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THREE-MONTH HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING REPORT ON BANGLADESH

Reporting Period: April – June 2021

Prepared by Odhikar

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Foreword

Since its inception in 1994, Odhikar has been relentlessly fighting for the protection of the civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of the people. Odhikar does not see the human rights movement in Bangladesh as merely a matter of protecting ‘individuals’ who are victims of human rights violations; rather, it considers the struggle for the establishment of civic and human dignity of the individual as inseparable from the movement and struggle for the formation of a democratic state. As a human rights organisation, Odhikar has always sought to raise awareness of and campaign against all human rights violations and campaign for internationally recognized civil and political rights. Odhikar unconditionally stands by the victims of human rights abuses, irrespective of their views; and works to ensure the safety of the victims and establish justice.

Odhikar has been facing elevated levels of persecution and harassment by the current government since 2013. Despite this adverse situation, Odhikar has prepared this quarterly human rights monitoring report for the period spanning April to June 2021, based on the reports sent by the human rights defenders associated with Odhikar and data published in various media.

To see the previous human rights reports of *Odhikar*, please visit www.odhikar.org; Facebook: [Odhikar.HumanRights](https://www.facebook.com/Odhikar.HumanRights); Twitter: @odhikar_bd

Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Statistics: Human Rights violations (January-June) 2021.....	8
Political Repression, Violation of Freedom of Assembly and Acts of Criminalisation	9
Political repression.....	9
Hindrances to and attacks on freedom of assembly and arrest of protestors	9
Acts of Criminalisation	12
Dysfunctional Election Commission and Electoral System	15
Union Parishad and other elections.....	16
Freedom of Expression, Repressive Laws and Freedom of Media	18
The Digital Security Act, 2018	18
Freedom of the media	20
State Repression, Impunity and Lack of Accountability.....	21
Torture and lack of accountability of law enforcement agencies	21
Enforced disappearances	25
Extrajudicial killings.....	27
Human rights violations in prisons.....	27
Public Lynching.....	28
Death Penalty and Human Rights	28
Violence against Women	29
Rape	29
Sexual harassment/stalking	30
Dowry-related violence.....	31
Repression on Labourers	31
Workers shot dead.....	32
Situation of RMG factory	33
Rescue and detention of Bangladeshis seeking to migrate to Europe continues	35
Human Rights Violations on Minority Communities	36
Interactions with other Countries.....	36
India's interference with Bangladesh	36
Human rights violations by Indian BSF.....	37
Situation of the Rohingya population.....	37
<i>Government drops the word 'all countries except Israel' from Bangladesh's passport</i>	<i>39</i>
Hindrances to Human Rights Activities	40
Recommendations	41

Executive Summary

1. This report has been prepared on the human rights situation in Bangladesh from April to June 2021. The Awami League-led government, which came to power by depriving the people of their right to vote, has systematically turned various important state institutions into subservient ones through partisanship; and introduced an authoritarian regime. As a result, the human rights situation in the country has not improved in any way during this reporting period. The report reviews cases of violations of civil and political rights, including state repression, deprivation of the right to life and other human rights violations.
2. The Government of Bangladesh adopted a nationwide lockdown policy from 5 April, as a way to control the surge of COVID-19 infection from the beginning of April. Later the restrictions were relaxed and the lockdown extended from time to time. When the Indian 'Delta variant' of the virus spread into the Indo-Bangladesh border areas, the government initially imposed area-based lockdowns in 13 Districts along the border. Subsequently, from 22 June, seven Districts surrounding Dhaka were brought under lockdown and from 28 June, a 'strict lockdown' was again declared all over the country. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected public health in densely populated Bangladesh, but has also had a profound effect on the economic and social life of the people. Due to the lockdowns the poor and those subsisting on daily wages, such as day laborers, rickshaw pullers and small traders, have suffered the most.
3. The human rights situation in the country during this period was extremely worrying. As a result of an authoritarian regime, the repression on the opposition leaders, activists and dissidents continues. Leaders and activists of the Opposition and dissidents have been arbitrarily arrested during this period. Corrupt, undemocratic governments seek to deprive the people of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, so that the people cannot protest against these injustices. At present, freedom of assembly of the opposition political parties and dissidents has been severely curtailed – and not just due to the pandemic. During this reporting period, the police obstructed various programmes of the opposition; and Chhatra League and Juba League¹ attacked those who had gathered. Opposition leaders and activists have even been arrested from indoor meetings and cases filed against them for allegedly planning to carry out 'sabotage'. There were allegations of various unlawful acts against the leaders and activists of the Awami League and its affiliates, including the public show of firearms² to intimidate, carrying of illegal trade³, extortion from public transport⁴, embezzlement of rice allotted to the poor⁵ and illegal occupation of *ghats*⁶, land grabbing,

¹ The student and youth wings of the Awami League (the party in power since 2009).

² The daily Prothom Alo, 13 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/শটগান-হাতে-মহড়া-দিলেন-আলীগ-নেতারা>

³ The daily Prothom Alo, 25 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/মাদকে-কোটপতি-ছাত্রনেতা>

⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 2 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/বছরে-১০-কোটি-টাকা-চাঁদা-তোলেন-সরকারদলীয়রা>

⁵ The daily Naya Dignata, 16 May 2021; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/barishal/582165/> and Jugantor, 19 May 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/422453/>

extortion⁷, ill-treatment and violence against civilians⁸. During this period they have also been involved in clashes over conflicts of interest.

4. Under the present Election Commission, on 21 June, 204 Union Parishad elections were held in the first phase, in different districts of the country and by-election in Laxmipur-2 parliamentary constituency and elections in Jhalokati Municipality and Setabganj Municipality of Dinajpur were also held. These elections were marred by the casting of fake votes, 'capturing' of polling stations, intimidation, attacks and clashes. Six people were killed in the election violence.⁹
5. At this time, the government is closely monitoring social media to curb freedom of speech, thought, conscience and expression. Many ordinary citizens, opposition political activists and dissidents were arrested under the much-criticized and repressive Digital Security Act, 2018 and imprisoned for criticizing the government for failing on various issues; and writing or 'liking/sharing' any post on social media against high-ranking members of the ruling party, including the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh and India, or their family members. Furthermore, cases have been filed and arrests made under this Act for making derogatory remarks against religion and religious people.
6. The government has put pressure on the media in various ways, disrupting objective and impartial news coverage, thus forcing journalists to apply self-censorship.¹⁰ During this period, journalists were attacked while performing their professional duties and false and fabricated cases were filed against them. Journalists were also arrested using the Digital Security Act 2018.
7. A wide range of human rights violations, including the torture and degrading treatment of citizens, by members of law enforcement agencies occurred due to extensive impunity. During this reporting period, members of the law enforcement agencies have been charged with torture; extortion, including by threatening to kill detainees in crossfire¹¹; shooting them in the legs; arresting and imprisoning people other than the main accused; kidnapping and various forms of harassment. Moreover, there have been allegations of death due to torture in police custody.
8. Acts of enforced disappearance continued during this reporting period. Those who have returned, refused to talk about their experience. Members of law enforcement agencies have been accused of extrajudicial killings even in April-June 2021.
9. There are allegations that inmates are at extreme risk, due to the coronavirus and overcrowding in prisons. With the Delta variant of the virus, the risk is elevated. It has been alleged that inmates have also died due to inadequate

⁶ Term used to denote a jetty or a flight of steps leading down to the river. These are taken over and people are forced to pay for using them to board boats; or they are taken over for the exclusive use by whoever has unlawfully claimed them.

⁷ The daily Manabzamin, 16 April 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=270406>

⁸ The daily Jugantor, 2 May 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/417668/>

⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 25 June 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=3&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-6-25>

¹⁰ The Daily Star, 5 May 2021; <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/news/self-censorship-not-choice-1738813>

¹¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 9 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/কুমিল্লায়-দেওয়া-হতে-পারেন-কোটি-টাকা-রেডি-করেন>

medical care. Furthermore, allegations of various irregularities and corruption, including torture on inmates, have been leveled against officials and employees of almost all prisons in the country.¹² It is alleged that a prisoner was tortured to death in Khagrachhari Jail.¹³

10. There were reports of incidents of public lynching all over the country. Due to mistrust in the police, frustrated people are taking the law into their own hands and committing offences such as mob violence and beatings.
11. The provision of the death penalty exists in the criminal justice system of Bangladesh. Prisoners who are on death row remain locked in solitary confinement for years. A study has found that most of the people who have been executed were poor.¹⁴ During this reporting period, two persons were executed by hanging.
12. Women have been subjected to various forms of violence, which seems to have increased in rate in the pandemic and lockdown.¹⁵ These include rape, sexual harassment, dowry related violence, and domestic violence. The incidence of child rape has risen sharply during this period. There are allegations of various forms of oppression and violence against women, against the leaders and activists of the ruling party.
13. During this reporting period, workers in both the formal and informal sectors have been subjected to various human rights violations. In Chittagong, seven coal-mine workers were killed when police opened fire on protesting workers who were seeking various demands.¹⁶ Police attacked readymade garment workers when they carried out protest rallies against closing the factories without notice, workers layoff and not paying wages on time. Children too are working as laborers in risky jobs. Construction workers and other informal sector workers are being employed in hazardous work without proper protection- and sometimes with no protection at all. As a result, accidents are happening and in most cases, victims and/or their families do not get compensation.
14. Unemployed youth from the poorer sections of the population and opposition leaders and activists seeking escape from political persecution, are risking their lives by falling into the trap laid by human traffickers. They risk losing their lives on inaccessible roads, ill treatment and malnutrition or may end up living in inhumane conditions after being detained abroad.
15. Various activities geared towards India's domination over Bangladesh, are continuing. The Indian government has objected to the UN claims of Bangladesh's rightful share to the continental shelf of the Bay of Bengal. In addition, the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has stopped repair work on

¹² The daily Prothom Alo, 18 February 2020; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/Corruption-in-jails-condoned-by-top-officials>, and Prothom Alo, 27 January 2021; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/kashimpur-jail-report-book-exposes-huge-irregularities>

¹³ The Daily Star, 29 May 2021; <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/khagrachhari-jail-prisoner-found-dead-bathroom-2100769>

¹⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 18 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/দেশ-মৃত্যুদণ্ডের-আসামিদের-মাঝে-দরিদ্র-মানুষ-বেনি-গবেষণা>

¹⁵ The Daily Star, 30 May 2021; <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/news/domestic-violence-situation-worsened-due-lockdown-constraints-2101401>

¹⁶ New Age, 22 April 2021; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/136044/another-worker-dies-taking-death-toll-to-seven>

the Bangladesh-India border at Mirsarai in Chittagong, claiming that the road being repaired inside Bangladesh falls into the no-mains land. Members of the [Indian BSF have also killed](#) and tortured Bangladeshi nationals at the border during this period.¹⁷

16. In the three months of April to June, human rights violations continued to occur against Rohingyas in Rakhine (Arakan). As a result, Rohingya's are seeking safety by entering Bangladesh. A Rohingya woman and her two children died when their boat capsized on their way to Bangladesh from Myanmar.¹⁸ 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 on 4 December 2020. At that time, a delegation from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) visited Bhasanchar¹⁹ and thousands of distressed Rohingya refugees protested that they wanted to return to the camps in Cox's Bazar.²⁰ When a group of them threw brick-bats and smashed the glass of a building in Bhasanchar, the police baton charged them.²¹ Several Rohingyas were injured.²² Meanwhile, some Rohingya refugees have fled Bhasanchar.²³
17. The phrase "All countries of the world except Israel" has been removed from Bangladesh's e-passport. As a result, Bangladeshi nationals are no longer banned from traveling to Israel. However, the government says Bangladeshi nationals are still banned from traveling to Israel. The Palestinian Ambassador to Bangladesh, Yusuf S. Y. Ramadan expressed frustration over the removal of the condition, saying that the change in Bangladesh's passport came at a time when atrocities by Israeli forces continue in Gaza and its surrounding areas.

¹⁷ The Daily Star, 29 June 2021; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/bangladeshi-youth-shot-dead-bsf-lalmonirhat-border-2120513>

¹⁸ Dhaka Tribune, 12 June 2021; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/rohingya-crisis/2021/06/12/body-of-rohingya-woman-two-children-recovered-from-naf-river>

¹⁹ Bangla Tribune, 31 May 2021; <https://www.banglatribune.com/683183/>

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ The daily Jugantor, 1 June 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/426689/>

²² Al Jazeera, 1 June 2021; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/1/rohingya-protest-against-living-conditions-on-bangladesh-island>

²³ The daily Jugantor, 1 June 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/426689/>

Statistics: Human Rights violations (January-June) 2021

Statistics: January-June 2021*								
Type of Human Rights Violations		January	February	March	April	May	June	Total
Extrajudicial killings	Crossfire	2	7	3	1	6	1	20
	Tortured to death	1	0	0	2	1	0	4
	Shot to death	0	0	21	9	0	0	30
	Total	3	7	24	12	7	1	54
Enforced Disappearances		1	0	10	1	0	4	16
Death in Jail		3	4	3	6	5	7	28
Death Penalty	Sentenced to death given	40	56	56	0	0	0	152
	Execution of death sentence	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Human rights violations by Indian BSF	Bangladeshis Killed	1	0	1	1	0	1	4
	Bangladeshis Injured	2	2	0	0	2	1	7
	Total	3	2	1	1	2	2	11
Attack on journalists	Killed	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Injured	0	1	2	12	5	3	23
	Assaulted	6	3	2	4	1	0	16
	Attacked	0	6	6	2	1	2	17
	Threatened	0	0	2	4	0	0	6
	Total	6	11	12	22	7	5	63
Political violence	Killed	10	9	11	8	12	12	62
	Injured	719	600	870	382	341	527	3439
Dowry related violence against women		9	12	22	21	19	18	101
Rape	Girl under the age of 18	67	47	75	92	74	73	428
	Women	41	47	48	59	52	42	289
	Age could not be determined	2	5	0	4	3	5	19
	Total	110	99	123	155	129	120	736
Sexual harassment /Stalking of females		11	8	9	12	8	10	58
Acid violence		4	1	4	6	1	2	18
Public lynching		2	1	1	7	4	5	20
Arrest under the Digital Security Act, 2018	For allegedly posting critical post against Prime Minister, high-ranking officials of the government and their family members and the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Bangladesh in social media	2	3	10	41	5	3	64
	For allegedly making derogatory remarks on religion or religious people	0	0	4	3	1	0	8
* Odhikar documentation								

Political Repression, Violation of Freedom of Assembly and Acts of Criminalisation

Political repression

1. During this period, the government carried out extensive acts of repression on the opposition political parties, organisations and dissidents. Police filed 154 cases in relation to clashes between Hefazat-e-Islam leaders and activists on one side and members of law enforcement agencies and ruling Awami League leaders and activists on the other, from 26 to 28 March. The protests had been organised by the Hefazat-e-Islam against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh. During the filing of the cases, the police accused a large number of anonymous persons – which made it easier for them to later arrest and include anyone in the case. Since the cases were filed, police have made mass arrests and detained 1,230 opposition leaders and activists, including members of Hefazat-e-Islam.²⁴ In addition, 53 leaders and activists of the Bangladesh Students, Youth and Labor Rights Council were arrested²⁵ and taken into remand through court, for holding rallies against Modi's arrival in Bangladesh. There are allegations that the detainees were tortured in remand.²⁶



Protest 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

Hindrances to and attacks on freedom of assembly and arrest of protestors

2. The authoritarian government continues to restrict the right to freedom of assembly of the opposition and dissidents. During this reporting period, police attacked a rally held in Dhaka in protest of Israeli atrocities in Palestine; and arrested protestors. The opposition leaders and activists were even arrested from indoor meetings and cases have been filed against them, for allegedly planning to carry out 'sabotage'.²⁷ Police blocked various opposition

²⁴ New Age, 28 May 2021; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/138993/1230-hefazat-people-arrested-in-2-months>

²⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 15 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/মাদিবিরোধী-বিক্ষোভে-নরুলের-সংগঠনের-৫৩-জন-গ্রেপ্তার>

²⁶ The daily Jugantor, 15 April 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/politics/411875/>

²⁷ The daily Jugantor, 5 May 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/418484>

programmes and Juba League²⁸ and Chhatra League²⁹ attacked those attending the events. One opposition leader was later killed in a police attack.

3. The BNP³⁰ announced a programme in protest of the brutal killings that occurred by law enforcement firing on peaceful processions, in several parts of the country on Independence Day (26 March). On 29 March 2021, 20 people were injured when police attacked a programme in front of the BNP office in Khulna. Among them, Ward 31 unit BNP leader Babul Kazi was hit in the head by a police baton. On 11 April, Babul Kazi died at Khulna Medical College Hospital while undergoing treatment.³¹



Injured Khulna City unit BNP leader Mohammad Babul Kazi. Photo: Manabzamin, 13 April 2021

4. On 2 May 2021, police arrested five leaders and activists of the Islami Chhatra Shibir³² from a madrassa in Natore's Baraigram Upazila.³³ On 3 May, police arrested eight leaders and activists of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir, in Jhikra area of Ullapara under Sirajganj district. Police filed a case against all of them for holding a secret meeting with the aim of creating sabotage in the area.³⁴
5. On 19 May 2021, when Jamaat-e-Islami brought out a procession in Natore town in protest of Israeli atrocities in Palestine, police attacked the procession and arrested 17 Jamaat leaders and activists.³⁵ On the same day, Jamaat-e-Islami staged a procession in Kushtia to protest the Israeli atrocities in Palestine. After the procession, the police raided the houses of the leaders and activists of Jamaat and arrested 24 of them. The arrested were charged with

²⁸ Youth wing of Awami League

²⁹ Student wing of Awami League

³⁰ BNP is the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. It is considered the main (out of parliament) opposition party to the Awami League.

³¹ The daily Manabzamin, 13 April 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=269983&cat=9/>

³² The student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

³³ Bangladesh Protidin, 5 May 2021; <https://www.bd-pratidin.com/country-village/2021/05/05/646351>

³⁴ The daily Jugantor, 5 May 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/418484>

³⁵ The daily Naya Diganta, 19 May 2021; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/politics/582818/>

‘conspiracy to commit sabotage’. Police also arrested five BNP leaders and activists from different places in Kushtia.³⁶

6. On 31 May 2021, the police obstructed various programmes, including a food distribution among the poor, organised on the occasion of the death anniversary of BNP’s founder and former Bangladesh president, Ziaur Rahman. Leaders and activists of Juba League and Chhatra League attacked the programmes too. They also chased and dispersed the BNP leaders and activists who had come to take part in the *Milad Mahfil*³⁷ on the occasion of the death anniversary of former president Ziaur Rahman in Gournadi under Barishal District. On the same day, in Tangail Municipality, the police stopped the distribution of food among the poor and street children, initiated by the district BNP.³⁸ The BNP alleged that the food cooked for the orphans in Narail was taken away by the police.³⁹ On 1 June 2021, a group of miscreants led by Mizanur Rahman Pikul, vice-president of the Chhatra League’s central committee, attacked a programme to distribute food and educational materials to underprivileged groups, organised by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal⁴⁰ in the TSC area of Dhaka University. Twenty leaders and activists, including Central Chhatra Dal president Fazlur Rahman Khokon, were injured in the incident.⁴¹



Wounded Dhaka University Chhatra Dal activists
Photo: Manabzamin, 1 June 2021

Chhatra Dal activists were attacked at TSC area.
Photo: Prothom Alo, 1 June 2021

7. A group of men, led by Zahidur Rahman Monir Mollah, Organising Secretary of Barishal Metropolitan unit Awami League, and his brother Zakir Mollah, Councilor of 25 No. Ward of Barishal City Corporation, attacked a protest rally organised by Socialist Party of Bangladesh (SPB) at Rupatli Bus Terminal intersection on 14 June, that was demanding road and drainage reform and the elimination of water logging in Rupatali area of Barishal City. Ten SPB leaders and activists were injured in the attack.⁴²

³⁶ The daily Naya Diganta, 21 May 2021; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/583150/>

³⁷ Prayer meet.

³⁸ The daily Jugantor, 31 May 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/bangla-face/426294/>

³⁹ Bangla Tribune, 31 May 2021; <https://www.banglatribune.com/683235/>

⁴⁰ Student wing of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

⁴¹ The daily Manabzamin, 1 June 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=276322&cat=1/>

⁴² Prothom Alo, 14 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/বরিশালে-সড়ক-সংস্কার-দাবিতে-আয়োজিত-মানববন্ধনে-আলীগ-নেতার-হামলা>



SPB protests in Barishal demanding road repairs and removal of water logging. Photo: Prothom Alo, 14 June 2021



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

Acts of Criminalisation

8. The ruling Awami League has established an authoritarian regime by depriving the people of their right to vote, seizing power through farcical elections and destroying state institutions. In this situation, criminalisation has taken a terrible form in every sector of the country and the citizens have become victims of all forms violence and deprivation of rights. There are allegations that leaders and activists of the Awami League and its various affiliated organisations are involved in such criminal acts. Reports show that

during this reporting period they were engaged in violent clashes due to conflicts of interest among themselves. Leaders and activists of the ruling party have been accused of possessing various lethal weapons, including firearms, which they were seen carrying and using in public at different times.⁴³ Leaders and activists of the ruling party have been accused of vandalizing and looting houses of voters for not voting for the ruling party's candidate in the elections.⁴⁴ Furthermore, in these three months many people died in two horrific accidents on the waterway. There are allegations that these two accidents were due to criminalisation of the leaders of the ruling party and the apparent impunity they enjoy. The incidents are mentioned below.

9. **From April to June 2021, at least 32 people were killed and 1250 injured in political violence. Furthermore, 96 incidents of internal violence in the Awami League and one incident of internal violence in the BNP were recorded during this period. 13 persons were killed and 711 were injured in internal conflicts within the Awami League while 16 persons were injured in internal conflicts within the BNP.**
10. On 10 April 2021, a man named Hassan Ali died while being detained at the house of district unit Awami League Deputy Office Secretary, Masud Rana in Narayanpur area of Gaibandha District. It was alleged that Hassan Ali was kept in confinement for a month at Masud Rana's house because he had failed to repay money advanced by Rana under a business contract. Hassan Ali's wife Bithi Begum filed a case accusing three persons, including Masud Rana in this regard, with Gaibandha Sadar Police Station. In her statement, Bithi Begum alleged that Masud Rana took Hassan Ali away on 5 March, to collect the money. She lodged a written complaint with Gaibandha Sadar Police Station that evening for rescuing her husband. Sadar Police Station Inspector (Investigation) Mojibur Rahman and SI Mosharraf Hossain, along with three others brought her husband from Masud's house to the police station. In the presence of all, Inspector Mojibur Rahman handed over her husband back to Masud from the police station to collect money. Masud then detained Hassan Ali at his house and tortured him to death.⁴⁵
11. The Kalkini Municipality election was held on 31 March in Madaripur District. On 15 April, Awami League supporters attacked, vandalized and looted half a hundred houses in the Bibhagdi area of Ward No. 5 of the municipality, as people did not vote for the Awami League nominated mayoral candidate, SM Hanif. Ten people were injured in this incident. It is to be mentioned that on 6 February, Awami League's rebel mayoral candidate Moshir Rahman went missing after being picked up by the police during his election campaign. He returned home after 11 hours.⁴⁶

⁴³ The daily Prothom Alo, 13 June 2021; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/local-news/al-leaders-display-firearms-in-pabna-public-works-office>

⁴⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 16 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/সেই-কালকিনিতে-লোকায়-ভোট-না-দেওয়ায়-অর্ধশত-বাড়িতে-ভাঙচুর-লুটগাট>

⁴⁵ The daily Prothom Alo, 10 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/আওয়ামী-লীগ-নেতার-বাসায়-ব্যবসায়ীর-বুলেট-লাশ>

⁴⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 16 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/সেই-কালকিনিতে-লোকায়-ভোট-না-দেওয়ায়-অর্ধশত-বাড়িতে-ভাঙচুর-লুটগাট>



Houses were attacked and vandalized 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

12. On 6 April 2021, a launch boat, ML Sabit Al Hasan, which left Narayanganj for Munshiganj, was rammed from behind and sunk by a cargo ship SKL-3, killing 34 passengers. The owner of the cargo ship is Sheikh Sarhan Naser Tanmoy, an Awami League MP from Bagerhat-2 constituency. On 18 March 2021, the SKL-3 cargo ship was registered by the Department of Shipping. However, the cargo ship was not permitted for navigation and was to remain in the dockyard until approval was given.⁴⁷ The ship was taken out of the dockyard and started navigating, ignoring government restrictions. Manjurul Islam, the clerk of the launch boat that sank in the incident, went to Sadar, Bandar and Naval Police Station to file a case against the cargo ship, but the police refused to receive any complaint. Later, Babu Lal Baidya, acting Deputy Director of BIWTA⁴⁸, filed a case as a plaintiff. A few days later, police seized the cargo ship and arrested 14 people. On 20 May, Narayanganj District and Sessions Judge's Court granted bail to the 14 arrested persons and

⁴⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 7 April 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=4&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-4-7>

⁴⁸ Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority

on 23 May, the Senior Judicial Magistrate ordered the cargo ship to be handed over to the owner on a bond of Tk 18.5 million. When questioned later, the plaintiff of the case, Babu Lal Baidya said he did not know anything about the custody of the cargo ship or bail of the accused persons.⁴⁹

13. Pabna Sadar Upazila Awami League Science and Technology Secretary, Faruk Hossain, visited Public Works Department (PWD) in Pabna on 6 June 2021. At that time AR Khan, the Organising secretary of the municipal unit Awami League, and Sheikh Lalu, a member of the convening committee of the district Juba League, were seen behind him entering the Pabna Public Works Department with guns. Some contractors of the PWD said that Awami League leaders had been trying to influence the Pabna PWD for some time. They openly did this with arms to show their power and intimidate.⁵⁰ There were also allegations that Faruk Hossain had visited various government departments and insulted officials several times.⁵¹



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 Organizing 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

Dysfunctional Election Commission and Electoral System

14. The electoral system of Bangladesh has been completely destroyed. Due to a dysfunctional electoral system, there is no national parliament elected by popular vote. The people are also being deprived of the right to elect local government representatives freely. The reasons for this deplorable state of affairs in the electoral system are not only the occupation of the ruling party, but also the inefficiency and political biasness of the Election Commission as a whole. The current Election Commission, headed by KM Nurul Huda, has turned into a farce and lost the trust of the people as a result of the Commission's functioning as a subservient body of the government like its

⁴⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 25 May 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=6&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-5-25>

⁵⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 13 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/শটগান-হাতে-মহড়া-দিলেন-আলীগ-নেতারা>

⁵¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 16 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/কর্মকর্তাদের-লাঞ্ছিত-করা-তীর-অভ্যাস>

predecessor. Bangladesh is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Article 25 (b) of this treaty provides for universal and equal suffrage and elections that shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the 'free expression of the will of the electors'.

Union Parishad and other elections

15. Union Parishad elections are being held across the country in 2021 under this Election Commission. A by-election of the National Parliament and a municipal election were also held during this reporting period. Though there have been clashes in various unions and threats to candidates and vandalism of offices before and during the election, the Election Commission has not taken any action against this.
16. On 21 June 2021, elections were held in 204 Union Parishads in different districts of the country in the first phase of local government polls. By-elections in Laxmipur-2 parliamentary constituency and Jhalokati and Setabganj Municipality elections in Dinajpur were held on the same day. There are reports that these elections were held through casting fake votes, forceful occupation of the polling centres, attacks and clashes. The ruling Awami League and Awami League 'rebel candidates' contested in these elections. However, the main opposition BNP and other opposition parties including the Left Alliance boycotted elections. In some places, Jatiya Party a current and faithful ally of the ruling Awami League, competed. Six people were killed in electoral violence during this period.⁵²
17. Fifteen people were injured in a clash between supporters of Awami League nominated candidate Mirza Ashraful Jamal Rasel and supporters of Awami League rebel candidate Faisal Ahmed Ratan, at Uttor Charpagla Government Primary School polling centre in Torabganj Union under Laxmipur District.⁵³ Mohammad Monirul Islam, supporter of a councilor candidate Yasin Majhi, was shot dead in a clash between supporters of Yasin Majhi and Yusuf Sikder in Ward No. 5 of Hazariganj Union under Char Fashion Upazila in Bhola.⁵⁴ A man named Mouje Ali Mia was killed in a bomb attack that occurred over the casting of fake votes at the Kamalapur Government Primary School polling centre of Ward No. 9 in Khanjapur Union under Gournadi Upazila in Barishal.⁵⁵ Independent chairman candidate Mohammad Selim Jamaddar and his six supporters were seriously injured in an attack by supporters of the Awami League nominated chairman candidate in front of Uttar Noli Government Primary School polling centre in Sapeleja Union under Mothbaria Upazila in Pirojpur District.⁵⁶ A man named Abu Bakar was killed in a bomb attack during post-election violence between supporters of

⁵² The daily Prothom Alo, 25 June 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=3&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-6-25>

⁵³ The daily Manabzamin, 22 June 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=279824>

⁵⁴ 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>

⁵⁵ The Daily Star, 21 June 2021; <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangla/শীর্ষ-খবর/ইউপি-নির্বাচন-বরিশালের-গৌরনদীতে-বোমা-হামলায়-নিহত-২-233157>

⁵⁶ The daily Manabzamin 22 June 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=279824>

Mohammad Gias Mridha, winning candidate and General Secretary of the union unit Awami League; and Mohammad Aroj Ali Sardar, defeated candidate and former General Secretary of the union unit Awami League in Ward No. 8 of Khanjapur union under Gouranadi Upzila in Barishal.⁵⁷

18. The Awami League nominated candidate Nuruddin Chowdhury and Jatiya Party nominated candidate Sheikh Mohammad Faiz Ullah contested in the by-election in Laxmipur-2 constituency⁵⁸ while BNP and other opposition parties, including the Left Alliance boycotted this election. In the election, leaders and activists of Awami League captured all the polling stations unilaterally.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Awami League's rebel mayoral candidate Afzal Hossain boycotted the Jhalokati Municipality election. Former Joint General Secretary of the district unit Awami League and former mayor Afzal Hossain, said that people wearing the 'boat symbol'⁶⁰ drove his polling agents out of all polling stations immediately after the polls began.⁶¹ Humayun Kabir, Secretary of the Election Commission Secretariat, claimed that the election was peaceful, despite reports of widespread violence and rigging.⁶²



A man injured in a clash between supporters of the Awami League and an independent chairman candidate in Bhola's Tajumuddin's Chachra Union is being rushed to hospital. Photo: Prothom Alo, 22 June 2021

⁵⁷ 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>

⁵⁸ Kazi Shahid Islam Paplu, an independent MP from Laxmipur-2 constituency, was imprisoned by a Kuwaiti court on charges of human trafficking and money laundering. The National Parliament Secretariat published a gazette declaring the seat vacant on 22 February 2021 due to criminal charges.

⁵⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 22 June 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=2&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-6-22>

⁶⁰ The boat is the electoral symbol of the Awami League.

⁶¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 22 June 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=2&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-6-22>

⁶² The daily Prothom Alo, 22 June 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=2&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-6-22>



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

Freedom of Expression, Repressive Laws and Freedom of Media

19. In the three months of April-June 2021, the government has carried out various forms of harassment, including filing cases and arresting citizens, violating freedom of speech, thought, conscience and expression. The Digital Security Act, 2018 has been widely enforced during this period. Although various incidents were not published due to pressure on the media, they were published on social media. As a result, the government also brought the social media under extensive surveillance. The government wants to bring social media like Facebook and YouTube under registration. The Chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has also been instructed in this regard.⁶³

The Digital Security Act, 2018

20. The government is enforcing the Digital Security Act of 2018, against political opponents and dissidents in order to suppress their freedom of speech and expression. Sections 21, 25, 28 and 29 of this Act have been worded in such a manner that if desired, many statements can be created and a case can be filed against any person on the ground that the 'image of high-ranking individuals has been tarnished'. During this reporting period, citizens of different walks of life have been sued and arrested under the Digital Security Act, 2018 for posting or sharing on social media information and posts criticizing government and ruling party Ministers, high-ranking individuals or leaders, including the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and India, for various failures, corruption and massive irregularities.
21. A total of 11 cases have been filed against former VP of DUCSU⁶⁴ Nurul Haque under the Digital Security Act in different parts of the country for making anti-government remarks on Facebook. Furthermore, five cases have been filed under the Digital Security Act against an Islamic speaker Rafiqul

⁶³ The daily Prothom Alo, 3 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/কেসবক-ও-ইউটিউবকে-নিবন্ধনের-আওতায়-আলতে-চায়-সরকার>

⁶⁴ Dhaka University Central Students' Union.

Islam, for making anti-government remarks and he has been arrested and taken into remand. Journalists have also been arrested in cases filed under the Digital Security Act, mainly by the ruling party leaders and activists, for publishing news.⁶⁵ Members of law enforcement agencies arrested accused persons immediately after the cases were filed and there are allegations that the court has delayed in granting bail. It is to be noted that at this time, most of the accused under the Digital Security Act were reported to have posted on various social media criticizing the Bangladeshi and Indian Prime Ministers.

22. **In the three months of April-June 2021, 49 people have been arrested under the Digital Security Act, 2018, for critical posts/comments against the Prime Minister, high-ranking persons of the government and/or their family members and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Furthermore, four persons were arrested for allegedly making derogatory remarks against religion and religious persons.**
23. A Chhatra Dal activist named Hridoy Mia was apprehended by leaders-activists of Awami League and its affiliated organisations on 5 April and handed over to the police, for posting ‘offensive’ pictures of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Facebook, in Bhaluka Upazila under Mymensingh District. Hridoy is a student of class ten, in Kongsherkul High School. A case has been filed against him under the Digital Security Act 2018.⁶⁶
24. NTV’s Khulna District correspondent Abu Tayyab was arrested on 20 April 2021 in a case filed under the Digital Security Act, 2018 for allegedly campaigning against Khulna City Corporation Mayor and Metropolitan Awami League president Talukder Abdul Khaleq, on the social media platform Facebook.⁶⁷ Khulna Metropolitan Magistrate Tariqul Islam rejected the bail petition submitted the defendant’s lawyer during a virtual court hearing on 22 April.⁶⁸



Journalist Abu Tayyab. Photo: Dhaka Tribune, 22 April 2021

⁶⁵ The daily Kaler Kantha, 6 April 2021; <https://www.kalerkantho.com/online/national/2021/04/06/1021171>

⁶⁶ The daily Jugantor, 6 April 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/409302/>

⁶⁷ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar, Khulna

⁶⁸ Dhaka Tribune, 22 April 2021; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2021/04/22/ntv-s-khulna-bureau-chief-denied-bail-in-dsa-case>

25. On 4 May 2021, police arrested Rashed Alam Razzak for making ‘offensive’ comments on Facebook against some people, including Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmed, Sylhet’s Gowainghat Upazila Parishad Chairman Mohammad Farooq Ahmed and Upazila Nirbahi Officer Tahmilur Rahman. Shahin Ahmed, General Secretary of Gowainghat Upazila Shramik League⁶⁹, filed a case against him with Gowainghat Police Station under the Digital Security Act.⁷⁰

Freedom of the media

26. Freedom of the media in Bangladesh is under extreme threat. The ruling Awami League government is in control of most of the media, especially the electronic media, through its supporters and those who need to be subservient in order to function. As a result, the publication of fair and objective news is being hampered and an extreme deficit has been created in the maintaining of professionalism and a neutral media. Most of the media in the country are either distorting or not reporting information regarding the opposing and critical political/non-political organisations and dissidents. Journalists have been subjected to various forms of harassment, including assaults and prosecution under the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018, for publishing various news items, including information of corruption against members of the government and its allies. Pro-opposition electronic and print media - Channel One, Diganta TV, Islamic TV and Amar Desh - have been shut down by the incumbent government for many years. 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.⁷¹
27. **Between April and June 2021, 20 journalists were injured, five were assaulted, five were attacked and four were threatened while carrying out their professional duty.**
28. Leaders and activists of Juba League and Chhatra League attacked the office of Habiganj local newspaper Dainik Amar Habiganj on 19 April 2021 in the presence of police, after the paper published news about various misdeeds of Habiganj Awami League MP Abu Zahir and Mayor Ataur Rahman Selim.⁷²
29. Looting and corruption in the health sector have become extensive since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rozina Islam, a senior reporter of the daily Prothom Alo⁷³, had made a series of reports on corruption in this sector. On 17 May 2021, Rozina Islam went to the Ministry of Health. 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. There she felt unwell. Rozina Islam was handed over to Shahbagh Police at around 8.30 pm. A case was filed against Rozina Islam at Shahbagh Police Station under

⁶⁹ Labour wing of Awami League

⁷⁰ The daily Manabzamin, 5 May 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=272916>

⁷¹ 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>

⁷² The daily Jugantor, 20 April 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/413687/>

⁷³ This is the most popular daily Bangla language paper in the country.

Section 379⁷⁴ of the Penal Code-1860 and Sections 3⁷⁵ and 5⁷⁶ of the Official Secrets Act-1923. The next day, on 18 May, police produced Rozina Islam in court and sought a five-day remand for interrogation. The court did not grant police remand and sent her to jail custody. On 23 May, Rozina Islam got bail from the court.⁷⁷



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

State Repression, Impunity and Lack of Accountability

Torture and lack of accountability of law enforcement agencies

30. Members of law enforcement agencies are enjoying impunity for acting on behalf of the government to crack down on political opponents, government critics and dissidents. As a result, various human rights violations, including widespread torture and degrading treatment of citizens by members of law enforcement agencies have been taking place in the country. In the last three months, members of law enforcement agencies have been charged with various allegations, including the extortion of money even by threatening to kill in crossfire⁷⁸; shooting in the legs; arresting and imprisoning people other than the main accused; kidnapping; harassment; and extortion. There have been allegations of torture and death due to torture in police custody. It is established that the police inflict torture and inhumane treatment in remand to extract 'confessional' statements⁷⁹.

⁷⁴ Punishment for theft: Whoever commits theft shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both. Available at: <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-11.html>

⁷⁵ Penalties for spying. Available at: <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-132/section-6943.html>

⁷⁶ Wrongful communication, etc., of information. Available at: <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-132/section-6997.html>

⁷⁷ The daily Prothomalo, 23 May 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/জামিন-পেলেন-সাংবাদিক-রোজিনা>

⁷⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 9 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/রুমফারারেও-দেওয়া-হতে-পারেদুই-কাটি-টাকা-রেডি-করেন>

⁷⁹ According to laws of remand, criminal procedure and evidence, statements made to the police are not confessional statements. Furthermore, when an accused makes a statement to the Magistrate, the latter must take all measures to ensure that this confession is being given absolutely voluntarily and not due to threats or violence. Sadly, this is rarely followed and case reference and reports show that persons are often convicted base on the 'confession' they gave to the police on remand and in fear of further physical harm or even death threats. See <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/reports/cycle-of-fear-combating-impunity-for-torture-and-strengthening-the-rule-of-law-in-bangladesh>

31. The 'Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act' was passed in 2013 with the collective efforts and pressure of human rights defenders, victim-families and civil society. However, victims of torture or degrading treatment have been harassed and threatened after filing cases under this Act. Some have even been forced to withdraw their cases out of fear. There are allegations that leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League are also involved with members of law enforcement agencies in 'resolving' these matters and settling 'compromises'. The deaths in custody are being investigated by law enforcement officials. As a result, there were allegations that the investigations were not impartial. In most cases, members of law enforcement agencies responsible for torture and custodial death are transferred, suspended or 'closed'⁸⁰ without facing criminal trial, even if the crime is proven. For all these reasons this law remains in force only on paper. In addition, there have been allegations that various reports, including doctor's reports, findings of inquests and postmortems, have often been changed or contain misinformation in the case of torture or death by members of law enforcement agencies.⁸¹
32. International Day in Support of Victims of Torture is commemorated every year on 26 June.⁸² On the occasion of this day, Odhikar and the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) issued a [joint statement](#) demanding justice for the victims of torture and expressing solidarity with the victim-families. Due to the widespread transmission of the coronavirus across the country, human rights defenders have not been able to carry out any programmes with the local people, victims and members of the victim-families in different districts of the country this year.
33. A man named Sanaul Haque Biswas (44) was arrested and beaten to death by a team of the Detective Branch of Police at Bholahat in Chapainawabganj. Sanaul's brother Masud Rana said that on 29 April 2021, a team of DB police led by Sub-Inspector Ripon Kumar Pal, arrested Sanaul when he went to a shop near his house after Iftar. Police then demanded Taka 1 million from his family in exchange for his release. Later they agreed to release him for two hundred thousand Taka. When Sanaul's family refused to give money, police started beating him. Witnesses said that he was hit with a brick and a torch. When Sanaul Haque's condition became serious due to torture, he was taken to Bholahat Upazila Health Complex and later to Chapainawabganj Sadar

⁸⁰ Members of the police are often being 'closed' – meaning sent to the police lines as a petty departmental punishment for their criminal act.

⁸¹ Cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore, who was arrested under the Digital Security Act and was released on bail, filed a case against police under Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act-2013 with the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court on 10 March 2021. Following the case, Judge M Imrul Kayes on 14 March ordered the Director of Dhaka Medical College Hospital to form a three-member committee to examine. On 20 March, the Medical Board of Dhaka Medical College Hospital submitted a report to the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court. According to the report, after examining the physical condition of Ahmed Kabir Kishore and the medical board found no signs of injuries on his body. The daily Prothom Alo, 7 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/কার্টুনিস্ট-কিশোরের-শরীরে-আঘাতের-চিহ্ন-পায়>

⁸² On 10 December 1984, the UN General Assembly adopted a Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, established as a statutory legal force in international law. This treaty came into force on 26 June 1987, and at the same time, in accordance with the resolution adopted by the General Assembly, it was decided to observe 26 June every year as the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. This day has been commemorated in different countries of the world since 1988.

Hospital where he died at around 3:00 am. On 30 April, Mintu Rahman, Inspector (Investigation) of Chapainawabganj Police Station, attempted to sign a document which stated that Sanaul's death was natural, in front of the morgue at Chapainawabganj Sadar Hospital. When the family members objected, new documents were prepared.⁸³ Meanwhile, it was alleged that the officer-in-charge of Bholahat Police Station had given the responsibility to some local Awami League leaders to cover up the incident. Bholahat Upazila Parishad Vice Chairman and local Awami League leader Garibullah Dabir said that the matter should be settled and the body should be buried as soon as possible.⁸⁴ The inquest report of the body was prepared by Executive Magistrate Robin Mia. His report said that there were no signs of injuries on Sanaul's body.⁸⁵ However, a doctor, who wished to remain anonymous, said that there were marks of injuries on various parts of Sanaul's body, including on the knees. When the incident was published in various newspapers, on 1 May, Senior Judicial Magistrate Mohammad Abu Kahar of Bholahat cognizance Court took cognizance of the matter and ordered RAB-5 to investigate and submit a report in this regard.⁸⁶

34. On 1 May 2021, a man named Abul Hossain Mollah (46) died while in remand in the custody of the Detective Branch of Police in Faridpur. Abul Hossain Mollah's daughter Tania Akhter alleged that her father was tortured to death in custody during remand. Mohammad Tofazzal Hossain, a doctor at Faridpur General Hospital, said that police brought Abul Hossain to the hospital dead. Abul Hossain Mollah was arrested on 16 April 2021 in connection with violence that took place on 5 April centering around lockdown in Saltha of Pabna⁸⁷ and was taken to 5-day remand.⁸⁸
35. A woman named Hasina Begum was released from Chittagong Central Jail on 4 May 2021 after being detained for 1 year and 4 months just because her name was the same as that of a woman convicted in a drug case.⁸⁹ On 24 February 2017, a woman named Hasina Akter was arrested with 2000 yaba tablets in Moijartek area under Karnafuli Police Station in Chittagong. Police also arrested her husband and two children. After getting bail, Hasina Akhter and her husband escaped. On 1 July 2019, the Chittagong Additional Sessions Judge's Court gave verdict in the case while Hasina Akhter and her husband were on the run. Both were sentenced to five years rigorous imprisonment. Later their warrants were sent from the court to Teknaf Police Station. Teknaf police arrested Hasina Begum of Ward 7 under Teknaf Municipality on 16 December 2019 and sent her to jail through a court. After learning about the matter, senior lawyer of Chittagong, Golam Murad verified the matter and after confirming who Hasina Begum really was, he applied for her release in

⁸³ The daily Jugantor, 1 May 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/417205/>

⁸⁴ Bangladesh Pratidin, 1 May 2021; <https://www.bd-pratidin.com/last-page/2021/05/01/645062>

⁸⁵ The daily Jugantor, 1 May 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/417205/>

⁸⁶ Law Life Report, 2 May 2021; <https://lawlifebd.com/আদালত-সারাদেশ/গুলিশের-হাতে-আটকের-পর-খবর/>

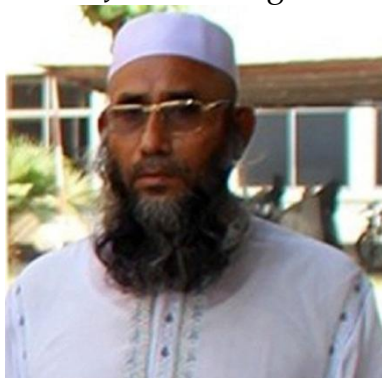
⁸⁷ The daily Manabzamin, 7 April 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=269235>

⁸⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 3 May 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=3&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-5-3>

⁸⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 4 May 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/কারামুক্তিতে-হাসিনার-আনন্দাশ্রু-ফেরত-চান-১৬টি-মাস>

the court on 22 March. Needless to say, she still had to spend almost two month extra in jail as an innocent person before her release.⁹⁰

36. On 20 May 2021, Maulana Iqbal Hossain (62) a leader of Narayanganj District Hefazat-e-Islam, who was detained in Narayanganj District Jail, died at Mitford Hospital in Dhaka. His eldest daughter Mahbuba said that they were informed in the morning that her father was very ill. They came to know in the hospital that he was in the ICU. Her father was declared dead at 3:00 pm. She alleged that her father had been killed without any charge. On 11 April, a team of RAB-11 arrested Maulana Iqbal Hossain, the main accused in the case of vandalism at Royal Resort (hotel) in Sonargaon; and for sabotage on the highway.⁹¹ He was interrogated in police remand and then gave a confessional statement in the Judicial Magistrate Court.⁹²



Maulana Iqbal Hossain, Photo: Dhaka Tribune, 20 May 2021

37. In the night of 16 June 2021, police of Bayezid Police Station in Chittagong picked up Saiful Islam Saif, former Deputy General Secretary of Chittagong Metropolitan unit Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD)⁹³, from his home. Police then took Saif to Arefin Nagar area in the city and shot him in his left leg, injuring him seriously. Saiful Islam Saif was sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital in critical condition. Then on 17 June, he was referred to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) in Dhaka where doctors had no choice but to amputate his left leg.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 4 May 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/কারামুক্তিতে-হাসিনার-আনন্দাশ্রু-করত-চান-১৬টি-মাস>

⁹¹ The daily Naya Dignata, 20 May 2021; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/politics/583017>

⁹² Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar, Narayanganj; Dhaka Tribune, 20 May 2021; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2021/05/20/hefazat-leader-arrested-over-mamunul-resort-scandal-dies>

⁹³ Student wing of the BNP.

⁹⁴ Information sent by local human rights defender associated with Odhikar, Chittagong; New Age, 17 June 2021; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/141037/former-ctg-jcd-leader-shot-in-leg-after-being-picked-up-by-police>



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

Enforced disappearances

38. Enforced disappearances continued in the three months from April to June. The victims were identified as opposition leaders and activists and dissidents. The tendency of law enforcement agencies to deny detention, has become a dangerous trend. Members of the law enforcement agencies have denied any involvement in the abductions of many people and their whereabouts remain untraced. When members of law enforcement agencies deny the detention or someone suddenly disappears, there is extreme anxiety and fear among the family members. Police refuse to take a General Diary or FIR⁹⁵ in these cases and continue to harass the victim-families. Many were shown as arrested after the disappearance. Victims of disappearance do not want to talk about this matter when they return. Although various investigative reports have confirmed disappearances⁹⁶, the government has consistently denied such allegations at the national and international level.
39. Every year in the last week of May, organisations consisting of family members of the disappeared, commemorate the International Week of the

⁹⁵ First Information Report – a report that is lodged after a possible offence occurs and is the basis of the investigation by police.

⁹⁶ On 2 March 2017, disappeared victim Mokhlesur 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 Mokhlesur 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 Mokhlesur 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/today-print-edition/first-page/2017/01/17/93821>)

Disappeared around the world. On the occasion of this week, on 27 May, Human Rights Defenders Network of Odhikar and Mayer Daak, a platform of the families and relatives of the disappeared, jointly organised rallies, human chains and discussion meetings in different districts of the country with members of the families of the disappeared. Police snatched away the banner and prevented the rally in Laxmipur District. Relatives of the disappeared and human rights defenders took a strong stand and were finally able to hold the rally. On 28 May, families of the disappeared, human rights defenders and civil society actors also assembled in front of the National Press Club in Dhaka and formed a human chain to demand the return of disappeared and on 30 May, Odhikar organised a discussion meeting with the families of the disappeared. Odhikar, Mayer Daak, the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) also issued a [joint statement](#) in solidarity with the victim-families.

40. **From April to June 2021, a total of five persons were allegedly disappeared⁹⁷ after being picked up by men claiming to be or dressed as members of law enforcement agencies. Among them, one disappeared person was shown as arrested after a few days of disappearance and the whereabouts of the other four remain unknown**
41. On 2 June 2021, the Detective Branch of Police allegedly picked up cloth merchant Mohammad Noman, madrasa student Mohammad Nasim and the imam⁹⁸ of a mosque Shahidul Islam, from Araihaazar area of Narayanganj. Family members of the disappeared made this allegation at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity on 25 June. At the press conference, Noman's father Sarwar Hossain said that Noman had a garment shop in Bunti Bazar of Araihaazar. On 2 June, Noman left for his shop on a motorcycle. When he reached the market at around 11:00 am, unidentified men claiming to be members of the DB Police stopped Noman's motorcycle and forcibly put him in a microbus. Mohammad Nasim and Shahidul Islam were already in the vehicle. Upon receiving this news, members of the three families went to Araihaazar Police Station to file General Diary but the police refused to do so, saying they should go to Dhaka and Narayanganj instead. The families later went to the office of Superintendent of Police in Narayanganj to find out the reason for the arrests and the whereabouts of the men. No law enforcement agency has yet acknowledged their detention.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ 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.

⁹⁸ Leader of prayers

⁹⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 27 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/২৫-দিন-ধরে-নিখোঁজ-তিন-ভরণ-স্বজনদের-কান্না>



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

Extrajudicial killings

42. Extrajudicial killings are a clear violation of Article 32 of the Constitution and Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Extrajudicial killings continue to occur due to the state's impunity for the perpetrators and dysfunctional justice systems. There are allegations that law enforcement agencies are trying to cover up the killings by calling them "gunfights" or "crossfire." Members of law enforcement agencies have been accused with extrajudicial killings in the past three months.
43. **From April to June 2021, a total of 20 persons were allegedly killed extrajudicially, as reported. Among the 20 persons killed, 12 persons were killed by police, two by RAB, two by BGB, and four were killed by DB Police. Among these 20 persons, eight were killed in 'crossfire', nine were shot to death, and three were tortured to death during this period.**

Human rights violations in prisons

44. Police filed 154 cases of clashes, vandalism and arson between Hefazat-e-Islam leaders and activists on one side and members of law enforcement agencies and ruling Awami League leaders and activists on the other, which occurred from 26 to 28 March during protests against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's arrival to Bangladesh. A large number of 'unnamed' persons, including 3,270 named persons have been accused in those cases – allowing police to make sweeping arrests.¹⁰⁰ After the cases were filed, the police carried out an arbitrary arrest operation and arrested opposition leaders and activists belonging to various groups, including Hefazat, BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. The highest number of arrests was made in Brahmanbaria. As a result, it was learnt that there were many more inmates in Brahmanbaria Jail during this period than the actual capacity. The prison has a capacity of 600 inmates. But as of 30 April, there were 1,700 prisoners incarcerated there.¹⁰¹ Due to impunity, members of law enforcement agencies

¹⁰⁰ New Age, 28 May 2021; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/138993/1230-hefazat-people-arrested-in-2-months>

¹⁰¹ The daily Manabzamin, 1 May 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=272394>

arrested and tortured many citizens without any evidence. Although arrestees were later sent to jail, they were reportedly deprived of medical treatment when they fell ill due to torture. Prisons lack the necessary physicians and modern medical equipment and some prisoners who have been tortured by police, have die due to lack of treatment in jail. The total capacity of prisons across the country is 42,450 inmates. However, as of 30 June 2021, there were 76,449 inmates in the prisons across the country.¹⁰² In addition, allegations of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners, including trade in food, money extorted for meeting with relatives and other irregularities and corruption have been leveled against the officials and employees of almost all prisons in the country.¹⁰³

45. **In the three months of April – June 2021, 18 persons reportedly died in prisons. Among them, 16 persons died due to ‘illness’, one committed suicide and one died due to torture.**

46. 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.¹⁰⁴

Public Lynching

47. People have lost their confidence in the state institutions due to impunity and widespread corruption in the country. As a result, a trend of mob violence is being observed and the crimes to kill the suspects in public lynching continue.

48. **In the three months between April and June 2021, 16 persons were killed in public lynching.**

49. On 1 April 2021, a mentally disabled youth named Syed Noor (28) was beaten to death by locals for allegedly molesting a housewife in Lohagara’s Chunti Union of Chittagong.¹⁰⁵

Death Penalty and Human Rights

50. Criminal laws in Bangladesh contain provisions for the death penalty. Every year accused persons are sentenced to death in the courts. Most of the victims are poor, less educated and disadvantaged people.¹⁰⁶ Death reference cases from different districts of the country are constantly being submitted to the High Court Division of the Supreme Court. The settlement rate is very low compared to the accumulated death reference cases. As a result, detainees become mentally and physically unwell as a result of being kept in condemned cells for many years; and in fear of not knowing when or if their sentences will be carried out.

¹⁰² Available at: <https://www.prison.com.bd/>

¹⁰³ The daily Manabzamin, 8 July 2019; <http://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=180233&cat=3>

¹⁰⁴ CHT News, 29 May 2021; <https://www.chtnews.com/খাগড়াছড়ি-কারাগারে-মিলন/>

¹⁰⁵ The daily Manabzamin, 2 April 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=268543&cat=9>

¹⁰⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 18 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/দেশ-মৃত্যুদণ্ডের-আসামিদের-মাধ্য-দরিদ্র-মানুষ-বেশি-গবেষণা>

51. **As per Odhikar's documentation, two accused persons were executed in jail between April to June 2021.**
52. On 30 May 2021, former army staff Moslem Ali Khan alleged at a press conference in Jhalokati Press Club, that his son Mohiuddin Hasanat had been sentenced to death in a kidnapping and murder case and that he had been framed by SI Joynal Abedin of Siddhirganj Police Station. Moslem Ali Khan also alleged at the press conference that his son's brother-in-law Rifat was abducted in front of his house in Manipur, Dhaka in 2012 and his body was later recovered from Siddhirganj under Narayanganj District. Mohiuddin Hasanat was arrested by SI Joynal Abedin of Siddhirganj Police Station for the death of Rifat. After his arrest, SI Joynal Abedin demanded money from Moslem Ali Khan. The matter was settled for three hundred thousand taka. At first one hundred thousand taka was given and later SI Joynal Abedin accused Mohiuddin Hasanat of kidnapping and killing Rifat after Moslem failed to pay the rest of the money. As a result, the Narayanganj District and Sessions Judge's Court sentenced Mohiuddin Hasanat to death in this case. Moslem Uddin Khan claimed that his son had been sentenced to death in a false and conspiratorial case. He is currently being held in a condemned cell in the jail. On 11 November 2020, Moslem Uddin Khan filed a case against SI Joynal Abedin in Narayanganj Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court.¹⁰⁷
53. On 9 June 2021 a man named Abdul Haque of Bhaktipur Chowdhurypara area under Mithapukur Upazila in Rangpur was hanged at Dinajpur District Jail for killing his wife in February 2002.¹⁰⁸
54. A man named Sirajul Siraj was executed in Sylhet Central Jail in the night of 17 June 2021 on charges of murdering his wife. On 28 February 2007, a judge of the Speedy Trial Tribunal of Sylhet District and Sessions Judge's Court expedited his execution.¹⁰⁹

Violence against Women

55. In the three months from April to June 2021, women have been victims of rape, sexual harassment, dowry violence and domestic violence. Incidents of child rape have risen alarmingly. There are allegations of various forms of oppression and violence against women, made against the leaders and activists of the ruling party. The number of trials and convictions of all these cases is negligible.

Rape

56. Due to the loopholes in the justice system, rapists have been released and incidents of rape are rampant in the country. One of the main reasons behind not getting justice is the non-cooperation of the police. About half of the women and children and their family members or those who go with them to helped them file a rape complaint, are being harassed at the police station while filing such complaints. During this period, leaders and activists of the

¹⁰⁷ The daily Jugantor, 31 May 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/426149/>

¹⁰⁸ The daily Manabzamin, 11 June 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=277878&cat=9/>

¹⁰⁹ The daily Manabzamin, 18 June 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=279188>

ruling party allegedly committed rape and threatened and attacked members of victim-families to make them withdraw the cases.

57. **A reported total of 404 women and children became victims of rape in the last three months. Among them, 153 were women, 239 were girls below the age of 18 while the age of 12 female individuals were unknown. Of the number of women who were raped, 51 were victims of gang rape and six were killed after being raped. Out of the 239 girls, 27 were victims of gang rape, eight were killed after being raped, and one committed suicide. Furthermore, 84 women and girls were also victims of attempted rape during this period.**
58. On 1 April 2021, a housewife was raped in Chandradwip Union under Bauphal Upazila in Patuakhali District. On 2 April, Nilufa Begum, a member of the reserved seat of Chandradwip Union Parishad, went to Bauphal Police Station with the housewife and complained to the Women and Child Abuse Help Desk of the police station. Police later took the victim into their custody. However, Nilufa Begum, who assisted the victim to file a complaint, was detained by a police officer named SI Zahid till late at night in the police station. At that time, the police misbehaved with her and threatened her. After being released from the police station at around 2:00 am, Nilufa Begum took shelter at a relative's house in the city. The next day, on 3 April, when she returned to the area, the rapists threatened her with dire consequences. Although the case was later recorded and the accused Kalam was arrested, no action was taken against SI Zahid.¹¹⁰
59. On 21 May 2021, Mostafizur Rahman Nasir, a former leader of the Awami League-backed Chhatra League at Jagannath University took a 9th grade madrasa student to his friend's house and raped her in Banshkandi Union under Shibchar Upazila in Madaripur District. Family members later rescued the victim from the scene in a critical condition. Mostafizur Rahman Nasir, the rapist, beat the victim's father when he demanded justice.¹¹¹

Sexual harassment/stalking

60. Sexual harassment continued unabated during these three months. Allegations of sexual harassment against women have been made against the leaders and activists of the ruling party during this period. There have also been attacks on protesters.¹¹²
61. **Between April and June 2021, a total of 30 females were victims of sexual violence. Of them, one committed suicide, one was injured, six were assaulted, and 22 were victimised in different ways due to stalking/sexual harassment. Furthermore, eight men were injured while protesting incidents of sexual harassment and three female relatives of victims, were attacked and injured by stalkers while protesting the sexual harassment.**
62. On 22 April 2021, when a schoolgirl was shopping at Sen Market in Dirai Bazar of Sunamganj District, a young man named Ovi grabbed her hand and

¹¹⁰ The daily Jugantor, 3 April 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/408245/>

¹¹¹ The daily Naya Diganta, 30 May 2021; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/more-news/585130/>

¹¹² The daily Prothom Alo, 15 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/উত্তরের-প্রতিবাদ-করায়-বখাটোদের-হামলা-আহত-৭>

sexually harassed her after forcibly taking her inside a shop. At that time people from the vicinity gathered there. Ovi's cousin Sohel Mia, a former Deputy Secretary of Sunamganj District unit Chhatra League, came to the spot and threatened the schoolgirl with acid burns if she told anyone about the incident. The schoolgirl's father filed a case with Dirai Police Station in this regard.¹¹³

Dowry-related violence

63. Violence against women over dowry demands was widespread in the three months from April to June 2021. There have been inhumane incidents of women being burned to death, beaten, suffocated and hacked to death over dowry. There has also been a case where a father committed suicide as he could not raise the dowry money for his daughter's in-law's. Due to lack of rule of law, most of the victims have been deprived from justice. It is to be mentioned that taking and giving dowry is prohibited and a crime as per the Dowry Prohibition Act, 2018.¹¹⁴
64. **A total of 58 women were subjected to dowry violence between April and June 2021. Among them, 14 were killed, 41 were physically abused, and three committed suicide due to dowry demands.**
65. On 9 April 2021, a disabled rickshaw puller named Jamal committed suicide at his residence in Sitakunda, Chittagong after failing to raise money for his daughter's wedding. Jamal married off one of his daughters two months ago. Jamal committed suicide due to constant pressure from the girl's father-in-law for dowry.¹¹⁵

Repression on Labourers

66. From April to June 2021, workers in both the formal and informal sectors have been subjected to various human rights violations. During this period, seven workers were killed when the police opened fire on the protesting workers in Banshkhali of Chittagong. Police attacked workers when they were protesting the closing of the factory without notice, workers being laid off and not being paid wages on time.
67. There are about 3.2 million child labourers in Bangladesh. Among them, 1.3 million children are engaged in hazardous work.¹¹⁶ Children are working in risky jobs like shoe factories in different residential areas of old Dhaka including Kamrangirchar, Bangshal, Chawkbazar and tanneries in Hemayetpur of Savar under Dhaka District. Their average age is between 9 and 12 years.¹¹⁷ According to 34 of the labour law, no child under the age of 14 can be employed in a factory. Besides, children between the ages of 14 to 18 years cannot be employed in risky jobs, as declared by the government.¹¹⁸ The

¹¹³ The daily Manabzamin 24 April 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=271452>

¹¹⁴ Available at: https://www.dpp.gov.bd/upload_file/gazettes/37373_28337.pdf

¹¹⁵ <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/410592>

¹¹⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 1 May 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/শিশুমুক্ত-আট-খাত-কেবল-কাগজকলমে>

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Available at: https://www.dpp.gov.bd/upload_file/gazettes/14212_75510.pdf

main cause of child labour is poverty. Children from extremely poor families are mainly forced to work as child labourers.¹¹⁹

Workers shot dead

68. Bangladeshi company S Alam Group was constructing a coal-mine power plant called SM Power Plant at Gondmara under Banshkhali Upazila in Chittagong District 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 demands, including reduction of working hours, increase of wages, supply of clean water, and introduction of a sewerage system in the construction site.¹²⁰ The workers started protesting on 16 April 2021. Police opened fire on 17 April at protesting workers, killing five workers- Ahmed Reza (18), Roni (22), Shuvo (24), Mohammad Rahat (22), and Mohammad Rayhan (18).¹²¹ Many workers were seriously injured in the incident. Among the injured, Rajeul Islam (25) died on 20 April and Shimul Ahmed (22) died on 21 April while undergoing treatment at two separate private hospitals in Chittagong.¹²² Two cases were filed with Banshkhali Police Station in this regard. Three and a half thousand anonymous people were accused in the cases. Workers feared that the police would conduct mass arrests.¹²³ Police also blamed the workers for the deaths. According to the police case, workers were shot dead by workers and they had weapons in their hands. However on the day of the incident, the police said that they had fired in self-defense.¹²⁴ It is to be mentioned that in 2016, the locals started a movement against the establishment of a coal-mine power plant in the Gondamara area. On 4 April of that year, the locals organised a rally in Gondamara area under the banner of 'Homestead and Land Protection Committee'. On the other hand, Awami League leader Shamsul Alam, a supporter of Mostafizur Rahman, an Awami League MP of that area, called a rally at the same place in favour of a coal-fired power plant. The local administration issued section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure in the area for holding rallies by both parties. When the locals wanted to hold a rally, violating Section 144, the police and miscreants with them opened fire at the locals. Hundreds of people were shot. Among them Mortuza Ali (52) Angur Ali (45), Zaker Ahmed (35), Golam Mohammad (40), Badsha (30) and an unidentified woman of Gondamara area were shot dead.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 1 May 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/শিশুশ্রমমুক্ত-আট-খাত-কেবল-কাগজকলমে>

¹²⁰ The daily Amader Shomoy, 18 April 2021; <https://www.dainikamadershomoy.com/post/311353>

¹²¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 17 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/শ্রমিকেরা-গণবিদ্রোহ-পুলিশের-শরীরে-ইটপাথরের-আঘাত>

¹²² The daily Prothom Alo, 22 April 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?pagedate=2021-4-22&edcode=71&subcode=71&mod=1&pgnum=1&type=a>

¹²³ The daily Prothom Alo, 18 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/বান্শখালী-বিদ্যুৎকেন্দ্রের-নির্মাণকাজ-বন্ধ-২-মাসপা>

¹²⁴ The daily Prothom Alo, 23 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/হত্যার-দাম-চাপানো-হচ্ছে-শ্রমিকদের-ওপরই>

¹²⁵ Bangladesh Protidin, 5 April 2021; <https://www.bd-pratidin.com/first-page/2016/04/05/136710>



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

Situation of RMG factory

69. Closing of factories without informing the garment workers, workers layoffs and non-payment of wages on time are often causes of workers' dissatisfaction in the ready-made garment industry. In many factories workers are still deprived from the right to form trade unions. It was very difficult to form a trade union before the Rana Plaza collapse on 24 April 2013. But after this incident, the matter of registration of trade unions gained momentum due to international pressure. At present the number of trade unions is being increased. However, most of the registered unions are on paper only, i.e. they do not exist at the factory level. The factory owners are registering the union with the workers of their choice so that the ordinary workers cannot organise. Ordinary workers are facing harassment whenever they try to form a union. Many workers have been laid off and attacked. Moreover, the applications of many real trade unions are being rejected. Corrupt officials of the Labour Department are alleged to be involved in this act.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ The daily Prothom Alo, 1 May 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/business/industry/কাপজে-ট্রেড-ইউনিয়নের-সংখ্যাই-বাড়ছে>

70. On 10 May 2021, workers at a garment factory belonging to the Hamim Group in Tongi under Gazipur District staged a protest demanding an extension of the Eid holiday. Police baton charged and later shot at protesting workers. Twelve workers were injured in the incident. The workers were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Most workers had marks of injuries to their legs and backs. Roni Islam, a worker who was shot in the leg, said they stopped work and gathered at Tongi Mill gate demanding extra leave for Eid. At that time the police came and started beating them. The police also charged at them with batons and opened fire.¹²⁷



One of the wounded workers at the Tongi mill gate. Photo: Prothom Alo, 10 May 2021



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

71. In February 2021, owners closed a garment factory called Leni Fashions in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) in Ashulia. On 13 June, factory workers staged a protest demanding payment of arrears of wages and were attacked by police when they tried to block the Nabinagar-Chandra highway.

¹²⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 10 May 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/ছুটি-বাড়াতে-রাস্তায়-শ্রমিকেরা-পুলিশের-গুলিবারিমেটা>

Jasmine Begum, a garment worker at Golddex Garments, was killed when she was hit on the head by an electric pole during a police attack.¹²⁸

Situation of tea-garden industry workers

72. The Minimum Wage Board of the Tea-Garden Industry has finalized the draft wage for the workers. The minimum daily wage for permanent tea workers in accordance with tea garden will be 117-120 taka. Apart from this, workers will get accommodation, rice or flour at subsidized price, two festival allowances of the year and other benefits. The daily wage of apprentice workers is 110 taka. However, Ram Bhajan Koiri, a temporary representative of the tea-garden industry, objected to the draft recommendation and refused to sign it. Ram Bhajan Koiri said that every two years, the wages are adjusted on the basis of an agreement between the tea garden owners and the workers. On the basis of that agreement, the daily wage was fixed at 117-120 taka in accordance with tea garden owners last year. The workers on the wage board calculated the wage required for subsistence and demanded an allowance equal to the basic wage of the two festivals, including Tk. 300 per day.¹²⁹

Rescue and detention of Bangladeshis seeking to migrate to Europe continues

73. Citizens of Bangladesh continue to attempt unlawful migration by crossing the dangerous seas. The human trafficking racket has been active for many years and they are deceiving people and pushing them to a life of horror and even death. No action has ever been taken against the leaders of the human trafficking rings. Bangladeshi nationals seeking illegal migration often die when their boat sinks while crossing the Mediterranean Sea from Libya and Tunisia to Europe. Since 2015, 2,900 Bangladeshis rescued from the Mediterranean Sea with the help of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), have returned home from Libya.¹³⁰
74. The Tunisian Coast Guard rescued 36 Bangladeshis on 18 May, 243 on 27 and 28 May and 164 Bangladeshis on 10 June, while they were crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Italy. In May, Libyan anti-immigration officials rescued 86 Bangladeshi nationals from the clutches of human traffickers in the desert region of Darash at the Algerian border. In the last one month, 529 Bangladeshis have been rescued and detained in Libya and Tunisia while fleeing to Europe after falling into the clutches of human traffickers.¹³¹
75. Although the government claims that the country's economic growth rate has increased, the gap between the rich and the poor is extremely evident. Thousands of opposition leaders and activists have been sued and arrested. Numerous opposition leaders and activists have been subjected to enforced

¹²⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 14 June 2021;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=6&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-6-14>

¹²⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 21 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/business/economics/চাষমিকের-দৈনিক-মজুরি-১২০-টাকার-খসড়া-আগতি>

¹³⁰ The daily Prothom Alo, 14 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/এক-মাসে-উদ্ধার-৫২৯-বাংলাদেশি>

¹³¹ The daily Prothom Alo, 14 June 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/এক-মাসে-উদ্ধার-৫২৯-বাংলাদেশি>

disappearance, torture and extrajudicial killings. In such a situation, many people are going abroad and seeking political asylum. Unemployed youths from the poorer sections of the population and opposition leaders and activists, for political reasons, are risking their lives in the hands of human traffickers or living in inhumane conditions while being detained abroad.

Human Rights Violations on Minority Communities

76. On 18 June 2021, miscreants shot dead Omar Farooq, an imam of a local mosque, who belonged to the Tripura community in Roangchhari Upazila of Bandarban. Omar Farooq changed his name from Beran Chandra Tripura after converting to Islam from Christianity in 2014. Furthermore, he preached Islam and had converted 10/12 people in his area. The deceased Omar Farooq then built a mosque and led the prayers there. It was reported that ever since he became Muslim, some miscreants have been constantly threatening him.¹³²



Omar Farooq. Photo: Help Foundation Bangladesh, 21 June 2021

Interactions with other Countries

India's interference with Bangladesh

77. Acts of India's domination over Bangladesh continue. For years, India has been depriving Bangladesh from its fair share of water during the dry season and most of Bangladesh's rivers are dying. Despite repeated promises, the Indian government has not signed the Teesta Agreement with the Bangladesh government. Now the issue of the Continental Shelf in the Bay of Bengal has been added to the mix. Not only that, the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has been obstructing the construction or renovation of roads or any other infrastructure in the border areas of Bangladesh.
78. On 18 April 2021, India requested the United Nations Commission on Determining the Continental Shelf, not to consider Bangladesh's demands, saying that Bangladesh has determined the continental shelf on the basis of the baseline of the sea surface, which is a part of India. Before India, Myanmar observed Bangladesh's demands in January 2021, but unlike India, it did not challenge Bangladesh's claim. It is to be noted that in 2011 Bangladesh applied to the United Nations for a continental shelf. In October 2020, Bangladesh submitted an amendment to that demand.¹³³

¹³² The daily Manabzamin 21 June 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=279652>

¹³³ The daily Prothom Alo, 18 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/সাগরে-মহীসোপানের-দাবি-বাংলাদেশের-জাতিসংঘে-আপত্তি-ভারতের>

79. The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has stopped the repair work of Obaidul Haque Khandaker Road in Mirsarai, Chittagong on the Bangladesh-India border, claiming that it fell in the no-man's land. As the renovation work was stopped, the transportation of emergency food grains, sick patients and all other normal activities that require the road, have been hampered. There have been several flag meetings between the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and the Indian BSF but no solution has been found.¹³⁴

Human rights violations by Indian BSF

80. From April to June 2021, two Bangladeshis were reported killed and three were injured by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). To date, no incidents of killing and torture by the BSF have been brought to justice.
81. On 5 April 2021, Bangladesh police recovered the body of a young man named Umar Farooq from Bokchar in the border area of Chapainawabganj. Farooq's family members said that Farooq went to India four years ago to work as a construction worker. On his way home, members of the Indian BSF beat him to death and dumped his body into the river.¹³⁵
82. On 29 June 2021, a Bangladeshi youth named Rifat Hossain (34) was shot dead by the BSF members at the Shamsher Nagar border under Patgram Upazila in Lalmonirhat District.¹³⁶

Situation of the Rohingya population

83. Human rights violations against the Rohingya population continue in the Rakhine State of Myanmar and they are fleeing the country and entering Bangladesh. Six Rohingya refugees released from prisons in Myanmar entered Jadimora Shalbagan area of Hnila Union under Teknaf Upazila in Cox's Bazar 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.¹³⁷ 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.¹³⁸
84. 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 on 4 December 2020. On 2 December 2020, the United Nations issued a statement opposing this relocation. The UN commented that the whole process was being carried out on the basis of limited information and by not including them in the

¹³⁴ The daily Jugantor, 29 May 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/425710/>

¹³⁵ The daily Jugantor, 6 April 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/409077/>

¹³⁶ The Daily Star, 29 June 2021; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/bangladeshi-youth-shot-dead-bsf-lalmonirhat-border-2120513>

¹³⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 30 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/মিয়ানমার-থেকে-৬-রোহিঙ্গার-টুকনাকে-অনুপ্রবেশ>

¹³⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 13 June 2021; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/?mod=1&pgnum=16&edcode=71&pagedate=2021-6-13>

process of Rohingya relocation. It was stated that the Rohingyas should be relocated voluntarily and on the basis of accurate information and should be allowed to move freely in the mainland; and that education, health care and all other basic and humanitarian needs and employment opportunities should be ensured.¹³⁹ However the government, ignoring the UN, relocated around 20,000 Rohingya refugees to a shelter project in Bhasanchar in six phases. 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.¹⁴⁰ Soon after the helicopter carrying the delegation landed at Bhasanchar, a large group of Rohingyas marched towards them. Police stopped them and tried to remove them from there. Thousands of Rohingya refugees protested at that time, saying they were in trouble and wanted to return to the camps in Cox's Bazar.¹⁴¹ One of the Rohingya groups threw bricks and smashed the glass of a building called Ware House in Bhasanchar.¹⁴² Several Rohingyas were injured when police charged with batons at them.¹⁴³ Some Rohingya refugees living in Bhasanchar told an international news agency that the Rohingyas wanted to talk to the UN delegation that visited Bhasanchar. Out of about 19,000 Rohingyas in Bhasanchar, only a few were appointed as focal points and it was decided that they should speak. The complaint was that many Rohingyas in Bhasanchar did not want to stay there anymore, but the members of the focal point were vague and did not give a complete picture of the difficulties – making it difficult to get thorough information. For this reason, fearing that the UN delegation would not learn of the actual difficulties they were facing, the Rohingya's wanted others to be allowed to speak and not just the focal point group. The Rohingyas further complained that many of the promises the government had made before being taken to Bhasanchar, had not been fulfilled. They were to be given a monthly allowance and a cow given to each family- which was not given to everyone. No school had been set up for the education of children. The food they were given every month is a minimum. They were also promised they would be able to meet their relatives in Cox's Bazar, but this was not implemented. They are also worried about the bad weather. In the rainy season, water often floods the low island and although some dams have been built, one of them was broken. The Rohingyas are worried about heavy rains and cyclones and the lack of protection. Meanwhile, some Rohingya refugees had fled Bhasanchar.¹⁴⁴ The UNHCR said in a statement on 31 May that it was "deeply concerned" about the

¹³⁹ The daily Prothom Alo, 16 April 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/ভাসানচর-মুদ্রে-দেখেনমনীয়-জাতিসংঘ>

¹⁴⁰ Bangla Tribune, 31 May 2021; <https://www.banglatribune.com/683183/>

¹⁴¹ Bangla Tribune, 31 May 2021; <https://www.banglatribune.com/683183/>

¹⁴² The daily Jugantor, 1 June 2021; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/426689>

¹⁴³ Al Jazeera, 1 June 2021; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/1/rohingya-protest-against-living-conditions-on-bangladesh-island>

¹⁴⁴ All the information in the paragraph is from BBC, 31 May 2021; <https://www.bbc.com/bengali/news-57309085>

aftermath of the Rohingya protests in Bhasanchar. It stated that protection and healthcare of refugees are the priority of the UNHCR.¹⁴⁵



Rohingyas gather after seeing UN representatives. Photo: Bangla Tribune, 31 May 2021

85. Human Rights Watch said in a report, that the Bangladeshi authorities had relocated many Rohingya refugees to Bhasanchar without their full knowledge or consent and prevented them from returning to the mainland. Humanitarian experts in the report expressed concern that there are not enough measures in place to protect Bhasanchar from severe cyclones and tidal surges. Refugees on the island reported inadequate health care and education services, movement restrictions, food crisis, lack of livelihood opportunities and abuse by security forces.¹⁴⁶

Government drops the word 'all countries except Israel' from Bangladesh's passport

86. The word "All countries of the world except Israel can be traveled" has been removed from Bangladesh's e-passport. As a result, there are no more obstacles for Bangladeshi nationals to travel to Israel. However, the government still says Bangladeshi nationals are banned from traveling to Israel.¹⁴⁷ Palestinian Ambassador to Bangladesh, Yusuf S. Y. Ramadan expressed frustration over the issue. He said the change in Bangladesh's passport came at a time when atrocities by Israeli forces continue in Gaza and its surrounding areas. The blood of the Palestinian children on the hands of the Israeli occupying forces has not yet dried. This change in Bangladeshi passport was a gift to Israel.¹⁴⁸ It is to be noted that the phrase 'all countries except Israel' has been added in Bangladeshi passports since the very first passports were issued in an independent Bangladesh.

¹⁴⁵ The daily Mazmin, 1 June 2021; <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=276285>

¹⁴⁶ All information from Human Rights Watch, 7 June 2021; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/07/bangladesh-rohingya-refugees-island-fear-monsoon>

¹⁴⁷ The daily Prothom Alo, 25 May 2021; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/ইসরায়েল-বাদ-পড়ায়-হতাশ-ফিলিস্তিনি-দূত>

¹⁴⁸ The daily Prothom Alo, 25 May 2021

Hindrance to Human Rights Activities

87. The crackdown on Odhikar that began in 2013 continues in 2021. The case filed against Odhikar's Secretary and Director in 2013 under the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 (amended 2009) is still pending in the courts. 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 Crimes Tribunal. Odhikar also applied to the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) under the Prime Minister's Office for the renewal¹⁴⁹ of its registration in 2014, but the registration has still not been renewed. Human rights defenders associated with Odhikar are under surveillance for being vocal against human rights violations. Odhikar has also been forced to resort to self-censorship during the writing and publishing of its reports, due to various obstacles and hindrances to freedom of expression placed by the government.

¹⁴⁹ On 13 May 2019, *Odhikar* filed a Writ Petition (numbered 5402/2019) to 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 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 Bureau of NGO Affairs was asked to respond to the Rule within two weeks, but the NGOAB did not take any action to renew its registration.

Recommendations

1. Democracy must be established by forming an accountable government through free, fair and credible elections under a neutral caretaker government or under the direct supervision of the United Nations. It is unfortunate that we are unable to hold elections without these checks and balances.
2. The electoral system has to be restructured by reorganising the Election Commission and making it a neutral body by replacing subservient members.
3. The government must refrain from repressive, unconstitutional and undemocratic activities. Harassment of opposition political parties and dissidents must be stopped. Opposition and dissidents must be allowed to have freedom of peaceful assembly. The ruling party leaders and activists must stop criminal activities and violence on these rights.
4. Freedoms of expression and the media must be ensured. All repressive and abusive laws, including the Special Powers Act, 1974, the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (amendment 2009 and 2013), the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009 (amended 2012 and 2013) and the Digital Security Act, 2018 and its Rules 2020 should be repealed immediately.
5. The Government must stop enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings. Members of the law enforcement and intelligence agencies who are involved in extrajudicial killings, torture and enforced disappearance must be brought to justice and punished as per law. The disappeared persons must be rescued and returned to their families. Victims of torture must be adequately compensated.
6. 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. The government must accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture; and effectively implement 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*¹⁵⁰.
7. The government must ensure proper implementation of laws to stop violence against women and children and the offenders must be effectively punished under prevalent laws. The ruling party affiliated miscreants who are attacking women should be prosecuted and convicted as per the law if proven guilty. Their political affiliation must not be grounds for acquittal. Section 10 of the Suppression of Repression against Women and Children Act (2000) must be amended to include the full definitions of sexual harassment and stalking as directed by the Court in the matter of *BNWLA and Others Vs. Bangladesh*¹⁵¹.
8. The people involved in the killing of workers engaged in the construction of a coal-mine power plant at Gondmara in Banshkhali, should be brought to justice. The case filed against the workers has to be withdrawn and their 12-point demand accepted.

¹⁵⁰ Available at: <https://www.blast.org.bd/issues/justice/214-3806of1998>

¹⁵¹ Available at: <https://www.blast.org.bd/content/judgement/BNWLA-VS-Bangladesh2.pdf>

9. An enabling environment will have to be created for workers in the readymade garment industry and other industries, including the paying of adequate wages. Workers' rights must be implemented in accordance with the ILO Conventions, ensuring the right to form worker-friendly, unbiased trade unions in all factories, including ready-made garment factories.
10. Fair wage demands made by tea-garden workers need to be accepted and implemented.
11. People involved in human trafficking must be brought to justice. Adequate measures should be taken by Bangladesh embassies abroad to monitor the protection of migrant workers who are victims of financial, physical and mental abuse.
12. India must stop its domination over Bangladesh and comply with Bangladesh's just demands. All human rights violations, including killings and torture of Bangladeshi nationals by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) at the border, must be stopped and India must be compelled to compensate the victims/victim-families.
13. Rohingyas need to be repatriated by establishing and guaranteeing their full civil and political rights. The government has to accept the demands of the Rohingya refugees relocated to Bhasanchar.
14. The ongoing repression and harassment on Odhikar and on human rights defenders associated with Odhikar must stop. The case filed against Odhikar's Secretary and its Director 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.