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BANGLADESH
ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT 2023

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FOREWORD

Since its establishment on 10 October 1994, Odhikar has been continuously struggling to defend the civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of the people. Human rights violations are taking place on a large scale due to the authoritarian rule prevailing in the country. Odhikar is facing extreme state repression and harassment since 2013, and as a result, it has been forced to impose self-censorship in publishing its reports.

Odhikar has published this Annual Human Rights Report 2023 monitoring the country's human rights situation in accordance with international human rights laws and standards and based on reports sent by human rights defenders and data published in various media, despite the continuous harassment and obstruction by the state. Odhikar is profoundly grateful to all the national and international human rights defenders, organisations and well-wishers who have stood by and expressed solidarity with Odhikar during these difficult times.

Website: www.odhikar.org

Facebook: [Odhikar.HumanRights](https://www.facebook.com/Odhikar.HumanRights)

Twitter: @odhikar_bd

Statistics: January - December 2023*

Statistics: January - December 2023*														
Type of Human Rights Violation		January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Extrajudicial killings	Crossfire	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
	Tortured to death	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	1	8
	Shot to death	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	4	3	0	11
	Beaten to death	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Total	1	0	5	0	0	2	1	3	0	6	5	1	24
Enforced Disappearances		2	5	1	4	2	2	0	15	2	2	15	2	52
Death in Jail		15	6	5	10	9	13	12	16	8	12	8	14	128
Political Violence	Killed	8	4	10	13	8	6	6	6	9	15	11	10	106
	Injured	375	1144	521	349	784	440	1044	800	878	621	525	1250	8731
Death Penalty	Sentenced to death	25	18	50	28	50	41	54	40	18	32	34	0	390
	Execution of death sentence	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	5
Human rights violations by Indian BSF	Bangladeshis Killed	2	3	0	2	2	2	1	1	4	3	3	5	28
	Bangladeshis Injured	3	2	0	1	4	4	2	1	2	1	1	7	28
	Total	5	5	0	3	6	6	3	2	6	4	4	12	56
Attack on journalists	Killed	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	3
	Injured	21	17	16	20	10	7	31	11	7	29	8	6	183
	Assaulted	4	10	3	1	7	5	2	8	0	9	3	9	61
	Attacked	0	0	1	4	6	0	2	14	6	12	3	1	49
	Arrested	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	12
	Threatened	3	1	4	3	4	3	3	2	1	3	1	4	32
	Sued	14	5	6	10	1	4	6	19	1	0	5	2	73
	Total	43	33	31	38	28	21	45	56	17	55	21	25	413
Public lynching		6	5	4	2	6	2	6	7	6	4	8	4	60
Arrest under the Digital Security Act, 2018	For allegedly posting critical post against Prime Minister, high-ranking officials of the government, their family members, anti government and the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Bangladesh in social media	9	10	5	4	14	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	48
	For allegedly making derogatory remarks on religion or religious people	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total		12	10	5	4	14	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	51

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In 2023, significant human rights violations were perpetrated prior to the 12th National Parliament elections set for 7 January 2024. These violations included gagging of freedom of speech, denial of right to life and measures taken to deny people's free and fair voting rights. Freedoms of expression and media were severely disrupted, leading to a lack of media coverage on various human rights abuses. Additionally, victims were hesitant to report these incidents due to concerns for their personal safety. Consequently, it is likely that the actual number of human rights violations surpassed the statistics presented in this report.
- The Awami League-led coalition government in Bangladesh abolished the caretaker government system¹ in 2011, disregarding opposition protests and public opinion, in order to extend its own power. Prior to the controversial election in January 2014, which was boycotted by most political parties in Bangladesh, Indian Foreign Secretary Sujata Singh visited the country and convinced the Jatiya Party to participate.² The political crisis in Bangladesh has escalated due to India's active interference in the democratic system, with Indian support favouring the ruling Awami League.³ The Awami League has gained power through disputed parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2018, and aims to retain power in the 7 January 2024 election, by depriving citizens of their right to choose candidates freely.⁴ Throughout 2023, the government has conducted violent crackdowns on the opposition, particularly the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and left-wing political leaders and activists, who have been advocating for a neutral caretaker government for the elections.
- Bangladesh has faced significant international criticism due to severe human rights abuses. In 2021, the United States imposed sanctions on the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and implemented a new visa policy targeting individuals involved in disrupting Bangladesh's democratic election process. As a result, the number of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings decreased to some extent, and the opposition BNP and other political parties were able to organize rallies and meetings. However, the situation still remains concerning in terms of human rights violations.
- In 2023, the Awami League government employed law enforcement agencies and party members to disrupt, attack, and arrest political opponents and dissidents. They launched a widespread arrest campaign targeting leaders and activists from opposition parties, primarily the BNP, by filing politically motivated, trumped-up cases against them. Many of these cases are fabricated, with charges even being brought against individuals who are deceased, bedridden, already incarcerated, or residing abroad.

¹ The caretaker government system was incorporated through the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution when the Awami League was in opposition from 1991 to 1996, on their demand and through a peoples' movement. However, in 2011, without any referendum and ignoring all the protests of the conscious population, the AL abolished the caretaker government system through the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution and enforced the provision of holding national elections under the Awami League (incumbent) government.

² BBC Bangla, 16 November 2018; <https://www.bbc.com/bengali/news-46237664>

³ New Age, 23 December 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/220916/bnp-says-india-backs-dictatorship-in-bangladesh>

⁴ The 10th parliamentary election on 5 January 2014 was held unilaterally despite the boycott of almost all political parties. The elections were not only farcical (153 MPs were elected unopposed before the polls), but were also marked by cases of snatching of ballot boxes, capturing of polling stations and intimidation of voters. The Jatiya Party became the in-parliament opposition but was, in effect, controlled by the Awami League, the party in power. In the 2018 elections, the Jatiya Party remained as 'opposition'. for more information see HRW Report: Democracy in the Crossfire: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/04/29/democracy-crossfire/opposition-violence-and-government-abuses-2014-pre-and-post> and TIB Report: <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangladesh-national-election-2018/bangladesh-election-2018-irregularities-47-out-50-seats-tib-1687840>

There are [allegations of torture](#) against the arrested opposition party members while in jail.⁵

- [Eight BNP leaders](#) and [one Jamaat leader](#) have died in jail custody since 28 October 2023. Over 23,000 leaders and activists of the opposition parties, mostly from the BNP's central leadership to its grassroots level, have been arrested since 28 October⁶ and at least 1,724 opposition political leaders and activists, mostly from the BNP, were sentenced to different terms of imprisonment in alleged fabricated cases between 1 August and 31 December 2023.⁷ While the conviction rate for serious crimes such as violence against women was only 3.6 percent, the conviction rate of opposition party leaders and activists in fictitious political cases was 80 percent.⁸
- Members of the law enforcement agencies and security forces enjoy impunity as the government abuses these forces for political gains. The government arbitrarily arrested opposition leaders and activists, journalists and dissidents and detained them in jails in trumped-up cases registered under various repressive laws, including the Digital Security Act, 2018. Prior to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Bangladesh at the UN Human Rights Council, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [raised serious concerns](#) regarding cases of excessive use of force by state authorities, as well as incidents of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.⁹
- The Awami League government has been accused of exerting control over key government and constitutional institutions, including the Election Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the National Human Rights Commission, and other state institutions, over the past 15 years. These institutions have been politicized and are considered subservient to the government. There are allegations of government interference in the judiciary.¹⁰ The current Election Commission (EC), led by Kazi Habibul Awal, has faced a loss of trust and acceptance from the public, similar to its predecessors. The upcoming twelfth national election has been boycotted by the BNP and other opposition parties.¹¹ Despite this, the EC has organized an election and granted registrations to newly-hatched political parties associated with the current regime, while denying registrations to ten active political parties, including AB Party, Gono Odhikar Parishad, Nagorik Oikya, and Gonosanhati Andolan.¹²
- Meanwhile, since the [announcement of the schedule](#) of the 12th National Parliament elections on the evening of 15 November¹³, election violence and breaches of the electoral code of conduct by the ruling Awami League candidates and (AL) party-backed 'independent' candidates, were persistent across the country. **According to Odhikar documentation, four persons were killed and 1,369 were injured in election-related violence since the announcement of the election schedule.** The election monitoring cell of the Home Ministry received 268 complaints related to

⁵ New Age, 22 December 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/220834/bnp-says-party-people-face-torture-in-jails>

⁶ New Age, 29 December 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/221273/bnp-people-held-while-distributing-leaflets>

⁷ New Age, 1 January 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/221682/1724-opposition-people-convicted-in-five-months>

⁸ Prothom Alo, 22 December 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/opinion/column/ntc21ka34b>

⁹ The Business Standard, 13 November 2023; <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/ohchr-asks-bangladesh-publish-list-detention-locations-ensure-no-one-held-secretly-738542>

¹⁰ New Age, 15 September 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/212231/judiciary-now-under-govts-full-control-bnp>

¹¹ The national election of January 2024 has been termed 'stage polling' by some independent election observers, 'dummy election' by the BNP and 'a farce' by The Economist. Himal South Asia, 28 December 2023; <https://www.himalmag.com/geopolitics-us-europe-china-india-sheikh-hasina-awami-league-2024-bangladesh-election/>

¹² New Age, 17 July 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/206883/10-parties-censure-ec-for-registration-denial>

¹³ Bdnews24.com, 15 November 2023; <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/5ps4txfm44>

violations of the electoral code between 19 and 27 December.¹⁴ The police documented 287 cases of electoral violence, including [shootings, bomb explosions, and arson attacks](#) involving the ruling Awami League and the party-backed ‘independent’ candidates. Most electoral violence was recorded between 30 November and 30 December in 46 districts.¹⁵ However, relevant authorities, including the Election Commission have ignored most of the allegations and complaints.

- The Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, Kamal Uddin Ahmed, has made claims that the human rights situation in the country is positive, despite the ongoing prevalence of widespread and grave human rights violations.¹⁶ There are allegations that the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is being utilized to suppress the opposition and [target individuals](#) and institutions expressing dissent.¹⁷
- In 2023, similar to previous years, the mainstream media in Bangladesh experienced government-imposed censorship. The government consistently restricted the freedom of expression for the opposition and dissidents, while government-supported media outlets refrained from publishing objective reports.
- It has been noted that reprisals against Odhikar, a human rights organization, escalate before each national election. In 2014, the government blocked Odhikar’s foreign funding and launched extensive smear campaigns through pro-government media. In 2013, before the 2014 elections, Odhikar’s Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan were arbitrarily arrested and detained. Ahead of the 2018 elections, the Election Commission revoked Odhikar’s status as an independent election monitoring entity. In September 2023, before the 2024 elections, Odhikar’s Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan were sentenced to two years in prison with a fine, at the end of their trial in the Cyber Crimes Tribunal¹⁸. Additionally, in 2022, the government cancelled Odhikar’s registration with the NGO Affairs Bureau.
- In 2023, leaders and activists of the ruling party were involved in criminal activities with impunity, while internal conflicts within the party escalated. They resorted to using lethal weapons against each other to gain personal control over political and financial benefits. The ruling party members were responsible for a range of criminal acts, including murder, violence against women, suppression of dissidents, attacks on students and opposition gatherings, extortion, drug trafficking, and land grabbing.
- In 2023, law enforcement agencies and Awami League leaders and activists, in support of factory owners¹⁹, attacked workers of garment factories who were publicly demonstrating for better working conditions, including higher wages to cope with rising commodity prices and improved workplace safety. During this period, workers were killed and injured, and many others were illegally arrested and terminated from their employment.

¹⁴ New Age, 31 December 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/221603/polls-code-violations-go-unabated>

¹⁵ New Age, 1 January 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/221674/use-of-guns-crude-bombs-in-polls-violence-continues>

¹⁶ The Business Standard, 15 May 2023; <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/countrys-human-rights-situation-improves-extrajudicial-killing-decreases-nhrc-630710>

¹⁷ In 2013, the ACC commenced acts of harassment on Odhikar as part of the government’s crackdown against the Organisation. After several long months of asking for files and audits that had already been submitted to it by Odhikar, answering queries already answered, and combating unrealising demands, the ACC investigation ultimately closed due to lack of findings against Odhikar.

¹⁸ They were charged under the notorious Information and Communication Technology Act in 2013.

¹⁹ Some information, which may explain why AL supports repressive factory owners, can be found at: <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangladesh-national-election-2018/61.07-percent-elected-mp-are-business-persons-shujan-1683718>, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/182-businessmen-elected-to-parliament>, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/25/world/asia/garment-trade-wields-power-in-bangladesh.html>

- In 2023, there were incidents of attacks and vandalism on places of worship and houses belonging to the Hindu community and Ahmadiyya community and members of ethnic minority groups. There were also reports of members of the ruling Awami League attacking minority communities leading up to the 12th parliamentary elections.
- The presence of a dysfunctional justice system, inadequate law enforcement, and a culture of impunity have resulted in numerous instances of violence against women in Bangladesh. These include rape, sexual harassment, dowry violence, acid attacks, and domestic violence.
- Along the Bangladesh-India border, there have been ongoing instances of killing, torture, and abduction of Bangladeshi citizens by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). These actions have been accompanied by interference from the Indian government in the political, economic, and cultural domains within Bangladesh.
- To restore the democratic system and regain political and economic stability in Bangladesh, there is no alternative other than cancellation of the one-sided election of 7 January 2024, dissolution of the 11th parliament and taking steps to ensure the participation of all pro-democracy parties through negotiations, to create a level playing field. Elections should be conducted within 90 days after dissolution of Parliament in accordance with Article 123 (3) (b) of the Constitution.²⁰

²⁰ <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-367/section-24682.html>

NARRATIVE REPORT

Forthcoming 12th Parliament Elections: State Repression and Violence Against Opposition Parties

1. The National Parliament is very important to a democratic state. The current government has undermined the importance of the National Parliament by compromising the fair electoral system and implementing oppressive policies that contradict both the Constitution²¹ and international law²². Similar to previous instances in 2014 and 2018, the government-controlled Election Commission is set to conduct another one-sided and farcical election on 7 January 2024, with the aim of suppressing the political opposition²³. The government has utilized tactics such as arbitrary detention on fabricated charges to pressure parties and opposition leaders who have chosen to boycott the election. Additionally, they have made various offers to these individuals in an attempt to legitimize the fraudulent nature of the upcoming election.²⁴ Individuals who have chosen not to participate in the elections have faced various forms of harassment. There have been instances of individuals going into hiding or leaving the country to evade pressure and violations.²⁵ Allegedly, the authorities are utilizing state intelligence agencies and the judicial system to carry out these actions.²⁶
2. On 6 July 2023, a special emergency meeting took place at the police headquarters with the aim of expediting the trials of politically motivated cases against opposition party leaders and activists. The objective of this effort was to facilitate a one-sided election by preventing the participation of opposition parties. During the meeting, the police analyzed the cases filed against leaders and activists of the BNP and Jamaat parties since 2013, specifically focusing on charges related to arson and violence.

- *From 1 August to 31 December 2023, at least 1,724 opposition leaders and activists, mostly from the BNP, have been sentenced to different terms of imprisonment. Most of the cases that convicted members of the opposition, were filed either by the police or supporters of the ruling Awami League between 2013 and 2018.*²⁷
- *It is to be noted that important organisers and active leaders were sentenced by the court even at night. Among the sentenced are Sajedul Islam Sumon, who had been abducted and disappeared by law enforcement agencies in December 2013 and his whereabouts still remain unknown; BNP leader Anwar Hossain Mahbub, who died in prison in 2016; BNP leader Imran Nahid, who died in 2019; BNP leader Abu Taher Daiya, who died in 2020; and BNP leader Mumtaz Uddin, who died in 2021.*
- *Courts have not granted bail to the BNP leaders in these politically motivated cases.*

²¹ Article 11 of the Constitution states that the 'Republic shall be a democracy, where basic human rights and freedoms shall be guaranteed, respect for the dignity and worth of human beings shall be ensured and effective participation of the people shall be ensured through elected representatives at all levels of administration.'

²² Article 25(b) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights clearly mentions: 'to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.'

²³ The political opposition, led by the BNP, are demanding free, fair elections under an interim/caretaker system, given the violent and corrupt nature of the 'elections' in 2014 and 2018 and the local level elections, that have all been organized by a partisan Election Commission. These opposition parties have boycotted the elections.

²⁴ Jugantor, 10 December 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/749543/>

²⁵ Manabzamin, 23 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=84866>

²⁶ Prothom Alo, 2 December 2023;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=2129ac3e92b&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=02/12/2023&seid=1>

²⁷ New Age, 1 January 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/221682/1724-opposition-people-convicted-in-five-months>

3. Throughout 2023, in preparation for the 12th National election on 7 January 2024, the government has engaged in systematic attacks on and suppression of leaders and activists from opposition parties, particularly BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. Fictitious and fabricated cases have been filed against BNP leaders and activists, often resulting in arrests without valid warrants. The police have registered cases against “unidentified” individuals, enabling arbitrary arrests and future implication of targeted individuals. Law enforcement agencies have illegally raided and vandalized the houses of opposition leaders and activists, while members of the ruling Awami League party have vandalized and set fire to BNP offices. Sons or brothers of BNP leaders have been arrested in their absence during house raids. Individuals released on bail have been re-arrested at the jail gate or implicated in newly fabricated cases. The police have coerced confessional statements through torture and inhumane treatment during remand custody. Female activists from opposition parties have faced various forms of harassment, including a case where a leader was sexually assaulted, but the police arrested her instead of the perpetrator.²⁸ In addition to targeting BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, the government has also arrested and subjected leaders and activists of other opposition parties, such as the Liberal Democratic Party, Bangladesh Socialist Party, and Gono Odhikar Parishad, to torture and harassment.
4. On 28 October 2023, a peaceful gathering organised by the BNP in Dhaka, was forcefully disrupted by the police and Awami League leaders and activists. Additionally, the central office of the BNP, at Naya Paltan in Dhaka was locked by the police and in 56 Districts, the district offices of the party have also been locked.²⁹ Law enforcement agencies conducted widespread arrests of BNP leaders and activists in Dhaka and throughout the country, and also detained BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, as well as grassroots-level leaders and activists, who are arbitrarily detained in prisons.³⁰



The gate of BNP's central office in Naya Paltan, Dhaka, has been locked since 28 October. Photo: Prothom Alo, 29 November 2023. The police cordoned off the BNP party office. Photo: TBS, 1 November 2023

5. As a result of the widespread arrests, numerous leaders and activists from opposition parties, particularly BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, were compelled to flee their residences across the country. Many of these individuals were reported to be living in dire conditions, seeking refuge in [paddy fields](#), [open grounds](#), and [forests](#).³¹ Local leaders and activists of the Awami League compiled lists of opposition party members, which they then provided to the police. These lists included marked houses of opposition party members, and the Awami League members accompanied the police during the

²⁸ Manabzamin, 19 June 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=61048>

²⁹ Prothom Alo, 29 November 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/politics/bb0ik9u0b3>

³⁰ New Age, 30 December 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/221521/govt-turns-prisons-into-concentration-camps-bnp>

³¹ Manabzamin, 6 November 2023, <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=82121> 8 November and 10 November 2023

arrests of these individuals.³² In 2023, following a pattern from previous years, the police filed a significant number of fabricated cases against opposition party leaders and activists throughout the country. **Since 28 October, a total of 684 cases were registered against opposition parties' leaders and activists, leading to the arrest of 23,460 individuals by the police.**³³ During arrest operations, members of the law enforcement agencies engaged in acts of violence, including torture and shooting, resulting in the deaths of civilians. Furthermore, an incident occurred where a BNP leader died as a result of physical assault inflicted by members of the ruling party and the police.³⁴

- *Swechchasebak Dal*³⁵ leader Md. Zakir Hossain tried to escape when the police raided his house to arrest him at Budichong in Cumilla on the night of 30 October. Locals recovered Zakir's body from the side of the house the next morning. Zakir had marks of handcuff on both arms and was allegedly tortured to death.³⁶
- A joint operation conducted by RAB (Rapid Action Battalion) and BGB (Border Guard Bangladesh) took place on 6 November at the residence of Sultan Chowdhury, the General Secretary of Ukhia Upazila unit BNP in Cox's Bazar. During the operation, as local residents and BNP leaders protested, the police opened fire indiscriminately, resulting in the death of BNP leader Jagir Hossain and several others sustaining injuries.³⁷



Swechchasebak Dal leader Md. Zakir Hossain. (Left) Photo: Manabzamin, 30 October 2023. BNP leader Jagir Hossain, (Right) Photo: Manabzamin, 7 November 2023

6. Numerous people were made accused in the cases filed against opposition leaders and activists. Among them were [deceased persons](#), [expatriates](#) and those who are [already incarcerated](#).

- *Sanaullah Mia, BNP's Central Legal Affairs Secretary and a lawyer, passed away on 27 March 2020. However, the police accused him in a sabotage case, alleging that he had thrown crude bombs at the police in the Mouchak area of Dhaka on 28 October 2023, while returning from BNP's grand rally.*³⁸

³² Samakal, 17 November 2023; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/207977/>

³³ The Daily Star, 28 December 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/national-election-2024/news/over-23000-opposition-men-held-oct-28-3504856>

³⁴ Manabzamin, 1 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=86137>

³⁵ Youth wing of BNP

³⁶ Manabzamin 30 October 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=81009>

³⁷ Manabzamin, 8 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=82447>

³⁸ Manabzamin, 13 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=83251>

- On 2 November 2023, BNP leader Ashfakur Rahman Kakon, along with other top leaders of the Khulna District unit of BNP, was accused in a case filed at Aranghata Police Station in Khulna City. The case alleged their involvement in throwing a petrol bomb at a truck. It should be noted that Kakon has been detained in Khulna District Jail since 26 October 2023, in connection with an alleged sabotage case filed in 2022.³⁹

7. Awami League members have been involved in [attacking](#) BNP leaders and activists, as well as vandalizing their residences.⁴⁰ Additionally, there have been reports of ruling party members vandalizing and setting fire to [BNP's party offices](#) and [business establishments owned by BNP supporters](#).⁴¹ There have been allegations of Awami League leaders and activists locking up business establishments belonging to BNP leaders and activists.⁴² As a result of the attacks by Awami League members, many family members of BNP leaders and activists have fled in order to escape further harm.⁴³ During house raids, the police have reportedly subjected family members of opposition leaders and activists to abuse and threats, in the absence of the targeted individuals. There are also allegations that the police have been arresting family members, including a [wife](#), [fathers](#), [children](#) and [brothers](#)⁴⁴ of BNP leaders and activists when they are unable to locate or apprehend the targeted individuals.

- The police conducted a raid on the house of a BNP leader in Faridpur, during which they vandalized the property and subjected his wife, Renjuara Begum, to threats. As a result of the distress caused during the raid, Renjuara Begum, a school teacher, fell ill and passed away.⁴⁵
- In Sitakunda, Chittagong, a group of criminals, led by local Jubo League leader⁴⁶ Touhid, hacked and shot Nurul Mostafa Bajal to death. Nurul Mostafa Bajal was the elder brother of a Jubo Dal leader.⁴⁷ The perpetrators targeted him after failing to locate the Jubo Dal leader.⁴⁸
- Brothers Maksudul Islam and Shahidul Islam Anik, sons of BNP President Aminul Islam Ashfaq of Kishoreganj Municipality unit, were arrested by the police after failing to apprehend their father.⁴⁹
- A physically challenged BNP leader Rafiqul Islam, was also arrested by the police in a fake 'sabotage' case.⁵⁰
- Putul, the wife of a BNP leader Abdul Hamid, was arrested by police after they failed to apprehend her husband in old Dhaka.⁵¹

³⁹ Samakal, 3 November 2023; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/205509/>

⁴⁰ Prothom Alo, 29 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/xrbfig7tf5>

⁴¹ Prothom Alo, 30 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/7oijr66ri9>

⁴² Prothom Alo, 20 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/xhvsxzs6lh>

⁴³ Manabzamin, 9 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=87403>

⁴⁴ Samakal, 30 Octo 2023; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/2310204954/>

⁴⁵ Prothom Alo, 29 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/1p5s32gshx>

⁴⁶ Youth wing of Awami League

⁴⁷ Youth wing of BNP

⁴⁸ Manabzamin, 26 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=90091>

⁴⁹ Manabzamin, 13 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=88067>

⁵⁰ Jugantor, 30 November 2023; https://epaper.jugantor.com/storage/2023-11-30/16/link_img_second_ed_1701304724_8.jpg, <https://epaper.jugantor.com/second-edition/2023-11-30?page=16>

⁵¹ Manabzamin, 29 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=85794>



Police arrested physically challenged Rafiqul in the case of 'sabotage' and took him to Dhaka CMM Court (Left). Photo: Jugantar, 30 November 2023. Noori, daughter of Putul and BNP leader Abdul Hamid, cries during a rally protesting the arrest of her mother (Right). Photo: Manabzamin, 30 November 2023

8. It is alleged that the police also [tortured](#) opposition leaders and activists after their arrest.⁵² Detained BNP leaders have [died in police custody](#) and in [prisons](#) due to torture, BNP leaders died or fell sick after having been tortured.⁵³
9. Many BNP leaders and activists lost their jobs, business establishments have been closed and goods have been destroyed as they have fled due to police raids and attacks by Awami League leaders and activists. As a result, their families are living in extreme financial crisis.⁵⁴
10. In addition to police raids and attacks by Awami League activists, there have been reports of clandestine assaults on opposition party leaders and activists, particularly targeting BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami members. These attacks are carried out by individuals wearing masks and helmets, arriving in vehicles such as microbuses or motorcycles without number plates. They violently assault their victims, often breaking their arms and legs, before forcibly taking them from their residences.⁵⁵ The attackers injure them with sharp weapons, cut their limbs and shoot them.⁵⁶ Four opposition leaders and activists were killed and many were seriously injured in such attacks.⁵⁷ The police did not arrest anyone in connection with these incidents, but the victims of such attacks were arrested under the Special Powers Act, 1974 and the Explosive Substances Act, 1908.⁵⁸

Impediments and attacks on opposition parties' rallies

11. In 2023, the government persisted in its [crackdown on political opposition and dissidents](#), curtailing their right to peaceful assembly. During this period, police and Awami League leaders and activists [attacked peaceful meetings and processions](#) of BNP and other opposition political parties and [different organisations](#) protesting or seeking various demands.⁵⁹ In many cases, the police and Chhatra League⁶⁰ jointly conducted these [attacks and vandalised](#) meeting stages.⁶¹ Cases have been filed

⁵² Prothom Alo, 11 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/piu95q2s3m>

⁵³ Jugantar, 4 December 2023; <https://www.jugantar.com/national/747518/>

⁵⁴ Samakal, 28 November 2023; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/209882/>

⁵⁵ Naya Diganta, 3 December 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/post-editorial/795907/>

⁵⁶ Prothom Alo, 14 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/t1g75vb70r>

⁵⁷ Manabzamin, 4 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=86597>

⁵⁸ Prothom Alo, 2 December 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/mbdqzvy4gf>

⁵⁹ Samakal, 11 February 2023; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2023-02-11/16/4190>

⁶⁰ Student wing of Awami League

⁶¹ The Daily Star, 26 September 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/news/cops-al-activists-vandalise-rally-stage-3427951>

against the opposition party leaders and activists for alleged sabotage and conspiracy after arresting them from indoor meetings.⁶²

12. It is to be noted that on 6 December 2023, the international organisation **CIVICUS** downgraded Bangladesh's civic space to '**closed**'. This is the worst rating. The downgrade is the result of a massive government crackdown on opposition leaders and independent critics ahead of the national elections scheduled for 7 January 2024.

- The police [*charged with batons*](#) at BNP leaders and activists while they were marching to the Martyr's Sanctuary to pay tribute to the liberation war martyrs on 26 March in Durgapur of Netrokona.
- Police [*attacked a procession*](#) organised by Sramik Dal in Khulna and [*demolished a stage*](#) set up by the Sramik Dal in Kishorganj to mark international labour Day on 1 May.

13. The Awami League called a rally on the same date and at the same place of the 28 October BNP programme, which had been approved earlier, and thus stopped the BNP rally by using the administration to issue Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.⁶³ It has been alleged that [*families and relatives of expatriate*](#) or exiled BNP leaders and activists, have been threatened and harassed in the country as the exiled BNP leaders and activists had participated in protest rallies against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina outside the country.⁶⁴ The Awami League deliberately announced programmes on the same date, time, and venue - copying every programme of the BNP - to create an atmosphere of conflict across the country.⁶⁵ During this period, leaders and activists of the ruling party and the police attacked all kinds of peaceful programmes, including BNP's [*divisional rallies*](#), [*founding anniversary*](#), [*sit-in programmes*](#) at the entrance of Dhaka, [*protest rallies*](#), [*road march programmes*](#). Moreover, members of Awami League took to the streets to obstruct the leaders and activists of the opposition and attacked them on their way to and from the rallies.⁶⁶
14. The BNP organised its rally on 28 October 2023, and the internet was shut down around the Naya Paltan area in Dhaka – the venue of the BNP's rally- while internet service remained uninterrupted at the Awami League's gathering place.⁶⁷ Even before the BNP rally commenced, the police conducted arrest operations across the country. The leaders and activists of Awami League and its affiliated organisations took position with sticks, at different entry points to Dhaka to prevent the BNP leaders and activists from entering and joining the rally.⁶⁸ The police searched people on the roads, and at the entry points of Dhaka.⁶⁹ At that time, apart from BNP leaders and activists, the police also arrested ordinary people.⁷⁰ There were also allegations of enforced disappearance.

⁶² Jugantor, 7 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/683280/>

⁶³ Samakal, 7 April 2023; <https://samakal.com/uk/article/2304166557/>

⁶⁴ Manabzamin, 20 October 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=79366>

⁶⁵ New Age, 15 February 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/194476/>

⁶⁶ Jugantor, 12 February 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/644447/>

⁶⁷ Prothom Alo, 28 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/bq5whyppgrc>

⁶⁸ Jugantor, 27 October 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/733567/>

⁶⁹ Jugantor, 28 October 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/others/733927/>

⁷⁰ Prothom Alo, 27 octobre 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/900zgi7o61>



Jubo League members takes position with sticks in Savar to prevent BNP leaders and activists from participating 28 October rally. Photo: Jugantar, 27 October 2023.

- The mother of an arrested rickshaw puller said in the court premises, that her son was arrested by the police on allegation of being involved in BNP politics, but her son does not do any politics. She said that they cannot even eat three meals a day. Police also demanded 500 taka from her to see her son. She has no money to post bail for her son.⁷¹
- On 16 October, Jubo Dal leader Jane Alam (46) was picked up by the police of Noapara outpost when he was travelling to Chittagong City from his home in Raujan. The police, however, refused to acknowledge the arrest although Alam remained disappeared. Three days later, on 19 October, he was shown as arrested and produced him before a Court with weapons, in a case of preparing to commit robbery.⁷²

15. On 28 October, BNP leaders and activists, who were stationed at the Kakrail intersection in Dhaka City, were chased by the police. On that day, ruling party leaders and activists who came to the ‘Peace Rally’ organised by Awami League, deliberately shouted provocative slogans at the BNP rally ground and that prompted a clash with the BNP leaders and activists.⁷³ At that time, police attacked the BNP leaders and activists and hurled sound grenades, bullets and tear gas shells, triggering another clash between the police and BNP supporters. The AB Party, also boycotting the election, held an anti- government rally on 28 October as well.

- A Jubo Dal leader named Shamim Molla was killed in police firing and a police constable named Amirul Islam Parvez was killed in an attack by miscreants during the 28 October clash.⁷⁴ At that time, incidents of vandalism took place and miscreants set police boxes and buses on fire. Driver Monir Hossain claimed that the two youths who set fire to the vehicle in Kakrail area were wearing ‘DB’s jacket’. The vehicle was requisitioned by the police.⁷⁵
- The BNP rally stopped due to attacks by police and Awami League leaders and activists. Furthermore, the police and Awami League members attacked and vandalized the AB Party office at Bijaynagar in Dhaka.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Manabzamin, 10 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=82824>

⁷² The Daily Star, 22 October 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/jubo-dal-leader-shown-arrested-after-3-days-family-3450196>

⁷³ Jugantor, 29 October 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/733942/>

⁷⁴ Jugantor, 20 November 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/others/741990/>

⁷⁵ Jugantor, 29 October 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/734108/>

⁷⁶ Prothom Alo, 28 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/qps07pnhps>



AB Party office vandalised and an injured party leader. Photo: Prothom Alo, 28 October 2023

16. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern over the incident in a statement, saying that on 28 October, protesters allegedly attacked the residence of the Chief Justice and several other judges. About 30 journalists were assaulted by protesters and masked men came on motorbikes. It is believed that these attackers were supporters of the ruling party.⁷⁷
17. In 2023, BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, along with other opposition political parties and organisations, were attacked by the police and the ruling party members and the programmes were cancelled on government orders. Some examples are given below:

- On 3 October, Swechchasebak League attacked the rally of the [Gono Odhikar Parishad in Tangail](#), and the police baton-charged at the [Left Alliance in Rangpur](#) and at a [lawyers' procession in Faridpur](#) on 26 November.
- On 10 October, Chhatra League attacked leaders and activists of the Democratic Student Alliance who were distributing leaflets at Chittagong University.⁷⁸
- On 6 December, the Left Democratic Alliance's programme on the occasion of 'Fall of Autocracy Day' in Bogura was stopped by the Executive Magistrate.⁷⁹
- On 10 December, police obstructed and attacked rallies and human chains organised by the BNP in various parts of the country on the occasion of International Human Rights Day.⁸⁰ On this day, the police opened fire and threw tear gas shells when a clash broke out between the police and BNP leaders and activists in Habiganj. Over a hundred BNP leaders and activists were injured in this incident.⁸¹
- On 16 December, Islami Chhatra Shibir⁸² held a rally in Dhaka's Mirpur on the occasion of Victory Day. Police, Chhatra League and Jubo League leaders and activists jointly attacked the rally and injured 10 people. At that time, 11 people were arrested.⁸³
- On 23 December, police attacked a peaceful programme in Sylhet and arrested two BNP leaders for creating public opinion about the non-cooperation movement.⁸⁴
- A number of leaders and activists of Gonotantra Mancha were injured when the police attacked their procession, calling for the boycott of one-sided elections, on 26 December in Dhaka.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ Manabzamin, 31 October 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=81219>

⁷⁸ Prothom Alo, 10 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/4d6ns5qib5>

⁷⁹ Samakal, 8 December 2023; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2023-12-08/6/3006>

⁸⁰ Prothom Alo, 11 December 2023, <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=111254f852ce&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=11/12/2023&seid=1>

⁸¹ Manabzamin, 11 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=87729>

⁸² Student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami

⁸³ Manabzamin, 17 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=88642>

⁸⁴ Manabzamin, 24 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=89738>

⁸⁵ Prothom Alo, 27 December 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/2iopmvuro2>



At one stage of the altercations with the police in Motijheel, Dhaka, leaders and activists of Gonotantra Mancha were attacked by the police. Photo: Prothom Alo, 27 December 2023

18. On 12 December, the Election Commission, in a letter, directed the Ministry of Home Affairs to take necessary measures to prevent all political rallies except election campaigns, from 18 December until the national elections.⁸⁶ In view of this letter, the government issued a ban on meetings and rallies from 14 December.⁸⁷
19. BNP started holding constant strikes and blockades across the country in protest of the stoppage of its 28 October rally. During the strikes and blockades, many [buses](#), [trains](#) and cars were [vandalized and set on fire](#), resulting in loss of property, livelihood and life.⁸⁸ The government and the opposition have blamed each other for these incidents, but the actual culprits remain unknown. During the strike-blockade, clashes between the opposition leaders-activists and the police and members of Awami League took place in different parts of the country.⁸⁹ During the general strike on 29 October, a BNP leader named Mohammad Abdur Rashid was allegedly [beaten to death](#) by criminals in Mohammadpur, Dhaka.⁹⁰ On 22 November, when Chhatra Dal⁹¹ brought out a procession with torches in Feni, in support of the blockade, a group led by a Jubo League leader opened fire on the procession, injuring 10 leaders and activists of Chhatra Dal.⁹²
20. In 2023, there have been widespread allegations of violence and criminal activities against leaders and activists affiliated with the ruling Awami League, Jubo League, Chhatra League, and other associated organisations. These incidents highlight a lack of accountability and impunity. Furthermore, clashes have occurred among ruling party members themselves as they vie for dominance and establish supremacy within their ranks.⁹³ During this reporting period, there were allegations of various types of violence against the Awami League and its member organisations, including [extortion](#), [taking bribes](#) in the name of providing jobs, [corruption](#), [control of Jalmahals and Balumahals](#),⁹⁴ [rape](#), [stabbing businessmen](#), [beating teachers](#), and [attacks on doctors and government officials](#). During this period, firearms were openly carried in the processions of the ruling party, but the police did not take any action in this regard.⁹⁵

⁸⁶ Prothom Alo, 13 December 2023;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=13125d1fbe54&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=13/12/2023&seid=1>

⁸⁷ Jugantor, 15 December 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/751524/>

⁸⁸ Samakal, 5 November 2023; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2023-11-05/1/1689>

⁸⁹ Jugantor, 29 October 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/734206/> and Manabzamin, 29 October 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=80808>

⁹⁰ Prothom Alo, 29 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/499iedyn36>

⁹¹ Student wing of BNP

⁹² Manabzamin, 23 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=84861>

⁹³ Naya Diganta, 2 October 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/first-page/781191/>

⁹⁴ Jalmahals are wetlands popularly known as fishery estate while the Balumahals are designated places in the rivers where sand is lifted from. Prothom Alo, 30 November 2023

⁹⁵ Prothom Alo, 13 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/yza67jamtf>

Awami League leaders have even publicly threatened to kill US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas, who has constantly highlighted Bangladesh's democracy and human rights situation.⁹⁶



A man carrying gun during a procession brought out by Awami League at Notun Bazar area in Nandail, Mymensingh. Photo: Prothom Alo, 12 November 2023

21. In 2023, many ordinary students were injured due to the reckless violence of Chhatra League leaders and activists, in different places and educational institutions across the country. Allegations of various types of violence have been found against them, including [occupying seats in the residential hall of the universities](#), [beating students](#) and [sexually assaulting them](#). In these incidents, the administration of the educational institutions acquitted the accused Chhatra League leaders and activists.⁹⁷ On 14 December, four leaders of Chhatra Union⁹⁸, including its university unit president Meghmallar Bose and general secretary Moin Ahmed, were beaten and injured by supporters of the university unit Chhatra League general secretary Tanvir Hasan Saikat, in Dhaka University. Meghmallar Bose, who suffered severe eye injuries, was admitted to a hospital in Dhaka.⁹⁹



Chhatra Union leader Meghmallar was attacked and injured by the Chhatra League activists and treated at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Photo: Daily Star, 14 December 2023

⁹⁶ The Business Standard, 16 November 2023; <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/coxs-bazar-al-leader-threatens-kill-us-ambassador-peter-haas-740574>

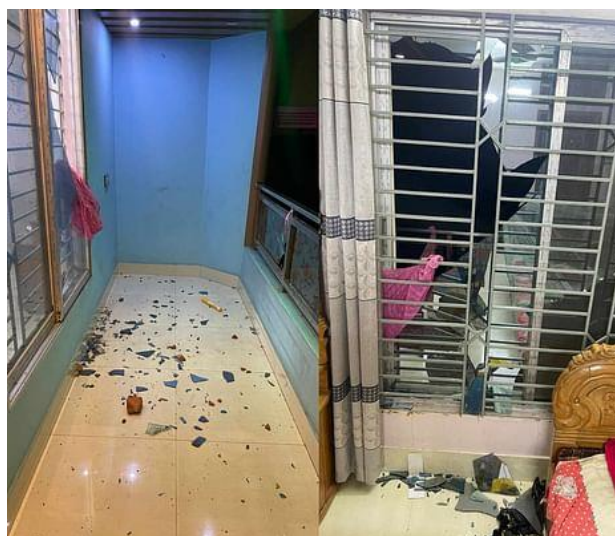
⁹⁷ Prothom Alo, 23 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/g300lmfnx/>

⁹⁸ Student wing of the Communist Party of Bangladesh

⁹⁹ Samakal, 15 December 2023; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/212944/>

22. Since the hindrance to the BNP rally on 28 October, incidents of attacks, vandalism and the throwing of hand-made bombs, continued at the houses and business premises belonging to top and grassroots level leaders and activists of BNP across the country.¹⁰⁰ It is alleged that Awami League members wearing masks or helmets carried out such attacks.¹⁰¹

- On 20 November, a man named Mohammad Monir Bayati was reportedly killed in a bomb explosion while making bombs at the house of Bhola Chhatra League leader Shariful Islam.¹⁰²
- A man named Fazlul Haque died in Dhaka Medical College Hospital on 23 December, in an explosion while making a bomb at the house of Sramik League leader¹⁰³ Motaleb Sarkar in Belkuchi, in Sirajganj.¹⁰⁴



Masked miscreants broke the windows of the house of Kumira Union unit Jubo Dal President Md. Alamgir in Sitakunda, Chittagong. Photo: Prothom Alo, 21 November 2023

23. In addition to violence, Awami League leaders and activists have become owners of huge wealth through criminalization and embezzlement.¹⁰⁵ Due to the increase in commodity prices, the ordinary people in the country are either facing or living in poverty and economic crisis, but most of the leaders and activists of the ruling party are living a luxurious life.¹⁰⁶ Awami League nominees and their independent candidates have acquired huge wealth in the last 15 years, according to the asset declarations submitted with the nomination papers for the upcoming national elections.¹⁰⁷ It has also been reported that the wealth of their wives and children has also increased manifold.¹⁰⁸

24. In 2023, at least 106 people were killed and 8,731 were injured in political violence. Election-related violence is included within these statistics. Furthermore, 420 incidents of internal violence within Awami League and 29

¹⁰⁰ Prothom Alo, 22 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/k67qdehguv>

¹⁰¹ Prothom Alo 21 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/37bwm0z9k2>

¹⁰² Prothom Alo 21 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/xklf57i6cn>

¹⁰³ Labour wing of Awami League

¹⁰⁴ Manabzamin, 24 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=89737>

¹⁰⁵ Samakal, 4 November 2023; <https://samakal.com/crime/article/205627/>

¹⁰⁶ Samakal, 18 November 2023; <https://samakal.com/capital/article/208144/>

¹⁰⁷ Jugantor, 6 December 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/748016/>

¹⁰⁸ Manabzamin, 7 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=87095>

incidents of internal violence within BNP were recorded. 31 persons were killed and 3,123 were injured in internal conflicts within Awami League while six persons were killed and 254 persons were injured in internal conflicts within BNP.

Constitutional and State Institutions

25. The Awami League government has turned various state institutions, including the Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and National Human Rights Commission, into subservient institutions through politicization. There are allegations that the government is also [controlling the Judiciary](#).¹⁰⁹
26. The Election Commission is notoriously subservient and even made no comment after Awami League's Presidium Member and Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque said in an interview with the private television channel, Channel 24, that "BNP did not accept the proposal we offered, of joining the election in exchange for all its detained leaders getting released overnight. BNP leaders would have been exempted if it participated in the elections".¹¹⁰ The National Human Rights Commission remained silent on the issues of gross human rights violations, despite widespread reports of persecution of opposition leaders and activists, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, mass arrests and torture and the persecution of human rights defenders. Rather, the current chairman of the Commission, Kamal Uddin Ahmed, commented that the human rights situation in the country was praiseworthy.¹¹¹ There are allegations against the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) that the ACC is being used to suppress the opposition and dissenting individuals and institutions. There are various allegations of [corruption](#) against [Ministers](#), [Members of Parliament of the ruling party](#), [influential politicians](#) and people of various professions who support the government and [government officials](#).¹¹² Most of the ill-gotten money has been [laundered abroad](#).¹¹³ Even though the ACC investigated the corruption in some cases, most of the accused are acquitted.¹¹⁴

The Election Commission

27. During the tenure of the Awami League, three Election Commissions have overseen elections over the past 15 years. However, each commission has lost the trust and acceptance of the people due to both perceived and obvious bias towards the ruling party. Consequently, the Election Commission has become a dysfunctional institution. On 15 July 2023, the Election Commission registered several new, relatively unknown political parties with government support, but did not grant registration to ten active political parties, including AB Party, Gono Odhikar Parishad, Nagrik Oikya and Gonosanghati Andolon. These newly registered parties are participating in what is perceived as a manipulated election organised by the government.¹¹⁵
28. The local level, municipal and by-elections, conducted prior to the national elections under the leadership of Kazi Habibul Awal in the Election Commission, were marred by widespread violence and irregularities, rendering them unacceptable to many. The main opposition party,

¹⁰⁹ Manabzamin, 2 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=56798>

¹¹⁰ New Age, 17 December 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/220456/promise-of-releasing-all-leaders-fails-to-convince-bnp-to-join-polls-says-razzaque>

¹¹¹ Samakal, 7 May 2023; <https://samakal.com/world-australia/article/2305171200> ;

¹¹² Samakal, 31 January 2023; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/2301154142/> and Samakal, 2 March 2023; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/2303159844/>

¹¹³ Prothom Alo, 14 January 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/gfkryulc4h>

¹¹⁴ Manabzamin, 10 January 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=37679>

¹¹⁵ New Age, 25 July 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/207817/police-intercept-gono-odhikar-parisad-march-towards-ec>

BNP, along with other political parties, including left-wing parties, boycotted all elections held under this Commission, be it for local government or vacant seats in the national parliament through by-elections. As a result of the boycott and lack of confidence, voter turnout in these elections was notably low.¹¹⁶ Most of the voters [boycotted](#) these elections.¹¹⁷

29. By-elections of the National Parliament and [local government elections](#) held in 2023 were marred by extensive rigging and fraudulent practices.¹¹⁸ Instances of casting [fake votes](#), [stamping ballot papers](#) and stuffing ballot boxes before and during polls were reported. Moreover, there were incidents of controlling polling centres and expelling polling agents affiliated with rival candidates of the Awami League. In many of these elections, Awami League candidates were allegedly “selected” through various irregularities and voter manipulation.¹¹⁹ The ruling party candidates used the administration to [intimidate supporters](#) of rival candidates to [prevent voters](#) from going to the polling stations¹²⁰ and to [attack and expel](#) the opposition candidate's polling agents from the polling stations.¹²¹



Ballots are being stamped openly in Talshahar Pashchim Government Primary School polling centre in Ashuganj during Brahmanbaria-2 by-election. Photo: Prothom Alo, 5 November 2023.

30. The Election Commission announced the schedule for the 12th National Parliament election on 15 November 2023.¹²² Before announcing the schedule, the Chief Election Commissioner commented that a [favourable environment for fair election was not developed](#). With disregard to his own comment, he announced this schedule unilaterally. Although most of the political parties of the country, including BNP rejected the election schedule, Awami League welcomed it and held a joyous procession all over the country.¹²³ To create an appearance of participation in the one-sided election, the ruling party decided that no party action would be taken against

¹¹⁶ Jugantor, 29 April 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/669420/>

¹¹⁷ The Daily Star, 17 July 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/elections/news/ctg-10-polls-independent-candidate-assaulted-polling-centre-3382076>

¹¹⁸ New Age, 7 September 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/print/article/211509>

¹¹⁹ Jugantor, 18 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/687579/>

¹²⁰ Samakal, 2 February 2023; <https://samakal.com/lifestyle/article/2302154502/>

¹²¹ Manabzamin, 13 June 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=60160>

¹²² Prothom Alo, 16 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/4yfus8kwke>

¹²³ Jugantor, 16 November 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/others/740613/>

those leaders affiliated with the Awami League, who chose to participate as independent candidates. This leniency was granted because their nomination papers had not been accepted by the party.¹²⁴ It is to be noted that most of the independent candidates are Awami League ‘dummy candidates’.

31. Despite what is to be a one-sided election, [electoral violence](#) occurred between supporters of Awami League nominated candidates and its party-backed independent candidates (most of whom are Awami League party leaders), across the country, resulting in [injuries](#) and [deaths](#). During this period [election camps were set on fire](#) and incidents of [‘secret attacks’](#) took place. The police recorded 287 incidents of electoral violence involving the ruling Awami League and the party-backed ‘independent’ candidates. Most electoral violence was reported in over 46 districts between 18 and 30 December.¹²⁵ Voters are being intimidated with various threats if they do not vote on the ‘Boat’ symbol.¹²⁶ Awami League leader Abdur Rauf in Tangail said during speech at a Waj Mahafil that people do not need to go to the polling centres, if they are not going to vote for ‘boat’.¹²⁷
32. People loyal to the Awami League have been [appointed as Presiding Officers](#) and they [campaigned](#) for Awami League nominated candidates.¹²⁸ Breach of the [electoral code of conduct](#) continues unabated by Awami League nominated candidates. For example, the Election Commission refrained from taking any effective action against the display of the national flag on a Minister’s car taking part in the election campaign, violating the code of conduct.¹²⁹ Instead of implementing meaningful penalties, the Commission primarily resorted to issuing warnings in most cases.¹³⁰



National flag being used on Heath Minister Zahid Malek’s car that took part in the election campaign in Manikganj. Photo: Prothom Alo, 25 December 2023

¹²⁴ Manabzamin, 27 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=85494>

¹²⁵ New Age, 1 January 2024; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/221674/use-of-guns-crude-bombs-in-polls-violence-continues>

¹²⁶ Jugantor, 27 December 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/755866/>

¹²⁷ Samakal, 14 December 2023

¹²⁸ Samakal, 26 December 2023; <https://epaper.samakal.com/nogor-edition/2023-12-26/7/9484>

¹²⁹ Prothom Alo, 25 December 2023; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=2512f621f464&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=25/12/2023&se did=1>

¹³⁰ Prothom Alo, 27 December 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/politics/bglgtccxq8>



Left: An election pylon created to gather support for Awami League candidate Mohammad Solaiman Selim beside Lalbagh Fort in Dhaka, violating electoral code of conduct. Photo: New Age, 31 December 2023. Right: An election camp of Awami League candidate AFM Bahauddin Nasim set up on the footpath in the Dhaka University area, violating election code of conduct. Photo: New Age, 28 December 2023.

Freedom of Expression

33. Throughout 2023, the interference of the government and the ruling party people on the freedom of expression of the citizens was blatant. Article 43 of the Constitution guarantees citizens' right to privacy in personal and other communications, but the government has bought [sophisticated spyware](#) equipment from the Israeli company WiSpear to do surveillance on the people of the country. The government has also announced the legal use of this technology.¹³¹ Over the past few years, pro-government media outlets have illegally leaked telephone conversations of dissidents, which violates the right to privacy and personal security of the citizens. There are allegations that the government is [using Pegasus spyware](#) to hack the cell phones of opposition leaders as part of a move to keep political opponents under control. On 5 October, research institute Freedom House stated in a report that freedom of expression online in Bangladesh has [declined](#) in 2023. The report says online activists and journalists in Bangladesh are increasingly facing violence, and supporters of the opposition BNP continue to face repression. According to the report of Freedom House, Bangladesh scores only 41 out of 100 in terms of internet freedom.¹³²
34. During this reporting period, the government carried out various forms of repression, including barring programmes, filing cases, arresting and sentencing opposition leaders and activists and dissenting citizens for expressing their opinions. Some reported incidents are as follows:

- Nafiz Mohammad Alam was arrested by police of Bhatara Police Station on 9 April from his house at Bashundhara Residential Area in Dhaka for giving an interview with German media [Deutsche Welle](#) for its special documentary.¹³³
- In Sirajganj, a leader of the opposition party was [arrested under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009](#) for chanting anti-government slogans in a public meeting; and in Magura, a Jubo Dal

¹³¹ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/security-aviation/2023-01-10/ty-article/.premium/israeli-spy-tech-sold-to-bangladesh-despite-dismal-human-rights-record/00000185-9692-d16a-a987-f6b75dd00000>, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-owned-firms-reportedly-selling-spyware-to-bangladesh-with-no-oversight/>

¹³² Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/bangladesh/freedom-net/2023>

¹³³ Deutsche Welle had aired a documentary called '[Death Squad](#)': Inside Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion on 3 April 2023. The documentary highlighted extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances committed by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). Nafiz Mohammad Alam had been a victim of enforced disappearance and had given an interview which was part of that documentary.

member was [hacked and injured](#) by Jubo League and Chhatra League leaders for allegedly posting on Facebook against a Member of Parliament affiliated to the ruling party.

- The government and government supporters have continued to [persecute](#) the relatives of Bangladeshi bloggers, human rights defenders and journalists who are abroad or in exile.¹³⁴ The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), has also documented retaliatory behaviour against family members of Bangladeshi journalists living abroad.¹³⁵ [Anisa Siddiq](#) (60), mother of an expatriate, was arrested under the Special Powers Act, 1974 after her son posted a comment on Facebook criticizing the government from abroad. She was released on bail after spending eight days in Khulna District Jail.¹³⁶
- On the occasion of International Human Rights Day, Maayer Daak, a network of the families and relatives of disappeared persons, gathered in Shahbagh, Dhaka on 9 December to organise a human chain programme. The members of Maayer Daak and human rights activists present could not organize this programme in Shahbagh due to police obstruction and they were forced to leave and later held this programme in front of the National Press club.¹³⁷



The police at Maayer Daak's programme in Shahbagh, Dhaka. Photo: Prothom Alo, 9 December 2023.

35. The Cyber Security Bill 2023 was passed in the National Parliament on 13 September 2023, replacing the repressive Digital Security Act, despite strong national and international protests. Earlier on 28 August, the Cabinet approved the Cyber Security Bill retaining almost all the provisions of the Digital Security Act (DSA), 2018 without any consultation with key stakeholders, even journalists. The government ignored the demands of civil society members and journalists to repeal the DSA and instead passed this new law. Although the new law has reduced punishment and reformed some sections, there has been no qualitative or significant change in the implementation of the law. The Act contains many elements that undermine freedom of speech and expression, freedom of the press, personal privacy and civil liberties. It contains several repressive provisions, which have previously been used to stifle the voices of independent journalism and human rights defenders. Bangladesh's Attorney General AM Amin Uddin said the ongoing cases filed under the Digital Security Act will not be withdrawn and the cases will continue to be tried under the previous law.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Al Jazeera, 24 March 2023; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/24/bangladesh-investigative-journalist-brother-beaten-with-rods> Prothom Alo, 25 March 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/haufscu1wn>

¹³⁵ CPJ, 24 March 2023; <https://cpj.org/2023/03/unidentified-men-attack-brother-of-exiled-bangladeshi-journalist-zulkarnain-saer-khan/>

¹³⁶ On 20 August 2023, Khulna police arrested Anisa Siddiq (60) under the Special Powers Act, 1974. She had been accused that her US-based son posted on Facebook criticizing the trial of war crime convict Delawar Hussain Sayedee and disappearance of his witness.

¹³⁷ The Daily Star, 10 December 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/rights/news/police-foil-mayer-daak-demos-dhaka-3490361>

¹³⁸ Prothom Alo, 14 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/8qdt4ch4ek>

- On 25 October 2023, police arrested a young man named Anarul Islam, a resident of Dimla Upazila in Nilphamari District, under the Cyber Security Act (CSA), 2023 for posting 'offensive' posts about Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader on social media.¹³⁹

36. Acts of persecution continued under the DSA until the CSA was passed. Courts appear to be reluctant when it comes to granting bail to victims in cases filed under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 and the Digital Security Act, 2018. A majority of the charges are for perceived criticism of the Prime Minister, the government and those high up in the AL. Given that there are allegations of the judiciary being bias towards the party in power, the courts' reluctance is understandable.

- Khadijatul Kubra, a student of Jagannath University, was [released on bail](#) after languishing for 14 months in prison.¹⁴⁰
- A man named Monir Khan Michael, who has been in jail since 23 January 2021 under the ICT Act, [threw a shoe at the judge](#) of the Chittagong Cyber Tribunal after his bail plea was rejected again on 28 November 2023.¹⁴¹

37. Furthermore, cases have been filed against journalists by imposing the DSA for publishing news on corruption and mismanagement of the government. Cases have also been filed under the DSA against opposition party leaders and activists for speaking at public meetings and a large number of unidentified persons have been made offenders.¹⁴² In 2023, the government used the DSA to arrest opposition leaders-activists and dissidents. Some reported incidents are given below:

- On 29 March, Shamsuzzaman Shams, a staff reporter of the daily Prothom Alo, was picked up by members of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) from Ambagan area of Savar on charges of publishing 'false and fabricated' news in Prothom Alo. Later Jubo League leader Syed Mohammad Golam Kibria filed a case with Tejgaon Police Station under the Digital Security Act, 2018, accusing some unknown persons and mentioning Shamsuzzaman's name.¹⁴³
- Gaibandha District unit Chhatra Dal General Secretary Mohammad Tarequzzaman Tarek, Chhatra Dal Vice President Imam Hossain Dulal, Joint General Secretary Mohammad Mirajuzzaman, Sadar Thana unit Chhatra Dal Convener Mohammad Imam Hasan Alal, District unit Jubo Dal senior Vice-President Shafiqul Islam, and Juba Dal leader Mohammad Kenan Haqqani, were arrested on 22 May, for defaming former President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, tarnishing the image of the state, hurting religious values and sentiments, attempting and abetting the deterioration of law and order; and a case was filed accusing another 200-250 unknown people as offenders.¹⁴⁴
- On 31 July, a youth named Habib Bin Mizan (28) was arrested under the Digital Security Act by the police, for making remarks against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina over the power crisis on Facebook, in Pirganj Upazila under Rangpur District. The court sent him jail the next day.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Prothom Alo, 26 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/neo4s2y9hh>

¹⁴⁰ The Daily Star, 20 November 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/jnu-student-khadijatul-walks-out-jail-after-over-14-months-3474146>

¹⁴¹ Manabzamin, 29 November 2023

¹⁴² Samakal, 4 May 2023; <https://samakal.com/capital/article/2305170680/>

¹⁴³ Prothom Alo, 30 March 2023;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=3033d17338d&imageview=1&epedate=30/03/2023>

¹⁴⁴ Samakal, 23 May 2023; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/2305174215>

¹⁴⁵ The Daily Star, 2 August 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/man-sent-jail-dsa-case-making-fb-post-against-pm-3384141>

38. In 2023, courts sentenced several citizens under the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, 2006 and the Digital Security Act (DSA), 2018 for ‘hurting religious sentiments’ and making ‘derogatory remarks’ about the Prime Minister. Some incidents are given below:

- On 30 January, Dhaka Cyber Tribunal judge A. M. Julfiker Hayet sentenced Shafiur Rahman Farabi to seven years in prison under the ICT Act on charges of ‘provocative religious comment’ on social media.¹⁴⁶
- On 8 February, Rangpur Cyber Tribunal judge Md. Abdul Mazid sentenced Paritosh Sarkar to 11 years imprisonment in a case filed under the DSA on charges of making ‘offensive remarks against religion’ on Facebook.¹⁴⁷
- On 10 May, Dhaka Cyber Tribunal judge A. M. Julfiker Hayet sentenced Ishrat Jahan Rili Begum, a student of Badrunnessa College, to two years and seven months to jail, for allegedly ‘insulting Islam and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)’ on Facebook. She was arrested by RAB on 6 November 2020 and was imprisoned for two years and seven months without bail.¹⁴⁸
- On 26 October, Chittagong Cyber Tribunal judge Mohammad Jahirul Kabir sentenced a college student named Safayet Ullah to five years imprisonment under the DSA, for making derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.¹⁴⁹

39. In 2023, a total of 51 people were arrested under the Digital Security Act, 2018. Among them, 48 were arrested for online posts/comments criticizing the Prime Minister, high-ranking persons of the government and/or their family members and for making ‘anti-government’ comments; and three persons were arrested for posting ‘provocative’ religious comments.

Freedom of the Media

40. Most of the media in Bangladesh are under the control of the government or owned by government-backed individuals. Due to lack of freedom of expression, people use alternative media, including Facebook, to express their views and share or exchange information. However, the government is suppressing dissent and creating an atmosphere of fear by enforcing repressive laws, violating freedom of the media. Given this situation, journalists are resorting to self-censorship. In 2023, journalists have been attacked by the ruling party leaders and influential individuals while performing their professional duties and cases have been filed against them. Many journalists were arrested during this period. It is to be noted that victims have been deprived of justice due to the slow process of prosecution of cases filed in connection with the killing and torture of journalists. The Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate has again extended the deadline for submitting the investigation report in the murder case of journalist couple Sagar Sarwar and Mehrun Runi, who were killed on 19 December 2012. RAB has failed to submit the probe report to the court. With this, the deadline was extended 106 times.¹⁵⁰ Some reported incidents of attacks on journalists and the media are as follows:

¹⁴⁶ Prothom Alo, 30 January 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/zuthpbk8a8>

¹⁴⁷ Prothom Alo, 9 February 2023;

<https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=92f5d574a6&imageview=1&epedate=09/02/2023>

¹⁴⁸ Dhaka Tribune, 11 May 2023; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/court/2023/05/11/woman-in-dhaka-jailed-for-hurting-religious-sentiment>

¹⁴⁹ The Daily Star, 26 October 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/man-jailed-5-years-derogatory-remarks-against-pm-ctg-3453621>

¹⁵⁰ The Daily Star, 19 December 2023; <https://bangla.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news-543421>

- On 11 February, during rallies of BNP and Awami League in Hatkora area of Gangutia Union in Dhamrai Upazila under Dhaka District, followers of Gangutia Union unit Awami League President Qader Khan attacked and stabbed Dhamrai correspondent of the daily Jugantor Shamim Khan who was gathering news about the clash between leaders and activists of the two parties. He also suffered fractures on his arm and leg.¹⁵¹
- On 15 March, Police baton charged and beat journalists who were covering the Supreme Court Lawyers Association election in Dhaka.¹⁵²
- Supporters of Rupganj Municipal unit Awami League General Secretary Golam Rasul Koli hacked Bangla TV reporter Sohel Kiran in Rupganj under Narayanganj District on 4 April, in retaliation of the publication of a report.¹⁵³
- On 4 May, Chhatra League and Jubo League leaders and activists attacked Jamuna TV journalist Aminul Islam in Sunamganj and left him seriously injured, over airing a report.¹⁵⁴
- On 14 June, Bakshiganj Upazila (under Jamalpur District) correspondent of the daily Manabzamin Golam Rabbani was allegedly killed by the instruction of Awami League leader Mahmudul Alam Babu.¹⁵⁵
- On 18 October, Anwar Hossain, Inspector of Kadmatoli Police outpost assaulted Bangla TV's Keraniganj correspondent Ariful Islam and broke his camera while he was gathering news about the police search of Dhaka-bound public transport passengers in Kadmatoli, Dhaka, prior to the opposition party's rally.¹⁵⁶
- On 31 October, Zahidul Alam, Chairman of Zafarganj Union Parishad and Awami League leader, physically assaulted the daily Bhorer Surjodoy correspondent Shafiul Alam Rajib and took his cell phone, over publishing a report on the attack on minority citizens in Debidwar under Comilla District.¹⁵⁷
- On 10 December, Manabzamin Companyganj correspondent Nazim Uddin Khokon was beaten and seriously injured by Awami League activists and handed over to the police along with two liters of alcohol, over the publication of a news titled "Families of BNP leaders and activists left home due to attack by Helmet Bahini in Noakhali".¹⁵⁸

41. In 2023, three journalists were killed, 183 were injured, 61 were assaulted, 49 were attacked, 32 were threatened, 12 were arrested and 73 were sued while carrying out their professional duty.

State Repression on Citizens and Impunity of Law Enforcement Agencies

42. In 2023, members of law enforcement agencies enjoyed impunity at the behest of the government, despite allegations of various human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and torture in custody. Members of law enforcement agencies have committed massive human rights violations by suppressing opposition movements on government orders.

Enforced disappearances

43. Before and after the controversial elections of 2014 and 2018, the government created a fearful atmosphere in the country by disappearing opposition leaders and activists. The government has used enforced disappearance as a tool to suppress political

¹⁵¹ Jugantor, 16 February 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/645838/>

¹⁵² Jugantor, 15 March 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/654901/>

¹⁵³ Manabzamin, 5 April 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=49879>

¹⁵⁴ Jugantor, 4 May 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/671256/>

¹⁵⁵ Manabzamin, 15 June 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=60559>

¹⁵⁶ Prothom Alo, 18 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/yh2xmd9hf9>

¹⁵⁷ Jugantor, 31 October 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/734995/>

¹⁵⁸ Prothom Alo, 11 December 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/wlifggqb1k>

movements and silence the dissenting voices in a similar manner in 2023 ahead of the 12th Parliamentary elections scheduled on 7 January 2024. Most of those who went missing are opposition party members and dissidents.¹⁵⁹ There are also allegations that some people were being disappeared as ‘Islamic militants’. During this period, a man along with his entire family was allegedly picked up and kept disappear for a month.¹⁶⁰ After stopping BNP’s grand rally on 28 October, members of the law enforcement agencies disappeared leaders and activists of the opposition party. Short-term disappearances have also occurred during this period, and victims of enforced disappearance were reportedly tortured while in custody.

44. It is to be mentioned that most of the disappeared persons were picked up by men claiming to be members of the Detective Branch (DB) of Police. The families of disappeared persons are under surveillance, harassment and threats. The victim-families have provided information to the police and various intelligence agencies to get their loved ones back, however, members of the intelligence agencies are repeatedly pressuring the families for information. They are alleging that victim families hid their relatives. During the International Week of the Disappeared, in the last week of May, family members of the victims of enforced disappearances were repeatedly intimidated and harassed by members of the intelligence agencies.¹⁶¹



*The family members of the victims of enforced disappearances formed a human chain in front of the National Press Club, demanding the return of their loved ones during International Week of the Disappeared in May.
Photo: Odhikar, 27 May 2023*

45. On 13 November, prior to the session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Bangladesh at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recommended the government to disclose the list of places where the victims are being ‘detained in secret’ after being picked up.¹⁶² In addition, during the UPR session it called for Bangladesh to accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and for independent investigation into allegations of all cases of enforced disappearance.¹⁶³
46. Among those who were disappeared in 2023 are leaders and activists of BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Chhatra Dal, Jubo Dal, Chhatra Odhikar Parishad, and people of different professions such as madrasa teachers, electrician, mason, private sector employee, private hospital employee, former government official and space scientist etc. All the victims were picked up by plainclothes men claiming to be members of the Detective Branch of Police, RAB or other law enforcement agencies. There have also been

¹⁵⁹ FIDH, 30 August 2023; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/bangladesh/bangladesh-government-must-cease-enforced-disappearances-stop>

¹⁶⁰ Information received from human rights defender associated with Odhikar in Mymensingh.

¹⁶¹ New Age, 27 June 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/205347/repeated-visits-by-police-nag-families>

¹⁶² Samakal, 13 November 2023; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/207218/>

¹⁶³ Prothom Alo, 14 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/8qdt4ch4ek>

incidents of the disappearance of the same person twice and of being picked up from the jail gate again after being freed on bail.¹⁶⁴ After being acquitted from the case, two men were again taken away from the jail gate after being released from jail.¹⁶⁵ Disappeared persons were subsequently shown as arrested and produced in court by members of the law enforcement agencies in cases filed for [political violence](#), and under the [Special Powers Act](#), Explosive Substances Act, [Anti-Terrorism Act](#) and [Digital Security Act](#). In addition, victims of enforced disappearances were tortured while in detention.¹⁶⁶ Many of the victims of disappearances who were produced in court are sick or too weak to stand or speak properly.¹⁶⁷ Some reported incidents are as follows:

- *It has been alleged that on 29 August, an electrician named Rahmat Ullah was picked up by RAB members from his home in Baranalai Village under Dhamrai Upazila of Dhaka.¹⁶⁸ Since then, his whereabouts remain unknown. The family stated that the police refused to record their complaint.¹⁶⁹*
- *It was reported that on 4 November, Jubo Dal leader Rajib Hasan was picked up by a group of men, who introduced themselves as members of the Detective Branch of police from Khilgaon, Dhaka. He was allegedly tortured and produced before the court five days after being disappeared.¹⁷⁰*
- *Titumir College unit Chhatra Dal leaders Mahmudul Hasan Rafiq, Saiful Islam from Mirpur, Dhaka and Abu Bakar Siddique Babu from Paribag Dhaka, were picked up by members of the DB of police on 6 November.¹⁷¹ After eight days of disappearance, on 14 November, they were produced before the court with criminal charges.¹⁷²*
- *On 14 December, Anwar Hossain Hridoy and Delwar Hossain, Kahalu Upazila unit BNP leaders, were picked up by some people claiming to be from the Detective Branch of police when they went to attend a programme in Bogura. The family members of Anwar and Delwar submitted petitions to the High Court Division on 26 December, saying the law enforcers detained them.¹⁷³ Both were returned home on 28 December, after 14 days of disappearance.¹⁷⁴*

47. According to data collected by Odhikar in 2023, a total of 52 people were allegedly disappeared after being picked up by members of law enforcement agencies. During this period, 25 people were disappeared by the Detective Branch of the Police, nine by the police, six by the Rapid Action Battalion and five by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Police, and seven by other law enforcement agencies. Among the 52 disappeared persons, 51 have surfaced alive and the whereabouts of one person remains unknown.

¹⁶⁴ Information gathered by Odhikar

¹⁶⁵ The Daily Star, 26 February 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/two-youths-who-were-picked-return-home-3257401>

¹⁶⁶ Samakal, 2 December 2023; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/210653/>

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸ Prothom Alo, 14 September 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/1yo11kogg9>

¹⁶⁹ Information gathered by Odhikar

¹⁷⁰ New Age, 11 November 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/217345/juba-dal-activist-missing-for-5-days-appear-at-court>

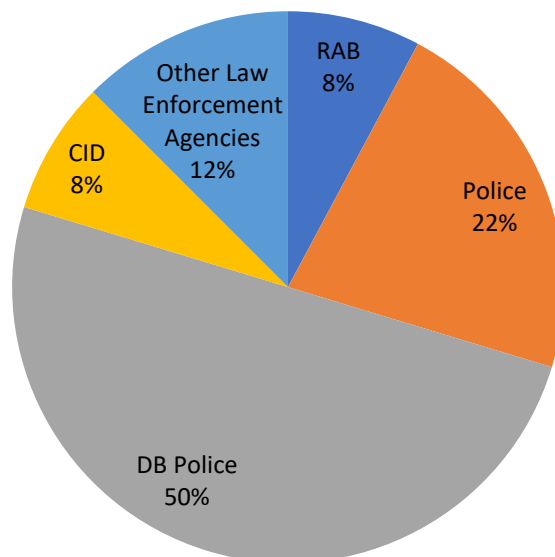
¹⁷¹ Manabzamin, 7 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=82328>; New Age, 12 November 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/217449/three-jcd-leaders-still-untraced-for-six-days>

¹⁷² Samakal, 2 December 2023; <https://samakal.com/politics/article/210653/>

¹⁷³ The Daily Star, 28 December 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/state-responsible-finding-out-missing-persons-hc-3504776>

¹⁷⁴ New Age, 28 December 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/221389/missing-bogura-bnp-leaders-return-home>

Alleged Perpetrators of Enforced Disappearances in 2023



Extrajudicial killings

48. Incidents of extrajudicial killings in the name of ‘crossfire’/‘gunfights’ occurred in 2023 and there were allegations of persons being shot and tortured to death. Extrajudicial killings are violations to right to life, right to fair trial, right not to be tortured and equality before law as enshrined under [Articles 27, 32 and 35 \(5\)](#) of the Constitution of Bangladesh and Articles 6, 7, 9 and 14 of the [ICCPR](#). Some reported incidents are as follows:

- On 17 March, Abul Kashem (65) was shot and died on the spot when a team of RAB-11 carried out an operation to arrest a suspect in a murder case in Bardagaon area under Sonargaon Upazila in Narayanganj.¹⁷⁵
- Sultana Jasmine (45), an Office Assistant of Chandipur Union Land Office, died on 24 March 2023 in Rahshahi Medical College Hospital after being taken into custody by Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)-5 on 22 March. The family alleged that she died due to torture while in custody.¹⁷⁶
- Ekramul Hossain Ershad (35), who was detained in Kurigram District Jail, died in Kurigram General Hospital on 3 June 2023, after being tortured by the police. Ekramul’s family alleged that Ekramul was healthy at the time of arrest and that on being arrested on 31 May, Bhurungamari Police Station Officer-in-Charge Nazrul Islam demanded Tk 200,000 from his family. They were unable to pay and Ekramul was tortured on the night of his arrest and he died as a result.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ The Daily Star, 20 March 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/narayanganj-rab-raid-they-showed-no-ids-half-hour-passed-3275466>

¹⁷⁶ Jugantor, 27 March 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/659041/>

¹⁷⁷ Prothom Alo, 4 June 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/local-news/qikuinbkhd>

- On 5 June, a man named Alaluddin, who was caretaker of a building in Turag, died in the custody of the Detective Branch (DB) of police.¹⁷⁸ His wife Parveen Akhtar alleged that Alaluddin suffered grievous injuries due to torture in DB custody.¹⁷⁹
- On 2 August, a Rohingya refugee named Mohammad Rafiq (40) was killed and seven others were injured when Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members opened fire during a clash between the BGB and a group of suspected drug dealers in Teknaf under Cox's Bazar District.¹⁸⁰
- On 31 October, during a BNP called countrywide blockade, Juba Dal leader Jhilu Ahmad was hit and injured by a police pickup van in Sylhet. He was arrested and taken to the police station and allegedly tortured to death.¹⁸¹
- On 31 October, Chhatra Dal leader Md. Refayt Ullah Tanoy (21) and Krishak Dal leader Md. Billal Mia (40) were killed when the police opened fire into a procession of blockade supporters in Kishoreganj.¹⁸²
- On 30 November, Dhaka Metropolitan unit BNP member Imtiaz Hasan Bulbul died in Suhrawardy Hospital under treatment while in custody of Kashimpur Central Jail. His family alleged that on 24 October, Bulbul was arrested by the police and taken to Wari Police Station where he was tortured.¹⁸³
- On 26 December, the body of Golam Rabbani was found hanging in the custody cell of Baniachong Police Station in Habiganj. Police claimed that Rabbani was arrested on suspicion of theft and committed suicide by hanging. Rabbani's brother Moin Uddin alleged that the police killed his brother by torturing him and hanged his body'. Rabbani had marks of injury on his body.¹⁸⁴ Moin Uddin also alleged that he had received an anonymous death threat on 28 December, if he speaks about the incident anymore or files a complaint.¹⁸⁵

49. In 2023, 24 people are alleged to have been victims of extrajudicial killings. Among them, one was a Rohingya refugee. Among the 24 persons killed extrajudicially, four were killed in “crossfire/encounters/gunfights”, eight persons were tortured to death, 11 were shot to death, and one was beaten to death during this period. It is also alleged that among the deceased, three were killed by the RAB, 16 by the police, two by the DB Police, and three by the BGB.

Torture, degrading treatment, lack of accountability and custodial death by law enforcement agencies

50. Acts of torture, degrading treatment, lack of accountability by law enforcement agencies were widely reported in 2023. Members of law enforcement agencies are acting recklessly since they enjoy impunity. During this period, the government used members of the law enforcement agencies and security forces to persecute the opposition party leaders and activists and their family members with the aim of conducting one-sided elections.¹⁸⁶ Police even arrested a female physician for

¹⁷⁸New Age, 18 June 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/204604/family-plans-to-sue-db-men-on-custodial-death>

¹⁷⁹Prothom Alo, 19 June 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/city/y8178jdnzx>

¹⁸⁰The Daily Star, 3 August 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/1-killed-bgb-drug-traders-clash-teknaf-3384896>

¹⁸¹Naya Diganta, 31 October 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/sylhet/788045/>

¹⁸²The Daily Star, 31 October 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/countrywide-blockade/news/two-killed-bnp-police-clash-kishoreganj-3457811>

¹⁸³Manabzamin, 1 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=86137>

¹⁸⁴The Daily Star, 28 December 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/suspect-found-hanging-police-station-3504741>

¹⁸⁵The Daily Star, 29 December 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/custodial-death-brother-deceased-gets-death-threat-3505491>

¹⁸⁶Jugantor, 8 October 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/724966/>

allegedly contributing money to an opposition party, in a case under the Explosives Act, 1908.¹⁸⁷

51. There have been various allegations against members of the law enforcement agencies of abuses, including torture on ordinary citizens, inhumane treatment, causing a person's death without giving him medicine while in custody, mugging, kidnapping and ransom, extortion, stealing money from the accused in custody, taking bribes, arresting an innocent person, extortion with threats to kill in crossfire, arresting innocent citizens instead of the main accused and sending them to jail, accusing a child in a criminal case after increasing his age, detaining innocent people after putting drugs in their pockets, releasing drug dealers after taking bribes, and harassment and arrest 'trade'.¹⁸⁸
52. Due to impunity and lack of proper implementation of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013, acts of torture continue by members of law enforcement agencies. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed deep concern over serious allegations of torture at the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Bangladesh.¹⁸⁹ During the UPR, many UN member states have also recommended that Bangladesh to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.¹⁹⁰ Despite widespread cases of torture and degrading treatment of citizens in the country, very few of them have come to light.¹⁹¹
53. Under the pretext of counter-terrorism, there is a risk of any citizen in the country being unjustly labeled as an 'Islamic militant'. State security forces have faced allegations of subjecting those labeled as militants to torture and degrading treatment. The victims of such torture are often ordinary, working-class, or economically disadvantaged individuals. On 16 March, the police claimed that 33 individuals accused of militancy in Belpur Police Station, under Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, had returned to normal life after being granted bail. However, the accused vehemently protested this statement in front of the media, asserting that they are ordinary working people. Among them are individuals such as road masons, tubewell masons, and pavement medicine sellers who claim to have been detained and tortured by law enforcement agencies in order to extract false confessions. False cases of involvement in militancy were filed against them.¹⁹² Other examples of torture are as follows:

- *On 13 November, police Sub-Inspector (SI) Sumon detained cloth merchant Mohammad Mamun Mia and his son Mohammad Qayyum for four days as suspects in a child murder case and tortured them in police custody in the Konabari area of Gazipur. The police arrested the real killer Ariful on 18 November. SI Suman demanded BDT 500,000 in exchange for releasing Mamun Mia and his son. The family were unable to pay this huge sum and borrowed BDT 20,500 to give to SI Suman, who then released the men.*¹⁹³
- *In Jashore, a rickshaw puller named Yunus Ali was allegedly tortured by members of RAB-6 after they entered his house on the pretext of searching for weapons. Yunus showed the marks of injuries while talking to reporters at the press club on 24 December. He was walking with a limp due to injuries to both legs. Yunus Ali was treated at Jashore General Hospital.*¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁷ Manabzamin, 5 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=81976>

¹⁸⁸ Arrest trade: Policemen make money from arbitrary detention and release. Prothom Alo, 20 January 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/lg5n8u1cbt>

¹⁸⁹ Samakal, 13 November 2023 <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/637294>

¹⁹⁰ Prothom Alo, 14 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/8qdt4ch4ek>

¹⁹¹ Jugantor, 22 January 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/637294>

¹⁹² Bangla Tribune, 16 March 2023; <https://www.banglatribune.com/country/rajshahi/790072/>

¹⁹³ Jugantor, 27 November 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/744856/>

¹⁹⁴ Samakal, 25 December 2023; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/214851/>



Tortured victim rickshaw puller Yunus Ali. Photo: Samakal, 26 December 2023

Human rights violations in prisons

54. There are allegations that since the beginning of 2023, leaders and activists of the opposition political parties, especially the BNP, have been arrested under false and fictitious cases and many ordinary people have also been imprisoned without any evidence. Allegations of [torture](#) and [inhuman treatment](#) of inmates in prisons across the country were reported. Apart from this, there have also been cases of [‘suicide’](#) in prisons.
55. On 28 October, the government carried out mass arrests across the country after the crackdown on the BNP.¹⁹⁵ As a result, all 68 prisons in the country have several times more inmates than their capacity. [Sirajganj District Jail](#) has five times more inmates than its capacity and [Rajshahi Central Jail](#) has four times its capacity. A humanitarian crisis has been created due to overcrowding in prisons. The prisoners are facing acute problems in eating, sleeping and moving.¹⁹⁶ During this period, when leaders and activists of the opposition political parties were released from jail after getting bail, it was alleged that members of the government’s intelligence agency stayed inside the prisons and created obstacles to their exit.¹⁹⁷
56. There have been allegations of inhuman or degrading treatment of inmates for political reasons in the prisons. Former Minister and BNP Standing Committee member Mirza Abbas alleged in the court that he and Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir were kept in a condemned cell after their earlier arrest and that this time he is sleeping on the floor.¹⁹⁸ On 23 October, Chhatra Odhikar Parishad President Bin Yamin Mollah, who is detained in a condemned cell, told the court that he might die due to the condition he is in. The police officer on duty there held Yamin’s mouth and prevented him from speaking further.¹⁹⁹ On 2 November, police arrested Jubo Dal leader Aminur Rahman Modhu from Amdabad Village in Jashore. On 12 November, Modhu suffered a heart attack while in Jessore Central Jail. From the jail, he was placed on the hospital floor with both legs shackled and his right hand handcuffed.²⁰⁰ It is to be noted that when Sramik Dal leader Kajal fell seriously ill, he was admitted to the hospital with fetters. Kajal died still in fetters while undergoing treatment in the

¹⁹⁵ The Business Standard, 8 November 2023; <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/un-shows-concern-over-mass-arrest-bangladesh-735558>

¹⁹⁶ Naya Diganta, 4 November 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/last-page/788906/>

¹⁹⁷ Jugantor, 20 April 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/politics/667434>

¹⁹⁸ Manabzamin, 6 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=82152>

¹⁹⁹ Manabzamin, 23 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=79899>

²⁰⁰ Manabzamin, 2 December 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/national/747518>

hospital.²⁰¹ The families of the deceased alleged that the opposition leaders were not taken to the hospital immediately after falling seriously ill in the prisons. They were also been deprived of proper medical care. They also alleged that relatives were not informed when the victims were taken to the hospital.



Jubo Dal leader Modhu, in hospital in shackles. Photo: Jugantor, 4 December 2023

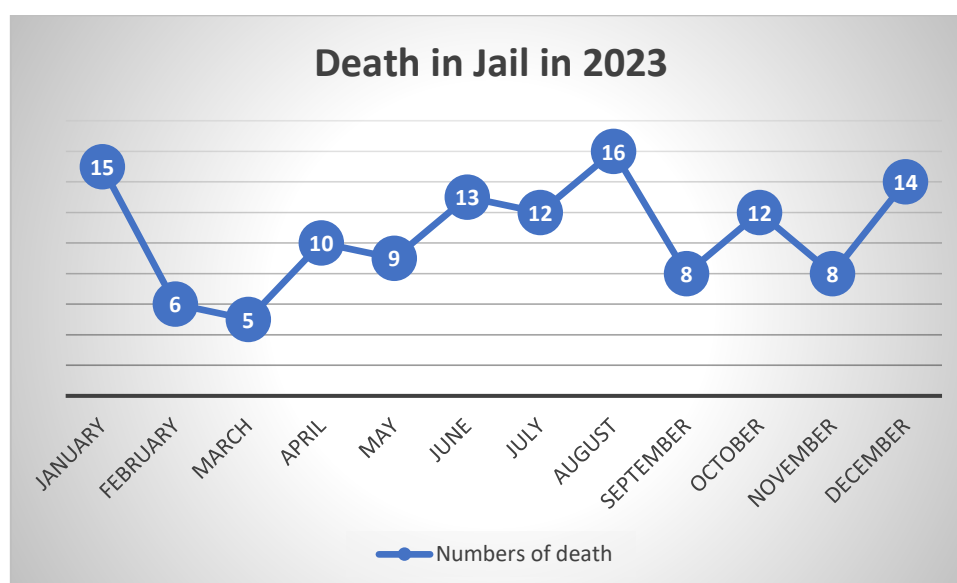
Since BNP's grand rally on 28 October 2023, eight BNP leaders who were arrested in police raids, died in prison. They are BNP leader [Golapur Rahman](#) (Kashimpur Central Jail on 25 November); BNP leader [Imtiaz Hasan Bulbul](#) (Kashimpur Central Jail on 30 November); BNP leader [Asaduzzaman Hira Khan](#) (Kashimpur Central Jail on 1 December); BNP leader [Abul Kalam Azad](#) (Natore District Jail on 7 December); BNP leader [Md. Monirul Islam](#) (Rajshahi Central Jail on 11 December); BNP leader [Md Motibul Mondol](#) (Naogaon District Jail on 20 December); BNP leader [Md. Shafiuddin Master](#) (Dhaka Central Jail on 25 December); Sramik Dal leader [Fazlur Rahman Kajal](#) (who was still in fetters when he died. Kashimpur Central Jail on 28 December).



The eight BNP leaders who died in jail custody. Photo sourced from various news media.

²⁰¹ Manabzamin, 31 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=90844>

57. In 2023, a total of 128 persons reportedly died in prisons. Among them, 121 persons died due to ‘illness’, two allegedly committed ‘suicide’ and the cause of death of five inmates were not mentioned.



The death penalty and human rights

58. In Bangladesh, the existence of the death penalty has led to numerous individuals being sentenced to death by lower criminal courts each year. However, concerns arise as many of these death sentences are based on confessions obtained through the use of torture. This raises serious questions about the reliability and fairness of the judicial process in capital punishment cases.²⁰² During this reporting period, a court in Madaripur awarded the death penalty to 23 persons simultaneously in one case.²⁰³ The acquittal rate is very low compared to the death references submitted to the High Court Division of the Supreme Court from different districts of the country.²⁰⁴ Due to the immense backlog of cases many accused have been waiting in condemned cells for years across the country. Condemned cells are also holding women prisoners along with their children. On 26 October, Hushna Akhter was sentenced to death by a Habiganj court. Her 10-month-old child Mahida is imprisoned with her mother in the condemned cell of Habiganj District Jail.²⁰⁵

- On 8 January, [Saiful Islam Rafiq](#); on 22 January, [Shukur Ali](#); on 9 February, [Aminul Islam](#) were executed by hanging in Kashimpur Central Jail.
- On 28 July, [Mia Mohammad Mohiuddin and Jahangir Alam](#) were executed in Rajshahi Central Jail.

59. In 2023, a total of 390 persons were sentenced to death by lower courts and five accused persons were executed by hanging.

²⁰² Jugantor, 22 June 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/688772>

²⁰³ The Daily Star, 21 March 2023 <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/23-gets-death-penalty-killing-youth-madaripur-3277111>

²⁰⁴ The Daily Star, 7 April 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/the-state-witness-protection-bangladesh-3291146>

²⁰⁵ Jugantor, 18 December 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/752554/>



Public Lynching

60. The country has experienced heightened social unrest due to the dysfunctionality of state and constitutional institutions, leading to an environment of unaccountability and impunity. Consequently, there has been a concerning trend where ordinary people take matters into their own hands, resulting in incidents of public lynching. In 2023, a significant number of victims of public lynching were individuals suspected of having involvement in theft or robbery.²⁰⁶ This reflects a breakdown in the rule of law and highlights the urgent need for effective governance and protection of human rights. Some incidents are as follows:

- On 12 January, two youths named [Nuru Mia and Ismail Hossain](#) were lynched on suspicion of being robbers in Muradnagar under Cumilla District.
- On 3 March, a teenager named [Rabbi Mia \(18\)](#) was lynched on suspicion of stealing a motorcycle in Kuliarchar under Kishoreganj District.
- On 26 March, a tea vendor named [Mohammad Mamun Mia \(35\)](#) was lynched on suspicion of theft in Sher Bangla Nagar, Dhaka.
- On 3 May, a mentally challenged man named [Surjaman \(62\)](#) was lynched on suspicion of theft in Kaliganj under Jhenaidah District.
- On 10 August, a youth named [Akram Shah \(21\)](#) was lynched on suspicion of theft in Bheramara under Kushtia District.
- On 14 October, [Abu Bakr Selim](#) was lynched in Chandnaish of Chittagong and [Sirikul Islam](#), a prime accused in a murder case in Gaibandha.
- On 20 November, two persons named [Mirjan Khalasi and Achmat Bepari](#) were lynched on suspicion of being robbers in Shibchar under Madaripur District.
- On 4 December, a young man named [Raihan](#) was lynched on suspicion of theft in Narayanganj District.

61. In 2023, a total of 60 persons lost their lives as a result of public lynching.

Violence against Women

62. In 2023, like previous years, a significant number of women in the country have endured various forms of violence, including dowry violence, rape, acid attacks, and sexual harassment. The persistence of violence against women can be attributed to a dysfunctional justice system, inadequate investigations, impunity, and a patriarchal societal mindset. [Educational institutions and workplaces](#) have also been sites where such violence occurs. Disturbingly, leaders, activists of the ruling party, and members

²⁰⁶ Manabzamin, 25 November 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=85094>

of law enforcement agencies have been implicated in acts of violence against women in different parts of the country. Although some accused individuals are arrested and initially sent to jail, they are often later released on bail, thereby intimidating the victims and their families and hindering further legal proceedings. Consequently, justice remains elusive for many victims.

Rape

63. Women and children of different ages, including women with disabilities, have been victims of rape and [gang rape](#). During this reporting period, there were allegations of rape against [leaders of the ruling party](#) and members of the [police](#). Several women and children who were raped have been [killed](#) or later [committed suicide](#). Furthermore, victims were attacked for filing cases against the accused persons and the accused filed cases against rape victims instead.²⁰⁷ During this period, allegations were found against the police for [releasing the accused](#) of a rape case.²⁰⁸ Awami League leaders and influential people have also been accused of [covering up the incidents of rape](#) through arbitration. In addition, victims were made to marry the rapists through arbitration.²⁰⁹

- *It has been alleged that on 4 February, UP member Robin Chowdhury raped a 30-year woman worker after tying up her husband in Sitakunda, Chittagong.*²¹⁰
- *On 14 May, late at night, Basail Municipality unit Chhatra League President Shakib Miah raped a bride in Tangail.*²¹¹ *As the police did not receive the complaint in this incident, victim filed a case with the District Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal.*²¹²
- *On 25 August, a physically challenged garment worker was gang-raped in Joydabpur Sadar Upazila. On 17 November, police arrested Milan, the main witness in the case, instead of arresting the main accused.*²¹³
- *On 20 September, a girl was gang-raped by the General Secretary of Chardarbesh Union unit Swechchasebak League*²¹⁴, *Imam Hossain (45) and his associate Md. Riyad (28) in Sonagazi Upazila under Feni District.*²¹⁵
- *On 13 October, former General Secretary of Kulaghat Union unit Chhatra League, Solaiman Ali, raped a housewife belonging to the Hindu community, in Lalmonirhat.*²¹⁶

64. According to a report, as many as 161,218 cases were pending till 30 June 2023 in 99 Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals in 64 districts. 21 percent of these cases have been under trial for five years, although as per law the cases with the Tribunals are supposed to be disposed of within 180 days.²¹⁷

Stalking/sexual harassment

65. A significant number of women sexually harassed in Bangladesh are adolescents. A criminal gang comprised of juvenile delinquents, named ‘Kishoregang’ has been formed all over the country, including Dhaka, under the shelter of the ruling party.

²⁰⁷ Naya Diganta, 8 October 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/barishal/782669/>

²⁰⁸ Naya Diganta, 8 October 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/barishal/782669/>

²⁰⁹ Samakal, 1 November 2023; <https://samakal.com/sports/article/2310205149>

²¹⁰ Prothom Alo, 5 February 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/74rdjbui8t>

²¹¹ Prothom Alo, 5 February 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/74rdjbui8t>

²¹² Manabzamin, 16 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=55810>

²¹³ Jugantor, 18 November 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/second-edition/741460/>

²¹⁴ Volunteer wing of Awami League

²¹⁵ The Daily Star, 25 September 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/gangrape-feni-swechchasebak-league-leader-aide-land-jail-3427226>

²¹⁶ Prothom Alo, 18 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/e1l2med0zh>

²¹⁷ Prothom Alo, 3 September 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/j0kdzdgno5>

Members of this gang have been widely involved in stalking women.²¹⁸ During this reporting period, female victims were stabbed and beaten for refusing love proposals.²¹⁹ When the victims and their relatives protested the acts of sexual harassment, miscreants attacked victim's family members and [set fire to their houses](#), and [hacked their loved ones to death](#). The police refused to file complaints regarding these attacks.²²⁰

66. Allegations of sexual harassment were also found against the [leaders and activists of the ruling party](#). On 3 October, Awami League activist Abdus Samad beat up Sakhawat Hossain Faraz for protesting the stalking of his wife Sabina Khatun in Jibannagar Upazila under Chuadanga District.²²¹

Acid violence

67. In 2023, incidents of acid violence continued in the country. The police have been accused of not taking prompt action in cases filed under the [Acid Offence Control Act, 2002](#). How the acid got into the hands of the accused, usually remains out of the investigation. Analyzing the incidents over the past few years, it has been found that most cases of acid violence are due to disputes over property. Apart from this, incidents of acid throwing occur due to refusal of love and immoral proposals and non-receipt of dowry.²²² Moreover, acid violence goes unabated due to lack of proper implementation of Acid Control Act, 2002. Victims are deprived of justice as acid violence cases are pending in the courts for years.

- On 26 March, a housewife named Fatema Begum (31) was beaten and burned with acid, which caused her death, by her husband Arif Hossain and his family members after the latter failed to get dowry, in Fatulla under Narayanganj District.²²³
- On 1 May, Anwar Hossain and his family members tried to kill his wife Rekha Begum by forcefully pouring acid on her mouth, over dowry demands in Ulipur under Kurigram District.²²⁴
- On 14 May, a young man named Lal Chan Bauri threw acid on a young woman in Rajnagar Upazila under Moulvibazar District as she refused his marriage proposal.²²⁵
- On 11 November, due to a family dispute, a housewife named Marina Akhtar was attacked with acid by her husband's younger brother Wadud in Kishoreganj.²²⁶

Dowry related violence

68. Although giving and receiving dowry is a criminal offense under the [Dowry Prohibition Act, 2018](#), widespread acts of violence against women over dowry demands continued in 2023. For non-payment of dowry, women are killed. Some committed suicide due to dowry related violence. Members of the law enforcement agencies were also involved in dowry violence during this reporting period.

²¹⁸ Prothom Alo, 9 June 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime/n8s4dv18lx>

²¹⁹ Jugantor, 30 August 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/712324/>

²²⁰ Manabzamin, 20 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=56371>

²²¹ Naya Diganta, 3 November 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/khulna/781486/>

²²² Prothom Alo, 23 February 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/u18dnp2hap>

²²³ Samakal, 27 March 2023; <https://samakal.com/food/article/2303164536/>

²²⁴ Samakal, 4 May 2023; <https://samakal.com/tp-upakhantho/article/2305170737/>

²²⁵ Jugantor, 17 May 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/news/675489/>

²²⁶ Jugantor, 13 November 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/739477/>

- On 7 February, a housewife named Popi Akhtar was killed by strangulation with an electric wire by her husband Saddam Hossain and his family members over dowry demands in Kendua under Mymensingh District.²²⁷
- On 18 April, a pregnant housewife named Tahmina Jannat was beaten to death by her husband Ujjal Mahmud and her in-laws after they failed to receive dowry in Jamalpur Sadar Upazila.²²⁸
- On 12 August, a housewife named Moushumi Khatun (25) was beaten to death by her husband Ashek Ali (28) for dowry in Phulbari under Kurigram District.²²⁹
- On 1 October, a pregnant woman named Rahima Akhtar Sumi was strangled to death by her husband Abu Yusuf because he did not receive the demanded dowry in Sonaimuri under Noakhali District.²³⁰

Condition of RMG Workers

69. In 2023, workers in the ready-made garment (RMG) industry staged protest rallies and road blockades to voice their grievances and make various demands. The most significant protests were centred around the call for increased wages. Despite the garment industry being a major contributor to Bangladesh's foreign exchange earnings and the accumulation of significant wealth for factory owners, there has been little improvement in the working and living conditions of the workers. Additionally, RMG factory owners receive government benefits, such as lower tax rates, compared to other industries. While corporate tax rates for other sectors can reach up to 45 percent, garment factories enjoy a lower tax rate of only 10-12 percent.²³¹ In addition to the aforementioned factors, the RMG industry also benefits from various forms of support. These include cash assistance, tax exemptions, access to low-interest loans from the Export Development Fund, and the privilege of duty-free import of raw materials. These measures are aimed at providing further assistance and incentives to the RMG industry in Bangladesh.²³² Despite the advantages enjoyed by factory owners, the RMG sector in Bangladesh is falling behind in terms of worker wages compared to competing countries. While the owners receive various benefits, the wages provided to workers in the RMG sector have not kept pace with those offered in other countries in the same industry. This wage disparity presents a challenge for the competitiveness and sustainability of the RMG sector in Bangladesh.²³³
70. According to a survey report of the Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation, at least 329 workers were killed and 277 workers injured in the formal sector in 2023. Among them, 64 workers were killed and 89 were injured in the RMG sector during this reporting period.²³⁴
71. According to the [Global Rights Index 2023](#), Bangladesh ranks among the 10 worst countries in the world for workers.²³⁵ The low wages provided to workers have become insufficient for them to support their families, particularly with the rising prices of daily commodities. Workers and labour leaders have been demanding that

²²⁷ Samakal, 13 February 2023; <https://samakal.com/whole-country/article/2302156572/>

²²⁸ Jugantor, 19 April 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/667082/>

²²⁹ New Age, 14 August 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/209384/woman-killed-for-dowry-in-kurigram-husband-arrested>

²³⁰ Naya Diganta, 8 October 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/chattagram/782693/>

²³¹ Prothom Alo, 7 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/business/industry/sf41sz60xl>

²³² Ibid

²³³ Ibid

²³⁴ New Age, 29 December 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/221506/oshe-records-1432-workplace-deaths-in-2023>

²³⁵ The Daily Star, 3 July 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/rights/news/labour-rights-situation-bangladesh-listed-among-10-worst-countries-3062171>

the government and garment factory owners raise the minimum wage to BDT 23,000 (USD 210) per month. However, when the workers staged a movement to press for this demand, they were met with police violence, including tear gas, sound grenades, and bullets.²³⁶ The ongoing workers' movement for a wage increase has led to the closure of over a hundred RMG factories in Ashulia, Savar, Dhaka.²³⁷ During this period, many workers were injured, and there were reports of attacks by individuals associated with the ruling party on behalf of the factory owners, using firearms.²³⁸



When the RMG workers started protesting in the Pallabi area of Mirpur, Dhaka, local Jubo League leaders came to disperse them. Jubo League leader Awlad Hossain carried a firearm. Photo: Prothom Alo, 1 November 2023

- On 29 October, four labourers, including women workers, were killed in a clash between protesting workers and the police in Ashulia, Savar, when RMG workers were demanding a minimum wage of BDT 23,000. Among them, three workers were shot dead and one worker was burnt to death.²³⁹ The workers who were killed in the shooting are Rasel Howladar, Anjuara Begum and Jalal Uddin. In all these incidents, 12 cases have been filed against the workers and many workers, including labour leader Babul Hossain, were arrested by the police.²⁴⁰ Babul Hossain was shown as arrested by the police on 30 October in a case for setting fire on vehicles.²⁴¹

72. Despite massive workers' protests and loss of lives, the government rejected the workers' demand for a minimum wage of Tk 23,000 (USD 210) and announced a minimum wage of BDT 12,500 (USD 115).²⁴² The workers rejected this. Meanwhile, the closure of the factories without notifying workers, along with the demand for salary hike, payment of arrears and the non-payment of wages on time are all issues that led to labour unrest and the killing of a labour leader in 2023.

²³⁶ Naya Diganta, 18 July 2023; <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/dhaka/595945/>

²³⁷ Prothom Alo, 12 November 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/business/local/sbnwazlnbl>

²³⁸ Prothom Alo, 2 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/capital/g7au848daa>

²³⁹ Manabzamin, 10 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=87533>

²⁴⁰ Prothom Alo, 12 November 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/business/local/sbnwazlnbl>

²⁴¹ Prothom Alo, 16 December 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/u6gvs5s7fh>

²⁴² Prothom Alo, 8 November 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/business/industry/0ggcmbr681>

Human Rights Violations on Minority Communities

73. In 2023, criminals attacked citizens belonging to the Hindu community and their places of worship, the Ahmadiyya community and ethnic minority communities and vandalized and looted their homes.²⁴³ Some incidents are as follows:

- On 1 January, Lama Rubber Industry Limited evicted the ethnic minority Mro community, in order to occupy their land and attacked them in Rengen Mropara, vandalized, looted and set fire to their houses in Lama Upazila under Bandarban District.²⁴⁴
- On 3 March, clashes occurred between the police and leaders of some Islamic organisations and the local people, centering around a three-day Salana Jalsa (annual conference) organised by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat in Ahmadnagar under Panchagarh District. Houses and shops belonging to the Ahmadiyya community were vandalized and set on fire during the clash. Two youths named Arifur Rahman (28) and Zahid Hasan (23) were killed in the clash and at least 50 people, including two journalists were injured.²⁴⁵
- On 21 October, BNP leaders and activists visited the Durga Puja mandaps in Narayanganj Port and distributed clothes among the poverty-stricken members of the Hindu community. After receiving news about the distribution of clothes in the temple, Awami League leader Masud along with his men, threatened the temple committee members. Masud's men attacked Shibu Chandra Das, General Secretary of the Temple Committee and stabbed him leaving him seriously injured.²⁴⁶
- On 31 October, the procession of the Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad in Cumilla was stopped by a police barrier and attacked by Jubo League-Chhatra League members.²⁴⁷

74. Attacks on Hindu citizens have become a recurring issue during national elections in Bangladesh. A specific incident is highlighted below:

- In Madhuhati Union, Jhenaidah Sadar Upazila, supporters of the Awami League allegedly cut down trees from the Hindu community's cremation ground. When the Hindu community members demanded action against the perpetrators from the Union Awami League General Secretary, Farooq Hossain Jewel, no action was taken. Subsequently, when the Hindu community was asked to participate in a pre-election procession on behalf of an Awami League candidate, they refused. This refusal angered Jewel and his supporters, leading to an attack on the Hindu citizens with local weapons on 29 November. As a result, the police arrested three individuals, including Farooq Hossain Jewel, in connection with the incident.²⁴⁸

75. Instances of attacks on minority communities persist, with previous attacks on religious and ethnic groups being politicized and lacking proper prosecution. As a result, citizens belonging to minority communities live in constant fear, as the perpetrators of these attacks are allegedly being protected by the Awami League. This situation raises concerns about the safety and security of minority communities in the country.²⁴⁹ The trial for 42 out of 54 cases related to clashes that occurred in Cumilla, Noakhali, and Chandpur regarding the placement of the Holy Quran in a temple in Cumilla in 2021 has not yet begun. This delay in the trial proceedings raises concerns about the timely administration of justice in these cases.²⁵⁰

²⁴³ Prothom Alo, 2 January 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/imqpnfytb6>

²⁴⁴ Prothom Alo, 2 January 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/imqpnfytb6>

²⁴⁵ Prothom Alo, 4 March 2023 <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/swyz6pi0g4>

²⁴⁶ Prothom Alo, 22 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/t4sbvngfud>

²⁴⁷ Prothom Alo, 13 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/1xlv73svp>

²⁴⁸ Manabzamin, 1 December 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=86088>

²⁴⁹ Samakal, 30 October 2023; <https://samakal.com/special-samakal/article/2310204766/>

²⁵⁰ Prothom Alo, 18 October 2023; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/4wa2khuuug>

India's Aggression on Bangladesh and Human Rights Violations by Indian BSF

76. The aggression of the Indian ruling political elite on Bangladesh has possibly reached its peak, involving the 12th National Parliament elections. India's ruling party has been extending its full support to a political party in Bangladesh for its own interests.²⁵¹ Consequently, the current authoritarian government in Bangladesh is perceived to be safeguarding India's interests. One such instance is the special privileges granted to the Adani Group, an Indian industrial conglomerate associated with India's ruling party.²⁵² The government of Bangladesh has purchased electricity from this group, raising concerns about favoritism and potential alignment of interests between the two nations.²⁵³ Bangladesh has emerged as the fourth-largest source of remittances for India. It has been discovered that over a million Indian citizens are working illegally in Bangladesh and transferring a significant amount of foreign currency from Bangladesh to India through illegal channels. This phenomenon raises concerns about the impact on Bangladesh's economy and the need for stronger measures to address illegal labour migration and currency smuggling.²⁵⁴
77. Throughout 2023, the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) continued to violate the human rights of Bangladeshi citizens. These violations included attacks on Bangladeshi citizens crossing into Bangladesh territory, as well as incidents of [killing](#), [abduction](#) and [torturing](#) of Bangladeshi citizens along the border areas. The BSF has often claimed that Bangladeshi nationals were shot dead while involved in cattle smuggling. However, India's Enforcement Directorate (ED) charged in a case related to cow smuggling in West Bengal, India, that the BSF is directly involved in smuggling cows into Bangladesh.²⁵⁵ This revelation raises concerns about the actions of the BSF and their impact on safety of the life and property of Bangladeshi citizens living along the border of India.²⁵⁶
78. It has been reported that BSF personnel in the border areas often take the bodies of Bangladeshi citizens away²⁵⁷ after killing them and delay in handing them over to Bangladeshi authorities.²⁵⁸ Under the Memorandum of Understandings (MoU) signed between India and Bangladesh regarding the border, it is stipulated that individuals who illegally cross the border should be arrested and handed over to the respective law enforcement agencies. Additionally, the Indian government has made repeated promises to avoid using lethal weapons at the border. However, despite these commitments and obligations under international laws, the BSF continues to shoot and kill Bangladeshi citizens, thereby violating the MoU and international norms. This raises concerns about the adherence to agreements and the safety of individuals residing near the border areas.

²⁵¹ Jugantor, 16 February 2023; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/first-page/645491>

²⁵² Samakal, 1 March 2023; <https://samakal.com/economics/article/2303159642/>

²⁵³ Samakal, 18 February 2023; <https://samakal.com/bangladesh/article/2302157542/>

²⁵⁴ Daily Industry, <https://dailyindustry.news/bangladesh-becomes-4th-largestremittance-source-for-india/>

²⁵⁵ Millenium Post,

https://www.google.com/search?q=ED+says+BSF+involved+in+smuggling+cows+to+bangladesh&rlz=1C5CHFA_enBD969BD969&oq=ED+says+BSF+involved+in+smuggling+cows+to+bangladesh&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYODIBCjE2MTlyajBqMTWoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

²⁵⁶ Manabzamin, 6 May 2023; <https://mzamin.com/news.php?news=54100>

²⁵⁷ New Age, 22 February 2023; <https://www.newagebd.net/article/194907/>

²⁵⁸ The Daily Star, 23 August 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/bsf-returns-youths-body-after-78-days-3400696>

Bangladeshi nationals shot dead by Indian BSF include the following: on 1 January, [Biplab Mia](#) (22) at Burimari border under Patgram Upazila in Lalmonirhat District; on 14 January, [Delwar Hossain](#) (28) at Tekerghat border under Tahirpur Upazila in Sunamganj; on 8 February, [Ariful Islam](#) (28) at Shyamkur chairman ghat border in Jhenaidah District; on 17 February, a day labourer named [Shahabul Hossain Babu](#) (24) at Hili border in Dinajpur District; on 1 April, [Rabiul Islam](#) at Belbaridanga border under Patgram Upazila in Lalmonirhat District; on 23 April, [Sadikur Rahman](#) at Chakpara border under Shibganj Upazila in Chapainawabganj District; on 16 May, a youth named [Manjurul Islam](#) (22) at Shahpur Kamarpara border under Chirirbandar Upazila in Dinajpur District; on 21 May, a stone worker named [Palash Hossain](#) (35) at Baguladangi border under Tetulia Upazila in Panchagarh District; on 5 June, [Yusuf Ali](#) (25) at Kalirhat border under Patgram Upazila in Lalmonirhat District; on 10 June, a farmer named [Zinnat Ali](#) (55) at Jagdal border under Ranisankail Upazila in Thakurgaon District; on 4 July, a cattle trader named [Sujan Rana](#) (30) at Sukani border under Tetulia Upazila in Panchagarh District; on 22 August, a mentally challenged person named [Bablu Haque](#) (36) at Chakpara border under Shibganj Upazila in Chapainawabganj District; on 3 September, a cattle trader named [Manik Mia](#) (35) at Behular Char border under Roumari Upazila in Kurigram District; on 7 September, [Nur Islam](#) (27) at Ghaowra border under Boda Upazila in Panchagarh District; on 16 September, [Mizanur Rahman](#) (50) at Jibannagar border in Chuadanga District; on 28 September, a cattle trader named [Rabiul Islam](#) at Damurhuda border in Chuadanga District; on 4 October, [Ferdous](#) (14) at Lalarchak border under Kulaura Upazila in Moulvibazar District; on 17 October, a cattle trader named [Akkas Ali](#) (35) at Islampur border under Tetulia Upazila in Panchagarh District; on 23 October, [Nuruzzaman](#) (40) at Ratnai border under Baliadangi Upazila in Thakurgaon District; on 1 November, a businessman named [Ainul Haque](#) (32) at Tetulia border in Panchagarh; on 9 November, [Samirul Islam](#) (14) at Diar Manikchak border under Godagari Upazila in Rajshahi District; on 27 November, [Rakibul Islam](#) (35) at Chapatala border under Maheshpur Upazila in Jhenaidah District; on 2 December, [Rajbul](#) (22) at Ronokpur border under Gomstapur Upazila in Chapainawabganj District; on 4 December, [Zahurul Islam and Mohammad Mokles](#) at Dabri border under Haripur Upazila in Thakurgaon District; and on 16 December, two cattle traders named [Sajedur Rahman](#) (27) and [Khaja Moinuddin](#) (35) at Baradi border under Darshana Upazila in Chuadanga District.

79. In 2023, a total of 28 Bangladeshi nationals were killed and 28 were injured and seven were abducted by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). Among those who were killed, 27 were gunned down, one was tortured to death. Among the 28 who were injured, 21 were shot, six were tortured and one Bangladeshi was wounded when BSF members threw crud bomb.

Government Repression on Human Rights Defenders

80. Human rights defenders continue to be persecuted under an authoritarian regime in Bangladesh. They have been targeted by the government for their legitimate work and reporting to the UN human rights mechanisms and other international organisations. A study conducted by the Centre for Government Studies (CGS) found that human rights defenders faced obstruction and harassment by members of the ruling party, law enforcement and intelligence agencies.²⁵⁹
81. On 31 March, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk [expressed deep concern](#) over the detention, trial, harassment and intimidation of journalists and human rights defenders in Bangladesh and the imposition of the Digital Security Act, 2018 to suppress the voices of online critics.
82. In addition to the deregistration of Odhikar by the NGO Affairs Bureau, the government and pro-government entities have launched hate campaigns against

²⁵⁹ The Daily Star, 23 July 2023; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/50-rights-defenders-65-percent-faced-obstacles-work-3375901>

Odhikar in various media. On 11 July, UN human rights experts called on Bangladeshi authorities to end all forms of harassment against Odhikar representatives and ensure respect for due process. Despite this, the Awami League government launched a massive crackdown on Odhikar and its leadership since 2013 through repression, surveillance, harassment and smear campaigns by pro-government media outlets. Following years of stalling, in 2023, the government expedited the trial²⁶⁰ in the case filed against Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan under the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006, for publishing a fact-finding report on extrajudicial killings in 2013. After a decade of [judicial harassment](#), on 14 September 2023, Dhaka Cyber Tribunal judge A. M. Julfiker Hayet sentenced them to two years in prison and fined them BDT 10,000 each. This is the first time in Bangladesh's history that human rights defenders have been jailed for reporting on human rights violations. On 10 October 2023, Justice Md Emdadul Haq Azad, of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, granted Adilur

²⁶⁰On 14 February 2021, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court (AD) dismissed the application for dismissal of the case filed against the Secretary and Director of Odhikar and directed that the case be referred to the Cyber Tribunal for hearing. In light of this dismissal a review application was filed with the AD seeking reconsideration of Odhikar's application for dismissal. Meanwhile, the first hearing of the case commenced on 12 September 2021 at the Dhaka Cyber Tribunal. The lawyer for Odhikar informed the Tribunal of the application for review, which was pending in the AD, and appealed to the Tribunal to take necessary steps after the review hearing. The Tribunal did not grant the prayer and fixed 05 October 2021 as the date for taking evidence and examining witnesses for the Prosecution (PW). The Tribunal proceeded to take evidence and examined witnesses for the Prosecution on 09 November and 24 November 2021. On 15 December the PW was not present, so the next date for examination was set for 20 January 2022. On 20 February and 28 March, the PW's to be examined was absent. On 08 May, a PW was examined but on the next given date, 09 June 2022, it was learnt at the Tribunal, that the PW who was to be examined had passed away several months ago. The Tribunal fixed 13 July 2022 as the next date but the PW was absent that day. The PW's who were to be examined on 03 August and 22 August had also passed away. However, the defendants still had to appear at the Tribunal on each and every day. PW's were examined on 05 and 26 September, 17 October and 27 November respectively. The Tribunal fixed 15 January 2023 as the next date but the government witness (PW) did not appear and the court fixed the next date on 29 January. Cyber Tribunal Judge A. M. Julfiker Hayet also ordered that the government's evidence be taken on every working day from the next hearing. On 29 January, two government witnesses testified. The testimony of the investigating officer of this case, Police Inspector Mohammad Ashraful Islam, was taken over two days, 29 January and 1 February. The Tribunal fixed 20 February as the next date for taking evidence. No witness appeared in court on 20 February. On that day, the evidences seized by the Intelligence and Crime Information Department (North) DMP, under General Diary No.268, dated 10/08/2013, was produced by P.W.-18, and the defendant appealed to exclude the said evidences, as they were not under the GD which was the basis of the trial. However, the court rejected the appeal. Witnesses did not appear on 02 March, 19 March or 05 April. The Tribunal then declared the taking of evidence closed and fixed 30 April for the examination of the accused under Section 342 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898. On 30 April, the Tribunal fixed 03 May as the next date, without examining the accused under Section 342. As the Tribunal was 'not ready' on 03 May, the next date was fixed on 10 May. On 10 May, a written objection was filed on behalf of the defendants when the Public Prosecutor (PP) applied for further investigation on behalf of the State. The Tribunal fixed 15 May as the date of hearing on the plea for further investigation. On that day, the Tribunal granted the plea for further investigation and sent the case to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court and directed the CID, Dhaka to conduct further investigation. 01 June was fixed as the date for submission of a supplementary charge sheet by CID, but the CID failed to submit the supplementary charge sheet that day, and the Metropolitan Magistrate's Court fixed the next date of the case on 09 July. On 17 July, and 20 July the Prosecution presented two witnesses who had been named in a new seizure list (a list made during the 'further investigation'). 26 July was the scheduled date for examination of these witnesses, where the Defense lawyers submitted that the Cyber Tribunal Judge should adjourn its ongoing proceedings until the hearing of the matter challenging the validity of a 'further investigation' takes place in the High Court Division and is disposed off accordingly. The Tribunal Judge A. M. Zulfiker Hayet rejected the application for adjournment. On 1 August 2023 the two accused were examined under Section 342 of the Code of Criminal Procedure-1898. 10 August was the scheduled date for arguments. The Public Prosecutor concluded his arguments by praying to the court for the maximum punishment to be given to the accused persons. On 24 August the defence lawyer, Advocate Ruhul Amin Bhuiyan, summarized the whole of the proceedings then argued that the Prosecution's case is false and fabricated and that it has failed to prove the allegations and is liable to be dismissed and Adil and Elan should be acquitted. On 7 September 2023 (fixed by the Tribunal) the Tribunal judge did not pronounce the judgment as he was not prepared. On 14 September 2023, Dhaka Cyber Tribunal judge A. M. Julfiker Hayet pronounced the judgement and sentenced the rights activists each to two years imprisonment and fine.

and Elan's bail, but they were released from the Dhaka Central Jail located in Keraniganj on 15 October after 31 days of imprisonment.

83. On 13 November 2023, International human rights organisations - Amnesty International, The May 18 Memorial Foundation, Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), International Service for Human Rights, (ISHR), CIVICUS, FORUM-ASIA, Capital Punishment Justice Project (CPJP), Martin Annals Award for Human Rights Defenders, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) – organised a discussion meeting on the human rights situation in Bangladesh at Room XXII of the UN building after the main session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Bangladesh at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. The speakers at the meeting were OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock, CIVICUS UN Advocacy and Network Officer Roisin Dunbar, FORUM-ASIA Executive Director Mary Aileen Diez Bacalso, Human Rights Watch Senior Researcher Julia Bleckner and Odhikar Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan. The event was moderated by CPJP consultant Ashrafuzzaman. Many officials, including Sanchita Haque, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Bangladesh Mission in Geneva, were present in the audience. During the meeting, Sanchita Haque read a long, pre-written statement supporting the government and against human rights defenders in Bangladesh. Some Switzerland based Awami League leaders and activists accompanying her, created chaos in the meeting and verbally abused and harassed the moderator of the meeting, Ashrafuzzaman and the speakers, including Adilur Rahman Khan.
84. The court proceedings in the case filed against internationally acclaimed photographer and rights activist [Shahidul Alam](#) under Section 57 of the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) Act, 2006 continue, despite enormous criticism at home and abroad. It is to be noted that Section 57 of the ICT Act, 2006 under which the case was filed against Shahidul, was repealed in 2018 and incorporated in the Digital Security Act 2018. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is yet to submit an [investigation report](#) despite the court order for it to be submitted by 16 March 2023. Shahidul Alam has to appear at the Tribunal every month. On 13 December, Shahidul Alam appeared at the Tribunal, as per court order.
85. Nobel Peace Prize winner and founder of Grameen Bank, Professor Muhammad Yunus, has been facing judicial harassment and intimidation for almost a decade. He is facing [174 cases](#) filed on allegations of labour law violation, money laundering, corruption, etc., over the past decade during the Awami League rule. On 27 September, the Anti-Corruption Commission [summoned](#) Yunus and seven directors of Grameen Telecom to appear at the ACC in connection with a case filed against them on charges of money laundering. On 24 December, the Labour Court in Dhaka fixed 1 January 2024 as the date to pronounce the verdict against Prof Dr. Muhammad Yunus and three others in a case filed on charges of violating labour laws.²⁶¹ During the writing of this report, Prof Yunus and three others were convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for six months in a [labour law violation case](#) on 1 January 2024, by the third Labour Court chairman, Sheikh Merina Sultana. The court also fined them BDT 30,000 each.²⁶²

²⁶¹ Prothom Alo, 24 December 2023; <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/oq67o5bqsf>

²⁶² The Daily Star, 1 January 2024; <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/yunus-sentenced-six-months-jail-labour-law-violation-case-3508051>

Recommendations

1. The one-sided 12th Parliamentary elections, under the authoritarian regime of the Awami League, scheduled for 7 January 2024, will push the ongoing political and economic crisis of Bangladesh to the edge. Therefore, according to Article 123 (3) (b) of the Constitution, the parliament should be dissolved and elections should be held within the next 90 days after ensuring the participation of all pro-democratic political parties through objective dialogue on restoration of democracy by ensuring the people's right to vote in a credible and transparent manner.
2. Government's interference on constitutional and state institutions must be stopped and the government must refrain from controlling the judiciary.
3. The citizens' freedom of peaceful assembly must be protected and ensured. Attacks and harassment of opposition political parties and dissidents must stop. All repressive and politically motivated cases must be withdrawn and political prisoners be released immediately.
4. The government's interference on freedom of expression and media must cease. All cases filed against human rights defenders, including journalists, must be withdrawn. Fair and impartial investigations into the attacks on them must be made, and the actual perpetrators be brought to justice. The targeted ban on print and electronic media should be lifted.
5. All repressive laws, including the Special Powers Act 1974, Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 (Amendments 2009 & 2013), Cyber Security Act, 2023 should be repealed. The cases filed under these draconian laws, including the Digital Security Act, 2018 must be withdrawn.
6. Members of law enforcement agencies and security forces involved in extrajudicial killings, torture and ill-treatment must be prosecuted and held accountable. Basic Principles on the use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement officials and the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement officials must be followed.
7. All victims who still remain disappeared must be returned to their families. Enforced disappearance must be criminalized under domestic law as a punishable offense and those involved in disappearances should be prosecuted.
8. To curtail acts of violence against women and children, perpetrators must be impartially investigated and prosecuted quickly. Shelter homes must be established in all districts for women and child victims of domestic violence.
9. The state and the government should take special measures to ensure that citizens who are in a minority compared to other citizens of the society due to their language, caste or religious belief, are able to protect their lives and property; and that their full rights in the practice of their language, religion and culture are ensured.
10. The state repression on Odhikar must stop. The judgement against Odhikar's Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and its Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan must be quashed and the case filed against them under the ICT Act should be withdrawn. Odhikar's registration must be reinstalled. Persecution, surveillance, harassment of all human rights organisations and human rights defenders at home and transnational repression abroad must cease.
11. India's invasive and aggressive behaviour towards Bangladesh must stop. All kinds of human rights violations, including killing, torture and abduction by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on Bangladeshi citizens at the border areas must cease.
12. The UN Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should strongly consider adopting a new country mandate on Bangladesh to collect evidence of gross human rights violations.

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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Odhikar.HumanRights>

Twitter: [@odhikar_bd](https://twitter.com/odhikar_bd)

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 so.