



24. Februar 2015

## BANGLADESH

Dozens of people were killed when passenger buses and other vehicles were attacked with petrol bombs in the context of anti-government campaigns. Hundreds of opposition supporters were detained for various periods, at times on politically motivated grounds. Independent media came under severe pressure and freedom of expression was restricted. At least nine secularist bloggers and publishers were attacked, five of whom died from their injuries. More than 40 people were subjected to enforced disappearance.

### *Background*

An anti-government campaign led by the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) between January and March turned violent as hundreds of buses and other vehicles were attacked, allegedly by demonstrators using petrol bombs. Dozens of passengers were killed and scores more injured. No one directly involved in the attacks was brought to justice.

Police arrested senior members of the BNP and charged them with arson. They included Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the party's acting Secretary General, who was frequently arrested during the year for periods of weeks or months before being released.

Hundreds of opposition members were detained for days or months before being released. Some were charged with arson.

A number of foreign nationals were targeted for attacks by unidentified assailants. Between 28 September and 18 November, an Italian aid worker and a Japanese national were shot dead; an Italian doctor survived a gun attack.

A 13-year-old boy, Samiul Islam Rajon, was beaten to death in public in July after being accused of theft, prompting strong public criticism of the neglect suffered by children living on the street. The government ordered an investigation into the killing shortly afterwards.

At least 16 people accused of mass human rights violations during the 1971 Independence War were on trial at the end of the year. Well-documented killings by pro-independence forces were not addressed by the authorities.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Independent media outlets critical of the authorities came under severe pressure. In October the government warned business enterprises that they would be penalized if they advertised in *Prothom-Alo* and the *Daily Star*, two leading newspapers known for their critical stance.

In November, a parliamentary standing committee recommended that the anti-corruption NGO Transparency International should be deregistered in Bangladesh for criticizing the Parliament.

A court in Dhaka imposed charges of contempt of court against 49 civil society activists who criticized its trials as unfair.

Authorities blocked social media messaging and other communications applications in November, in what constituted restrictions on freedom of expression.

Bloggers expressing secular views were attacked, reportedly by Islamist groups. In February, Avijit Roy was hacked to death by men wielding machetes. His wife, Rafida Ahmed Bonya, survived. By August, three other bloggers, Washiqur Rahman, Niloy Neel and Ananta Bijoy Das, had been hacked to death. In October, a publisher of secularist literature was hacked to death, and a publisher and two secularist writers survived an attack. Government authorities, including the Prime Minister, accused the bloggers and publishers of offending religious feelings in their writings.

## ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Members of the security forces in plain clothes arrested dozens of people and later denied knowledge of their whereabouts. A survey of national newspapers conducted by the human rights organization Ain O Salish Kendra indicated the enforced disappearance of at least 43 individuals, including two women, between January and September. Of the 43, six were later found dead; four were released after their abduction; and five were found in police custody. The fate and whereabouts of the other 28 was unknown.

Trials continued against three Rapid Action Battalion officers charged with abducting and killing seven people in April 2014. No members of security forces or officials implicated in other cases of enforced disappearance were brought to justice.

## TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

While torture and other ill-treatment in police custody was widespread, torture complaints were rarely investigated. In March, senior police authorities complained publicly about the legal safeguards against torture, calling on the government to decriminalize torture in time of war, threat of war, internal political instability or public emergency, or when torture is ordered by a superior or a public authority.

## CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

A government memorandum issued in January placed severe restrictions on people wishing to visit or organize events in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in breach of the government's obligation to respect

the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as freedom from discrimination and freedoms of movement, peaceful assembly and association.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

According to the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association, more than 240 complaints of rape were reported in the media between January and May. Human rights groups said while reported incidents of rape had risen in recent years, the conviction rate was extremely low, mainly due to the lack of timely and effective investigations. Many women and girls were reluctant to report rape to the authorities. Survivors of rape were required to prove that force was used against them, including having to undergo a physical examination.

## DEATH PENALTY

At least 198 people were sentenced to death, including six men convicted of killing Samiul Islam Rajon (see above). They also included Oishee Rahman, sentenced to death for killing her parents in 2013. Her lawyers argued that she was under the age of 18 at the time of the alleged murder and therefore not subject to the death penalty, but the court upheld a medical examination that concluded she was 19.

The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), a Bangladeshi court established to investigate the events of the 1971 independence war, sentenced four more people to death. The proceedings of the Tribunal were marked with severe irregularities and violations of the right to a fair trial. Challenges to the jurisdiction of the court continued to be barred due to a constitutional provision. Statements from prosecution witnesses shown by the defence to have been false were still used as evidence in court. Affidavits by defence witnesses that the accused was too far from the site of the offence to be involved were not admitted. The government prevented defence witnesses abroad from attending trials by denying visas. Appeals processes were marked by similar flaws.

Despite repeated calls by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations to stop executions after unfair trials and flawed appeal hearings, three prisoners were executed in 2015, bringing the number of executions after ICT trials to four.