

*Annual Observation by*  
**BANGAJ**

# HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF BANGLADESH IN 2017

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of Bangladesh in 2017

*This report has been prepared based on  
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BANGAJ's investigation.*

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# HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF BANGLADESH IN 2017

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Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in the areas of poverty, hunger and nutrition, women empowerment, education and climate change which are directly linked to United Nations (UN's) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On the other hand, although, the country has continued its advancement in the areas of economic, social and cultural rights, there was limited progress in the sphere of civil and political rights. Some positive initiatives included: providing shelters to Rohingya refugees who were subject to 'genocide', barbaric torture and forced displacement; the verdict of seven-murder case of Narayanganj, and finalizing the draft of "The Dowry Prohibition Act 2017". However, the trend of "missing people" of different class and profession has added a new dimension to the human rights violations, besides abduction, disappearance and secret killings by the Law Enforcement Agencies. Moreover, oppression against religious minorities was also disquieting in the year 2017.

## ABDUCTION AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES (EDS)

BANGAJ's documentation revealed that 60 people fell victims to abduction, disappearance, and murder by the members of Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) in 2017. Later, dead-bodies of two persons were rescued, eight were shown arrested, and seven returned to their family. Total 31 people disappeared mysteriously in 2017. Among them, nine people returned and law enforcement agencies showed seven persons as arrested. In most of these cases, family members claimed that they remained missing since, they had been taken away by the people who introduced themselves as members of law enforcement agencies. However, on 16 January 2017, Narayanganj District and Sessions Judge delivered a verdict against the criminals including RAB officials in a much-discussed Narayanganj seven-murder case through due processes against 35 convicts. In the verdict, 26 were given death penalty including three senior RAB officers and a former Narayanganj City Corporation

Councillor Nur Hossain while nine others have been sentenced to various prison terms.

## CASE STUDY

On 15 November 2017, a Madrasa student named Masum Billah, as his family claimed, was taken away by some people in plain clothes introducing themselves as policemen from a house of Harindiya Berepukur Madrasapara area of Kotchadpur, Jhenaidah. Almost one month before the incident, on 12 October 2017, an unknown person or persons took away Masum's cousin named Maksudur Rahman from the adjacent area of their house. It may be mentioned that, though Masum was shown as arrested in a case at Damurhuda Model Thana, Chuadanga on 05 December 2017, Maksud is still missing.

## THREATENED FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Incidents of misusing section 57 of the "Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act" were frequently reported by the media and human rights organizations. Since, the proposed 'Digital Security Act' contains the same provisions as section 57, it also poses threats to freedom of speech. According to media reports, cases were filed against 54 journalists and writers under section 57 of the ICT Act in 2017. Besides, in the pretext of security, in different

social and religious festivals like Pohela Boishakh and Rathayatra, law enforcement agencies imposed terms and conditions, even putting bars to the celebrations of the festivals. However, honourable High Court division retained the lower court's verdict of death sentence of two criminals and punishment of eight other accused people in the case of blogger Rajib Haider murder in April 2017.

### CASE STUDY

- ! On 02 June, Hefajat-e-Islam gave 24 hours ultimatum to arrest Sultana Kamal, a prominent human rights activist and former managing Executive Director of BANGAJ, for her comment in a Television talk show regarding the removal of the statue from the Supreme Court premises. They also threatened to assault her physically.
- ! Upon the allegation of homosexuality, 27 young boys were arrested from Keraniganj, Dhaka on 18 May. Later they were shown as arrested in a drug case. Nevertheless, their pictures were shown in different media identifying them as homosexuals.

## EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLINGS (EJKS), TORTURE, AND DEATH IN CUSTODY

Following the trend of the previous year, this year also police, RAB, and other law enforcement agencies were accused of killing many people. According to BANGAJ Documentation, 162 people were killed by law enforcement agencies through crossfire, gunfight, and shootout. Besides, 53 people died under jail custody in 2017, among them 33 were prisoners and 20 were convicted prisoners.

### CASE STUDY

- ! On 18 July, approximately at around 7:30 pm, a person named Shah Jamal alias Shahjalal (31), was detained by police allegedly to be a mugger and he was taken to Khalishpur police station. Shahjalal claimed, "from the Police station they took me to the Khulna Highway area although, they said that they will take me to the hospital. There, police gouged out my two eyes with something like a screwdriver after binding my hands, legs and mouth."
- ! On 18 March 2017, RAB took a businessman named Hanif Mridha, severely injured, to Kurmitola General Hospital, Dhaka, where the on-duty doctor declared him dead. During investigation by BANGAJ team, Hanif's family accused that on 27 February 2017, some persons in civilian dress claiming to be plain clothed CID

(Criminal Investigation Department) policemen arrested him from Kanchpur area of Narayanganj and took him away. Then, on 15 March, some persons introducing themselves as RAB personnel went to his house at Rayerbajar with Hanif and left the house taking him away with his two signed cheques of a privately-owned bank. But RAB claimed that Hanif was arrested from Ashkona of Dhaka on 17 March in suspicion of his involvement with terrorist group. On 04 March 2017, Hanif's family filed a general diary (GD) in Siddhirganj police station when Hanif was still missing as his whereabouts were unknown.

## RESTRICTED FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

Though freedom of assembly and freedom of association are guaranteed as fundamental rights under the constitution of Bangladesh, enjoyment of these rights were restricted especially, for the political parties as they were not allowed to arrange any meeting on different occasions in this year.

## CASE STUDY

- ! On 20 July, police created barricade to the movement of the students of seven colleges of the Capital under University of Dhaka for their examination schedule. Siddiqur Rahman, a student of Titumir College, was seriously injured as the police threw tear gas on the demonstrators. Siddiqur's both eyes were damaged in that incident.
- ! Police created a barricade in a procession arranged by Khagrachori Hill Women's Federation on the occasion of 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the abduction of indigenous leader Kalpana Chakma; participating women were beaten and 21 activists of Hill Women's Federation were arrested from the spot.
- ! On 28 October, the Chairperson of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Begum Khaleda Zia's car, along with others, were attacked on the way to Cox's Bazar where she was going to distribute relief to Rohingya refugees. Besides, on 18 June, BNP General Secretary Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir and his whole group were attacked at Ichakhali, Rangunia Upazila, Chittagong when they were going to Rangamati to distribute relief to the people affected by landslides – some BNP leaders were physically harassed too. BNP accused the activists of the ruling party for the attacks.

## HARASSMENT AGAINST JOURNALIST

In 2017, the sum of journalists who were physically assaulted, attacked, threatened and harassed by law enforcement agencies, powerful people, leaders, criminals, ruling political party members and activists was 122 as mentioned in BANGAJ documentation.

## CASE STUDY

- ! On 02 February 2017, a reporter named Abdul Hakim Shimul of the Daily Samakal was shot while collecting news during a conflict between two groups of Awami League at Shahjadpur, Sirajganj. Next day, on 03 February, he died while undergoing treatment. Against this incident, a case was filed. According to the Ballistic report of Crime Investigation Department (CID) of Police, it was proved that the reporter was killed by the bullet shot by the shotgun of Halimul Haq Miru, municipal Mayor of Sahjadpur, Sirajganj.
- ! On 26 January, Kazi Ahsan Bin Didar, a reporter, and the cameraman named Abdul Alim of ATN News, were attacked by police while performing their professional duties on the day of half-day hartal (shut down) called by 'National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports'. They were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) with several injuries.
- ! On 27 June, camera reporter Ashik Ahmed of Daily Observer was arrested and tortured by police who were accused of demanding one lakh taka as bribes from him.

## SHRINKING RIGHT TO HEALTH

A series of complaints about indiscipline and chaos in health sector came into public in 2017, including patients' death for doctors' negligence, wrong treatment, delayed treatment to critical patients, deprivation of basic healthcare and so on. For example, several patients and their relatives brought repeated allegations of misbehaviour and attack against the intern doctors of Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital, Bogra. Though, the Health Minister postponed their internship, he had to withdraw the declaration following the movements by

these doctors. On the other hand, Bangladesh government finalized a draft of “Sasthyaseba Ain 2017” (‘Health Care Act 2017’) to ensure better health care services. Nevertheless, many have raised questions against section 25 of the law where doctors are given an indemnity.

### CASE STUDY

- ! Parvin Akter gave birth to a child on the street in front of Azimpur 'Matrisadan o Sishushastya Proshikshan Protisthan' on 17 October 2017, as she was denied from basic health care from three government hospitals. The new-born died just after the birth.
- ! A female student of University of Dhaka named Afia Jahan Choity died on 18 May at Central Hospital in the Capital for wrong treatment. Though, a case was filed against the accused doctors including the director of the hospital, it was later withdrawn.

## VIOLATION OF WOMEN RIGHTS

Despite the fact that women are progressing in socio-economic, cultural, educational, sports and administrative sectors, the parliament passed the “Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017”, keeping “special provision” for child marriage. Nevertheless, many women, human rights and development organizations protested and raised voices against this.

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

In 2017, the number of sexual harassment increased in different educational institutions and workplaces. 255 women were sexually harassed by miscreants of whom 12 committed suicide. Altogether 13 people including three women were murdered for protesting sexual harassment. In addition, 168 people were assaulted for protesting sexual abuse.

## RAPE

About 818 incidents of rape took place in 2017 which were higher compared to 659 in the previous year. Among these, 47 women were killed after the rape and 11 committed suicide. It is alleged that rich and powerful people, members of law enforcement agencies and transport labourers were involved in these incidents.

### CASE STUDY

- ! On 29 April, Hazrat Ali and his daughter Ayesha Akter committed suicide by jumping out from the running train near Sripur Station of Gazipur for not getting justice for the incident of rape.
- ! On 28 March, two university female students were invited to a birthday party and raped at Raintree Hotel at Banani, Dhaka by the son of the Owner of Apan Jewelers, Safat Ahmed and his aides.
- ! On 25 August, a student of Ideal Law College named Rupa Haq was raped by transport labourer in a running bus from Bogra to Mymensingh, and after rape, she was killed.
- ! On 27 July, convener of Sramik League Tufan Sarkar from Bogra called a student to his house and raped her. Then on 28 July he and a host of his cadres took the girl away and they beat her mother as well—later, they cut off their hairs.

## SALISH AND FATWA

According to BANGAJ documentation, 10 women became subject to Salish and Fatwa in 2017. Among them, three women were ousted from the village, three became victims of *hillah* marriage and *dorrah* (beating in public) and four were physically assaulted. In December 2017, a *Fatwa* was issued from Silaidaha-Jam-e mosque of Kumarkhali Upazila, Kushtia that women were not allowed to go to the crop field on the grounds of causing 'harm to crops' and committing 'unsocial activities'.

Women in many parts of the country experienced severe violence, for example – a total of 303 women were tortured for dowry and among them, 145 were killed and 10 committed suicide. Nonetheless, 188 cases were filed regarding these incidents. Moreover, 442 women went through domestic violence in 2017 of which 270 women were killed by husbands and in-laws, 34 women were killed by their own family and 58 women committed suicide due to torture. Altogether, 239 cases were filed with different police stations for these incidents.

## TORTURE ON DOMESTIC WORKER AND ACID VIOLENCE

In 2017, 43 female domestic workers were exposed to torturers. Among them, 26 died in their employers' houses. Alarmingly, 32 women became victims of acid throwing and one died for the same. Due to adverse situations, it was difficult to collect real information about violence against domestic worker.

## CHILD REPRESSION AND MURDER

The frustrating trend of child repression and murder continued in this year. According to BANGAJ's documentation, 1675 children were killed and became subject to cruel tortures. Among them 339 were murdered, 117 committed suicide and 37 died mysteriously. Besides, 565 children became victims of sexual harassment, rape and stalking in 2017.

## VIOLATION OF WORKERS RIGHTS

According to 'Safety and Rights Society'<sup>1</sup> a total of 321 accidents took place in workplaces in 2017, whereas 426 workers died due to fire breakout and building collapse. Challenges like the lower wage, dues, and bonus dissatisfaction remained similar to previous year. Moreover, migrant workers continued being subject to torture and deprivation of their rights.

### CASE STUDY

On 03 July, 13 workers died and 50 were injured in Gazipur due to boiler burst which they were forced to continue using despite of their complaints of defects. At Char Muktarpur, Munshiganj Sadar, fire broke out in Ideal Textile Mill on 20 July 2017. Six people died including 4 workers in that incident. Lastly, on 12 December, four workers including three women got burnt and died in a gas cylinder burst at FS Cosmetic factory at Kaliarkoir, Gazipur.

## BORDER KILLING AND TORTURE

This year Border Security Force (BSF) of India killed 24 Bangladeshis among whom 18 people were shot and 6 others died due to physical tortures at the Bangladesh-India border and adjacent areas. Despite repeated assurances from the highest authority of India, killing in the border did not come to an end.

## ATROCITIES AGAINST RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

This year several communal groups attacked on different inhabitants of minority communities while destroying and torching their houses and looting their resources in Rangpur, Brahmanbaria, Faridpur, Jessore, Barishal, and Sunamganj. According to the statistical report of BANGAJ, a total of 212 idols of the Hindu community, 45 houses and 21 business organizations were attacked, destroyed and looted in different parts of the country.

### CASE STUDY

- ! Accusing people for defaming Islam on Facebook, criminals launched a massive attack and made a huge devastation in Bishnu's shop at Malopara and different houses in Faridpur's Sadarpur Hat Krisnapur Bajar and its adjacent area on 02 November.
- ! 15 Hindu houses were torched and 03 houses were vandalized and destroyed on 10 November for the same accusation in Rangpur Sadar and Thakurpara of Gangachora Upazila. One person died in this incident when police clashed with the attackers and 20 police were injured.
- ! On 18 May, at Iswarganj of Mymensingh, a group of miscreants critically injured a muezzin named Mustafijur Rahman of a mosque of Ahmadia community with a sharp knife. On 02 January, miscreants beat and killed Narayan Chandra Das at Hatiya, Noakhali for not fulfilling their demand of illegal subscription. On 04 January, at Jamaibajar of Tungipara, Gopalganj miscreants broke grills of three temples and destroyed 20 idols. Moreover, incidents like destroying temples and idols and launching attacks more than once over Hindu community took place in Brahmanbaria, Faridpur, Jassore, Barishal, Sunamganj and different other districts of the country.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

In spite of 20 years of the peace accord between Bangladesh government and Janasonghomi Somiti of Chittagong Hill Tracts, the indigenous people are severely suffering from violence like - forceful land grabbing and eviction, recurrent attacks, massive destruction, incineration, and harassment.

### CASE STUDY

- ! According to BANGAJ investigation record, on 02 June 2017, around two hundred houses in three indigenous-inhabitant-villages in Longdu, Rangamati were set on fire as the dead body of a Bangalee Jubo League leader named Nurul Islam Nayan was rescued from nearby area. Houses and valuables of indigenous people had been burnt in that incident. An old woman of above seventy named Gunmala Chakma died in the fire breakout. She was inside the house when the atrocities were being carried out.
- ! According to media reports, on 05 April 2017, a college student and leader of Pahari Student Porishad, Naniarchor, Rangamati named Romel Chakma was detained by army personnel. It is alleged that Romel was later critically injured by their tortures, then hospitalized and passed away in the hospital while undergoing treatment.

## CONCLUSION

BANGAJ demands the establishment of an independent commission to deal with the issues of enforced disappearances, secret killings and all kinds of extra-judicial killings through fair and accountable investigation. As a leading human rights organization, BANGAJ expects that the Government of Bangladesh will undertake the responsibility to ensure an agreeable standard of human rights for all as well as embark on effective measures to keep up with the commitments made at national and international levels in order to protect and preserve human rights. It is necessary that the Government and civil society work together to ensure dignity and equality among the people of different classes and religions to establish the culture of human rights in the country.

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