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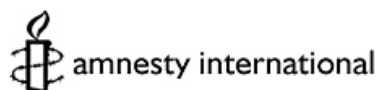
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Amnesty International Annual Report 2012 - Bangladesh

Head of state: Zillur Rahman

Head of government: Sheikh Hasina

Death penalty: retentionist

Population: 150.5 million

Life expectancy: 68.9 years

Under-5 mortality: 52 per 1,000

Adult literacy: 55.9 per cent

Extrajudicial executions continued despite a government pledge to end them. Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) personnel, suspected of more than 54 unlawful killings during the year, were neither investigated independently nor brought to justice. The government failed to enforce its new policy to support women victims of violence. Amendments to the rules governing the Bangladeshi International Crimes Tribunal reduced, but did not eliminate, the possibility of unfair trials for those accused of 1971 war crimes. The government failed to secure the right to livelihood and land of Indigenous People in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. More than 49 people were sentenced to death and at least five men were executed.

Background

In June, Parliament passed the 15th amendment to the Constitution, which removed provisions allowing for elections to be organized by a non-party caretaker government. It also banned the military from assuming state power. Also in June, the World Bank announced that Bangladesh had reduced poverty levels and improved living standards. However, more than 35 per cent of the rural population and 21 per cent of the urban population lived below the poverty line. In November, Parliament passed the Vested Property Return (Amendment) Act. The new law ended legally sanctioned violations of the economic and social rights of Hindus by allowing them to reclaim property that had been taken away under the decades old Vested Property Act.

Extrajudicial executions

RAB allegedly killed at least 54 people in 2011, bringing the total number of people killed since 2004 – when RAB was formed – to more than 700. RAB injured or tortured scores more. In many cases, family members told Amnesty International that victims died after being arrested by RAB and not in an encounter as RAB claimed. The authorities failed to investigate these incidents credibly.

- Limon Hossain, aged 16, was shot in the leg by RAB officers in Jhalakathi on 23 March. RAB officials alleged that he was a member of a criminal gang and that he was injured when RAB officers returned fire after the gang shot at them. Limon Hossain said he was alone, bringing cattle home, when RAB personnel arrested and shot him. The conclusions of a separate government inquiry – never made public – reportedly confirmed his claim. The police charged Limon Hossain with trying to kill RAB officers.

Violence against women

Under a new National Women Development Policy, published in March, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs announced a plan to, among other things, "eradicate violence against, and oppression of, women and children by providing medical treatment, legal assistance and counselling to abused women and children". Human rights organizations said the authorities had failed to implement the plan and many women and children subjected to sexual and other violence were receiving no support from state institutions.

- Human rights defender Shampa Goswami was abducted for several hours by a gang of men in Satkhira in October after she encouraged a female survivor of gang rape to report the incident to the police. The abductors threatened to harm Shampa Goswami if she did not stop supporting the victim. Shampa Goswami told Amnesty International delegates visiting her in Satkhira in November that initially police ignored her request for protection. The authorities subsequently promised to protect her following a vocal campaign by national and international human rights organizations.

International justice

In May, the International Crimes Tribunal, a Bangladeshi court set up in 2010 to try people accused of large-scale human rights abuses during the 1971 war of independence, began to address procedural shortcomings that were rendering its trials unfair. Its amended Rules of Procedure provided for bail, presumption of innocence before guilt is proven, and measures to ensure the protection of witnesses and victims. However, a constitutional ban on the right to challenge the jurisdiction of the Tribunal remained in force.

- Motiur Rahman Nizami, Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojaheed, Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, Abdul Quader Molla and Delwar Hossain Sayeedi from Jamaat-e-Islami, and Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and Abdul Alim from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, were indicted for war crimes. All but Abdul Alim, who was released on bail, remained detained. Five of the detainees were in custody for more than 18 months without charge. Delwar Hossain Sayeedi was formally charged in October for allegedly assisting the Pakistani army to commit genocide; kill, torture and rape unarmed civilians; torch houses of local Hindus; and force Hindus to convert to Islam. No one was indicted for crimes committed immediately after the victory of independence forces in late 1971.

Indigenous Peoples' rights

The government failed to prevent confiscation of Indigenous Peoples' land by Bengali settlers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This led to violent clashes between the two communities, ending in loss of property and, at times, loss of lives. Bengali settlers usually entered Indigenous Peoples' land and appropriated it for agricultural use. Indigenous People told Amnesty International delegates visiting the area in March that Bengali settlers, emboldened by the army's tolerance of their actions, had frequently set fire to Indigenous homes, usually in clear sight of soldiers or other law enforcement personnel, without being stopped.

- In March, Indigenous People from Langadu, in Rangamati hill district, told Amnesty International that local officials and soldiers from the local Border Guard Bangladesh unit failed to prevent an imminent attack by Bengali settlers against them in Rangipara village. They said that soldiers stood by while the settlers torched their homes on 17 February.

Torture and other ill-treatment

At least three people died in police custody, allegedly after being tortured. The government announced that criminal charges would be brought against any police personnel found responsible for these deaths. However, no one was charged or prosecuted by the end of the year. The government did not commit to bringing to justice police, RAB or other security personnel who allegedly tortured thousands of individuals in their custody throughout the year.

- Newspaper editor Mahmudur Rahman told Amnesty International after his release in March that he was beaten severely on his back over the course of a night at a police station inside the army cantonment. He was detained in mid-2010 after publishing articles exposing alleged government corruption. The beating was so severe that he lost consciousness for several hours. He said he saw no point in complaining as he knew the authorities would not bother to act.

Death penalty

At least five men were executed, and more than 49 people were sentenced to death.

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