, <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/tk-2000cr-laundering-faridpur-al-leader-lands-jail-2020521>

¹¹⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 31 August 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/বন্দকযুদ্ধে-হত্যাগুপ্তমের-মতো-ঘটনা-পাশ-কাটাচ্ছে-মানবাধিকার-কমিশন>

¹¹⁶ Ibid

36. On 10 December, International Human Rights Day, the US Treasury Department imposed [sanctions](#) on seven former and current RAB officers and the Organisation for serious human rights violations in Bangladesh. Former Home Secretary and current full-time member of the National Human Rights Commission, Kamal Uddin Ahmed told at a press conference on 18 December that there could be a political motive behind the sanctions. At the press conference, Nasima Begum, former Secretary and current Chairperson of the Commission, while answering the questions of the journalists, expressed her displeasure over all the negative reports about the Commission.¹¹⁷

Independence of the Judiciary

37. There are allegations that the independence of the Judiciary is being severely undermined as the Awami League government has heavily interfered with the Judiciary. This government basically exercised absolute power over the Judiciary when the then Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha was forced to resign in 2017 due to differences with the government. He went to Canada to seek [political asylum](#).¹¹⁸ This was the first time in the history of Bangladesh that a Chief Justice had resigned. The Judiciary is still dependent on the Executive branch for budget and funding. Furthermore, the government has not set up a separate secretariat for the Supreme Court. The Ministry of Law controls the promotion and transfer of judges of lower courts. No law has yet been enacted on the appointment of Supreme Court judges. As a result, qualified judges are not being appointed as there is no transparent process.¹¹⁹

C. Political Violence

38. In 2021, at least 182 people were killed and 8558 were injured in political violence. Election-related violence is included within these statistics. Furthermore, 400 incidents of internal violence within Awami League were reported, where 62 persons were killed and 3424 were injured in internal conflicts; and 15 incidents of internal violence within BNP were recorded, where 109 were injured.

39. In 2021, misconduct, violence and internal conflicts among the leaders and activists of the ruling party became widespread. During this period leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League and its affiliated organisations were allegedly involved in various criminal acts, including attacking and [killing leaders-activists of opposition](#) political parties and [student organisations](#), [atrocities against students](#) and [ordinary citizens](#), [violence against women and children](#), [embezzlement of rice](#) under food-friendly programmes for the poor¹²⁰, [openly displaying firearms](#) and firing¹²¹ and [attacks on opposition party office](#) and [residence of the government officials](#). The

¹¹⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 19 December 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/প্রশ্নে-জেরবার-মানবাধিকার-কমিশনের-চেয়ারম্যান>

¹¹⁸ The Daily Star, 27 July 2019; <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/sinha-seeks-asylum-canada-1777516>

¹¹⁹ New Age, 31 October 2021; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/153331/>

¹²⁰ The daily Jugantor, 19 May 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/422453/>

¹²¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 10 March 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-3-10&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

internal conflicts of the ruling Awami League have escalated due to vested interests centring on the Municipalities and Union Parishad elections. Leaders and activists of the Awami League have been accused of possessing various lethal weapons, including firearms, which they have been seen carrying in public at different times.¹²² In most cases, the accused have not been brought to justice.

40. On 9 March 2021, a man named Alauddin (32) was killed and 50 others were injured in a clash between two groups of Awami League in Basurhat Municipality under Companiganj Upazila of Noakhali District.¹²³ Shahjalal, a cattle trader, was shot dead and thrown into a pond on 15 July by Abul Kalam, a councillor of Ward No. 6 of Feni Municipality and General Secretary of the Ward unit Awami League, and his three associates.¹²⁴ On 17 August, Awami League-backed Chhatra League leaders and activists [vandalised the Jessore District BNP office](#) and stabbed District unit BNP member Golam Reza.¹²⁵ On 4 September, during a clash between two groups of Awami League in Noakhali District town Awami League activists were seen firing at each other with firearms.¹²⁶ On 4 November, three people, including a woman, were killed in a clash between two factions of the Awami League centring around the Alokbari Union Parishad elections in Narsingdi Sadar Upazila.¹²⁷ On 8 December, 50 people were injured in a clash between two factions of the Awami League over establishing supremacy in Shariatpur Sadar Upazila.¹²⁸



Houses were attacked and vandalised in Kalkini Municipal area of Madaripur when people did not vote for the AL candidate under the 'boat' symbol, in the municipal elections. Photo: Prothom Alo, 16 April 2021

¹²² The daily Prothom Alo, 13 June 2021, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/local-news/al-leaders-display-firearms-in-pabna-public-works-office>

¹²³ The daily Prothom Alo, 10 March 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-3-10&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

¹²⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 17 July, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=1&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-7-17>

¹²⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 17 August 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/যশোর-জেলা-বিএনপির-কার্যালয়ে-ছাত্রলীগের-হামলা-নেতা-আহত>

¹²⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 7 September 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/আলীগের-দুই-পক্ষের-ধাওয়ার-মধ্যে-অস্ত্রধারী-তিন-তরুণের-ভিডিও-ভাইরাল>

¹²⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 4 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/নরসিংদীতে-ইউপি-নির্বাচন-ঘিরে-আলীগের-দুই-পক্ষের-সংঘর্ষে-নিহত-৩>

¹²⁸ The daily Jugantor, 8 December 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/495944/>



Pabna Sadar Upazila unit Awami League Science and Technology Affairs Secretary Faruk Hossain (pink shirt) enters the Public Works Department Building, followed by armed Municipality unit Awami League Organising Secretary AR Khan (white shirt) and (behind him) armed District unit Juba League leader Sheikh Lalu (Striped T-shirt). Photo: Prothom Alo, 12 June 2021



A still from a video of two factions of the Awami League chasing each other in Noakhali, has gone viral. A young man can be seen with a weapon. Photo: Prothom Alo, 7 September 2021

D. Freedom of Assembly

41. The government has perpetuated an authoritarian system by suppressing the right to freedom of peaceful assembly through repression. During this reporting period, the government used law enforcement officials to [threaten political parties and dissidents](#) to not hold rallies.¹²⁹ The government and the ruling party leaders and activists have obstructed and attacked the peaceful rallies of the opposition political parties and

¹²⁹ Dhaka Tribune, 14 March 2021, <https://bangla.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/03/14/32756>

various protesting organisations. During this period, [police fired at a rally](#) and [tortured opposition leaders and activists after taking them in remand](#) for joining the rally.¹³⁰



Police dispersed the leaders and workers of Chhatra Dal by beating them with sticks while they were organising a rally in front of the National Press Club. Police fired tear gas shells and blank shots to disperse them. Photo: Prothom Alo, 1 March 2021

42. On 25 March 2021, police attacked a protest rally organised by Jubo Odhikar Parishad (Youth Rights Council) that was organised to protest against the arrival of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Dhaka.¹³¹ On March 26, leaders and activists of Chhatra League¹³², Juba League¹³³ and Swechchhasebak League¹³⁴, along with police, attacked protesters in front of Baitul Mokarram Mosque.¹³⁵ At least 19 people were killed¹³⁶ and more than 100 injured by [police and BGB firing at the protestors during protests and hartal](#) called by Hefazat-e-Islam centring on Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka on 26, 27 and 28 March.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ The daily Jugantor 2 March 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/politics/398065>, Prothom Alo, 1 March 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/ছাত্রদলের-১৩-নেতাকর্মী-রিমান্ডে>

¹³¹ The daily Naya Diganta, 26 March 2021, <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/first-page/571648/>

¹³² Student wing of Awami League

¹³³ Youth wing of Awami League

¹³⁴ Voluntary League of Awami League

¹³⁵ The daily Manabzamin, 26 March 2021, <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=267771>

¹³⁶ The names of the deceased persons are: Nasir Ullah (22), Rabiul Islam (22), Kazi Mirazul Islam (22), Wahidul Islam (18), Mohammad Ashiq (20), Zahirul Islam (40), Hafez Kausar Ahmed (20), Badal Mia (28), Hussain Ahmed (22), Kauser (30), Mohammad Moshahid Mia (18), Mohammad Foysal (17), Hafez Mohammad Jubayer (14), Mohammad Al Amin (19), Liton (30), Kamal Mia (32), Kalon Mia (40), Ashiqul Islam (32) and Abdullah Ratim (22).

¹³⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 8 April 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/ছাত্রদলের-১৩-নেতাকর্মী-রিমান্ডে>



Rally of the Bangladesh Students and Youth Rights Council in Motijheel, in protest of Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh. Photo: Prothom Alo, 15 April 2021



Several Islamist groups, including Hefazat-e-Islam, clashed with police at the north gate of the Dhaka's Baitul Mukarram Mosque, in protest of the arrival of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At that time, activists of Juba League and Chhatra League also joined the police. Photo: Manabzamin, 26 March 2021



*Hefazat-e-Islami supporters and Police-BGB clash in the Signboard area of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway.
Photo: Manabzamin, 28 March 2021*



Police shot at madrasa students in Hathazari of Chittagong during a protest rally against India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh. Injured students are being taken to hospital. Photo: Manabzamin, 26 March 2021

43. On 3 May 2021, police arrested Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir¹³⁸ leaders and activists, including women, from indoor meetings and filed cases against them for plotting sabotage.¹³⁹
44. Leaders and activists of the ruling party attacked a protest rally organised by the Socialist Party of Bangladesh (BSD) in Barisal on 14 June, that was organised to demand road and drainage reform and elimination of water logging.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami

¹³⁹ The daily Jugantor, 5 May 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/418484>



Zahidur Rahman Monir Mollah, Organising Secretary of the Metropolitan unit Awami League, tearing down a banner of a human chain demanding road repairs and removal of water logging, organised by SPB at the Rupatli Bus Terminal in Barishal. Photo: Prothom Alo, 14 June 2021

45. On 31 September 2021, Tejgaon police raided the house of Hajera Khatun, founder of Mayer Daak, a network of families and relatives of the disappeared persons, during a prayer meet. During the raid, police forcibly entered different rooms of the house and beat the relatives of the disappeared persons.¹⁴¹
46. Awami League-backed Chhatra League leaders and activists attacked ordinary students for blocking the road on 17 and 23 November, who were demanding half fare in buses running in Dhaka.¹⁴²



Chhatra League attacks protesting students. Photo: Manabzamin, 23 November 2021

¹⁴⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 14 June 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/বরিশালে-সড়ক-সংস্কার-দাবিতে-আয়োজিত-মানববন্ধনে-আলীগ-নেতার-হামলা>

¹⁴¹ New Age, 1 October 2021, <https://www.newagebd.net/article/153269/police-detain-bnp-activists-at-prayer-session>

¹⁴² The daily Manabzamin, 17 November 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=302476>, and Manabzamin 23 November 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=303422>

47. On 20 November 2021, police in Barguna attacked a hunger strike programme organised by BNP demanding better treatment for BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia abroad, who is under house arrest.¹⁴³ On 18 December, police obstructed an indoor meeting of BNP at Tongi in Gazipur and baton-charged the leaders and activists.¹⁴⁴



Police arresting leaders and activists of BNP from its hunger strike in Barguna. Photo: Prothom Alo 20, November 2021



Police baton-charged BNP leaders-activists in front the BNP office in Chittagong when they brought out a rally on its founding anniversary. Photo: Prothom Alo, 3 September 2021

E. Freedom of Expression

48. The authoritarian government has carried out various forms of persecution, including lawsuits and arrests, against the free flow of information violating the right to freedom of speech, thought, conscience and opinion of the citizens. Mymensingh District Awami Bar Council Member Secretary Advocate Abul Kalam Muhammad Azad filed

¹⁴³ The daily Prothom Alo, 20 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/বরগুনা-বিএনপির-অনশনে-পুলিশের-লাঠিপেটা-আটক-৬>

¹⁴⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 18 December 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/টঙ্গীতে-বিএনপির-ঘরোয়া-সভায়-পুলিশের-বাধা-লাঠিপেটার-অভিযোগ>

a case under the Digital Security Act, 2018 against Advocate Usman Gani Mallik and Advocate Tofazzal Hossain for chanting ‘defamatory’ slogans against former President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The court ordered them to be sent to jail.¹⁴⁵ There are allegations that the government blocked mobile 3G and 4G in Bangladesh from 26 to 30 March 2021, to prevent people from exchanging news/information that protest Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s arrival in Bangladesh.¹⁴⁶ During this period, there has been wide imposition of the repressive Digital Security Act. Although various incidents have not been published due to pressure on the mainstream media, they have been published on social media. In this situation, the government also brought social media under heavy surveillance.¹⁴⁷

Imposition of repressive laws, digital security and surveillance

49. In 2021, a total of 134 people have been arrested under the Digital Security Act, 2018. Among them, 111 were arrested for online posts/comments criticizing the Prime Minister, high-ranking persons of the government and/or their family members and for making anti government comments; and 23 persons were arrested for posting ‘provocative’ religious comments.
50. The government has imposed the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018 to suppress members of opposition parties and dissidents. The government also harassed and punished opposition political leaders and activists, dissidents and human rights defenders in cases filed under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (Amendment 2009 and 2013) and then sending them to jail. Citizens of different walks of life, including opposition political leaders¹⁴⁸, public representatives¹⁴⁹, [labour leaders](#), Islamic speakers¹⁵⁰, [school and college students](#)¹⁵¹ and journalists¹⁵² have been sued and arrested under the Digital Security Act, 2018 for posting or sharing information criticising the various failures of the government, corruption and massive irregularities and information which are critical of high-ranking individuals of the government, including the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh and India, Ministers and/or leaders of the ruling party, on social media.
51. [Nusrat Shahrin Raka](#), sister of exiled journalist Konak Sarwar, has been arrested in Bangladesh for allegedly airing anti-government talk shows abroad.¹⁵³ In most cases, the ruling party leaders and activists have filed such lawsuits. It is alleged that members of law enforcement agencies arrest the accused immediately after a case is

¹⁴⁵ The daily Manabzamin, 1 December 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=304613&cat=9/>

¹⁴⁶ The daily Manabzamin, 28 March 2021, <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=268012>

¹⁴⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 3 June 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/ফেসবুক-ও-ইউটিউবকে-নিবন্ধনের-আওতায়-আনতে-চায়-সরকার>

¹⁴⁸ The daily Jugantor, 21 April 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/413952/>

¹⁴⁹ The daily Jugantor, 18 October 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/477159/>

¹⁵⁰ The daily Naya Diganta, 8 April 2021; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/first-page/574416/>

¹⁵¹ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Thakurgaon.

¹⁵² Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Khulna. Prothom Alo, 19 October 2021;

¹⁵³ The daily Prothom Alo, 6 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/কনক-সারোয়ারের-বোনকে-গ্রেপ্তার-করেছে-যাব-দিয়েছে-মাদকের-মামলা>

filed and they are tortured in the name of interrogation in remand.¹⁵⁴ Delays in getting bail from the court is very common and there are allegations that bail, if granted, is cancelled again.¹⁵⁵ According to the organisation [Article 19](#), forty percent of the cases filed under the Digital Security Act from January to November 2021 were filed over statements made against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Cabinet members, Awami League leaders and Members of Parliament.¹⁵⁶ In addition, multiple lawsuits have been filed for Facebook comments against ruling Awami League leaders and Ministers.¹⁵⁷

52. Cases were filed against [Nurul Haque](#), former Vice President of [DUCSU](#)¹⁵⁸, and Rafiqul Islam, an Islamic speaker, in different districts of the country under the Digital Security Act, for making anti-government remarks on Facebook. Rafiqul Islam was arrested and taken into remand.¹⁵⁹
53. On 4 July 2021, Rafiqul Islam, a member of the Convener Committee of Jhalakathi District unit BNP, posted a Facebook post against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and other politicians. Mohammad Sabbir Khan, former President of Rajapur City unit Chhatra League filed a case against him on 7 July under the Digital Security Act. On 22 August, police arrested Rafiqul Islam. He was later released on bail from the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. After the Appellate Division Chamber Judge's Court cancelled his bail, Rafiqul Islam appeared before the Jhalokathi Senior Judicial Magistrate Sheikh Anisuzzaman on 30 November and was sent to jail.¹⁶⁰
54. On 20 September 2021, Akhtar Hossain (45), General Secretary of Sherkuli Union unit BNP under Shingra Upazila in Natore District, was charged under the repressive Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (Amendment 2009 and 2013) for allegedly distorting pictures of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Facebook. Judge Mohammad Ziaur Rahman of the Cyber Tribunal, Rajshahi sentenced him to seven years imprisonment and fined him one hundred thousand taka.¹⁶¹

Freedom of the media and attacks on journalists

55. In 2021, one journalist was killed, 43 were injured, 26 were assaulted, 30 were attacked, 14 were threatened, seven were arrested, one was abducted, and 10 were sued for carrying out their professional duty.
56. In 2021, journalists have been [harassed with the filing of lawsuits](#) and with arrests under various laws including the repressive [Digital Security Act, 2018](#) for publishing

¹⁵⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 7 October 2021;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=4&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-10-7>

¹⁵⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 30 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ডিজিটাল-নিরাপত্তা-আইনে-বিএনপি-নেতা-রফিকুল-আবার-কারাগারে>

¹⁵⁶ New Age, 28 December 2021; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/158429/>

¹⁵⁷ The daily Manabzamin, 30 November 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=304645>

¹⁵⁸ The daily Manabzamin, 30 November 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=304645>

¹⁵⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 11 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/গাজীপুরে-শিশু-বক্তা-রফিকুল-মাদানীর-নামে-আরেকটি-মামলা>

¹⁶⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 30 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ডিজিটাল-নিরাপত্তা-আইনে-বিএনপি-নেতা-রফিকুল-আবার-কারাগারে>

¹⁶¹ New Age, 20 September 2021, <https://www.newagebd.net/article/149627/bnp-leader-jailed-for-7yrs-for-distorting-photos-of-hasina-manmohan>

various news items, including corruption, against individuals associated with the ruling party and government officials. Journalists have been [attacked by ruling party leaders-activists](#) and influential people for covering the local government elections, including irregularities and corruption.¹⁶² During this period, a journalist was killed. The Ministry of Public Administration handed out lenient punishment to Sultana Parveen, former Deputy Commissioner of Kurigram for her act of detaining and torturing Ariful Islam, District Representative of Bangla Tribune, on 13 March 2020 over the publication of a report on corruption against Sultana Parveen.¹⁶³ On 23 November 2021, Sultana Parveen was acquitted from her charges by the President of Bangladesh.¹⁶⁴ According to the [Global Impunity Index-2021 of the Committee to Protect Journalists](#) (CPJ), an organisation working for the rights of journalists, Bangladesh ranks 11th among the countries in the world where perpetrators have not been tried for killing journalists.¹⁶⁵ In addition, according to the [2021 World Press Freedom Index](#), conducted by Reporters Without Borders on 180 countries, Bangladesh ranks 152nd (score 49.71), which is one step behind last year's position.¹⁶⁶



Journalists blocked the Sirajganj-Nalka road in protest of attack on journalists while carrying out their professional duties in Sirajganj. Photo: Prothom Alo, 7 November 2021

57. On 19 February 2021, Burhan Uddin Muzakkir, Companiganj Upazila correspondent of the Daily Samachar, was shot dead while collecting information of a clash between supporters of two factions of Awami League in Companiganj Upazila under Noakhali District.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² The daily Prothom Alo, 11 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/বড়াইগ্রামে-কেন্দ্রে-ভেতর-স্বতন্ত্র-প্রার্থী-ও-সাংবাদিককে-মারধর-গাড়ি-ভাঙচুর>, Prothom Alo, 7 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/সিরাজগঞ্জে-সাংবাদিকদের-ওপর-হামলা-চালানোর-প্রতিবাদে-সড়ক-অবরোধ>

¹⁶³ The daily Prothom Alo, 15 March 2020; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2020-3-15&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

¹⁶⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 27 November 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/কুড়িগ্রামের-সাবেক-ডিসিকে-অভিযোগ-থেকে-অব্যাহতি>

¹⁶⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 28 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/সাংবাদিক-হত্যার-বিচার-না-হওয়া-দেশের-তালিকায়-বাংলাদেশ-১১তম-সিপিজে>

¹⁶⁶ The Daily Star, 20 April 2021, <https://www.thedailystar.net/world/news/world-press-freedom-index-finds-journalism-blocked-over-100-countries-2080641>, Also available at: <https://rsf.org/en/bangladesh>

¹⁶⁷ The daily Naya Diganta, 23 February 2021, <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/chattagram/564759/>

58. On 17 May 2021, Rozina Islam, Senior Reporter of the daily Prothom Alo went to the Ministry of Health to collect information on looting and corruption in the health sector amid the Covid-19 pandemic, where she was confined in the room of Health Secretary Lokman Mia's Private Secretary (PS) for about six hours and ill-treated by Health Ministry officials. Later a case was filed against Rozina Islam at Shahbagh Police Station under Section 379 of the Penal Code, 1860 and Sections 3 and 5 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923.¹⁶⁸



Journalist Rozina Islam in a prison van. Photo: Prothom Alo, 23 May 2021

59. Akhtaruzzaman, Bogura District correspondent of the daily Baniya Protidin, was picked up from his home by members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police late at night on 17 July 2021 for publishing news about corruption in the distribution of allowances to employees working on a project in the family planning department in Bogura. A case was filed against him under the Digital Security Act, 2018 with Bogura Sadar Police Station.¹⁶⁹
60. On 26 December 2021, supporters of the Awami League-nominated chairman candidate snatched ballot papers and began stamping the election symbol 'boat' on them at Dhantoradanga Government Primary School polling centre in Ruhia West Union under Thakurgaon Sadar Upazila. When Hasinur Rahman, a correspondent of the daily Motprakash went to take a picture of the incident, supporters of the Awami League candidate beat him and snatched away his camera and cell phone.¹⁷⁰

F. Labour Rights

61. Authorities continued to crackdown on workers in 2021. During this reporting period, workers were subjected to various human rights violations and as a result many were injured and killed. According to a survey carried out by [Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies \(BILS\)](https://www.bils.org/), in 2021, 1053 workers were killed and 594 injured in accidents at their workplace in different sectors. During this period, 148 workers were ill-treated, and 125 workers were injured in the workplace.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 23 May 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/জামিন-পেলেন-সাংবাদিক-রোজিনা>

¹⁶⁹ The daily Naya Diganta, 18 July 2021, <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/organization/595954/>

¹⁷⁰ The daily Naya Diganta, 26 December 2021; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/rangpur/632168/>

¹⁷¹ The Daily Star, 10 January 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/economy/news/more-workers-died-workplace-accidents-2021-2935941>

Violation of human rights of readymade garment workers

62. According to BILS, four workers were killed and five were injured in the readymade garment industry in 2021. During this reporting period, 182 labour unrests took place in the RMG sector. During protests, 136 workers in the garment sector were injured.

63. In 2021, garment workers were forced to protest over the [non-payment of their arrears](#) of wages and [maternity benefits](#), and against [factory closures](#) and [layoffs](#). During this period, most of the protests erupted over the demand for arrears of wages. The factory authorities had not paid their workers for [four months](#) to [three years](#). During this period, the police attacked the workers' protests and threw tear gas shells and sound grenades and also fired at protestors.¹⁷² Furthermore, unidentified miscreants also attacked the workers on behalf of the employers.¹⁷³ Many workers were injured in police attacks and shootings.¹⁷⁴



Workers blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in protest of the closure of a garment factory. Photo: Prothom Alo, 10 October 2021



Workers of Lakhsma Innerwear Ltd took position on the factory road in Chapilapara of Shreepur in Gazipur demanding payment of arrears of salary-bonus. Photo: Prothom Alo, 15 July 2021

¹⁷² The daily Naya Diganta, 18 July 2021, <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/dhaka/595945/>

¹⁷³ The daily Prothom Alo, 15 July 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=6&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-7-15>

¹⁷⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 10 May 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/ছুটি-বাডাতে-রাশায়-শ্রমিকেরা-পুলিশের-গুলিলাঠিপেটা>



Police fired rubber bullets when workers took to the streets demanding longer leave. Photo: Prothom Alo, 10 May 2021



Police baton-charged at garment workers in Adamji EPZ area in Narayanganj. Photo: Prothom Alo, 10 January 2021

64. It is to be mentioned that on 13 June 2021, when workers tried to block the Nabinagar-Chandra highway demanding arrears of wages, the police attacked them. A female worker named Jasmine Begum was killed when she was hit on the head by an electric pole during a police chase.¹⁷⁵
65. Workers in many ready-made garment factories are still [deprived from trade union rights](#). Ordinary workers are harassed whenever they try to form a union. Many of them were terminated and attacked by factory authorities. Many genuine trade union applications have been rejected. Allegedly, corrupt officials of the Department of

¹⁷⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 14 June 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=6&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-6-14>

Labour were involved in this.¹⁷⁶ In addition, women workers have been subjected to various forms of deprivation and oppression in various workplaces.

Repression on workers in other sectors

66. On 17 April, [police opened fire at protesting workers](#) of S. Alam Group who were working at constructing a coal-mine power plant at Gondmara under Banshkhali Upazila in Chittagong with funding from a Chinese company SEPCO Electric Power Construction Corporation. The construction workers have been protesting for a long time with a list of 12 demands¹⁷⁷, including reduction of working hours, increase of wages, supply of clean water and introduction of a sewerage system in the construction site. Seven workers¹⁷⁸ were killed.¹⁷⁹



A worker who was shot during a clash between police and workers at the Banshkhali coal-fired power plant in Chittagong is being taken to Chittagong Medical College Hospital. Photo: Amader Shomoy, 18 April 2021



Mother of deceased Mohammad Reza crying at Banshkhali Upazila Hospital. Photo: Prothom Alo, 17 April 2021

¹⁷⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 1 May 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/business/industry/কাগুজে-ট্রেড-ইউনিয়নের-সংখ্যাই-বাড়ছে>

¹⁷⁷ Amader Shomoy, 18 April 2021, <https://www.dainikamadershomoy.com/post/311353>

¹⁷⁸ Ahmed Reza (18), Roni (22), Shuvo (24), Mohammad Rahat (22), Mohammad Rayhan (18), Rajeul Islam (25) and Shimul Ahmed (22).

¹⁷⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 17 April 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/শ্রমিকেরা-গুলিবিদ্ধ-পুলিশের-শরীরে-ইটপাথরের-আঘাত>; The Business Standard, 22 May 2021, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/irregular-payment-mismanagement-behind-banskhali-clash-probe-report-249262>

67. On 8 July, a [fire broke out at the Hashem Foods factory](#) of Sajib Group in Rupganj, Narayanganj, resulting in the death 54 workers and injured 50 others.¹⁸⁰ Most of the victims were children.¹⁸¹ The warehouse inside the building compound was built illegally and there was no fire extinguishing system in the factory. The building that collapsed due to the fire was built without a proper plan and without complying with the Building Code. Furthermore, the emergency exit was closed and the building's gates were kept shut during the fire.¹⁸² As a result, the workers were trapped inside and could not exit the factory.¹⁸³
68. On 4 November 2021, five workers were killed in a fire at a shoe factory called Rumana Rubber Industries at Soarighat in Dhaka.¹⁸⁴

Bangladeshi citizens at risk crossing the sea

69. Citizens of Bangladesh have tried to immigrate by crossing rough seas. Although the government claims that the country's economic growth rate has increased, the economic disparity between rich and poor has become very obvious in 2021. In 2021, the income of the top 10 percent in the country was 44 percent of the total national income. On the other hand, the income of 50 percent of the population was 17.1 percent.¹⁸⁵ The Awami League government continues its repression on the opposition parties and dissidents. In such a situation of economic disparity and persecution, many people have sought political asylum abroad. Unemployed youth from the poorer sections of the population and opposition leaders and activists have lost their lives while traveling abroad illegally on inaccessible roads after falling into the clutches of human traffickers, or are living in inhumane conditions after being detained abroad. The human trafficking rings has been active for many years. Many Bangladeshi nationals trying to migrate have died after their boat sank while crossing the Mediterranean from Libya and Tunisia to Europe.¹⁸⁶

G. Violence against Women

70. In 2021, a large number of women became victims of violence, including dowry, rape, acid throwing, domestic violence and sexual harassment. Due to a culture of impunity, leaders and activists of the ruling party and even members of law enforcement agencies have resorted to various forms of oppression and violence against women during this period. The number of trials in cases of violence against women and the conviction rate of perpetrators is extremely low.

¹⁸⁰ Dhaka Tribune, 31 August 2021, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/08/31/citizens-probe-hashem-food-factory-fire-a-mere-murder-due-to-negligence>

¹⁸¹ The Daily Sun, 10 July 2021, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/worldnews/15551650/dozens-children-killed-bangladesh-fire-locked-forcing-workers-jump/>

¹⁸² The daily Jugantor, 9 July 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/441120/>

¹⁸³ Al Jazeera, 09 July 2021; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/9/deadly-fire-at-bangladesh-food-processing-factory>

¹⁸⁴ The daily Jugantor, 6 November 2021 ; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/484004/>

¹⁸⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 10 December 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/business/economics/মাত্র-১০-শতাংশ-ধনী-হাতে-বিশ্বের-মোট-সম্পদের-৭৬>

¹⁸⁶ For example, two Bangladeshi youths named Sabbir Khan and Sakibul were detained in Libya and tortured and the brokers took one million taka by hearing their call records. They were then forced into a trawler to be sent to Italy. The two Bangladeshi youths were killed when a trawler sank in the Mediterranean Sea in Tunisia on 20 November while traveling from Libya to Italy. The daily Jugantor, 23 November 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/490462/>

Rape

71. In 2021, Odhikar recorded a total of 1411 women and children who had been victims of rape. Among them, 556 were women, 809 were girls below the age of 18 while the age of 46 female individuals were unknown. Out of the number of women who were raped, 20 were killed after being raped and 154 were victims of gang rape. Out of the 809 girls, 23 were killed after being raped, 121 were victims of gang rape, and eight committed suicide. Moreover, eight females of unknown ages were victims of gang rape. Furthermore, 295 women and girls were also victims of attempted rape.
72. Victims of rape are being deprived of justice as rapists have been acquitted due to a dysfunctional justice system. As a result, rapists and potential perpetrators are being encouraged and the incidents of rape has increased in the country. A review of rape cases in 2021 shows that the number of child rape incidents has risen sharply. According to a survey, 64 percent of rape victims in the Chittagong Metropolitan City are children and adolescents.¹⁸⁷ One of the main reasons behind not getting justice for rape is the non-cooperation of the police. In many cases, police force the victim's family to file a case in accordance with their instructions.¹⁸⁸ Although cases are being filed, the police are reluctant to arrest the accused and, in several cases, the police released the accused from the police station after consulting with the leaders and activists of the ruling party.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, influential people threaten the family members of the victims to withdraw their cases. A rape victim was killed after she filed a case with the police station.¹⁹⁰ Despite a direction from the High Court Division of the Supreme Court to take [necessary steps to prevent 'arbitration'](#) or 'settlement' of rape cases, local influential people have earned huge amounts of money by resolving many rape cases through informal arbitration and out-of-court settlements. There is no legal punishment for those who settle cases without a judicial process outside the court. Furthermore, there are also [allegations of rape of women against the ruling party](#) leaders and activists¹⁹¹ and the [police](#).¹⁹²
73. On 7 December 2021, a housewife from Bagerhat went to Khulna with her infant daughter and nephew for treatment and they spent the night in two separate rooms at a hotel called Sundarbans. Late at night, Sub-Inspector Mohammad Jahangir Alam of Khulna Metropolitan Detective Branch of Police entered the woman's room under the pretext of carrying out a search and raped the housewife in front of her baby girl.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 12 January 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/চট্টগ্রামে-ধর্ষণের-শিকার-৬৪-শিশু-কিশোরী>

¹⁸⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 21 November 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/পুলিশের-বিরুদ্ধে-মামলা-থেকে-আসামিদের-নাম-বাদ-দেওয়ার-অভিযোগ>

¹⁸⁹ The daily Naya Diganta, 1 July 2021, <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/chattagram/592033/>

¹⁹⁰ The daily Jugantor, 8 July 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/440733>

¹⁹¹ The daily Jugantor, 18 October 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/477400/>

¹⁹² The daily Prothom Alo, 9 December 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=16&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-12-9>

¹⁹³ The daily Prothom Alo, 8 December 2021 ; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/এসআইয়ের-বিরুদ্ধে-গভীর-রাত-হোটেলের-কক্ষে-দুকে-মেয়ের-সামনে-মাকে-ধর্ষণের-অভিযোগ>

Sexual harassment/stalking

74. In 2021, a total of 113 females were victims of sexual violence. Of them, seven committed suicide, one was killed, seven were injured, 10 were assaulted, one was abducted, and 87 were victimised in different ways due to stalking/sexual harassment. During this period, four men were killed, 33 were injured, one committed suicide and one was assaulted while 10 women were injured by the stalkers when the women protested against such acts that were committed against their relatives.
75. In 2021, there have been a large number of incidents of stalking and sexual harassment. Among the targets were a significant number of children. Allegations of sexual harassment of women against ruling party leaders and activists have been levelled during this period.¹⁹⁴ Leaders and activists of the ruling party even [surrounded the police station](#) in order to free the stalker after he was arrested. Furthermore, ruling party leaders-activists have [attacked protesters](#) while they were protesting against sexual harassment. Women, especially adolescents, have committed suicide as a result of sexual harassment and lack of justice.
76. Moinul Islam protested when a man named Abdul Hakim molested his sister named Shakira in Joypurhat Sadar. For this reason, on 17 October, Abdul Hakim attacked Shakira's house and stabbed and injured Moinul Islam and five members of his family, including his mother. Moinul died on 18 October while he was under treatment.¹⁹⁵

Dowry-related violence

77. In 2021, 197 women were subjected to dowry violence. Among them, 72 were killed, 118 were physically abused, and seven committed suicide due to dowry demands. Among the victims, four were child brides. Two child brides were killed, one was physically abused and one committed suicide due to dowry violence.
78. Despite the fact that giving and receiving [dowry is a punishable offense](#) under the [Dowry Prohibition Act, 2018](#) and dowry violence is a punishable crime under the [Repression of Women and Children Prevention Act, 2000](#), violence against women over dowry demands was widespread in 2021. During this reporting period, women were beaten to death, burnt to death, suffocated and hacked to death over the non-receipt of dowry. A pregnant woman was killed due to dowry demands. A father committed suicide as he could not raise the money for dowry for his daughter's wedding. Due to lack of rule of law, most of the victims have been deprived from justice.
79. [Lima Khatun](#), a housewife in Ullapara under Sirajganj District, was beaten to death by her husband Sabuj Ali and his relatives on 17 February; and [Runa Begum](#), a

¹⁹⁴ The daily Jugantor, 12 January 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/383274>
Manabzamin, 24 April 2021, <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=271452>

¹⁹⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 19 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/বোনকে-উত্ত্যক্ত-করতে-বাধা-দেওয়ায়-ভাইকে-কুপিয়ে-হত্যা-যুবক-গ্রেপ্তার>

housewife, was beaten to death by her husband Rashel in Char Uria of Charklak Union under Subarnachar Upazila in Noakhali on 1 March 2021.

80. On 9 April 2021, a disabled rickshaw puller named Jamal committed suicide at his home after failing to raise dowry money for his daughter's wedding in Sitakunda of Chittagong.¹⁹⁶
81. On 8 July, Sabbir stabbed his father-in-law Asadul Islam to death in Sherpur, Bogura as he was unable to pay the dowry money of five hundred thousand taka.¹⁹⁷
82. On 23 July 2021, an 8-month pregnant housewife named Pinky Akhter was beaten to death by her husband Billal Hossain in Cumilla.¹⁹⁸
83. A housewife named Swarna Begum died on 7 November, after her husband Sejnu Mia poured boiling oil over her body for dowry demands at Sarishabari in Jamalpur District on 1 October 2021.¹⁹⁹

Acid violence

84. In 2021, it was reported that 38 persons became victims of acid violence. Of them, 23 were women, seven were girls and six were men and two were boys.
85. Acid violence continued in 2021 due to the non-implementation of the [Acid Control Act, 2002](#) and the [Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2002](#). During this period, almost all the victims of acid violence were women and children. According to Section 16(3) of the Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2002, cases are expected to be completed within 90 working days, however, these cases remain pending for years. As a result, victims are deprived from justice.²⁰⁰
86. On 8 January 2021, a woman named Shamsunnahar poured acid on a six-month-old baby named Afia Akter Meem in Kapasia under Gazipur District, burning various parts of Afia's body, including her ears.²⁰¹
87. In the night of 2 August 2021, a madrasa student named Sumaiya Akhter (16) and her younger brother Mohammad Ali (12) were sleeping in their house in Patuakhali Sadar when some miscreants entered the house after cutting a part of one of the bamboo outer walls and threw acid on Sumaiya Akhter and Mohammad Ali.²⁰²
88. On 9 October 2021, Ayesha Meem, a pregnant housewife, was beaten by her husband Sumon and father-in-law Sobhan Sheikh for not paying dowry in Madaripur and later they threw acid on her.²⁰³

¹⁹⁶ The daily Jugantor, 10 April 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/410592>

¹⁹⁷ The daily Naya Diganta, 9 July 2021, <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/rajshahi/593794/>

¹⁹⁸ The daily Jugantor, 25 July 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/446129/>

¹⁹⁹ The daily Jugantor, 7 October 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/473316/>

²⁰⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 25 January 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1575905/>

²⁰¹ The daily Jugantor, 12 January 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/383324/>

²⁰² The daily Prothom Alo, 4 August 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/দুর্ভোগের-ছোড়া-অ্যাসিডে-বলসে-গেল-ভাই-বোনের-শরীরঅনলাইনের-জন্য>

²⁰³ The daily Prothom Alo, 10 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/অন্তঃসত্ত্বাকে-অ্যাসিড-নিষ্ফেপ-স্বামী-শ্বশুর-আটক>

H. Human Rights Violations on Religious and Ethnic Minority Communities

89. In 2021, citizens belonging to ethnic minority communities were killed and there were attacks and looting of houses, businesses and places of worship belonging to religious minority groups. During this period, houses and places of worship of the citizens of the Hindu community were vandalised and looted by miscreants. Such incidents continue to occur as past incidents of such violence have not been investigated or tried and have been politicised instead.
90. A young Hindu man named Jhumon Das of Noagaon Village under Shalla Upazila in Sunamganj District had allegedly posted something on Facebook insulting Maulana Mamunul Haque, a central leader of Hefazat-e-Islam. Upon the creation of this allegation, Ward No. 9 unit Jubo League President of Saramangal Union under Dirai Upazila and Union Parishad member Shahidul Islam Swadhin and Pokkon Mia, provoked the locals into a frenzy by announcing the news through a megaphone on 16 March 2021. The Hindu-dominated Noagaon villagers handed Jhumon Das over to the police, but on 17 March, miscreants led by Juba League leader Shahidul Islam Swadhin and Pokkon Mia, attacked the Hindu community in Noagaon Village, vandalised their houses, temples and idols and looted their valuables.²⁰⁴



Vandalism and looting of the Hindu houses in Shalla Upazila of Sunamganj. Photo: Jugantar, 19 March 2021

91. On 18 June 2021, miscreants shot and killed Omar Farooq, an imam of a local mosque in Bandarban's Roangchhari area. He was a member of the Tripura community and was on his way home from prayers. He converted to Islam from Christianity in 2014 and changed his name from Beran Chandra Tripura to Omar Farooq.²⁰⁵
92. On 13 October 2021, on the north bank of Nanua Dighi in Cumilla City, a copy of the Holy Quran was found placed at the feet of the idol of Lord Hanuman during a Durga Puja organised by Darpan Sangha.²⁰⁶ The incident [sparked a spate of violence across the country](#), with miscreants attacking and vandalising Hindu temples and places of

²⁰⁴ The daily Jugantar, 19 March 2021, <https://www.jugantar.com/country-news/403576/>

²⁰⁵ The daily Manabzamin 21 June 2021, <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=279652>

²⁰⁶ The daily Naya Diganta, 14 October 2021, <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/first-page/615440/>

worship in different districts, [attacking, vandalising and looting houses and shops](#) of the Hindu community and also [setting fire](#) to their houses.²⁰⁷ Five people were shot dead by police and three were killed in such violence.²⁰⁸ Victims alleged that the incident was caused by the indifference and negligence of members of law enforcement agencies.²⁰⁹ Police have filed cases against BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and activists and thousands of others for their alleged involvement.²¹⁰ As a result, opposition leaders and activists and the ordinary public were harassed. For example, on 13 October, a gateway of a temple at the Sarkarhat area of Chittagong's Hathazari Upazila was vandalised. Police filed a case against several people, among which were BNP leaders Syed Iqbal, Akram Uddin and Jonaid Mehedi who were detained in Chittagong Central Jail at the time of the incident.²¹¹

I. Bangladesh and its Neighbouring States

India's interference with Bangladesh

93. The India government is widely held to be responsible for the collapse of the electoral system in Bangladesh and the establishment of authoritarian rule in the country.²¹² By seizing power in a farcical election with Indian support, the Awami League government gave India an opportunity to dominate Bangladesh and violate human rights.²¹³ As the Bay of Bengal has become an important issue in the geopolitical context, India wanted to extend its dominance in the Bay in 2021. The Indian government sent a letter to the United Nations in April 2021, [claiming Bangladesh's rightful share of its part in the continental shelf of the Bay of Bengal](#). In response to that letter sent to the UN Secretary General on 13 September, Bangladesh said that it (Bangladesh) had determined the demand for the continental shelf following the ruling of the International Court of Arbitration in 2014. Bangladesh has registered two protests to the United Nations against the claims of India made on some of the geographical coordinates concerning the straight baselines for measuring the breadth of the territorial sea and setting outer limits of the continental shelf.²¹⁴ Bangladesh requested a bilateral solution after the International Arbitral Tribunal ruled in 2014

²⁰⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 15 October 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/সার্ব-দেশে-গ্রেপ্তার-শতাধিককর্তার-অবস্থানে-সরকার>; The Daily Star, 16 October 2021;

<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/violence-vandalism-several-districts-2199151>

²⁰⁸ The names of the deceased persons are: Al Amin (18), Shamim (19), Yasin Hossain (15), Babu (30), Sagar, Jatan Kumar Saha (38), Subal Chandra Saha (20) and Dilip Das (60).

²⁰⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 20 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/পুলিশের-অবহেলাকে-দুষ্ট-ভুক্তভোগীরা>

²¹⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 17 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/চার-মামলায়-আসামি-হাজারের-বেশি-আছেন-বিএনপি-জামায়াতের-নেতারা>

²¹¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 20 October 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/৬-মাস-ধরে-কারাগারে-থাকা-বিএনপি-তিনজনও-আসামি>

²¹² Before the controversial and farcical parliamentary elections on 5 January 2014, almost all the political parties in Bangladesh decided to boycott the election. At that time the then Indian Foreign Secretary Sujata Singh came to Bangladesh and succeeded in bringing the Jatiya Party, which had also decided to boycott the elections, to the polls. (BBC Bangla, 16 November 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/bengali/news-46237664>)

²¹³ India continues the construction of Rampal power plant in Sundarbans despite protests from all quarters. Due to the construction of this power plant, the biodiversity of Bangladesh's Sundarbans and its adjacent environment will be destroyed and it will push Bangladesh towards humanitarian and natural disaster.

²¹⁴ New Age, 18 September 2021, <https://www.newagebd.net/article/149405/bangladesh-files-protests-at-un>

that the two neighbours had demarcated the maritime boundaries. However, India did not respond to Bangladesh's request.²¹⁵ In addition, a portion of the coastal baseline used by India to determine its own maritime boundary falls within the territorial waters of Bangladesh. After seven years of trying to resolve the issue bilaterally, Bangladesh sent a diplomatic letter informing the UN Secretary General about India's position.²¹⁶

94. Apart from dominating the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) halted construction work on the Obaidul Haque Khandaker road in the Bangladesh-India border area at Mirsarai in Chittagong, claiming that it fell into the no-man's land. As the renovation work was stopped in the middle, all normal movement, including transport of emergency food grains and transport of sick patients have been hampered. Although there have been several flag meetings between the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), no solution has been found.²¹⁷ Locals took an initiative to rebuild a 200-year-old mosque in the Bangladesh side of Pillar 1357 at the Gajukata border in Beanibazar under Sylhet District. However, BSF members obstructed the reconstruction. Lt. Col. Mohammad Shah Alam Siddiqui, commander of the BGB's 52nd Battalion, confirmed the matter by saying that BSF had obstructed the reconstruction of the mosque while also illegally building a bunker within 150 yards on No Man's Land.²¹⁸

Human right violations by Indian BSF

95. **In 2021, 17 Bangladeshis were killed and 12 were injured by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). Among those who were killed, 15 were gunned down, one was tortured and one was stoned to death. Among the 12 who were injured, 10 were shot and two were tortured by BSF.**
96. Despite repeated promises by the Indian authorities to reduce the killing of Bangladeshi nationals at the border to zero, the killing, torture and rape of Bangladeshi nationals by BSF at the border continued in 2021. Indian Foreign Minister S. Jayashankar, during his visit to Bangladesh, told reporters on 4 March 2021 that in fact deaths at the border occurred inside India. He said the reason of death was criminal activity. "No crime, no death on the border", said the Indian Foreign Minister.²¹⁹ With this statement, the Indian government clarified its "shoot to kill policy" and legitimised the killing of Bangladeshi nationals on the pretext of 'criminal activities' at the border. In many cases over the years, it was seen that [BSF members entered Bangladesh](#) and killed, tortured and abducted Bangladeshi citizens, violating international law. According to Bangladesh's border agreement with India and international law, if a citizen of one country crosses the border illegally, it should be identified as an intrusion and accordingly the person should be arrested and handed

²¹⁵ Ibid

²¹⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 17 September 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/ভারতের-সমুদ্রসীমা-নিষে-আপত্তি>

²¹⁷ The daily Jugantor, 29 May 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/425710/>

²¹⁸ The Daily Star, 23 March 2021, <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangla/node/212345>

²¹⁹ The Hindu, 4 March 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/jaishankar-arrives-in-bangladesh-to-prepare-ground-for-pm-modis-visit/article33986980.ece>

over to the civil authorities.²²⁰ It is to be noted that not a single incident of killing and torture by the BSF has been tried to date.

97. On 7 October 2021, members of the 192 [BSF Battalion entered the house of a Bangladeshi national](#), Rafiqul Islam at Phulbari border in Kurigram²²¹ and the patrolling BSF members of Natwal camp at Ratna border in Baliadangi Upazila under Thakurgaon District fired into Bangladesh without any reason.²²² On 13 December, BSF members of Phulbari camp illegally entered a bordering village and vandalised the house of Aynal Haque in Singimari village at Hatibandha in Lalmonirhat District. They exploded crude bombs when they were chased by villagers. At least two women were injured during the attack.²²³
98. On 15 January, [Abul Kalam at Patgram border](#) in Lalmonirhat district; [Shippu at Bakshiganj border](#) in Jamalpur district on 15 February; on 20 March, [Abdul Momin Bappa Mia at Juri border](#) in Moulvibazar; on 29 June, [Rifat Hossain \(32\) at Shamser Nagar border](#) under Patgram Upazila in Lalmonirhat District; on 11 July, [Abdur Razzak \(19\) at Basantapur border](#) under Kaliganj Upazila in Satkhira District; on 29 August, two Bangladeshi citizens named [Yunus Ali and Sagor Chandra at Burimari Miyamraghat border](#) in Lalmonirhat; on 3 September, a Bangladeshi fisherman named [Sahibur Rahman \(40\) at Roumari border](#) in Kurigram; on 27 October, a motorcyclist named [Mohammad Mithun \(25\) at Paba border](#) in Rajshahi; on 3 November, two youths named [Askar Ali \(25\) and Arif Hossain \(22\) at Kanaighat border](#) in Sylhet; on 11 November, two cattle traders named [Idras Ali \(40\) and Asaduzzaman Bhasani \(45\) at Burirhat border](#) in Lalmonirhat; on 11 December, a cattle trader named [Mikail Hossain \(30\) at Maheshpur border](#) in Jhenaidah; and on 21 December, a youth named [Ibrahim \(24\) at Shibganj border](#) in Chapainawabganj, were all shot and killed by BSF members.



The body of Sahibur Rahman who was killed in BSF firing. Photo: Prothom Alo, 5 September 2021

²²⁰ New Age, 24 September 2016, <http://archive.newagebd.net/253126/bsf-kills-2-bangladeshis-borders/>

²²¹ The daily Naya Diganta, 8 October 2021; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/rangpur/614235/>

²²² The daily Naya Diganta, 11 October 2021; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/rangpur/614965/>

²²³ New Age, 14 December 2021, <https://www.newagebd.net/article/157341/indian-bsf-enters-bangladesh-illegally-damage-village-house>

99. On 5 April, a young man named Umar Farooq was beaten to death by BSF members at Bakchar in the border area of Chapainawabganj and his body was thrown into the river.²²⁴
100. On 28 July, two Bangladeshi women were detained by BSF members on their way back to Bangladesh through Jhaudanga border in Gaighata of the North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, India. After the arrest, one woman was [raped by Sub-Inspector Rameshwar Kayal](#) who was in charge of the BSF camp. The woman came to Gaighata Police Station on 29 July and lodged a complaint of rape against the BSF member.²²⁵

Human rights abuses on the Rohingya population

101. No progress has been made in repatriating Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar in 2021. On 18 January, a tripartite meeting was held between Bangladesh, Myanmar and China on the Rohingya crisis, mediated by China. On 25 January 2021, the international community called for safe and dignified repatriation of Rohingyas, amendments to the discriminatory Citizenship Act, implementation of recommendations of the Rakhine Commission and compliance with the interim directions of the International Court of Justice during the third cycle review of the human rights situation of Myanmar at the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Geneva, Switzerland.²²⁶ However, the ongoing repatriation process became ineffective when Aung San Suu Kyi's government was overthrown in a [military coup in Myanmar](#) on 1 February 2021.²²⁷ Following the military coup, the Myanmar army set up an army camp at Nayapara Village in Maungdaw town in Rakhine state on 4 February, instigating the remaining Rohingyas in Myanmar to leave the country by registering them as foreign nationals and forcing them to obtain [National Verification Cards](#) (NVC). During this period, the Myanmar army arrested Rohingya Muslim youth from the Budichaung area of Rakhine State. Rohingyas have complained of being tortured and even killed when they refused to take the NVC cards.²²⁸
102. On 22 March, a fire broke out in Rohingya refugee camps at Balukhali in Ukhia under Cox's Bazar District, killing 15 Rohingya refugees, including six children. In addition, 560 people were injured and about 400 Rohingya went missing.²²⁹ A [Human Rights Watch report](#) released on 25 March states that thousands of refugees were trapped due to barbed wire fences around Rohingya refugee camps and thus could not get out quickly when the massive fire spread.

²²⁴ The daily Jugantor, 6 April 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/409077/>

²²⁵ The daily Manabzamin, 30 July 2021, <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=285838&cat=44/>

²²⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 27 January 2021,

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=16&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-1-27>

²²⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 2 February 2021, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-2-2&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

²²⁸ The daily Naya Diganta, 6 February 2021, <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/chattagram/560770/>

²²⁹ Al Jazeera, 23 March 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/23/bangladesh-probes-deadly-fire-at-rohingya-refugee-camp>



A fire broke out at Rohingya Refugee Camp No. 8 in Balukhali, Ukhia of Cox's Bazar. Photo: Prothom Alo, 22 March 2021

103. As the persecution of Rohingyas in Rakhine state continued in 2021, they fled the country and entered Bangladesh. Six Rohingya refugees who were released from prisons in Myanmar entered the Jadimora Shalbagan area of Hnila Union under Teknaf Upazila in Cox's Bazar District on 29 April 2021, through a border point in Maungdaw town of Akiab in Myanmar. They later took refuge with their families in the Rohingya camp.²³⁰ On 12 June, the bodies of a woman and two children (ages 7 and 3 years) were recovered from the Naf River in Teknaf under Cox's Bazar District. According to police, the dead woman was a Rohingya and the children were her daughters. They drowned in the river on their way to Bangladesh from Myanmar.²³¹
104. Despite [objections from the United Nations](#) and international human rights organisations, the Bangladesh government began relocating Rohingya refugees from various camps in Cox's Bazar to Bhasanchar from 4 December 2020.²³² On 31 May 2021, a delegation including UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Assistant High Commissioner for Operations Raouf Mazou and Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Gillian Triggs, visited Bhasanchar.²³³ Thousands of [Rohingya refugees there protested](#), saying they were in distress and wanted to return to the Cox's Bazar camp.²³⁴ Several Rohingyas were injured when the police baton-charged them.²³⁵ Some Rohingya refugees living in Bhasanchar complained to BBC on condition of anonymity, that many Rohingyas no longer wanted to stay in Bhasanchar. The Rohingyas further complained that many of the promises the

²³⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 30 April 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/মিয়ানমার-থেকে-৬-রোহিঙ্গার-টেকনাফে-অনুপ্রবেশ>

²³¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 13 June 2021,

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=16&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-6-13>

²³² The daily Prothom Alo, 16 April 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/ভাসানচর-ঘুরে-দেখেনমনিয়-জাতিসংঘ>

²³³ Bangla Tribune, 31 May 2021, <https://www.banglatribune.com/683183/>

²³⁴ Ibid

²³⁵ Al Jazeera, 1 June 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/1/rohingya-protest-against-living-conditions-on-bangladesh-island>

government had made before being taken to Bhasanchar had not been fulfilled. In this situation, Rohingya refugees have fled from Bhasanchar while risking their lives.²³⁶

105. On 13 August 2021, an engine-driven fishing trawler carrying 41 Rohingya refugees sank in the Bay of Bengal near Sandwip border in Chittagong, while fleeing Bhasanchar in Hatiya under Noakhali District. Fishermen who went fishing in the sea rescued 14 of the Rohingya refugees. 27 Rohingya refugees were missing. Among them, the number of women and children is known to be higher.²³⁷ Meanwhile, [Human Rights Watch](#) reported that Bangladeshi authorities had relocated many Rohingya refugees to Bhasanchar without their full knowledge or consent and prevented them from returning to the mainland. Refugees on the island reported inadequate health care and education services, movement restrictions, food crisis, lack of livelihood opportunities and abuse by security forces.²³⁸
106. On 29 September 2021, [Mohibullah](#), a human rights activist and Chairman of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights (ARSPH), was shot dead by a group of criminals at the Lambasia Rohingya Camp in Ukhia under Cox's Bazar District. Mohibullah was working on the documentation of the genocide committed by the Myanmar Army against Rohingyas and to establish justice and accountability for these atrocities. Furthermore, he had been making 7-point demands to the Myanmar government, including ensuring the rights of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and for the restoration of citizenship of the Rohingyas and for ensuring security and a dignified repatriation to the birthplace they left in Rakhine (Arakan). He was taken for questioning several times by the Bangladeshi authorities for his activities. There are also allegations that he had received death threats in the past.²³⁹



Rohingya leader Mohibullah (centre) was shot dead by unidentified assailants. Photo: Collected from internet.

²³⁶ BBC, 31 May 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/bengali/news-57309085>

²³⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 14 August 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/ভাসানচর-থেকে-পালানোর-চেষ্টা-ট্রলারডুবিতে-২৭-রোহিঙ্গা-নিখোঁজ>

²³⁸ Human Rights Watch, 7 June 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/07/bangladesh-rohingya-refugees-island-fear-monsoon>

²³⁹ Al Jazeera, 30 September 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/29/top-rohingya-leader-in-bangladesh-shot-dead>

107. The proceedings of the genocide trial started on 16 December 2021, when the Second Chamber Court of the Federal Criminal Court in Buenos Aires, Argentina, decided to commence the trial against Myanmar's Rohingya by the Myanmar Army under the principle of "universal jurisdiction". Tun Khin, President of the Burmese Rohingya Organization, a UK-based Rohingya organisation, testified on that day.²⁴⁰

J. Hindrance to Human Rights Activities

108. The persecution of Odhikar that began due to its struggle for the promotion and protection of human right continued in 2021. The Cyber Tribunal, Dhaka commenced the trial proceedings against Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan of the case filed in 2013 under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amended 2009). On 14 February 2021, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court rejected the petition for dismissing the said case filed against Odhikar's Secretary and Director and ordered that the case proceed with the Cyber Tribunal. Subsequently, an application for Review (Petition No. 8/2021, dated 04/04/2021) was submitted to the Appellate Division, seeking reconsideration of the rejection of the application for dismissal of the case. The hearing commenced on 12 September 2021 at the Cyber Tribunal, Dhaka. When Odhikar's Secretary and Director appeared before the Tribunal that day, their lawyer informed the court about the submission of a Review Application with the Appellate Division and appealed to the Tribunal to take necessary steps after the Review hearing. However, the Tribunal did not accept that submission and fixed 5 October as the date for taking evidence and examining witnesses in Cyber Tribunal Case No. 1/2013. The court then proceeded to take evidence as usual and took evidence on 9 November and 24 November. The next date for taking evidence was fixed on 20 January 2022 as no witness for the Prosecution was present on 15 December 2021.
109. Odhikar's registration has not been renewed as of yet. Odhikar applied to the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) for the renewal of its registration in 2014. On 13 May 2019, Odhikar filed a Writ Petition (numbered 5402/2019) at the High Court Division of the Supreme Court; the court issued a Rule upon the NGO Affairs Bureau as to why the inaction of the Respondent (NGOAB) to grant renewal of registration, pursuant to application made by the Petitioner dated 25.09.2014, shall not be declared to be without lawful authority and of no legal effect, and why the Respondent shall not be directed to renew registration of the Petitioner from 2015 onwards in accordance with law. The NGOAB was asked to respond to the Rule within two weeks, but the NGOAB did not take any action in this regard.
110. Human rights defenders associated with Odhikar are under surveillance for being vocal about human rights violations. It is to be mentioned that on 27 May, during International Week of the Disappeared, the police snatched the banner away and prevented a rally organised by human rights defenders associated with Odhikar and Mayer Daak, a network of the families of the disappeared in Lakshmipur district.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ The daily Jugantor, 18 December 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/498790/>

²⁴¹ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Lakshmipur.

On 9 December, the local police took away the banner and festoons prepared for the programme on the occasion of International Human Rights Day, to be organised by human rights defenders associated with Odhikar and family members of the victims of enforced disappearances in Rajshahi.²⁴² Odhikar has also been forced to resort to self-censorship in publishing its reports due to various obstacles and hindrance to freedom of expression by the government.

²⁴² Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar from Rajshahi.

Recommendations

1. Immediate steps must be taken to establish democracy by forming an accountable government through free, fair and participatory elections under an interim government and to take steps to prevent human rights violations by reconstructing the dysfunctional institutions into effective, independent ones.
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.
3. The Government's interference with constitutional and state institutions must be stopped. All political violence and criminalisation must be stopped. Rule of law must be reinstituted and reenforced with a truly independent Judiciary and justice system.
4. Members of the law enforcement and intelligence agencies who are involved in human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture and enforced disappearance, must be brought to justice and punished as per law and persons who are disappeared must be retrieved and returned to their families.
5. The government must accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and criminalise enforced disappearance by bringing it under domestic law. It must also ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.
6. Effective implementation of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 and the High Court and Appellate Division directives contained in the matter of [BLAST and Others vs. Bangladesh and Others \(2003\)](#) are a must to control and prevent violations.
7. Punishment of errant members of law enforcement agencies should not be limited to departmental actions such as temporary suspension, demotion or closure of members of law enforcement agencies who are or have been involved in criminal offenses. Members of law enforcement agencies involved in criminal offenses should be punished under criminal law.
8. Legal action must be taken by investigating allegations of irregularities, negligence and corruption against prison officials and all human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment of prisoners must stop.
9. The government should refrain from repressive and unconstitutional activities. It must respect the rights to freedom of assembly and association guaranteed in the Constitution. The government should stop filing cases against 'unidentified persons'. Harassment on the leaders and activists of the opposition political parties and dissenters must be stopped. All political prisoners must be released.
10. Interference on freedoms of expression and the media must be stopped. All false cases filed against journalists and human rights defenders should be withdrawn and incidents of attacks on them must be properly investigated and those responsible be brought to justice. The targeted ban on some print and electronic media must be removed.
11. All repressive and abusive laws, including the Special Powers Act, 1974, the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006, Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009

and the Digital Security Act, 2018 should be repealed immediately. All persons detained under such repressive laws must be released and cases filed, withdrawn.

12. Workers' wages and allowances must be paid on time. Labour rights must be implemented in accordance with the ILO Conventions, including the right to form trade unions in all factories, including the readymade garment industries. Children should be discouraged from being engaged in hazardous forms of work and sexual harassment prevention committees should be formed in all factories as directed by the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. Special measures for women and workers with infants must be established in all factories.
13. Migrant workers, especially women workers, must be protected and those involved in human trafficking must be brought to justice under the existing laws.
14. Violence against women and children must be stopped and the perpetrators must be punished under prevalent laws. Arbitrations of crimes amounting to violence against women should be stopped and the police should properly investigate and arrest the accused and bring them to justice. Section 10 of the Suppression of Repression against Women and Children Act 2000 (amended 2003, 2011) must be amended to include the full and proper definition of 'sexual harassment' and 'stalking' as provided by the High Court Division in the decision of BNWLA and Others Vs. Bangladesh (2010).
15. Citizens belonging to linguistic, ethnic, religious and all other minority communities, must be protected and the state and government must take special measures to ensure their full rights.
16. The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) must stop all human rights violations, including the killing and torturing of Bangladeshi citizens along the border areas, and compensate the victims. India must abide by all Agreements and Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two countries. India's invasive and aggressive behaviour towards Bangladesh must stop.
17. Rohingyas must be repatriated by establishing and guaranteeing their full civil and political rights. The Myanmar military, Buddhist extremists and others responsible for the genocide against the Rohingya population must be brought to justice by expediting the ongoing trial at the International Criminal Court.
18. The ongoing state repression and harassment on Odhikar must be stopped. 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. The NGO Affairs Bureau must renew Odhikar's registration.

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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.