

Human Rights Monitoring Report, October'23

Currently, the human rights situation in Bangladesh is getting worse. There has been anarchy and conflict in the country especially in the run up to the upcoming national parliamentary elections over the question of political rights and voting rights of the citizens. In the month of October 2023, the overzealous behavior of some members of the law enforcement agencies forces in the country, centered on the various movements of the BNP and other opposition political parties, fell to the level of human rights violations. A concerted effort by the government party and law enforcement agencies to disrupt opposition rallies was observed. There have been multiple examples of suppression of dissent through searches, mobile phone checks at check points, anonymous political prosecutions and mass arrests across the country. There were also reports of loss of lives of opposition activists and law enforcement personnel due to firing and use of force at rallies organized by opposition parties. Eight people were killed in the country especially in late October due to widespread violence centered on mass gatherings, strikes and blockades. Out of which there are 01 law enforcement officer, 01 journalist, 01 bus driver's assistant, 01 Awami League worker and 4 BNP workers. Also, 02 members of BNP died of shock and illness during the search at their homes and 01 died in an accident while fleeing from the police. In addition, at least 71 cases and 2335 arrests have been made against opposition party leaders and activists in the last 7 days of the month for rallies, mass gatherings, strikes and blockades.

Surrounding the blockade and hartal, attacks, searches and vandalism and arson of opposition party leaders' homes and party offices took place across the country. In addition, last month's attacks on journalists and the enforcement of cyber security laws have made the country's freedom of expression even more deplorable. In October, a significant number of journalists were attacked and prosecuted while carrying out their professional duties. Moreover, persecution of minorities has further exacerbated the country's fragile human rights situation. The insulting remarks of a Member of Parliament in Comilla in connection with various puja activities and the attack on the procession protesting those remarks has posed a threat to the security of the country's minorities. The rise in commodity prices has made life burdensome for the common people. Its impact has been seen most on low-income workers. Garments workers have been killed and scores injured in clashes with the police during several agitations demanding salary allowances and other basic rights.

In October 2023, the overall human rights situation in Bangladesh was alarming. Political arrests, torture and ill-treatment, restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly and attacks on minorities, attacks and arrests of journalists, killing and torture of innocent Bangladeshis by the BSF, violence against women and public lynching continue to occur. Human rights are routinely violated in Bangladesh despite constitutional obligations and obligations towards international laws and treaties. Based on the news published in different media of Bangladesh and the information of HRSS's documentation and investigation unit, and local representatives, this information has emerged in the human rights monitoring report for the month of October 2023.

Extra-Judicial Killing:

According to collected data from prominent national dailies, victim families and HRSS investigation unit, a total of 08 people were reportedly extra-judicially killed in the months of October 2023. Out of them, 03 were tortured to death, 04 shot to death and 01 died in the custody in a total of 07 incidents. At the same time, about 09 persons reportedly died in prison.

Enforced Disappearance:

According to collected data from prominent national dailies, victim families and HRSS investigation unit, at least 03 persons have 'disappeared' by the LEAs (i.e., remained missing for at least 72 hours) in 03 incidents. Out of them, 01 was shown arrested, and the remaining 02 are still unknown.

Attack on Journalists:

The attacks on journalists in Bangladesh are part of a wider trend of repression against freedom of expression and the media in the country. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of journalists who have been attacked, arrested, harassed, and intimidated. The government has also passed Cyber Security Act 2023 that restrict the media's ability to report freely. Journalists in Bangladesh faced a number of attacks in October 2023, including at least 35 journalists being injured or attacked while performing their duties at political rallies. The worst incident occurred on October 28, when 30 journalists were injured in clashes between police and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activists in Dhaka. According to data collected by HRSS in October'23, a total of 57 journalists were victims of various atrocities such as killing, torture, threat, arrest and

harassment. Among them 1 journalists was killed, 47 journalists were injured, 03 threatened, 02 arrested and 03 were assaulted in nearly 19 incidents. Senior journalist Rofiq Bhuiya was killed on October 28 in clashes between police and BNP.

Political Violence and Arrest:

Political arrests in Bangladesh in October 2023 were widespread, with at least 2335 opposition members arrested in the last 7 days of the month. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) accused the government of conducting raids on party members' homes and setting up checkpoints around Dhaka, the capital, to arrest opposition activists traveling to participate in the rally. The crackdown is part of a wider pattern of intimidation and harassment of political opponents. In the lead-up to the October 28 rally, the BNP secretary general, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, standing committee member Mirza Abbas and joint secretary Moazzem hossen Alal were arrested, along with many opposition activists were arrested for their alleged involvement in the death of a police officer during the rally.

According to HRSS, 15 people were killed and at least 778 people injured in a total of 74 incidents of political violence. In the meantime, around 2786 persons including 2750 BNP and Jamaat leaders and activists were victim of political arrested by LEAs. During the same period, in 98 cases against opposition leaders and activists named 2596 persons, and 2692 others were accused as unidentified defendants. In addition, there have been incidents of obstruction of 83 meetings, rally and gatherings of opposition parties by law enforcement agencies and government party leaders and activists. Meanwhile, at least 558 people were injured in the clash with them and 2331 people were arrested at assembly oriented.

Attack on Minorities:

The recent attack on a rally of minorities in Comilla, Bangladesh, by the activists of the ruling Awami League party is a disturbing example of the ongoing discrimination and violence faced by minorities in the country. Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists make up about 10% of the population of Bangladesh, but they are often marginalized and discriminated against. The Awami League government has been criticized for failing to protect minorities from violence and for its role in promoting religious intolerance. The attack in Comilla is particularly concerning because it was

carried out by members of the ruling party. This suggests that the government is not doing enough to protect minorities from violence and that it may even be complicit in such attacks.

HRSS has observed the incidents of attacks on minorities in the month of October 2023, where 02 temples were attacked as well as 04 were injured in a total of 05 incidents.

Human rights violations by Indian BSF:

According to the October'23 report of HRSS, 03 Bangladeshi citizens have been killed and 01 injured by BSF (Indian Border Security Force) in a total of 04 incidents.

Cyber Security Act and Freedom of Expression:

According to the HRSS report, one was arrested, 04 accused and 03 cases were filed in the Cyber Security Act in October'23.

Violence against Women:

According to the HRSS report, a total of 198 female and girls were victim of violence in October, 2023. Among them, 71 were raped whereas alarmingly 39 (55%) were children under the age of 18. It's a grave concern that 12 girls and women have been victim of gang-raped, among them 03 women and girls were brutally killed after being raped. Meanwhile, about 32 women were killed, 05 injured and 10 committed suicide in the family feud-related violence. Besides, 09 women were killed, and 03 women were physically abused over dowry demand. Moreover, a total of 68 female including 46 girls were reportedly victims of attempt to rape and sexual harassment.

Violence against Children:

It is also alarming that a total of 167 children were reportedly victim of torture in October' 2023, where 39 children lost their lives and 128 were physically & mentally tortured and critically injured.

Labor Rights Violation:

The labor rights situation in Bangladesh is of great concern, with numerous reports of violations emerging in October 2023. These include the deaths of two workers from inhaling toxic gas at a factory in Feni district and the siege of a factory Dhaka by RMG workers protesting poor working conditions and unpaid wages. Russel Hawlader, a garments worker has been killed by police bullet during protest. During October 2023, 05 laborers were killed and at least 84 injured in a total of 18 incidents. It has also been reported that 01 housemaids were killed and other 02 were injured in a total of 03 incidents. In the meantime, 13 labors were died in their workplace for unhealthy environment and lack of personnel protective equipment.

Public Lynching:

During the month of October 2023, 07 people were killed and 09 were injured in 11 incidents of public lynching.

HRSS is deeply concerned about the degradation of human rights conditions in the country. It urges all national and international human rights organizations, civil society, journalists, social leaders, political parties and activists as well as general citizens to raise their voices to protect and promote human rights in Bangladesh.