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The State of the World's Human Rights; Bangladesh 2024

Freedom of expression continued to be stifled by the draconian Cyber Security Act which did not adhere to international laws and standards. Student-led protests faced violence from the police, armed forces and groups aligned with the former ruling party, the Awami League. The violence left hundreds dead and thousands injured and sparked domestic and international pressure for reform. The new interim government began to address the issue of enforced disappearances, however, families of the disappeared were still waiting for truth and justice. Rohingya refugees continued to face dire living conditions in camps, without access to essential services. Religious minorities and Indigenous Peoples faced violence. Garment workers continued to suffer intimidation, harassment and repression of their rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

Background

Following weeks of student-led protests, on 5 August Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to India. An interim government comprised of advisers was formed on 8 August. Subsequent breakdowns of law and order were reported, along with incidents of violence against those with ties to the Awami League party and minority communities, including Indigenous Peoples. The interim government extended an invitation to the OHCHR, the UN human rights office, to investigate human rights violations that took place between 1 July and 15 August.

In August, flash floods and heavy monsoon rains created what authorities referred to as the “worst climate disaster in recent memory”. Climate-induced flooding affected almost 6 million people and displaced at least 500,000.

Freedom of expression

Following mounting domestic and international pressure, in 2023 the government had replaced the Digital Security Act (DSA) with the equally draconian Cyber Security Act (CSA). Despite its repeal, media reports indicated that cases continued to be filed under the DSA as late as April. In February the Rangpur Cyber Tribunal instigated investigations into the editor of a local newspaper and two other people; all were later charged and imprisoned under the DSA.

The CSA was criticized for duplicating problematic provisions of the DSA. It retained 58 of the 62 provisions – 28 were retained verbatim – and enabled severe restrictions on freedom of expression, liberty and privacy.¹ In February, Pinaki Battacharya, a blogger living in exile in France, and six others were charged under the CSA for allegedly distorting images of then prime minister Sheikh Hasina and publishing them on social media. Similarly, in June, 11 people were charged under the CSA for allegedly making “derogatory remarks” about then prime minister Hasina on social media. On 24 December the interim government approved the draft Cyber Protection Ordinance (CPO) which repealed and replaced the CSA. The CPO has been criticized by civil society for its vague, over-broad and repressive provisions, which could be used to stifle freedom of expression.

Selim Khan, a 19-year-old atheist blogger who had expressed views critical of Islam in a private Facebook group, had been arrested and detained under the CSA on 4 November 2023. Despite finally being granted bail on 13 March after several refusals, he was not released until 13 August. His case was ongoing at year’s end.

On 14 August, journalist Rozina Islam was acquitted of allegedly stealing confidential documents. She had been detained under the Official Secrets Act and Penal Code in May 2021 and held for a week before being released on bail. The authorities failed to produce any evidence to substantiate the charges against her.

During the nationwide protests that took place in July-September, authorities enforced an internet blackout on 18 July for six days. Ongoing restrictions were reported. The government alleged the blackout was to combat the spread of misinformation. Civil society groups expressed concern, however, that it hindered human rights monitoring and limited people’s ability to counter misinformation.²

Freedom of peaceful assembly

A quota system that allocated 30% of government jobs to descendants of independence war veterans was reinstated in June. In early July, university students took to the streets in protest demanding equal job opportunities based on merit. Many were concerned the quotas favoured supporters of

the ruling party. The protests took place amid high unemployment rates, including among graduates.

On 15 July, peaceful protesters were violently dispersed by police using unlawful force. Some protesters were allegedly attacked by members of the Bangladesh Chatra League (BCL), a group affiliated with the Awami League, with the support of security forces using batons, sticks and firearms. Students reported being attacked by members of these groups while they were seeking treatment in hospital.

On 16 July, student leader Abu Sayed was intentionally and unlawfully shot by police officers who fired directly at his chest from across the street in circumstances where he posed no threat. Abu Sayed was reported dead upon arrival at the hospital. His was one of six deaths reported on 16 July.

Protests demanding an apology for the violence from former prime minister Sheikh Hasina erupted across the country in solidarity with student protesters. Some protests turned violent and public facilities such as railway stations and highways were reportedly damaged. At midnight on 19 July a nationwide curfew was implemented. Armed forces were deployed and authorities passed “shoot-on-sight” orders.

Amnesty International documented the repeated use of unlawful force by authorities with weapons including assault rifles loaded with lethal ammunition. Authorities fired tear gas into enclosed spaces and used rubber bullets and shotguns loaded with pellets. Lethal and less-lethal weapons were used against unarmed students, violating Bangladesh’s obligations under international law and standards.

According to media reports, between 17 and 29 July, 10,000 protesters were arrested and detained, including student leaders, protest coordinators, bystanders and people providing protesters with food and water. Student leaders Arif Sohel, Rony Sheikh and Sabir Rahman were arrested in July. Their families and lawyers reported being denied access to them while in detention, in violation of their due process rights. Rony was released on bail on 2 August, Arif was released on bail on 3 August, and Sabir was released on bail at the end of July. Most of the students were arrested under mass First Information Reports, (FIRs), where they remained unnamed.

According to local civil society group Human Rights Support Society, the death toll between 16 July and 9 September was at least 875, of whom at least 52% were students. Media reported at least 111 deaths on 4 August alone.

From August onwards, protests called for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s resignation, which culminated in a planned “Long March to Dhaka” on 5

August. Sheikh Hasina fled to India and resigned on 5 August, after 15 years in power.

Women's and girls' rights

Women and girls played a key role in the student protest movement, facing unlawful use of force by the police and reporting violent attacks from groups affiliated with the Awami League. Women who spoke to Amnesty International said they were kicked in their breasts, stomach and head during these attacks. Media reports suggested that women and girls were attacked to deter them from protesting.

Women journalists claimed that their coverage of the protests led to them being targeted by the police, groups affiliated with the Awami League and even protesters.

On 27 July, Nusrat Tabbasum, a student leader and key protest coordinator, was arrested and arbitrarily detained alongside other coordinators. The government claimed they were taken into custody "for their safety". Nusrat Tabbasum was released on 1 August with five others after they went on a 32-hour hunger strike. The coordinators claimed that while in police custody they were coerced into declaring an end to the protests.

Enforced disappearances

According to Odhikar, a Bangladeshi human rights organization, there were 10 reported cases of enforced disappearances between January and June.

After Sheikh Hasina's resignation, three people whose whereabouts had been unknown for years were released from a secret detention facility. They were Michael Chakma, an Indigenous rights activist who was forcibly disappeared in 2019; Abdullahil Aman Azmi, a retired brigadier general and son of the head of the Jamaat-e-Islami party, who was forcibly disappeared in 2016; and Ahmad Bin Quasem, a Supreme Court lawyer, who was also forcibly disappeared in 2016.

On 27 August the interim government set up a five-member Commission of Inquiry to investigate allegations of enforced disappearances that took place between 6 January 2009 and August 2024. On 14 December the Commission published an interim report which detailed the legal frameworks and patterns observed in incidents of disappearances in Bangladesh.

In a welcome step, on 29 August, the interim government acceded to the International Convention against enforced disappearance. However, Bangladesh is a dualist country (one where the government considers international law separate from domestic law) and there was no domestic

legislation enacted to give full effect to the Convention in the domestic system.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

Bangladesh was host to almost 1 million Rohingya refugees who fled violence and persecution in Myanmar. Living conditions in the camps remained dire, especially as more refugees entered Bangladesh due to violence in Myanmar. Refugees in camps experienced food insecurity, a lack of housing and essential services such as healthcare, and were unable to be registered by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency. Many refugees were prevented from entering Bangladesh and were "pushed back" – unlawfully rejected at the border by guards – in violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

Refugees were also victims of floods and landslides in the camps during heavy monsoon rains. A large fire which spread through the camps in January led to at least 800 shelters being burned, affecting the shelter of almost 7,000 refugees. According to UNHCR, authorities and humanitarian agencies provided refugees with temporary emergency shelter, food and medical and psychological support.

Freedom of religion and belief

Authorities failed to protect minority communities from violence, discrimination and harassment. On 5 and 6 August, there was a spate of attacks against Hindu and Ahmadi communities. Houses, places of worship and businesses belonging to religious minorities were attacked and at least one person from the Hindu community was killed.

Indigenous Peoples' rights

In April and May, as part of an ongoing military operation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in south-eastern Bangladesh, over 100 Indigenous Bawm people were arbitrarily arrested on charges including alleged sedition under the draconian Special Powers Act³ They remained in detention at the end of the year.

On 20 September, violence erupted between Bengali settlers and Indigenous Jummo people in the Khagrachari and Rangamati districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The violence left at least three people dead, 15 injured and at least 50 homes and businesses burned.

Workers' rights

Garment workers faced continued repression and crackdowns on their right to freedom of association, assembly and peaceful protest.

At least nine garment workers, along with other workers, including child labourers, were killed by authorities exercising unlawful use of force during the nationwide protests in July and August. During this time, many garment factories were closed for extended periods, leaving workers without wages and forcing many to protest in demand of back pay.

Workers faced arbitrary charges and unlawful use of force, prompting fears of arrest or detention. On 30 September a garment worker was shot dead by police, and at least 41 workers were injured when initially peaceful protests demanding higher wages turned violent.

At least 40,000 garment workers remained at risk of arrest and detention due to legal charges brought against them during wage-related protests in September to November 2023. Despite the announcement on 24 September by the interim government that they would drop these charges, by the end of the year the majority of cases had not been formally dropped.

On 11 September the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association promised to abolish a database of workers. They had previously denied that the database was being used to “blacklist” and prevent the employment of workers associated with trade unions or protests.

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1. [“Bangladesh: Repackaging repression: The cyber security act and the continuing lawfare against dissent in Bangladesh”, 8 August ↩](#)
 2. [“Bangladesh: Further video and photographic analysis confirm police unlawfully used lethal and less-lethal weapons against protesters”, 25 July ↩](#)
 3. [“Bangladesh: Over 100 Indigenous People Arbitrarily Arrested: Bawm Villagers”, 22 May ↩](#)

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Associated documents

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Report on the human rights situation (covering 2024)

Amnesty Report 2024/25: Zur Lage der Menschenrechte weltweit;
Bangladesch 2024 (Periodical Report, German)

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