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In the pouring rain, Rohingya refugees queue for hours, waiting for an aid distribution, Bangladesh, 28 September 2017. More than 520,000 Rohingya have fled the Myanmar military's campaign of violence in the span of seven weeks, which has led to an unfolding humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh. Many arrive without having eaten for days or weeks while trying to flee the military's violence in Myanmar. © Andrew Stanbridge / Amnesty International

BANGLADESH

People's Republic of Bangladesh

Head of state: **Abdul Hamid**

Head of government: **Sheikh Hasina**

A smear campaign, mostly provoked by mainstream media stories, against Rohingya refugees fuelled tension between host and refugee communities. Hundreds of people were victims of apparent extrajudicial executions in the so-called "war on drugs" campaign. The Digital Security Act severely restricted the work of journalists, activists, human rights defenders, and others who faced arrests for exercising their right to freedom of expression. There was a sharp increase in incidents of violence against women and girls. Meanwhile, Bangladesh reported the fastest economic growth rate in the Asia-Pacific region, accelerating the country's socio-economic

development efforts, while widening inequalities.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The government continued to use repressive legislation to unduly restrict the right to freedom of expression, and target and harass journalists, activists and human rights defenders. Nearly 400 indictments were filed under the DSA since October 2018, and 200 were dismissed due to lack of evidence. Journalists of mainstream newspapers told Amnesty that they refrained from publishing stories for fear of reprisals or intimidation from members of intelligence agencies. In February, five journalists of Jugantor newspaper were sued and one was arrested under the DSA for reporting on police corruption.

In January, in two separate cases, an opposition activist was arrested for her

online action of allegedly "spreading anti-state propaganda" on Facebook. A young man was arrested by the Rapid Action Battalion for posting a "distorted image" of the Prime Minister on Facebook.

In May, a famous national poet Henry Sawpon, a university teacher and another youth were arrested under DSA provisions for social media posts deemed to "hurt religious sentiment". A Supreme Court lawyer and human rights defender Imtiaz Mahmud was arrested in May for a Facebook post he made in 2017 regarding violence against indigenous community in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

In October, members of Bangladesh Student League (BSL), the ruling party Awami League's student wing, mercilessly beat to death a student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) at his dormitory for merely expressing his views on Facebook on an India-Bangladesh agreement.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly continued to be severely restricted. Political opponents were frequently denied the right to organize campaign meetings and political rallies.

In August, the authorities restricted Rohingya refugees' freedom of movement and assembly after they organized a rally to mark what they called the 'Genocide' day, the second anniversary of their forced displacement, and urging Myanmar's government to ensure their safe and dignified return.

Police blocked the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) from holding rallies in Narayanganj in February and in Dhaka in August. In September, the police prevented the BNP from holding an anniversary rally in at least 14 districts. In June, the ruling party Awami League's student wing attacked people gathering for the funeral of an opposition leader of the Jamaat Islami, injuring six of them. The student wing also dispersed an anti-drug demonstration, along with the police, attacking protesters in the eastern Sunamganj district. On 30th December, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) attacked a left-alliance rally organized to protest alleged vote rigging in the 11th National Parliament Elections held in 30th December 2018, leaving at least 31 people injured. On the same day, the police also denied the opposition BNP holding a rally in Dhaka protesting the similar event.

In December, members of BSL and an associate outfit Muktijuddha Manch (so-called Liberation Fighters' Platform) attacked the Vice President of Dhaka University Student Union Nurul Haq and other students from different public and private universities for organizing a rally in solidarity with Indian students protesting Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens, which left at least 25 students critically injured—some of them faced life-threatening injuries.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

More than 388 people were killed by the security forces in alleged extrajudicial executions (EJEs)—279 people were killed before arrest, 97 people killed after arrest, and others were killed after torture or other means. At least 49 Rohingya refugees were extrajudicially executed during this period. EJEs by security forces continued unabated, many under the cover of the "war on drugs" campaign. In some of the cases, victims were disappeared for months before they were killed in what the authorities claimed were "gunfights". At least 13 people were forcibly disappeared—four of them were released, one was shown arrest and the remaining eight people are still missing.

MOB VIOLENCE

At least 65 individuals were killed in mob violence. At least eight of them were killed by mob lynching on fabricated allegations about child abduction. The authorities did little to investigate cases or hold perpetrators to account for their crimes.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

There was a sharp increase in violence against women and girls during the year. At least 17,900 reported cases of violence against women, including 5,400 reported rape cases. At least 988 women and girls (including 103 minors aged between 7-12 years) were murdered after rapes, attempted rapes, sexual and physical tortures, acid violence, and dowry-related violence. The reported incidents of rape increased dramatically in recent months. September 2019 observed 232 reported rape cases—the highest in a single month since 2010. The alarming rise of violence against women and girls is partly due to the prevailing culture of impunity and lack of government commitment.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

About a million of Myanmar's mainly Muslim Rohingya remained in the district of Cox's Bazar. Bangladesh continued to refuse to formally recognize Rohingya as refugees while the community faced discrimination at multiple levels, including access to education, livelihood and freedom of movement.

The government's strict policy not to allow Rohingya refugees access to education continues. Though the government allows informal education in learning centres—in total 280,000 children aged 4 to 14 have access to these learning centres, more than half a million children aged 18 years or below (including 4-14 age group) had no access to any accredited primary and secondary education in the refugee camps.

A section of the mainstream media launched a smear campaign against the Rohingya refugees labelling them as a "security threat", a "burden" and an "abscess" that needs to be removed. The state of hysteria dangerously agitated the host community and turned them against the refugees. In September, regulatory authorities ordered mobile phone companies to shutdown network frequencies inside the refugee camps, while the security forces recommended erecting barbed wire fence around the camps.

CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

Police and army continued to fail to protect indigenous villagers and activists in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) from the [Bengali] settler attacks. Indigenous people[s] faced forced-displacement and discrimination. At least 43 indigenous political activists were killed and 67 injured mostly as a result of infighting between political factions. Fifteen indigenous political activists were reportedly abducted by unknown groups. In an incident in March, seven people, including polling officials, were killed by unknown assailants. In August, the military extrajudicially executed three Indigenous political activists.