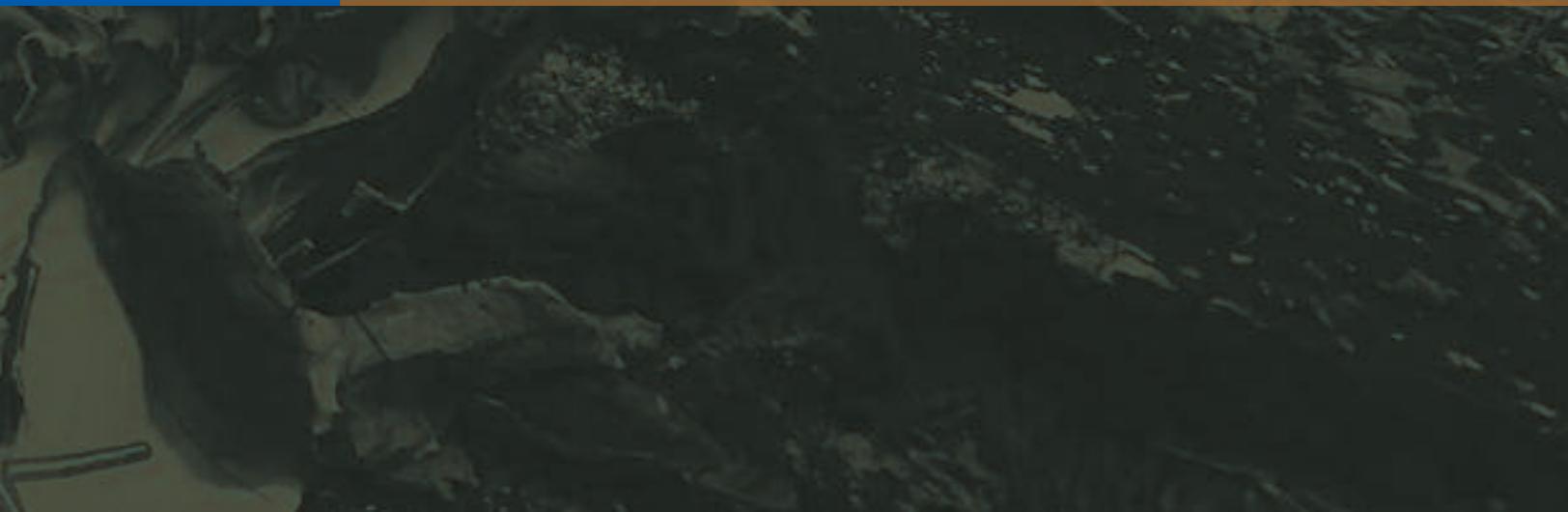




HUMAN
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DEMOCRACY IN THE CROSSFIRE

Opposition Violence and Government Abuses
in the 2014 Pre- and Post- Election Period in Bangladesh





Democracy in the Crossfire

Opposition Violence and Government Abuses in the 2014 Pre- and Post-Election Period in Bangladesh

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Map



Summary

Parliamentary elections in Bangladesh in January 2014 were the most violent in the country's history. Months of political violence before and after the elections left hundreds dead and injured across the country.

The Awami League (AL) government and the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) sharply disagreed about the appropriate mechanism to hold free and fair elections in January 2014. As a result, the BNP and other opposition parties staged blockades and demonstrations beginning in October 2013. Their chief demand was the reinstatement of the neutral caretaker government system to oversee elections, which the Awami League had previously supported but then abolished after taking power. Tensions were further heightened after the December 13 execution of a senior leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami party for crimes committed during Bangladesh's independence war in 1971. Jamaat, which opposed independence and is the country's largest religious party, was disqualified from participating in the 2014 polls after the Supreme Court and the Election Commission ruled that its charter violated the constitution.

Calling for an election boycott, some opposition activists attacked and killed people who refused to honor blockades, as well as security forces and members of the Awami League. The minority Hindu community, long the target of attacks by Islamic extremists and others, was also singled out for attacks. During the vote itself on January 5, opposition activists targeted election officials and attacked schools and other buildings serving as polling places.

The government responded by deploying the notorious paramilitary unit, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), as well as the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) and the police, often under the rubric of "joint forces." Members of these units individually or in joint operations carried out extra-judicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and the unlawful destruction of private property. These abuses continued long after election day. As a result of the opposition boycott, more than half of Bangladesh's parliamentary seats were uncontested. On a low turnout, the Awami League won nearly 80 percent of the seats, leaving the country effectively without a parliamentary opposition. Voter turnout was a record low in Bangladesh's history because of the boycott and related violence.

Opposition Attacks

In an effort to pressure the Awami League to allow a caretaker government during the elections, the opposition alliance, from the end of October 2013 onwards, organized strikes, demonstrations, and traffic blockades which frequently turned violent. On numerous occasions, opposition party members and activists threw petrol bombs at trucks, buses, and motorized rickshaws that defied the traffic blockades or were simply parked by the side of the road. In some cases, opposition groups recruited children to carry out the attacks. Such petrol bomb attacks killed more than 20 people and injured dozens, according to local human rights organizations. Some of the victims were children.

When Human Rights Watch visited the Dhaka hospital where burn patients were taken, it was so overcrowded that some were forced to sleep in the corridors. Most patients said they had not had any warning they were going to be attacked and had not seen who had thrown the bombs. Others identified their attackers as opposition supporters. Rubel Mia, a motorized rickshaw driver from Comilla, told Human Rights Watch he was burned from the waist down after accidentally driving into a road block.

I was driving down the road when all of sudden I came across a picket. There were lots of men. I had no idea they were there. I tried to escape but they chased me and they hit the vehicle with sticks and I crashed. They then poured petrol into the cab and lit it. I think they wanted to kill me.

Attackers in several locations also vandalized hundreds of homes and shops owned by members of Bangladesh's Hindu community before and after the election, as well as those of some members of Bangladesh's tiny Christian community. Victims interviewed by Human Rights Watch blamed BNP and Jamaat activists for some of the attacks. Hindus traditionally vote for the Awami League in elections.

Uday Roy, a Hindu from Dinajpur district, said opposition supporters attacked his village on the morning of January 5, after they had warned Hindus not to vote:

The attackers were our neighbors from the other side of the village. They are all BNP-Jamaat. They asked us not to vote. Between 9 and 11 a.m. they actually blocked the road so no one could go to the polling center. Then at

11 they began the attack. Some of them threw bricks at us. Others had sticks. There was lots of screaming, women and children were screaming. Plenty of houses were damaged. I was hit by a brick on my waist.... About 20 people were injured, including some women and children.

On election day and the days leading up to it, opposition activists attacked polling stations and officials. According to media reports citing the Bangladesh Election Commission, attackers killed three election officials and injured 330 other officials and law enforcement agents. Because of the violence, the commission suspended voting in 597 of 18,000 polling centers.

Killings and Other Abuses by Security Forces

In response, Bangladesh's security forces launched a brutal crackdown on the opposition. In this report we document the killing or unlawful arrests of 19 opposition leaders and activists in the run-up to and aftermath of the elections. The number of cases we documented was limited by time, resources, and access. Journalists, local human rights organizations, and opposition groups have reported numerous other killings in circumstances that appear similar to the cases documented here.

Election-related killings and enforced disappearances follow past patterns. Bangladesh has a long history of extrajudicial executions, which have taken place under both BNP and AL governments and been allowed to happen with impunity. RAB, Bangladesh's elite anticrime and anti-terrorism force created in 2004, has been implicated in hundreds of unlawful killings.

In nine of the killings documented in this report, authorities claimed that the victims were killed in "crossfire" during gunfights between the security forces and armed criminals. In all nine cases, there is strong reason to question the official account. In several of the alleged crossfire cases, witnesses said that the killed person had been detained hours or days earlier, contradicting government claims. In the cases documented by Human Rights Watch, the detainee was the only person seriously injured or killed in what was claimed to have been a fierce gun battle. Security forces have little credibility when they claim that suspects die in crossfire, as they have regularly invoked the "killed in crossfire"

explanation to justify what the evidence later showed to be cold-blooded executions of detainees or suspects.

For instance, local police authorities claim that security forces killed 15-year-old Abu Hanif, also known as Chhoton, when he and other members of the Jamaat youth wing attacked them in the Satkhira district on January 18, 2014. Several witnesses interviewed separately, however, said that security forces had detained Chhoton the previous day, accusing him of participating in protests and setting fire to several motorcycles in his village. Chhoton's mother told Human Rights Watch:

The police grabbed my son in broad daylight like a vulture catches its prey. Then, one of our relatives informed us that Chhoton's body had been found near the Bhomra border crossing with India. Why was my son killed? for what reason was he killed? Was there no jail to keep him? Was there no law to try my son if he was found guilty of committing a crime?

In two cases, security forces killed opposition leaders and activists during arrest operations, but where the circumstances indicate that the victims were executed. In 10 other cases, witnesses told Human Rights Watch that opposition party members and activists were arrested by people who either identified themselves as members of security forces or used vehicles marked with the letters RAB. On January 18, 2014, for instance, men in black uniforms using a vehicle with the letters RAB on it picked up Mosharraf Hossain, a local Shibir leader, from his sister's house in Chittagong district. The following day, local residents discovered Hossain's bullet-ridden body close to the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway. The authorities deny any involvement.

In addition to executions and enforced disappearances, security forces arrested thousands of opposition party members and activists across the country. The Bangladeshi authorities have the authority and duty to investigate, detain, and prosecute people who have committed offenses. But this must be done in accordance with international human rights standards and Bangladeshi law. Human Rights Watch research shows that security forces in a number of cases appear to have detained people solely because of their affiliation with an opposition party and without any evidence or reasonable suspicion that they had broken the law.

In a common pattern, security forces detained opposition party members and activists without warrant and charged them later in criminal cases in which they had not been originally named. Another striking pattern is that many of the opposition party members and activists were detained shortly after they announced strikes to protest the elections. Inciting violence is an offense, but calling for peaceful protests is not.

For example on January 7, 2014, police arrested eight BNP politicians, including BNP Vice-Chair Selima Rahman, who was detained after addressing a press conference announcing a new set of demonstrations. Khandaker Mahbub Hossain, a senior adviser to the BNP president, was also held shortly after giving a speech denouncing the election. They were later shown arrested for involvement in a grenade attack on the office of the police commissioner. Khandaker Mahbub Hossain told Human Rights Watch that the police did not question him about the attack:

Nothing was asked of me. In the interrogation cell they just asked me about a statement I had made when I said that the police were not acting as the servants of the Bangladeshi people, but of the government. No investigation was done. In every case they have two or three hundred ‘unknown’ people in the FIRs [First Information Reports]. My name was not in the FIR, they had no allegation against me.

Human Rights Watch investigated three sites where the evidence suggests that security forces unlawfully destroyed property by using a bulldozer, which completely or partially destroyed the houses of opposition leaders and activists who were wanted by the authorities, seemingly as punishment when the security forces were not able to locate and detain them. For example, on December 15, 2013, security forces destroyed parts of the house of Abdul Khaleq, the Jamaat leader for Satkhira district. According to the authorities, Khaleq was wanted in several criminal cases related to violence by opposition supporters. Neighbors told Human Rights Watch that security forces came to the area on December 15, 2013 with about 25 police vehicles and a bulldozer. An elderly neighbor told Human Rights Watch:

There was nobody home [at Khaleq’s house]. I was standing in the street. When the police arrived and started shooting in the air I became afraid and

moved further away. The bulldozer was in front and started destroying the house. It took them perhaps 30 minutes. They also tried to set fire to the house, but neighbors managed to extinguish the fire after they left.

Impunity as a cause and consequence of abuses

Law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh have a dismal human rights record. Successive governments have an equally dismal record of failing to hold perpetrators to account. In particular, RAB has committed systematic human rights violations with impunity since its founding in 2004, as documented by Human Rights Watch and others.

The BNP created RAB and used it as a death squad during its last term in office. It now loudly calls for its members to be held accountable. While the Awami League called for RAB to be disbanded while in opposition and promised “zero tolerance” for extrajudicial killings after it came to power in 2009, its officials have at times even refused to acknowledge that security forces are responsible for human rights violations. Some have even appeared to encourage them. For instance, on March 9, 2014, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, in response to criticism of the frequent deaths in crossfire, responded, “Of course, every human being has the right to live. But, I think a bit of crossfire is needed to uproot terrorism from the country.” Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina praised law enforcement agencies for their actions against those responsible for violence during strikes and blockades, saying that “members of the police force along with people are discharging their duties sincerely in keeping law and order.” She said nothing about reports of extrajudicial killings, ensuring law enforcement officers act within the law, or holding abusers accountable.

The long-standing impunity enjoyed by Bangladesh’s law enforcement agencies fuels rampant violations. Despite hundreds of reported cases in recent years, no member of RAB has been convicted and imprisoned for an unlawful killing.

The government and all political parties in Bangladesh should make clear and unambiguous public statements, at the highest political levels, opposing politically motivated violence for any reason, while emphasizing that both domestic and international law prohibit such attacks. Bangladesh authorities should prosecute to the fullest extent of the law members of law enforcement agencies, of whatever rank, found

responsible for unlawful killings, torture, and other human rights abuses, including those who ordered such attacks. It should also act against commanding officers and others in a position of authority who knew of these abuses but failed to take reasonable steps to prevent them.

RAB should be disbanded and replaced with a fully accountable civilian law enforcement agency dedicated to fighting crime and terrorism. In the meantime, because of a lack of political will to end abuses and prosecute perpetrators, all assistance to RAB should end. In recent years the United States has worked with RAB to create a functional internal affairs unit, but this and other training has failed over many years to prevent abuses or create a culture of legal accountability.

Members of the international community have repeatedly urged the Bangladesh political leadership to initiate dialogue to end the political deadlock. In a statement on January 6, 2014, UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon, whose representative was unable to mediate a settlement, said he regretted that the parties had not reached an agreement before the elections and called on all sides to ensure a peaceful environment, “where people can maintain their right to assembly and expression.” After the disputed January 5, 2014 elections, many governments, including the United States, Canada, Germany, and others, called for credible elections to resolve the ongoing crisis. While elections are a basic right, no right is more important than the right to life. The UN and governments should use the full weight of the international community to press the authorities to end extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and arbitrary arrests, prosecute those responsible, and allow peaceful protest and full rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly, and movement.

Key Recommendations

Bangladesh’s political parties, particularly Jammāt-e-Islami, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, and the Awami League, should make clear and strong public statements, at the highest levels of each party, denouncing all forms of politically motivated violence, and should dismiss party members found to be involved in planning or carrying out violence. They should also support and fully cooperate with any criminal investigation into crimes of violence.

The Bangladeshi government should:

- Make clear and strong public statements, at the highest political and institutional levels, condemning unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and other violations by law enforcement agencies.
- Commit to ending impunity and ensure that all those responsible for abuses are investigated and prosecuted in an independent, transparent, and credible manner.
- Ensure that all arrests are made in strict compliance with Bangladesh’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), including that arrests be made only with necessary court-ordered warrants, that detainees be held only in recognized places of detention with prompt access to lawyers and family, and timely production before relevant court.
- Ensure the safety of detainees in government custody, including by prohibiting law enforcement agencies from taking detainees on nighttime operations where they are often executed in “cross-fire killings.”
- Require each law enforcement agency to regularly provide parliament and the National Human Rights Commission with detailed information about numbers of arrests, numbers and types of police abuse or misconduct complaints received, status of the complaints investigated, numbers of officers disciplined and for what offenses, and the number of cases referred for prosecution and their status. Require that such information be made public.
- Establish an independent, external accountability entity to conduct prompt, impartial, and independent investigations into all allegations of violations by law enforcement agencies including the police, Rapid Action Battalion, and Border Guards Bangladesh. Empower this mechanism to investigate and prosecute commanding officers and others in a position of authority who knew of abuses and failed to take action to prevent or punish abuses. The report of the mechanism should be made public. This entity should be charged with receiving complaints from the public.

Methodology

This report is based on field investigations conducted in Bangladesh from December 2013-February 2014. Human Rights Watch researchers visited the cities of Dhaka and Chittagong as well as the districts of Comilla, Feni, Jessore, Laxmipur, Meherpur, Noakhali, Satkhira, and Chittagong where they interviewed more than 120 victims, witnesses, and lawyers.

Interviews were conducted in person or by phone. Most interviews were conducted through Bangla-English interpretation. Some interviews were conducted in Bangla by a Bangla-speaking researcher. In some cases, we have withheld the names of those we interviewed, using instead pseudonyms to identify the sources of information to reduce the possibility of reprisals.

Before each interview we informed interviewees of its purpose and asked whether they wanted to participate. We informed them that they could discontinue the interview at any time or decline to answer any specific questions without consequence. No incentives were offered or provided to persons interviewed.

In some cases Human Rights Watch researchers visited the sites where the killings, detentions, or destruction of property had taken place to corroborate witness evidence.

The Bangladeshi authorities did not respond to a letter we submitted on March 28, requesting information about the specific cases documented in this report. For information on the authorities' versions of the cases, we therefore have relied on news accounts giving details of their responses, where such accounts are available.

I. Background: 2014 General Elections

Two parties dominate political life in Bangladesh: the Awami League (AL), currently in power and headed by prime minister Sheikh Hasina, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by former prime minister Khaleda Zia. The rivalry between the two main parties is longstanding, bitter, personal, and often turns violent. Each party also has active student wings (Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal for BNP and Bangladesh Chhatra League for AL), whose members are often implicated in violent attacks and clashes.

A third party, Jamaat-e-Islami, is the largest Islamist political party and an ally of the BNP. In 2013 the High Court of Bangladesh cancelled its registration for the 2014 general elections, ruling that provisions in the party's charter were incompatible with Bangladesh's constitution.¹ Its student wing, the Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir, has been implicated in significant amounts of violence over many years.²

To guard against fraud and manipulation, a caretaker government oversaw general elections starting in 1996. The system was initially demanded by the Awami League while in opposition as it feared the BNP government would manipulate the electoral process. The caretaker system has been widely credited with limiting fraud and irregularities for the elections over which it presided. In 2011, however, the Awami League-dominated parliament abolished the system, in order, it said, to prevent a *de facto* coup as occurred in 2007 when a caretaker government was put in place by the military and remained in power for two years.³ Opposition parties, however, insisted that fair and free elections would only be possible under an independent caretaker government.

¹ "Bangladesh high court restricts Islamist party Jamaat," *BBC News*, August 1, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-23531826> (accessed February 2, 2014).

² See for example, "Bangladesh: End Violence Over War Crimes Trials," Human Rights Watch news release, March 1, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/01/bangladesh-end-violence-over-war-crimes-trials>.

³ In December 2006, widespread protests over alleged fraudulent election preparations led to deepening political instability. After the United Nations and European Union announced that plans for elections were so compromised that they would not send observers, then-President Iajuddin Ahmed announced that elections would be postponed and declared a state of emergency. A new army-backed caretaker government assumed power in January 2007. Although initially welcomed by most Bangladeshis, civil society activists, and the international community, the military-backed caretaker government caused increasing concern because of the lack of progress on election preparations, the increasingly visible role of the army as the main power in the country, and the large numbers of arbitrary arrests, cases of torture, and custodial killings by security forces acting with impunity under emergency rules. The caretaker government handed power back to an elected Awami

In October 2013, BNP leader Khaleda Zia called for strikes in support of her demand that elections be held under a caretaker government. Several strikes, including an economic blockade, followed.⁴ The Awami League government rejected the opposition's demands, offering an all-party government instead with Hasina as prime minister. The opposition alliance rejected this and boycotted the elections.⁵ The December 2, 2013 boycott announcement was followed by a sharp increase in political violence across the country.⁶

The 2014 election also took place against a backdrop of violence related to the prosecution and sentencing of Jamaat leaders accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity during Bangladesh's struggle for independence in 1971. Opposition supporters resorted to violence following the death sentence of Jamaat leader Hossain Sayedee on February 28, 2013. Awami League leaders claim that opposition supporters killed at least 17 of their activists in the Satkhira district alone, which is a Jamaat stronghold, in 2013.⁷ Tensions and violence increased further in the days just before and after the execution of another Jamaat leader, Abdul Quader Mollah, on December 13, 2013.⁸

Legal Framework

Bangladesh is a state party to several of the central international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Bangladesh is thus, among other things, obliged to ensure that no one is arbitrarily deprived of her or his life, that no one is subjected to torture, and that in the determination of a criminal charge, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing by a tribunal established by law, and to be presumed innocent until proven

League government in January 2008. See for example, Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2008* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008), Bangladesh chapter, <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/bangla176o2.htm>.

⁴ "Khaleda gives govt 36hrs to open talks," *New Age*, October 26, 2013, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-10-26&nid=70476#.UwXEMfowjwl> (accessed February 20, 2014)

⁵ "Bangladesh opposition to boycott elections," Al-Jazeera English, December 2, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/12/bangladesh-opposition-boycott-elections-2013122900876856.html> (accessed February 22, 2014).

⁶ See for example, "4 dead in rly sabotage," *New Age*, December 5, 2013, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-12-05&nid=75571#.UzNKYqhdWSo> (accessed March 26, 2014).

⁷ Mohiuddin Alamgir and Ruhul Quddus, "40 AL, Jammaat men killed in Satkhira," *New Age*, January 23, 2014, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-23&nid=81269#.UzyHVqiSySo> (accessed April 2, 2014).

⁸ "Seven killed as Jamaat men run riot," *New Age*, December 14, 2013 <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-12-14&nid=76738> (accessed February 20, 2014)

guilty.⁹ The ICCPR also provides the right to liberty and security, and guarantees against arbitrary arrests and detention. Under international human rights law, Bangladesh is also obliged to thoroughly and promptly investigate serious violations of human rights such as the right to life or freedom from torture, prosecute those implicated by the evidence and, if their guilt is established following a fair trial, impose proportionate penalties.¹⁰ Implied in this is that all victims shall have the opportunity to assert their rights and receive a fair and effective remedy, that those responsible shall stand trial, and that the victims themselves can obtain reparations.

United Nations principles on the prevention and investigation of extrajudicial executions provide detailed guidelines for governments. They include the need for “thorough, prompt and impartial investigations” of all suspected unlawful killings to determine the cause of death and the person responsible. Independent and impartial physicians should perform autopsies in cases of possible unlawful killings, and bodies should be kept until an adequate autopsy is carried out and the family informed of the findings. Where the established investigative procedures are inadequate because of impartiality or lack of expertise, investigations of possible unlawful killings should be pursued through an independent commission of inquiry.¹¹

The UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions has repeatedly requested permission for a country visit to Bangladesh, but has yet to receive a positive response.¹²

⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, art. 6, 7, and 14.

¹⁰ See, for example, ICCPR, art. 2; UN Human Rights Committee, *Bautista de Arellana v. Colombia*, Communication No. 563/1993, 13 November 1993 (UN doc. CCPR/C/55/D/563/1993), reproduced at <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/undocs/html/563-1993.html> (accessed November 9, 2010); and UN Human Rights Committee, *Basilio Laureano Atachahua v. Peru*, Communication No. 540/1993, 16 April 1996 (UN doc. CCPR/C/56/D/540/1993), reproduced at <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/undocs/540-1993.html> (accessed November 9, 2010).

¹¹ Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, E.S.C. res. 1989/65, annex, 1989 U.N. ESCOR Supp. (No. 1) at 52, U.N. Doc. E/1989/89 (1989), art. 11.

¹² Human Rights Council, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston,” A/HRC/14/24, May 20, 2010, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/135/03/PDF/G1013503.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed April 15, 2011).

II. Election-Related Violence by the Opposition

The run-up to Bangladesh's general elections on January 5, 2014, and election-day itself, were marred by extensive violence, much of it initiated by members of the opposition.¹³ On October 25, BNP leader Khaleda Zia announced a series of general strikes (known in Bangladesh as *hartals*), protests, and traffic blockades (known as *abarudh*), halting transport links to the capital, Dhaka. The strikes and traffic blockades had a significant impact on the economy. The opposition was successful in preventing almost all travel outside the major cities during this period, harming many people's incomes and the national economy. Schools remained closed. Farmers were forced to dump milk and other fresh produce as they could not transport it to the cities. The estimated cost to the economy runs into the billions.¹⁴

In many incidents, opposition party workers attacked those not heeding the calls with petrol bombs and homemade grenades, and set off improvised grenades in busy streets without warning.¹⁵ As detailed below, in some cases members of opposition groups recruited street children to carry out the attacks. On election-day, opposition groups attacked hundreds of polling stations.

Opposition leaders denied the involvement of their parties in the violence. Khaleda Zia blamed "government agents," and said that "manipulation, terrorism, sabotage and disinformation have been used as tools to destroy people's rights in an effort to prolong the control of the state."¹⁶

¹³ Supporters of all the main parties engaged in serious violence in the build-up to previous elections, most recently in 2006 when the Awami League enforced a series of strikes and blockades, but these were not on the same scale as in 2013-14. "Protesters blockade Bangladeshi capital," *International Herald Tribune*, October 12, 2006 <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/12/world/asia/12iht-bangla.3497558.html> (accessed February 20, 2014)

¹⁴ "New Blockade Hits Bangladesh as Economy Suffers," *Agence France Presse*, December 17, 2013, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/international/new-blockade-hits-bangladesh-as-economy-suffers/> (accessed February 19, 2014).

¹⁵ For example a Human Rights Watch researcher witnessed two grenade explosions on Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka, on December 9. They were set off during the evening rush-hour without warning. No one was hurt.

¹⁶ "The full statement delivered by Khaleda Zia at Wednesday's press conference," UNB Connect, January 15, 2014, <http://unbconnect.com/khaleda-statement-5/#&panel1-1> (accessed March 11, 2014)

Many Bangladeshis lost their lives or suffered horrific burns. At least 25 people had died of burns and 97 had been admitted to hospital by the end of December, according to media reports compiled by the human rights organization Ain O Salish Kendra.¹⁷ A report by Odikhar, another human rights organization, put the number at 21 dead and 65 injured between November 25, 2013, and January 10, 2014.¹⁸

A Human Rights Watch researcher interviewed 25 patients or their relatives in December in the burn unit at Dhaka Medical College Hospital where many of the injured were brought. When Human Rights Watch visited the hospital it was so overcrowded that some of the injured were forced to sleep in the corridors. Most patients said they had not had any warning they were going to be attacked and had not seen who had thrown the bombs. Others identified their attackers as opposition supporters.

For example, one man told us that opposition supporters attacked his family as the truck they were riding in passed through Gazipur, north of Dhaka, on the evening of December 10, 2013. The opposition supporters, who had put timbers and bricks on the road, threw bricks at the vehicle. Adam Ali, a factory security guard, said he pleaded with them not to throw any petrol bombs. He told Human Rights Watch:

I said, ‘Please show us some mercy, my family is inside, please don’t throw the bombs.’ There were about 15 of them, aged 20 to 25. They saw my children were inside the cab. They shouted swear words at us then threw petrol bombs inside. I jumped out of one door with two of my children and told my wife, Sumi, to get out of the other. But she was trapped inside along with my 2-year-old, Sanjida. The door was locked and they could not get out. They died in the van. After that I was lying semi-conscious on the ground when some of those men came up to me. ‘Whatever happened, happened, you have to get over it,’ they told me.¹⁹

¹⁷ “Burn Victims from Political Violence,” *Ain O Salish Kendra*, January 31, 2014, <http://www.askbd.org/ask/2014/01/31/burn-victims-political-violence-jan-31-december-2013/> (accessed February 19, 2014)

¹⁸ Odikhar, “Human Rights Monitoring Report January 1-31, 2014,” February 1, 2014, <https://xa.yimg.com/kq/groups/19288733/1322906897/name/HR+report-January+2014+English.pdf> (accessed February 27, 2014).

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Adam Ali, Dhaka, December 10, 2013.

One of the worst single incidents took place in Dhaka on November 28, 2013. In response to the November 25, 2013 announcement of the date of the 2014 election, the 18-party opposition alliance announced a 48-hour rail-roadway-waterway blockade. The blockade was later extended.²⁰ A wave of violence ensued across Bangladesh.²¹ At around 6:30 p.m. that day, attackers threw a petrol bomb at a bus, killing four passengers and injuring 15. The driver, Hassan Mahbub, who suffered burns on 30 percent of his body, said the bus was struck as it was travelling at over 70 kilometers per hour. He told Human Rights Watch:

All of a sudden two men threw a bottle. They were aged 20-30. They threw it through the windscreen. The whole bus caught fire. I was hit first. The bottle hit me. I jumped from the bus which then hit a traffic island. The flames burnt my face and arms. I thought I was dying. It was a blockade but the government ordered the bus owners to keep running their buses.²²

In another case, Rubel Mia, a motorized rickshaw driver from Comilla, told Human Rights Watch he was burned from the waist down after driving into a road block.

I was driving down the road when all of a sudden I came across a picket. There were lots of men. I had no idea they were there. I tried to escape but they chased me and they hit the vehicle with sticks and I crashed. They then poured petrol into the cab and lit it. I think they wanted to kill me. No one came to help me.²³

Children

Human Rights Watch research shows that several children were injured or killed in attacks and some were recruited or forced by opposition supporters to carry out violent attacks.

²⁰ “BNP extends blockade,” *Dhaka Tribune*, November 27, 2013, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/politics/2013/nov/27/blockade-extended> (accessed February 27, 2014).

²¹ “Violence all over,” *New Age*, November 26, 2013, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-11-26&nid=74405> (accessed February 27, 2014).

²² Human Rights Watch interview with Hassan Mahbub, Dhaka, December 10, 2013.

²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Rubel Mia, Comilla, December 10, 2013.

One of the injured was Syamol Sardar, a 13-year-old working as a passenger minibus conductor in Dhaka when the bus was attacked on November 10, 2013. His father, Aminullah, told Human Rights Watch that two men allowed the passengers and driver to escape the vehicle before pouring petrol into it. They did not, however, let his son leave. He said:

All the passengers got out apart from two. They told the driver what they were going to do but not Syamol. Before he could escape they poured petrol onto the vehicle and set fire to it. He pleaded with them, asked them to wait until he had escaped, but they did not listen to him.²⁴

Mehedi Hassan, 7, was injured when a grenade exploded in front of him in Dhaka in December 2013, his mother Nasima Begum told Human Rights Watch.

Whoever did this to my baby, I want justice. I appeal to this government for them to be put on trial. He was on his way home from school when someone on a rickshaw threw a bag in front of him. It exploded. He lifted up his arms to protect himself. He was injured in both hands and legs and abdomen. Three fingers on his left hand were blown off.²⁵

Shumi Khatun, 8, suffered burns when the bus she was travelling in was set on fire on November 3, 2013 in Gazipur. Her mother Rubena told Human Rights Watch:

She was coming to Dhaka with her grandmother in a bus when it reached Gazipur. She saw the bus was set on fire and they tried to escape but there were so many people she fell down. When her grandmother came out she couldn't see Shumi so she went back inside the burning bus to rescue her. She found her crying under a seat. Nobody warned them that they were going to set it on fire.²⁶

²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Aminullah, Dhaka, December 10, 2013.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Nasima Begum, Dhaka, January 7, 2014.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Rubena, Dhaka, December 10, 2013.

Other children were injured picking up unexploded, homemade grenades left in the street. (Although Human Rights Watch has not been able to establish who produced the grenades, news articles have reported their use by opposition supporters).²⁷ Lima Akhter, 3, had her right hand blown off in Mirpur, Dhaka, on December 3, 2013. Her mother, Sohagi told Human Rights Watch that she had thought it was a ball:

She was in the road in front of our home and saw an object that looked like a ball. It was wrapped in red tape and she picked it up and it exploded. There was no hartal picket there. We have no idea how it got there. Her right hand was blown off above the wrist.²⁸

Human Rights Watch interviews, research conducted by others, and media reports indicate that opposition supporters used children to conduct some of the attacks. A 15-year-old boy living on the streets close to one of Dhaka's main bus terminals told Human Rights Watch that opposition supporters often asked street children like him to throw grenades and set fire to buses. He said he had twice been involved in the violence:

The first time two strangers gave me a box of cocktails [grenades] and said they would kill me if I did not throw them. The second time, a leader of the Jubo Dal [the BNP youth wing] gave me and three friends 2000 taka to set fire to two buses using petrol bombs. That night we did this, but we made sure people got out first.²⁹

Abu Ahasan, a researcher at BRAC, a Bangladesh development organization, told Human Rights Watch that his research for an upcoming report, “Street Children and the Politics of Violence,” confirmed the allegation that opposition groups had used children to carry out attacks. Ahasan told Human Rights Watch that he spoke to more than 70 children in Dhaka and found that some glue-addicted children were persuaded to throw bombs in exchange

²⁷ See, for example, Nozrul Islam, “Bangladesh in chaos: 2 dead and more than 1,000 arrests in March for Democracy,” *AsiaNews.it*, December 30, 2013, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Bangladesh-in-chaos:-2-dead-and-more-than-1,000-arrests-in-March-for-Democracy-29920.html> (accessed April 2, 2014).

²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Sohagi, Dhaka, December 13, 2013.

²⁹ The boy filmed one of the burning buses on his mobile phone.

for glue. Others were lured by money to participate in violence, while some were forced to do so.³⁰

Media reports suggest that homeless children and child laborers were involved in similar activity in Chittagong city. A reporter with The Dhaka Tribune said he spoke to a six-year-old who said he was paid 100 taka a day for throwing grenades.³¹

Attacks on Polling Stations and Officials

On election-day and the days leading up to it, opposition activists attacked polling stations and officials. According to media reports citing the Bangladesh Election Commission, attackers killed three election officials and injured 330 other officials and law enforcement agents on election-day.³²

In one case reported in the media, 100-150 BNP-Jamaat supporters attacked Molani Cheprikura Government Primary School, a polling station in Thakurgaon, on the evening of January 4. The attackers killed assistant presiding officer Zobaidul Haque, 55, and severely injured three others.³³

Mohamed Saiful Islam, a girls' college teacher who was in charge of a polling station in Gaibandha district, told Human Rights Watch that a large group of opposition members attacked his vehicle:

After polling ended 20-25 men attacked the vehicle that was carrying me, the ballot boxes, and a policeman, throwing bricks. Then they threw a fire bomb. I was badly burnt and the boxes were destroyed.³⁴

³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Abu Ahasan, Dhaka, December 16, 2013.

³¹ Tarek Mahmud, "Children used in political violence," *Dhaka Tribune*, December 7, 2013, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/crime/2013/dec/07/children-used-political-violence> (accessed February 20, 2014)

³² "EC to compensate victims on polls duty," *Dhaka Tribune*, January 31, 2014, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2014/jan/31/ec-compensate-victims-poll-duty> (accessed February 27, 2014).

³³ "Violence peaks day before vote," *The Daily Star*, January 4, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/violence-peaks-day-before-vote-5486> (accessed February 27, 2014).

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohamed Saiful Islam, Dhaka, January 6, 2014.

Attackers also torched dozens of schools intended to be used as polling stations in the days preceding election-day.³⁵ Government ministers said that in total 553 schools and educational institutions were damaged during election-related violence and that the government had allocated more than \$US1.7 million for repairs.³⁶

Because of the violence, the Bangladesh Election Commission said it suspended voting in 597 of 18,000 polling centers.³⁷

Attacks on Minority Communities

Attackers vandalized hundreds of homes and shops owned by members of Bangladesh's Hindu community before and after the elections. Members of Bangladesh's tiny Christian community were also attacked.³⁸ Most Hindus traditionally vote for the Awami League in elections and have been targeted by supporters of the opposition parties in previous years.³⁹ Community leaders, NGO staff, and journalists speculated that some attacks might have been primarily motivated by land and property disputes, but were facilitated by the outbreak of political violence.⁴⁰

In many cases, victims and witnesses were not able to identify the perpetrators. In some of the cases Human Rights Watch investigated, however, victims told us that BNP and Jamaat supporters were responsible for the attacks, claiming that the perpetrators were neighbors or other individuals already known to them as opposition supporters.

³⁵ "Polling centres torched across Bangladesh," *BDnews24.com*, January 4, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/01/04/polling-centres-torched-across-bangladesh> (accessed February 27, 2014); "More polling centres set on fire," *BDnews24.com*, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/01/04/more-polling-centres-set-on-fire> (accessed February 27, 2014).

³⁶ "Poll mayhem hit 553 institutes," *BDNews24.com*, February 16, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/02/16/poll-mayhem-hit-553-institutes> (accessed April 16, 2014)

³⁷ "Low turnout marks re-polling," *New Age*, January 17, 2014, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-17&nid=80607#.Ux3rMD9dV8E> (accessed March 10, 2014).

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Rosaline Costa, Coordinator of Hotline Human Rights Bangladesh, Dhaka, February 5, 2014.

³⁹ See Frances Harrison, "*Political Islam and the Elections in Bangladesh*," The Institute of Commonwealth Studies (London, 2013) p. 27, <http://commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/research/islamic-parties-and-elections-bangladesh>.

⁴⁰ Joseph Allchin, "The Hindus of Bangladesh Fear for Their Future," *Time*, January 14, 2014 <http://world.time.com/2014/01/14/the-hindus-of-bangladesh-are-fearing-for-their-future/> (accessed February 20, 2014).

Both the BNP and Jamaat denied their supporters were involved and blamed Awami League members. Jamaat has called for a UN-supervised inquiry commission.⁴¹

Uday Roy of Kornai village in Dinajpur district said opposition supporters attacked his village on the morning of January 5, after they had warned Hindus not to vote:

The attackers were our neighbors from the other side of the village. They are all BNP and Jamaat. They asked us not to vote. Between 9 and 11 a.m. they actually blocked the road so no one could go to the polling center. Then at 11 they began the attack. Some of them threw bricks at us. Others had sticks.

There was lots of screaming, women and children were screaming. Plenty of houses were damaged. I was hit by a brick on my waist. We called a local Awami League leader who promised to send help but none came. We called the polling station to send police but they said they could not come. About 20 people were injured including some women and children. Every time there is a national vote we face the same problem.⁴²

According to media reporters, the attackers looted and torched at least 100 shops and houses.⁴³

Paritush Chandra Sen, of Patgram Upazilla in Lalmonirhat, told Human Rights Watch that an attack on the village temple sparked a wider clash between government supporters and opposition members the day before the polls. He said:

BNP activists tried to burn down our temple. The Awami League then came out to stop them and there was a clash and two people died. One was killed

⁴¹ See "The full statement delivered by Khaleda Zia at Wednesday's press conference," *UNB Connect*, January 15, 2014, <http://unbconnect.com/khaleda-statement-5/#&panel1-1> (accessed March 11, 2014); see also "Jamaat-e-Islami demands UN supervised inquiry commission to probe into the incident of minority attack; urges authorities to ensure security of the minorities," January 8, 2014, <http://www.jamaat-e-islami.org/en/details.php?artid=MjQyMg> (accessed January 8, 2014).

⁴² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Uday Roy, January 7, 2014.

⁴³ "Kornai lives under pall of fear," *BDNews24.com*, January 10, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/01/10/kornai-lives-under-pall-of-fear> (accessed February 20, 2014).

on the spot, the other died in hospital. They were both ex-Jamaat men who then joined the BNP. The situation was then put under control and all of us voted. The police gave us protection. Still, there is a lot of fear in the area. It is very remote and close to the Indian border. All the Hindus are staying at home and are worried about the situation.⁴⁴

Gopal Bomon, a community leader, said an attack on shops in Lalmonirhat on November 27, 2013 was connected to a land dispute, but probably was facilitated by the outbreak of political violence:

In the market there are 40 or 50 shops, about half of which are owned by Hindus. That night 14 were vandalized. Two Hindu shops were spared because they are in the mosque compound. Another was spared because the building's owner is a Muslim. The problem is that there is a land dispute between the Hindus and a local BNP leader. He lost a court case against them, so we suspect that he was taking advantage of the *hartal* to target the Hindu community.⁴⁵

One of the most serious incidents took place on election-day in Malopara village in Jessore district. Dozens of people attacked the Hindu fishing village, forcing inhabitants to cross a river to escape. Human Rights Watch interviewed three villagers who witnessed the attack and the leader of a neighboring community who helped them to cross the river. All of them blamed members of the BNP and Jamaat for the attack. But the winning Awami League MP blamed his challenger, also an Awami League member, for orchestrating the violence, which the latter denies.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Paritush Chandra Sen, January 7, 2014. See also “BNP man dead in Lalmonirhat clash,” *Dhaka Tribune*, December 4, 2014, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2014/jan/04/al-bnp-clash-hindus-attacked-lalmonirhat> (accessed February 20, 2014).

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Gopal Bomon, December 15, 2013.

⁴⁶ Shamima Binte Rahman, “‘BNP, Jamaat’ behind Maloparha attack on Hindus,” *BDNews24.com*, January 15, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/01/15/bnp-jamaat-behind-maloparha-attack-on-hindus> (accessed February 20, 2014).

Shibu Sarker, a fisherman, told Human Rights Watch that the attack began after voting had finished. Many villagers had cast their vote despite being warned by opposition supporters not to vote:

At about 5 p.m., about 150 BNP and Jamaat men came to our village and argued with the people. Some Hindus tried to negotiate with them. But then one of the Jamaat guys, called Arif, made a phone call and told the person on the other end of the line that the Hindus were slaughtering the Jamaat. So then about 300 BNP and Jamaat came and they were carrying local weapons, like big knives and hand bombs and bricks, and they moved towards the village. We started to flee and crossed the river. We found a boat and escaped. No one was injured. The BNP men started throwing bricks. Then they ran amok in our homes.⁴⁷

According to Sarker the police finally arrived at 8 p.m. and villagers started to return at about 1 a.m. The attackers vandalized at least 43 houses, according to Odikhar.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Shibu Sarker, January 7, 2014.

⁴⁸ Odikhar, "Human Rights Monitoring Report January 1-31, 2014," February 1, 2014, <https://xa.yimg.com/kq/groups/19288733/1322906897/name/HR+report-January+2014+English.pdf> (accessed February 27, 2014).

III. Crossfire Killings by Government Security Forces

Before, during, and after the elections, Bangladesh's security forces launched a brutal crackdown on the opposition, unlawfully killing dozens of leaders and activists, carrying out widespread arbitrary arrests, and in some cases unlawfully destroying property belonging to opposition leaders and activists. Security forces responsible for violations continue to enjoy impunity in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has a long history of egregious abuses by security forces. Widespread violations have taken place under both the Awami League and BNP, as well as under the military-backed interim government.

RAB has been implicated in hundreds of unlawful killings, including "crossfire" killings that evidence suggests were extra-judicial executions.⁴⁹ Cases involving security forces we investigated for this report indicate that perpetrators now often belong to other law enforcement agencies as well. In several cases, witnesses told us that the perpetrators were "joint forces," a mix of RAB, BGB, and police. In media interviews about the killings, authorities also often referred to "joint forces" being involved. A police report about one "crossfire" killing obtained by Human Rights Watch corroborates this point: it lists members of the RAB, BGB, and police as having taken part in the operation.⁵⁰

Many of the victims in the cases documented in this report were leaders and activists belonging to BNP, Jamaat, or their student wings. They were all male, ranging in age from 15 to 62. In some cases the authorities appeared to target the victims because of suspected involvement in specific crimes. In other cases, however, security forces appeared to seek out influential opposition district and sub-district-level leaders who

⁴⁹ For previous Human Rights Watch reports on extrajudicial executions in Bangladesh, see Human Rights Watch, *Judge, Jury, and Executioner: Torture and Extrajudicial Killings by Bangladesh's Elite Security Force*, vol.18, no. 16(C), December 2006, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/12/13/judge-jury-and-executioner>; Human Rights Watch *"Crossfire": Continued Human Rights Abuses by Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion*, ISBN 1-56432-767-1, May 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/05/10/crossfire-o>. See also Amnesty International, *Crimes unseen: Extrajudicial executions in Bangladesh*, ASA 13/005/2011, August 24, 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA13/005/2011/en> (accessed April 2, 2014).

⁵⁰ First Information Report, from Md. Ziaul Haque to Officer-in-Charge, Debhata Police Station, Satkhira, undated. On file with Human Rights Watch.

might have been able to mobilize people to protest against the government and the holding of the elections.

The violations documented by Human Rights Watch took place across Bangladesh. Human Rights Watch documented extrajudicial executions and arrests in the districts of Satkhira, Meherpur, Laximpur, Noakhali, Nilphamari, and Sitakunda.

“Crossfire” Killings and Apparent Executions

In the limited time we had to prepare this report, Human Rights Watch documented the killing of 11 opposition leaders and activists by security forces before, during, and after the January 5, 2014 elections. Journalists, local human rights organizations, and opposition groups have reported numerous other killings in circumstances that appear similar to the cases documented by Human Rights Watch. Most of the killings took place in January, after the elections.

In six cases the authorities admitted that security forces had initially detained the victims and that the victims had been shot dead while in custody. In all six cases, however, the security forces made the implausible claim that the victims had been killed in crossfire when criminals attacked the security forces a day or so after the victim had been detained.

In three other cases the authorities claimed that the victims had died during gunfights between criminals and the security forces. The authorities denied that the victims had ever been in the authorities’ custody, but several witnesses told Human Rights Watch independently that security forces had detained the victims in these cases at least several hours before they were allegedly killed in gunfights.

In two cases security forces killed the victims during operations. In both cases, statements from witnesses and the circumstances of the killings indicate that the security forces executed the victims.

The Killing of Golam Sarwar, Feni District

On January 30, 2014, Golam Sarwar, a leader of the BNP’s youth wing, was killed in Fazilpur village, Feni district, during what the authorities claimed was an attack on the security forces who had just detained him. Four witnesses, however, told Human Rights Watch that

Sarwar was killed in a house close to his home and that there had been no attack on the security forces.

Sarwar, 28, was the senior vice-president of the local unit of the BNP's youth wing, Jubo Dal. According to a news report about his killing, Major Muhiuddin, the officer-in-charge of RAB-7 in Feni district, said that his RAB team had arrested Sarwar, who was wanted in connection with several criminal cases, around 6 p.m. on January 30, 2014. According to the news report, Muhiuddin said that Sarwar's associates attacked the RAB team on the way back to the headquarters and that Sarwar was caught in the line of fire and died on the spot.⁵¹ News reports about the incident reviewed by Human Rights Watch do not report anyone else killed or injured during the gunfight.

Four witnesses told Human Rights Watch that Sarwar died inside a house and that, although they could not see how Sarwar died, they were certain there was no gunfight.⁵²

A relative of Sarwar told Human Rights Watch that Sarwar was having lunch at about 3 p.m. on January 30 when she saw three motorized rickshaws approach outside. When about 18 men got out of the rickshaws, Sarwar ran out the back door. The men, who were not in uniform, chased after him, shouting, "stop, thief, thief," she said. According to the relative, one of the men fired a pistol at Sarwar's legs, but he kept running for about another 500 meters and hid inside somebody else's house.

Three people living in the same compound who witnessed the incident gave similar accounts. One of them said:

I heard a couple of gunshots then all of a sudden I saw him run into the compound. He went and hid behind the door. Then I saw the men running after him. They threatened me and said I was hiding a fugitive. They said they would shoot me.⁵³

⁵¹ "Jubo Dal leader killed in gunfight with Rab in Feni," *UNBConnect*, January 30, 2014, <http://unbconnect.com/gunfight-killing-7/#&panel1-8> (accessed February 16, 2014).

⁵² Human Rights Watch interview (names withheld), Feni, February 8, 2014.

⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Feni, February 8, 2014.

The second neighbor said:

I had just come back from school when I saw the incident. The men were searching everywhere for him. One put a pistol to my head and said, ‘Where the hell is he?’ I said I had no idea and the man then hit me.⁵⁴

According to the three witnesses, several of the men entered the house where Sarwar had sought refuge, while others stayed on guard outside and told villagers not to come near. Neither of the witnesses knew whether the men were civilian or members of a law-enforcement agency.

After a while, several uniformed policemen arrived, and after about 30 minutes they were joined by some RAB men, the witnesses said. They then heard further gunshots. One of Sarwar’s relatives said: “The police were there for half an hour before they brought his body out. Before that we heard two gunshots.”⁵⁵

Later they saw four men carry Sarwar's body out of the building, wrapped in bed sheets taken from the house where he was killed, and place it in a black minibus that was driven by RAB. A witness said there was a large blood stain in the room where Sarwar died.

The witnesses told Human Rights Watch that they believed that the men in civilian clothes and the police had beaten and stabbed Sarwar before they killed him. A relative showed Human Rights Watch a photograph of Sarwar's corpse with two bullet wounds to the chest, and bruises and cuts to his right arm. A journalist who later examined the body in the morgue said that there were bruises and cuts on Sarwar’s shoulders, left arm, neck, and back.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Feni, February 8, 2014.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Feni, February 8, 2014.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Feni, February 8, 2014.

The Killing of Touhidul Islam Touhid, Noakhali District

On January 30, 2014, Touhidul Islam Touhid, a detained local BNP leader in Noakhali district, was killed in what the police claimed was a gunfight during a nighttime operation to recover weapons from his home.⁵⁷

Mahbub Uddin, also known as Khokon, Touhid's lawyer and a BNP politician, told Human Rights Watch that because the police in Sonaimuri sub-district had accused him of involvement in pre-election violence, Touhid had come to Dhaka on January 28 to apply for "anticipatory bail," a provision in Bangladeshi law that allows a suspect to apply for bail before he is arrested. Because of the court backlog, however, Touhid's case was postponed to the following day.⁵⁸

Shortly after Touhid and his lawyer separated around 5 p.m., three men in civilian clothes apprehended Touhid outside the National Press Club, according to information collected by the lawyer. Shortly thereafter RAB forces arrived and took Touhid away.

Khokon said that he immediately went to the RAB office where he spent 1.5 hours, but they denied having detained Touhid. Later that evening, however, a police contact informed Khokon that Touhid had been transferred to the police. At around 1:30 a.m. Khokon met with Touhid in the police station where Touhid confirmed that he had been held in the RAB-3 office.

According to Bangladeshi law, the police are obliged to present a detainee to a court to apply for police remand within 24 hours. The next morning, however, Khokon found that Touhid was being driven to the police station in Noakhali, his home-district. Khokon told Human Rights Watch:

I immediately called several senior local politicians in Noakhali, telling them to warn the police not to kill him. I even went on a talk-show that evening and warned the police myself. But it didn't help.

⁵⁷ "BNP leader killed in 'gunbattle' in Noakhali," *BDnews24.com*, January 30, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/01/30/bnp-leader-killed-in-gunbattle-in-noakhali> (accessed February 6, 2014).

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Mahbub Uddin, Dhaka, February 5, 2013.

In the early hours of January 30, Touhid's body was dropped in front of the hospital in Noakhali. According to a lawyer who saw the corpse, it had three gunshot wounds in the legs and a doctor told him that Touhid had most likely bled to death.⁵⁹

According to media reports, the police claimed that they had taken Touhid along to search his house around 3:30 a.m. on January 30, during which they had recovered a weapon and some ammunition. There was no explanation why such an operation would be carried out in the middle of the night. On the way back to the police station, the police claimed, Touhid's associates opened fire on them, killing Touhid and injuring two police officers.⁶⁰

But this account is contradicted by Touhid's brother Kamal, who said he was in the house at the time. He said that his family was awakened by police trying to enter the property, who left after a brief conversation. Touhid was not present at that time. No guns were seized, he said. As Kamal described it:

There was shouting and banging at our gate. They broke it open and entered our yard. I came out onto the veranda to ask them what they wanted. There were 5 policemen. Touhid was not there. One said they wanted to talk about something with me. I said I have no idea what you mean and was scared of them so went inside. Then we heard 3 or 4 shots. We were all afraid but opened the door to have a look and saw the police running away.⁶¹

The Killing of Azharul Islam, Satkhira District

On January 27, Azharul Islam, a detained local leader of the BNP's student wing, was killed in Satkhira district in what the authorities claimed was a gunfight during a nighttime operation to arrest his accomplices and recover weapons and ammunition.

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Noakhali, February 7, 2014.

⁶⁰ "BNP leader killed in 'gunbattle' in Noakhali," *BDnews24.com*, January 30, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/01/30/bnp-leader-killed-in-gunbattle-in-noakhali> (accessed February 6, 2014).

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Kamal, February 7, 2014.

Islam, 27, was the vice-president of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, the student wing of the BNP, in the Tala sub-district of Satkhira district.⁶² According to statements by the Tala police officer-in-charge, the authorities had wanted Islam for suspected involvement in the 2002 murder of an Awami League activist and for pre-election violence.⁶³ According to a news report citing the officer-in-charge, the authorities arrested Islam and two others at Chandpur in the early hours on January 26, 2014.⁶⁴

A police report about the death of Islam obtained by Human Rights Watch alleges that, while in detention, Islam told police the location of his accomplices and some weapons. Acting on that lead, the report says, 17 police officers took Islam with them to arrest his accomplices and recover weapons the following night. According to the report, Islam's accomplices opened fire on the police officers during the operation, injuring three officers, including the one who filed the report. The two other injured officers subsequently returned fire, according to the report, firing five shots each during the 20-25 minute gunfight. At some point, according to the report, Islam tried to escape and was shot by the "unknown criminals." According to the police report, the police recovered one pipe-gun, two cartridges, and five hand-bombs at the scene of the incident.⁶⁵

Medical personnel at the Satkhira Sadar Hospital declared Islam dead upon arrival around 6 a.m. on January 27, 2014, according to the report and news articles. The report does not specify what injuries the police sustained, but the officer-in-charge at Tala police station described them as minor in an interview later that day.⁶⁶

The Killing of Abul Kalam and Maruf Hossain, Satkhira District

On January 26, 2014, two detained activists from Shibir, the Jamaat youth wing, were killed in what the authorities claimed was a gunfight during a nighttime operation to recover

⁶² "Satkhira JCD leader killed in 'gunfight,'" *The Daily Star*, January 27, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/satkhira-jcd-leader-killed-in-gunfight-8679> (accessed February 17, 2014).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ "JCD leader killed in Satkhira 'gunfight,'" *The Daily Star*, January 28, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/jcd-leader-killed-in-satkhira-gunfight-8803> (accessed February 17, 2014).

⁶⁵ First Information Report, from Md. Shakhawat Hossain to Officer-in-Charge, Tala Police Station, Satkhira, undated. On file with Human Rights Watch.

⁶⁶ "Satkhira JCD leader killed in 'gunfight,'" *The Daily Star*, January 27, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/satkhira-jcd-leader-killed-in-gunfight-8679> (accessed February 17, 2014).

weapons and ammunitions in the Satkhira district. No other people involved in the alleged gunfight were killed or sustained serious injuries.

Around 4:30 a.m. on January 25, offices from RAB-6 and BGB detained Abul Kalam and Maruf Hossain in the village of Kulia in the Debhata sub-district of Satkhira district, according to news reports and a police report about the deaths obtained by Human Rights Watch.⁶⁷ Kalam, 22, was the Shibir secretary in the Debhata sub-district, while Maruf Hossain, 24, was a Shibir activist and son of the Jamaat leader in Kulia.⁶⁸

According to the police report, Kalam and Hossain told the authorities the location of a weapons cache during interrogation. A joint group of RAB-6 and BGB officers went to recover the weapons in the early morning of January 26, taking Kalam and Hossain with them. About 100 meters from the house containing the alleged weapons cache, masked “unknown criminals” attacked the group, according to the report, trying to free the detainees. During a 15-20 minute gunfight, four officers fired 13 shots, according to the report. The two detainees and three officers were injured. Medical personnel at the Satkhira Sadar Hospital later declared the detainees dead.⁶⁹

According to the report, the three injured officers were released “after primary treatment,” indicating that they were only lightly injured. The report does not mention whether any of the attackers were injured during the gunfight.⁷⁰

The Killing of Tarique Mohammad Saiful Islam, Meherpur District

On January 20, 2014, a local Jamaat leader was killed in Meherpur district during a nighttime operation one day after he was detained. Authorities claim he was killed during a gunfight with his associates.

⁶⁷ First Information Report, from Md. Ziaul Haque to Officer-in-Charge, Debhata Police Station, Satkhira, undated. On file with Human Rights Watch.

⁶⁸ “Jamaat leader, 2 activists killed,” *BDnews24.com*, January 26, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/01/26/jamaat-leader-2-activists-killed> (accessed February 17, 2014).

⁶⁹ First Information Report, from Md. Ziaul Haque to Officer-in-Charge, Debhata Police Station, Satkhira, undated. On file with Human Rights Watch.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Tarique Mohammad Saiful Islam, 36, was the assistant secretary general of Jamaat in Meherpur district. According to his wife, the authorities had filed several criminal cases against him for participating in strikes and blockades, preventing the police from carrying out their responsibilities, and possession of weapons. Around 2:30 p.m. on January 19 security forces detained Tarique from the Islam bank in Meherpur. After his detention, Tarique's wife and sister went to the police superintendent, but he refused to see them.

Around 2 a.m. the following morning a relative of Tarique called his wife and told her that he had heard gunshots near his house and that he had heard from one police officer that Tarique had been killed. The relative lives about 1.5 kilometers outside the center of Meherpur. The relatives later learned that Tarique had been killed near a construction site.

His relatives told Human Rights Watch that a nearby night guard had told them that he saw the security forces executing Tarique and that there had been no gunfight. Human Rights Watch was not able to speak to the night guard to verify this account.

Tarique's wife told Human Rights Watch:

We couldn't do anything after the call. Security forces had cordoned off the entire area and they were patrolling the streets in case of any demonstrations in reaction to the killing. We could do nothing but cry.⁷¹

Tarique's wife told Human Rights Watch that she went to the hospital early in the morning, but that she was not allowed to see his body until the afternoon. A hospital employee with access to the morgue told Human Rights Watch that he saw Tarique's body there around 5:30 a.m. According to him, the body was lying face down on the floor and his hands were tied behind his back with a rope.⁷²

According to news reports, Meherpur's police chief told journalists that Tarique had told the police during interrogation that his associates were planning to hold a secret meeting. According to the police chief, when the police took Tarique to the place of the meeting, Tarique's associates opened fire on the police, and Tarique was killed during the

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tarique Mohammad Saiful Islam's wife (name withheld), Meherpur, February 9, 2014.

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Meherpur, February 9, 2014.

gunfight.⁷³ None of the news reports about the incident mention any other people killed or injured during the gunfight.

The Killing of Abu Hanif, Satkhira District

Local police claim that security forces killed 15-year-old Abu Hanif, also known as Chhoton, when he and other members of the Jamaat youth wing attacked them in the Satkhira district on January 18, 2014. Several witnesses we interviewed separately, however, said that Chhoton was in the custody of the security forces when he was killed and had been in their custody since the previous day.

News articles cited Satkhira District Police Station Officer-in-Charge Enamul Haque saying that security forces were forced to open fire on members of the Jamaat youth wing who attacked them with petrol bombs during an operation near East Bhomra around 4:30 a.m. on January 18, 2014 and that Chhoton was killed during the clashes.⁷⁴

According to his family, security forces had been searching for Chhoton, accusing him of participating in protests and setting fire to several motorcycles in his village of Padmashakra on December 16, 2013. On January 1, 2014, security forces destroyed part of the Chhoton's family house and set fire to property documents and clothes when they did not find him at home, according to relatives interviewed by Human Rights Watch (see chapter VI on unlawful destruction of property).⁷⁵

On January 17, Chhoton and his friend "Monir" (pseudonym) were riding their bicycles on their way home when several men in plainclothes stopped them about 300 meters from Chhoton's house. According to two witnesses, one of them a relative, the men grabbed the two boys, placed them in a white microbus and drove away.⁷⁶

⁷³ "Jamaat leader killed in gunfight with Bangladesh security forces," *The Hindu*, January 20, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/south-asia/jamaat-leader-killed-in-gunfight-with-bangladesh-security-forces/articles5596983.ece> (accessed February 8, 2014).

⁷⁴ "1 dead in Satkhira clash," *BDnews24.com*, January 18, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/01/18/1-dead-in-satkhira-clash> (accessed February 7, 2014). An article in another media outlet cites Haque as saying that the operation took place at 7:30 a.m. and that four policemen were injured in the clashes as well. "Shibir man shot dead in clashes with jt forces in Satkhira," *UNBConnect*, January 18, 2014, <http://unbconnect.com/raid-death/#&panel1-2> (accessed February 7, 2014).

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview (names withheld), Satkhira, February 7, 2014.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Satkhira (names withheld), February 7, 2014.

Monir told Human Rights Watch that the men blindfolded them and started asking them whether they had participated in protests and set fire to vehicles. They eventually discovered that Chhoton had photos of Jamaat leaders giving speeches on his phone. According to Monir, the men said that they were from the Detective Branch. The men released Monir after about three hours, but kept Chhoton.⁷⁷

Chhoton's family said that they searched for him all evening and night. They also contacted the Detective Branch, which denied having detained the boy.⁷⁸

At around 4 a.m. the next day, a friend of the family called and said they had found Chhoton's body near the East Bhomra border-crossing with India, about three kilometers from the family's house and the place where he had been detained. He said that the body had been taken to the Satkhira Medicinal College. Chhoton's cousin, who examined the body at the college, told Human Rights Watch that the body had slash wounds from a knife or a bayonet on his back and what appeared to be four bullet wounds in his right arm, right side of the chest, and in the left side of his torso.⁷⁹ Chhoton's cousin showed Human Rights Watch several photos that appeared consistent with his description.

The Killing of Anwarul Islam, Satkhira District

On January 14, 2014, an alleged Shibir activist was shot dead during what the police claimed was a clash between Shibir activists and joint forces in the Debhata sub-district of Satkhira district. Three witnesses told Human Rights Watch separately, however, that police had detained the victim the previous day, suggesting that Anwar was executed.

Anwarul Islam, aged 29, was a Jamaat leader in the village of Nangla in the Debhata sub-district of Satkhira district, according to his family.⁸⁰ According to a news report citing the police superintendent of Satkhira, Anwar was shot dead when police returned fire in response to an attack by Shibir activists around 10:30 a.m. on January 14 in the Debhata sub-district. The superintendent said that Anwar had been wanted in relation to a number of criminal cases, including three murders.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Monir (pseudonym), Satkhira, February 7, 2014.

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview (names withheld), Satkhira, February 7, 2014.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Chhoton's cousin (name withheld), Satkhira, February 7, 2014.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview (names withheld), Satkhira, February 10, 2014.

According to the news report, the superintendent also said that nobody else was injured in the gunfight. A district police press-release, cited in the same news report, stated that three police officers sustained minor injuries in the gunfight.⁸¹

Witnesses interviewed separately by Human Rights Watch, however, said that Anwar had been in custody since the previous day. Anwar's family told Human Rights Watch that on January 13, he went to work on his shrimp farm, which was located about three kilometers from his house. According to three witnesses who also worked in the shrimp farms and who were interviewed separately, while Anwar was working several motorbikes and a police vehicle with uniformed police officers suddenly appeared on the road by the shrimp farm. Anwar initially tried to run away, the witnesses said, but he stopped and surrendered when the police officers opened fire and he realized he would not be able to out-run them.⁸²

The three witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the police escorted Islam to the road. There, they said, it appeared that the police made Anwar turn his back towards them before they shot him in the leg.⁸³ All the witnesses said that they heard two gunshots. Afterwards, the policemen placed Anwar in the van and drove away.

The witnesses said that they were too far away to hear what the police said, but women who were standing closer to the road had told them that Islam was still alive when the police placed him in the van. A family member who later saw the body told Human Rights Watch that it had two gunshot wounds.

One bullet appeared to have hit the left buttocks and exited through his thigh. A second bullet appeared to have penetrated his chest. The family member believed Anwar had

⁸¹ "Shibir man gunned down in Satkhira," *UNBConnect*, January 14, 2014, <http://unbconnect.com/shibir-satkhira-ld/#&panel1-2> (accessed February 17, 2014).

⁸² Human Rights Watch interviews (names withheld), Satkhira, February 10, 2014.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch has documented other cases in which detainees have been shot in the leg, including Touhidul Islam Touhid (see above). Two members of Jamaat's student wing, Shibir, described to Human Rights Watch how they were both shot in the leg outside a police station in Dhaka after they had been arrested for taking part in a demonstration in March 2013. They said they were shot as a punishment before being released, Human Rights Watch interview (names withheld), Dhaka, February 11, 2014. A Shibir member in Noakhali also claimed he had seen one of his leaders, Eshrak Kandhaker, shot in the leg by police after his arrest. Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Dhaka, December 10, 2014.

been shot in the chest from the front because the wound on his back was bigger, indicating that it might have been an exit wound.⁸⁴

The Killing of Abdul Jabbar, Meherpur District

On December 30, 2013, a local leader and Jamaat supporter was killed while in police custody in what the authorities claim was a gunfight during a nighttime operation to retrieve a weapons cache.

Abdul Jabbar, 62, was a Jamaat supporter and an elected member of the Amjihupi Union Council in the Meherpur district, according to relatives that Human Rights Watch interviewed.⁸⁵

A police officer from the Meherpur district police station told reporters that members of the police, RAB, and BGB detained Jabbar in the morning of December 30. Around midnight, he said, the joint forces took Jabbar with them on an operation to arrest other Jamaat and Shibir activists and to retrieve a weapons cache. During the operation, according to the police, Jabbar's associates opened fire on the security forces and Jabbar was shot during the gunfight. Medical personnel at the hospital later declared Jabbar dead.⁸⁶

However, neighbors told Human Rights Watch that police officers in police cars detained Jabbar from his village of Hijuli in the morning on December 30, which the police confirmed. One of Jabbar's sons went to the Meherpur district police station the same day to give his father some clothes, but the police detained him and have since implicated him in five criminal cases. He was still in detention when Human Rights Watch interviewed his family in early February.

Around midnight the day Jabbar was detained, his relatives and neighbors saw several police cars driving through their village. About 15-20 minutes after they left, the villagers heard about 15 gunshots in the distance. One relative told Human Rights Watch:

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Satkhira, February 10, 2014.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview (names withheld), Meherpur, February 9, 2014.

⁸⁶ "Meherpur Jamaat leader killed in gunfight," *The Daily Star*, December 31, 2013, <http://www.thedailystar.net/meherpur-jamaat-leader-killed-in-gunfight-4820> (accessed March 3, 2014).

Early next morning the village policeman went to the place where we heard the gunshots, but the only thing he saw was a pool of blood. But around 6:30 a.m. a local journalist called us and said that Abdul had been killed. Abdul was a respected member of the community. We really did not think that he would be killed.⁸⁷

Jabbar's close relatives told Human Rights Watch that after Jabbar's son was detained they were afraid to contact the authorities. When they learned that Jabbar had been killed, they asked two distant relatives to go to the hospital. They said that there appeared to be three gunshot wounds on his body, two on opposite sides of his stomach and one in his chest.⁸⁸

The Killing of Anwarul Islam, Satkhira District

On December 30, 2013, a local BNP leader was killed by security forces during what the authorities claim was a gunfight between the security forces and Jamaat-Shibir members in the Satkhira district. Relatives of the opposition leader, however, claim that security forces detained him earlier in the day.

Anwarul Islam, 45, was the chairman of the Agardari Union Council (the smallest local administrative unit in Bangladesh) in Satkhira district and a member of BNP.

According to a news website, a police officer from the Satkhira police station said that Islam had been killed when security forces opened fire on a group of Jamaat-Shibir members who attacked them near Shikri, an agricultural area about eight or nine kilometers from Islam's house.⁸⁹ The officer-in-charge of Satkhira district reportedly told journalists that the gunfight lasted for an hour.⁹⁰ News reports citing police officers do not mention any other people being injured or killed in the hour-long gunfight.

Islam's relatives told a different story. They told Human Rights Watch that on the morning of December 30, 2013, five people pretending to be journalists came to Kashimpur village

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Meherpur, February 9, 2014.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "UP chairman killed in Satkhira," *Newsnextbd.com*, December 30, 2013, <http://newsnextbd.com/en/up-chairman-killed-in-satkhira/> (accessed February 8, 2014).

⁹⁰ "UP chairman killed in clash with joint forces at Satkhira," *primenews.com.bd*, December 30, 2013, <http://primenews.com.bd/details/20298> (accessed March 3, 2014).

saying they wanted to photograph Islam's destroyed house. They even had cameras. A large number of security forces had previously cordoned off and destroyed his house in the village on December 17, 2013 (see chapter VI on unlawful destruction of property).

However, when Islam showed up, along with his two brothers, the men pulled out revolvers and grabbed him. They beat him and placed him in a white microbus. The microbus drove away with two police vehicles that pulled up in front of the house, according to relatives. One relative told Human Rights Watch:

We trusted those people, believing them to be journalists. But as soon as he [Anwarul Islam] came out, they grabbed him. They started beating him, and tied his hands behind his back. They were beating him as they dragged him to the vehicle. They broke his arm, and he was screaming. When his brothers tried to save him, the men threatened to shoot them. The brothers were frightened so they ran away... We found out that he had been taken to the Circuit house. But by the time we got there, they had already taken him away. Later, we heard that he was beaten badly there. They took him to the rice field and shot him.... We don't know who these people are, but If it was not police or administration, who else will kill him?

They picked him up at 11 am. And within two hours, he was dead. He was an ordinary man, a good man. There were no complaints against him. We could have accepted it if he had committed a crime and was hanged. But they just killed him.⁹¹

In the afternoon the family heard that his body had been found in a rice field in Shikir and had already been taken to the hospital. It had seven gunshot wounds. Relatives who saw Islam's body in the hospital said they found his mouth stuffed with grass, possibly to gag him. He had been shot in leg, neck and chest. His body also had bruise marks from the beatings, and his arm was broken.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Sathkhira, April 17, 2014.

His relatives believe that it was the police that arrested Islam. “As soon as the men saying that they were journalists had caught Islam, two police cars turned up. We can’t trust anyone anymore,” one relative said.⁹²

The Killing of Dr. Faiz Ahmed, Laximpur District

On December 14, 2013, members of RAB stormed the house of Dr. Faiz Ahmed, the vice-president of the Laxmipur chapter of Jamaat-e-Islami. Dr. Ahmed died during the security operation, having fallen from the roof with apparent gunshot wounds to his leg and head.

On December 12, 2013, a RAB operation to detain a local BNP leader, during which the leader was shot in the leg, sparked clashes between BNP supporters and the RAB. Five people were killed and 50 injured in the clashes, according to media reports.⁹³ According to Dr. Ahmed’s family members, Dr. Ahmed was not involved in the December 12 protests but as a doctor, he treated 10-12 of the wounded in his private hospital.⁹⁴ Because of this and his high-ranking position in the Jamaat, the family suspected that RAB might try to arrest Dr. Ahmed. “My father didn’t want to hide,” his son told Human Rights Watch. “He told us that if they want to, let them arrest me.”

At around 11:45 p.m. on December 14, 2013, the Ahmed family was woken up by loud knocks on the door and shouts for them to open up, according to Dr. Ahmed’s wife and son. From the window on the second floor they saw a black SUV with the letters RAB written on the side. Six to eight men dressed in black were standing outside the house. Dr Ahmed’s son told Human Rights Watch that, fearing for his life, he hid on a window sill on the second floor.

The RAB members broke down a side-door and searched the ground-floor office before they moved up to the living quarters on the second floor.

Dr. Ahmed’s wife told Human Rights Watch:

⁹² Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Satkhira, February 8, 2014.

⁹³ “Five killed in Laxmipur in BNP-RAB clashes,” *New Age*, December 12, 2013, <http://newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-12-12&nid=76506> (accessed February 6, 2014). The BNP leader later escaped from the hospital, according to Ahmed family members interviewed by Human Rights Watch.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Dhaka, February 5, 2014.

While the men were downstairs, my husband got dressed, prepared his insulin and asked us to pray for him. He then opened the door for the men. An officer grabbed him and asked him whether he was Dr. Faiz. When my husband answered that he was, the officer pushed him onto the stairs leading up to the roof. One group dragged him upstairs while another group took our cell-phones and put us in a different room while they started searching the house.⁹⁵

From his hiding place, Dr. Ahmed's son heard a muffled bang from the roof and then a thump from the ground below, as if something had fallen off the roof. Thinking it was a trick to lure him out of his hiding place, he stayed concealed, he told Human Rights Watch.

After some time Dr. Ahmed's wife noticed that everything had gone quiet in the house. She told Human Rights Watch that she went to the front room and looked out the window:

From the window I saw that there was a body lying on the ground in front of the house and lots of people standing around. The men in black picked up the body and took it away in the car. The only thing left was two pools of blood, one from his head and one from his leg.⁹⁶

The family later learned from an acquaintance in the government hospital that the body of Dr. Ahmed had been left at the entrance of the hospital. The family told Human Rights Watch that they are too scared to go to the hospital and that they have received no official documents about the cause of death. A doctor at the hospital told them, though, that the RAB had pressured the hospital to classify the death as an accident or suicide.⁹⁷

Human Rights Watch reviewed photos that journalists had taken of the body in the hospital which appear to show that Dr. Ahmed had sustained wounds to the leg and head.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Dr. Ahmed's wife (name withheld), Dhaka, February 5, 2014.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Dr. Ahmed's wife (name withheld), Dhaka, February 6, 2014.

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Dhaka, February 6, 2014.

⁹⁸ Photos on file with Human Rights Watch.

An unnamed RAB officer claimed to a journalist that Dr. Ahmed had tried to escape to the roof to jump to an adjacent building when he slipped and fell to the ground. The officer provided no explanation for the gunshot wounds, however.⁹⁹

Family members told Human Rights Watch that a relative had tried to lodge a complaint about the killing with the local police, but that the police refused the complaint because it was against RAB.¹⁰⁰

Other Apparent Extrajudicial Executions

Human Rights Watch did not have the time, resources, or access to investigate all alleged extrajudicial executions that were brought to our attention. The following cases of possible extrajudicial executions have been reported by local and international media, Bangladeshi human rights organizations, or political parties. Though Human Rights Watch has not investigated these cases firsthand, they are similar in important respects to the cases documented in this report and warrant independent investigation.

- On February 25, 2014, Rakib Hasan Russell, a leader of the banned organization Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, was allegedly killed in a gunfight during a nighttime police operation one day after he was arrested, according to news reports citing police authorities.¹⁰¹
- On February 16, Rajab Ali was allegedly killed in a gunfight during a nighttime police operation hours after he was detained, according news reports citing police authorities.¹⁰² The National Human Rights Commission, which investigated the incident, concluded that no gunfight had taken place.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ "Jamaat leader 'found dead' in Lakshimpur; RAB blamed," *Dhaka Tribune*, December 15, 2014, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/law-amp-rights/2013/dec/15/jamaat-leader-%E2%80%98found-dead%E2%80%99-following-rab-police-operation> (accessed February 6, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview (names withheld), Dhaka, February 6, 2014.

¹⁰¹ "Killed; obviously in 'shootout,'" *The Daily Star*, February 25, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/killed-obviously-in-shootout-12908> (accessed April 1, 2014).

¹⁰² "'Dacoit' killed in Jessore shootout," *BDnews24.com*, February 16, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/02/16/dacoit-killed-in-jessore-shootout> (accessed March 10, 2014).

¹⁰³ "It's not crossfire," *The Daily Star*, March 6, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/its-not-crossfire-14301> (accessed March 10, 2014).

On February 15, 2014, the body of Jahangir Alam, a suspect in the murder of an Awami League leader, was discovered in Sirajganj. Ten days earlier, another suspect, Joban Ali, was also found dead. Ali's wife told journalists that plainclothes members of law enforcement agencies had detained Alam and Ali on January 19, 2014.¹⁰⁴ A third suspect, Bablu Miah, was allegedly killed during a nighttime operation by RAB, according to news reports citing a RAB commander.¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch is not aware of any allegation that Miah was previously detained.

- On January 28, 2014, Touhidul Islam Shabuj, a leader of the banned Purba Banglar Communist Party, was killed during a nighttime police operation one day after he was detained, according to police authorities cited in news reports.¹⁰⁶
- On January 28, 2014, Robiul Islam was allegedly killed in a gunfight during a police operation one day after he was arrested, according to news reports citing police authorities.¹⁰⁷ The family claimed that Islam was a local BNP activist, but the police and a local BNP leader denied the affiliation.¹⁰⁸
- On January 26, 2014, Enamul Haque, the finance secretary of a local Jamaat unit in Jhenaidah district, was allegedly killed in a gunfight during a nighttime operation in Jhenaidah, according to news reports citing police authorities. A local Jamaat leader and Haque's brother, however, told journalists that police had detained Haque the previous day in front of a large crowd of people.¹⁰⁹

Most of the alleged crossfire deaths took place at night with no witnesses, making it difficult to find witnesses in many cases. But several factors significantly undermine the credibility of the authorities' claims. First, the sheer number of detainees allegedly killed in

¹⁰⁴ "Body of another murder accused recovered in Sirajganj," *New Age*, February 15, 2014, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-02-15&nid=83906> (accessed April 2, 2014).

¹⁰⁵ "Sirajganj 'crossfire', murder accused killed," *BDnews24.com*, January 30, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/01/30/sirajganj-crossfire-murder-accused-killed> (accessed April 2, 2014).

¹⁰⁶ "2 more killed in 'shootouts,'" *New Age*, January 29, 2014, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-29&nid=81954#.UzvrOKiSx8E> (accessed April 2, 2014).

¹⁰⁷ "BNP activist shot dead after arrest by joint force in Jessore," *The Asia Post*, January 28, 2014, <http://www.asiapostbd.com/2014/01/28/bnp-activist-shot-dead-after-arrest-by-joint-force-in-jessore/> (accessed February 18, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ "2 more killed in 'shootouts,'" *New Age*, January 29, 2014, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-29&nid=81954#.UzvrOKiSx8E> (accessed April 2, 2014).

¹⁰⁹ "Three more killed," *New Age*, January 27, 2014, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-27&nid=81708#.Uzrm-KiSx8E> (accessed April 1, 2014).

“crossfire” is implausible. While the term “killed in crossfire” normally means an accidental death, Bangladeshi security forces have used the term so often in recent years to justify the death of detainees that the term, when used in Bangladesh, is now understood in everyday speech as a euphemism for a summary execution. As one lawyer told Human Rights Watch, “I begged the police not to kill my client in crossfire when he was arrested, but they didn’t listen.”¹¹⁰ Even some political leaders, rather than claiming that the killings take place during genuine armed confrontations, seek to justify the killings as a necessary response to “terrorism.”¹¹¹

Second, in most of the 2014 cases we and others documented, the detainee was the only person killed in the “gunfights.” None of the alleged associates of the detainee launching the attack have been reported to have been killed, injured, or even detained. While the authorities claimed in a couple of the cases that security forces were injured in the alleged gunfights, the injuries were all described as minor, requiring only basic treatment. No members of the security forces were killed during these alleged attacks. The lack of injuries to anyone other than the detainee is particularly striking since the authorities in more than one case claimed that the gunfight lasted for up to an hour.

Third, in a number of cases described above, witnesses contradicted the authorities’ assertion that the victim had not been in their custody before the killing. The authorities’ failure to acknowledge the detention casts doubt on other aspects of the official version of the killings.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Dhaka, February 5, 2014.

¹¹¹ See comment from Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan, “A bit of crossfire is needed: Minister,” *BDnews24.com*, March 9, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/03/09/a-bit-of-crossfire-is-needed-minister> (accessed April 1, 2014).

VI. Illegal Arrests Leading to Deaths and Disappearances

In 10 cases researched by Human Rights Watch, individuals were illegally arrested by people who witnesses claim identified themselves as police or RAB. In some cases, witnesses said that victims were taken away in vehicles marked as RAB vehicles. In 7 of the 10 cases the victims' bodies have been found, often by the roadside. The authorities denied involvement in all cases.

Disappearance of Omar Faruk, Laximpur District

On February 5, 2014, a group of men identifying themselves as members of the Detective Branch of the Bangladesh police arrested a BNP leader in Laximpur district. When we spoke with his relatives more than a week after he was arrested, they told us they still did not know his whereabouts.

Omar Faruk is the chairman of the Hazirpara union of Laxmipur district and the Organizing Secretary of the BNP Sadar Upazila (east) unit.

According to Faruk's wife, the couple was staying in the apartment of relatives in Chittagong city when the incident occurred. Two family members told Human Rights Watch that around 4 a.m. on February 5, 2014, a group of about eight men knocked on their door, waking them up. One of them told Human Rights Watch:

The men were not in uniform, but said they were from the Detective Branch and one of them showed his ID card. They said they did not have a warrant but wanted to search the apartment. They said Faruk was wanted in connection with an investigation. The men then took him outside, to where a pick-up truck was waiting. It was black, with RAB-7 written on the side.¹¹²

A second relative who witnessed the arrest confirmed the account.¹¹³ News media reported the arrest the same morning.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Human Rights Watch telephone interview (name withheld), February 9, 2014.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview (name withheld), February 9, 2014.

Later that morning, Faruk's relatives tried to locate him. They told Human Rights Watch that they went to the RAB-7 office and the Detective Branch office but both forces said they had not arrested him. They then went to the police station to report him as a missing person but the police said they should wait one or two more days to do so. Two months after the arrest, Faruk's relatives still did not know his whereabouts.¹¹⁵

Illegal Arrests and Killing of Atikur Rahman, Golam Rabbani, and Mohidul Islam, Nilphamari District

In January and February, 2014, three opposition activists in the Nilphamari district were killed. The three were among people accused of being involved in a December 2013 attack that left five people dead, including four Awami League supporters. Relatives of the three say they had been detained before they were killed by what appeared to be security forces.¹¹⁶

Following the December 13 execution of a Jamaat leader for alleged crimes committed in 1971, opposition supporters clashed with government supporters in the Nilphamari district the following day, leaving five dead, over 150 injured, and dozens of motorcycles and vehicles destroyed, according to media reports.¹¹⁷ The authorities filed criminal charges against 14 named and 1,500 unnamed people for the attack.¹¹⁸

The named suspects included Golam Rabbani, a local BNP leader, Atikur Rahman, a leader of BNP's student wing, and Rahman's cousin, Mohidul Islam, who was a Shibir activist, according to media reports.

¹¹⁴ "Rab' picks up BNP leader in CTG," *UNBConnect*, February 5, 2014, <http://unbconnect.com/bnp-leader-abduction/#&panel1-1> (accessed February 16, 2014).

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview (name withheld), April 8, 2014.

¹¹⁶ Media reports suggest that three other men accused in the same case might also have been subjected to enforced disappearances. The men initially went into hiding, but contacted their families from time to time. On January 27, 2014, a BNP activist said that the three had not been heard from since mid-January. Human Rights Watch has not been able to establish whether these three people were detained or arrested, or whether they are still in hiding. "4 including 3 Noor attack suspects disappeared in Nilphamari," *New Age*, January 27, 2014, <http://newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-27&nid=81710#.UyljKD9dWSo> (accessed February 19, 2014).

¹¹⁷ "Asaduzzaman Nur's convoy attacked, 2 killed," *New Age*, December 14, 2013, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-12-14&nid=76776#.Uylizj9dWSo> (accessed February 19, 2014).

¹¹⁸ "4 Jamaat activists held for attacking Nur's convoy," *BDnews24.com*, December 17, 2013, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2013/12/17/4-jamaat-activists-held-for-attacking-nurs-convoy> (accessed February 19, 2014).

Family members say that just after midnight on January 14, 2014, men in civilian clothes arrested Rahman and Islam from the house of a family friend in Tangail where they were hiding. A relative told Human Rights Watch that a person present during the arrests said that the men introduced themselves as members of the Detective Branch. He said that family members who contacted the police were told the cousins were first taken to Deldowar police station and then to Tangail district headquarters. But when they went there they could not find them. The relative said:

The morning after the Detective Branch took Atikur I phoned the police and they told me they didn't know anything. I called the DB and they also told me we don't know anything about it. I talked to the RAB commander and he also said he knew nothing. I checked again with the police station, they said they knew nothing. After 7 or 8 days I found his dead body. Somebody phoned my aunt's sister and said his dead body in Syedpur. I can't say who called. They didn't say who it was. When we tried to ring back the person wouldn't say.¹¹⁹

Atikur Rahman's body, with a gunshot wound to the back of his head, was found on January 20, 2014. Islam's body, also with a gunshot wound to his head, was found on February 1, 2014.¹²⁰

On January 15, 2014, Golam Rabanni was detained from the home of relatives in Nilphamari district. Rabanni's wife, Shahnaz Begum, told Human Rights Watch that he was taken away just after dawn. Relatives who were hiding him told her that he was arrested by as many as 18 men wearing RAB uniforms. The family later contacted friends and relatives in the police, RAB and army, seeking information, but none were able to establish Rabanni's whereabouts.

On the morning of January 18, Rabanni's body, with bullet marks to the back of the head and face, was discovered near Palashbari union council in the Sadar upazila. His wife, Shahnaz Begum, saw the body after the post-mortem and said it looked like he had been badly beaten before being shot. She said there was a rope around his neck.

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview (name withheld), March 25, 2014.

¹²⁰ "Another accused found dead," *The Daily Star*, March 5, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/another-accused-found-dead-14237> (accessed March 7, 2014).

Shahnaz said Rabbani had been accused in many cases connected to his activities for the BNP, and that if he had done anything wrong, he should have been put on trial. She told Human Rights Watch:

If he was found guilty in a trial I would have accepted it. I would have accepted it even if he was hanged after proper trial. But what happened now was a murder and I seek justice from the Bangladesh government.¹²¹

Illegal Arrest and Killing of Mosharraf Hossain, Chittagong District

On January 19, 2014, local residents discovered the body of a local Shibir leader close to the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway in the Sitakunda district in the Chittagong district. His sister told Human Rights Watch that she had seen men in black uniform, whom she believed to be RAB forces, detain Hossain the day before.

Mosharraf Hossain, 22, was the general secretary of the Sitakunda subdistrict unit of Shibir. Both Shibir and Jamaat have a strong presence in Sitakunda, and their members blocked the highway for several weeks during the protests, torching many vehicles, according to media reports.¹²²

Hossain's sister, Laila Begum, told Human Rights Watch that about 10 men wearing black uniforms entered her house looking for Hossain around 5 a.m. on January 18, 2014. When she protested, one man slapped her twice, and then took Hossain away, she said.¹²³

Laila Begum did not see what vehicles the men were driving but relatives told her that they came in two minibuses and a pick-up truck with “RAB” written on the sides. Later that day Laila Begum and her relatives visited the local police station and the RAB base asking for information, but both times were told they did know where Hossain was.

On January 19, 2014, as the family was about to hold a press conference in Sitakunda about the arrest, police informed journalists that a body had been found. One of those that

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Shahnaz Begum, February 9, 2014.

¹²² See for example, “Mayhem in Sitakunda,” *BDNews24.com*, December 2, 2013, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2013/12/02/mayhem-in-sitakunda> (accessed February 19, 2014)

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Laila Begum, Sitakunda, February 9, 2014.

rushed to the site said that Hossain's body was lying on its side with two bullet wounds to the chest and one to the back of the head. He told Human Rights Watch that a local auto-rickshaw driver told him that he had heard three shots at 10 p.m. the previous night.

According to media reports, RAB officers claimed that RAB had not detained Hossain, saying that they had not conducted any operations in the area at the time of the detention.¹²⁴

Disappearance of Saiful Islam Hiru and Humayun Kabir Pervez, Comilla District

BNP politicians Saiful Islam Hiru and Humayun Kabir Pervez have not been seen since November 27, 2013.

Relatives of Saiful Islam Hiru, a former BNP member of parliament, told Human Rights Watch that the two men were in an ambulance when it was intercepted by RAB members at about 9 p.m. on November 27, 2013. Hiru was taking Humayan Kabir Pervez to the hospital in Comilla and the two were accompanied by a third BNP politician, Mr Jashim. The three men were forcibly transferred to a RAB vehicle, and Jashim was then handed over to the police, he later told Hiru's relatives.

When the family enquired at the office of RAB-1 the next day, officers denied knowing where the two men were. The family believes the disappearance of the two men was politically motivated. Hiru was a popular opposition leader in the Comilla area and was able to mobilize many supporters, they said. They now fear he is dead.

“When it is night we all get scared, we fear that we might lose him, and we don't want that. No one wants that,” his son Rafsan Islam said.

Illegal Arrest and Killing of Aminul Islam Amin

On November 16, 2013, Aminul Islam Amin was arrested by a group of men in plainclothes who identified themselves as being from the Detective Branch. His corpse was found four days later, with two bullet wounds in the back of his head and one in his chest. His arms were tied, he was blindfolded, and his mouth was gagged.

¹²⁴ “Ctg ICS leader found dead,” *New Age*, January 20, 2014, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-20&nid=80946#.UwDS2WjdV8E> (accessed February 16, 2014).

Aminul Islam Amin was a Union Joint Secretary of the Jamaat party in the Sitakunda subdistrict in Chittagong district, one of the protest hotspots. On the day he was arrested, he was travelling by bus with his wife and five-month-old daughter from Dhaka to their home in southeast Bangladesh. At about 6 p.m. the bus stopped for refreshments near Comilla. As they were walking back to the bus, they saw a group of men, not in uniform, standing by its door.

According to his wife, Ayesha Akhter Shima, there were eight or nine of them who had come in a white minibus.¹²⁵ They questioned Amin, asking him, “Were you involved in yesterday's incident?” she recalled. Then they told Amin to come with them without making a fuss. When Shima asked them who they were and why were they taking her husband, one of the men said they were from the Dhaka Detective Branch. She said she then saw them drive away in the opposite direction, towards Sitakunda and Chittagong. She tried calling Amin but after he answered she heard someone tell him to switch off the phone.

When they found out about the arrest, Jamaat supporters in Sitakunda barricaded the highway to try to intercept the vehicle carrying Amin, but they did not see the vehicle. The following morning, Amin’s relatives tried to locate him. They called the Detective Branch and RAB 7, and went to the local police station. But each agency said they did not know where Amin was, a relative said. Travelling by motorcycle, one of the relatives then visited two police stations in Comilla, but was told to check in Chittagong. He went to Chittagong the next day but could not find Amin there either, he said.¹²⁶

On November 19, 2013, the family planned to hold a press conference to appeal for information, but before they could do so they heard that a corpse had been found. A local journalist who knew Amin went to identify it. The body was lying close to the highway, about four kilometers from his home.

The family filed a complaint (First Information Report) at the Sitakunda police station. When the police did not begin an investigation, the family took the case to the Chittagong High Court. On November 23, 2013, it ordered the police to investigate the killing and

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Ayesha Akhter Shima, February 9, 2014.

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Sitakunda, February 9, 2014.

submit a report within three days. At the time of the interview, on February 9, 2014, this had still not been done.

V. Arbitrary Arrests

Bangladeshi security forces detained thousands of people before, during, and after the January 5, 2014 elections. Bangladeshi officials have the authority and duty to investigate, detain, and prosecute people who commit criminal offenses. But Human Rights Watch research shows that in many cases security forces appear to have detained people solely because of their affiliation with an opposition party and without any evidence or reasonable suspicion that they had broken the law.

The Bangladeshi police have broad powers to detain people. The Bangladeshi Code of Criminal Procedure gives police the right to detain a person without a warrant wherever they have “reasonable suspicion” that the person has committed an offense.¹²⁷ The code does not, however, define reasonable suspicion, contributing to widespread abuse.

Our research shows a pattern in which security forces detain opposition leaders and activists without a warrant and without informing them of the reasons for detention. They then charge or otherwise accuse the detainee of being involved in a criminal case in which the person was not originally named.

The practice of adding a detainee to a criminal case after detention is usually described by lawyers, media, and authorities in Bangladesh with the phrase saying that a detainee was “shown arrested” in a particular case. Human Rights Watch documented several cases in which detainees were “shown arrested” in several criminal cases after their detention. Often, opposition leaders were detained before the elections, “shown arrested” in one or several criminal cases, and then released on bail after the elections. The frequent use of this practice strongly suggests that politically motivated arrests are a widespread problem in Bangladesh.

Another striking pattern is that many opposition leaders were detained shortly after they announced strikes to protest the elections. Inciting violence is an offense, but calling for peaceful protests is not.

¹²⁷ The Code of Criminal Procedure, No. V of 1898, http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/sections_detail.php?id=75§ions_id=14518 (accessed February 28, 2014), art. 54.

In the cases below, Human Rights Watch has not established in each individual case whether the individual had committed an offense or whether the authorities had reasonable suspicion that the person had committed an offense. But the lack of warrants and the frequent use of the “shown arrested” mechanism suggest a “detain first, figure out the charges later” approach that at a minimum creates the impression that the arrests are politically motivated.

BNP standing committee members Moudud Ahmed, MK Anwar, and Rafiqul Islam Mia were arrested as they left an evening function at a 5-star hotel in Dhaka on November 8, 2013. As with several of the later cases, the arrests occurred shortly after the BNP announced a new strike in protest at the elections.¹²⁸ Soon afterwards, in the early hours of November 9, 2013, Khaleda Zia’s special assistant, Shamsur Rahman Shimul Biswas, and her adviser, Abdul Awal Minto, were detained after they came out of the opposition leader’s house.¹²⁹

Describing the arrest of Moudud Ahmed, one of his lawyers told Human Rights Watch that the police did not have a warrant, and did not tell the former prime minister why he was being detained.¹³⁰ The lawyer said that Moudud was taken after his arrest to the office of the Detective Branch without his lawyers or family being informed. The five men were charged the next day with inciting vandalism and attacks on police by opposition supporters during two separate rallies.¹³¹ They were held for more than a week on police remand.¹³² The then Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said the arrests were justified because the leaders were instigating violence.¹³³

According to the lawyer, Moudud’s name, along with those of the other leaders, was added to the charge sheet after their arrest. In both cases, the police had said that “80-90

¹²⁸ “Moudud, Anwar, Rafiqul held,” *The Daily Star*, November 8, 2013, <http://archive.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/moudud-picked-up/> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹²⁹ “Five BNP leaders sent to jail,” *New Age*, November 10, 2013, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-11-10&nid=72446#.UxRP7f3gLwl> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Noor-Ul-Matin, Dhaka, January 4, 2013.

¹³¹ First Information Reports on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹³² “BNP leaders placed on 8 day remand,” *The Dhaka Tribune*, November 15, 2013, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/politics/2013/nov/14/5-bnp-leaders-placed-8-day-remand> (accessed April 8, 2014).

¹³³ “Bangladesh arrest three major opposition leaders,” *The Associated Press*, November 10, 2013, <http://www.arabnews.com/news/475096> (accessed March 4, 2014).

unnamed persons” were involved in the violence.¹³⁴ Later, the police also charged Moudud and the other leaders with inciting violence by anti-government protesters in May 2013.¹³⁵

All have since been released on bail: Abdul Awal Minto was released on January 23, 2014,¹³⁶ Shimul Biswas on January 29, 2014,¹³⁷ MK Anwar on February 2, 2014,¹³⁸ and Moudud Ahmed and Rafiqul Islam Miah on February 4, 2014.¹³⁹

In a different case, police arrested BNP standing committee member and retired Brigadier General ASM Hannan Shah in Dhaka on November 25, 2013, and charged him with leading a violent protest by opposition supporters.¹⁴⁰ According to the *Daily Star*, the police accused him, at a remand hearing, of leading “the BNP leaders and activists in creating anarchy, killing people by torching vehicles, damaging public and private properties, blocking roads and using explosives.”¹⁴¹ He was also charged with two cases of instigating violence in May 2013.¹⁴² He was released on bail on January 29, 2014.¹⁴³

The organizing secretary of the BNP's central committee in Chittagong, Golam Akbar Khandaker, was arrested along with six others after the police intercepted a procession through the city.¹⁴⁴ Khandaker's son, Tareque Akbar Khandaker, told Human Rights Watch

¹³⁴ First Information Reports, on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Noor-Ul-Matin, Dhaka, January 4, 2013; First Information Report, on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹³⁶ “Mintoo freed from jail,” *The Daily Star*, January 24, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/3563/mintoo-freed-from-jail-8194> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹³⁷ “Shimul Biswas released,” *BDnews24.com*, January 29, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/politics/2014/01/29/shimul-biswas-released> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹³⁸ “3 BNP leaders get HC bail,” *The Daily Star*, February 3, <http://www.thedailystar.net/3-bnp-leaders-get-hc-bail-9698> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹³⁹ “BNP's Moudud, Rafique, Mahbub freed,” *BDnews24.com*, February 4, 2013, <http://bdnews24.com/politics/2014/02/04/bnps-moudud-rafiq-rahman-mahbub-freed> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁴⁰ “Hannan Shah arrested,” *New Age*, November 26, 2013, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-11-26&nid=74426#.UxRtQP3gLW> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁴¹ “Hannan Shah remanded,” *The Daily Star*, November 26, 2013, <http://archive.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/hannan-shah-remanded-2/> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁴² “Hannan Shah released from jail,” *New Age*, January 30, 2014, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-30&nid=82099#.UxRyPf3gLW> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁴³ “Hannan Shah released from jail,” *New Age*, January 30, 2014, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-30&nid=82099#.UxRyPf3gLW> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁴⁴ “BNP leaders arrested,” *BDnews24.com*, November 28, 2013, <http://bdnews24.com/politics/2013/11/28/bnp-leaders-arrested> (accessed March 4, 2014).

that his father and five others were charged with throwing grenades in two cases that had been filed the previous night.¹⁴⁵ He was released on six-month bail by the High Court on February 3, 2014, his son said.¹⁴⁶

BNP Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi was arrested on November 30, 2013 at the BNP headquarters. He had been living there since October to avoid arrest. Members of the Detective Branch reportedly raided the offices around 4 a.m. and detained Rizvi, one of the party's spokespersons, hours after he had announced a new 72-hour strike.¹⁴⁷ The detectives also arrested Belal Ahmed, an executive committee member of the BNP.¹⁴⁸

Rizvi was charged with involvement in an arson attack on a bus in Dhaka on November 28, 2013, which eventually led to the deaths of four people.¹⁴⁹ The police charged Rizvi and Belal of involvement in two other violent incidents, including arson and vandalism.¹⁵⁰ Rizvi was released on bail on January 30, 2014.¹⁵¹

In an illustrative series of cases, security forces launched a wave of seemingly politically motivated arrests on December 26, 2013, immediately after the opposition alliance announced a “March for Democracy” towards Dhaka on December 29, 2013. Correspondents for the *New Age*, a Bangladeshi newspaper, reported that security forces arrested at least 203 opposition leaders and activists in nine districts across Bangladesh on that day.¹⁵² An update by the newspaper on December 28, 2013 claimed that the authorities had detained more than a thousand supporters of the BNP and Jamaat to

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Tareque Akbar Khandaker, January 4, 2014.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Tareque Akbar Khandaker, March 4, 2014.

¹⁴⁷ “Rizvi's ordeal: from court to jail,” *BDnews24.com*, November 30, 2013, <http://bdnews24.com/politics/2013/11/30/rizvi-s-ordeal-from-court-to-jail> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁴⁸ “Rizvi, Hannan to be interrogated at jail gate,” *The Daily Star*, December 9, 2013, <http://archive.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/rizvi-hannan-to-be-interrogated-at-jail-gate/> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁴⁹ “Rizvi sent to jail,” *The Daily Star*, November 30, 2013, <http://archive.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/rizvi-held/> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁵⁰ “Rizvi, Hannan to be interrogated at jail gate,” *The Daily Star*, December 9, 2013, <http://archive.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/rizvi-hannan-to-be-interrogated-at-jail-gate/> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁵¹ “Rizvi released on bail,” *The Daily Star*, December 30, 2013 <http://www.thedailystar.net/rizvi-released-on-bail-9287> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁵² “Tension mounts at arrest of opposition leaders,” *New Age*, December 26, 2013, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-12-26&nid=78121> (accessed February 28, 2014).

prevent the December 29, 2013 rally.¹⁵³ The aide of one BNP member of parliament told Human Rights Watch that he helped organize the transport of some 200 supporters into the capital, but all of them were arrested. After they paid bribes to the police they were told to go home that evening, he said.¹⁵⁴

Mahbub Uddin Khokon, a lawyer for many BNP members and a BNP parliamentarian, was among those arrested on December 26, 2013. He was on his way home from a bail hearing at the Dhaka High Court when officers from the Detective Branch detained him. He told Human Rights Watch:

The police asked me for the names of my relatives, where they stayed, and they asked me why I was involved in politics. When I asked why they had detained me, the police officers questioning me said that they didn't know. It was only the next day that they told me that I had been arrested for involvement in an attack on a police bus.¹⁵⁵

On December 24, 2013, a petrol bomb attack on a police bus killed a police officer. The initial police complaint named 18 opposition leaders, including the acting secretary of the BNP and 18 to 20 other unnamed perpetrators, according to news reports.¹⁵⁶ Khokon was not among the opposition leaders named in the initial police complaint. After Khokon was transferred to a prison he found out that the authorities had also “shown him arrested” in two other cases. On January 20, 2014, the Bangladesh High Court granted Khokon bail. Khokon told Human Rights Watch that nobody asked him a single question about the alleged cases against him during his 26 days in detention.¹⁵⁷

Others detained on December 26, 2013 included BNP member of parliament Shammi Akhter and a former MP, Sarder Sakhawat Hossain, who were detained as they entered

¹⁵³ “AL, BNP face off as Dhaka ‘delinked,’” *New Age*, December 28, 2013, http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-12-28&nid=78387#.UxSyj_3gLwI (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Dhaka, January 4, 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Mahbub Uddin Khokon, Dhaka, February 5, 2014.

¹⁵⁶ “Tension mounts at arrest of opposition leaders,” *New Age*, December 26, 2013, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-12-26&nid=78121> (accessed February 28, 2014).

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Mahbub Uddin Khokon, Dhaka, February 5, 2014.

Khaleda Zia's residence.¹⁵⁸ They were later charged with vandalism and torching vehicles. They were both freed on bail on January 22, 2014.¹⁵⁹

Khaleda Zia was prevented from leaving her home to attend the December 26, 2013 rally and was not able to leave it until after the January 5 election.¹⁶⁰ Following a meeting with the British High Commissioner there on December 29, 2013, the police arrested her adviser on foreign relations, Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury. He was detained for five hours by members of the Detective Branch.¹⁶¹ Also that day, the police detained another of Zia's advisors, Enam Ahmed Chowdhury, along with other party members, near their headquarters.¹⁶² That evening, one of the party's vice-presidents, Hafizuddin Ahmed, was arrested shortly after he held a press conference calling for non-stop demonstrations until the elections.¹⁶³ He was accused of involvement in the firebombing of a bus on December 24, 2013, in which a police officer died.¹⁶⁴ Ahmed was not mentioned in the original First Information Report.¹⁶⁵ He was released on bail on February 3.¹⁶⁶

Police arrested eight BNP politicians in Dhaka on January 7, 2014, although five were later released. Three were charged with inciting violence before the election. BNP Vice-Chair Selima Rahman was arrested after addressing a press conference announcing a new set of demonstrations. Khandaker Mahbub Hossain, a senior advisor to the BNP president, was held shortly after giving a speech denouncing the election. The police also arrested a

¹⁵⁸ "BNP lawmaker Khokon held," *The Daily Star*, December 27, 2013, <http://www.thedailystar.net/bnp-lawmaker-khokon-held-4236> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁵⁹ "Shammi Akter freed from jail," *BDnews24.com*, January 22, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/politics/2014/01/22/shammi-akter-freed-from-jail>; "Khokon, Bakul freed from jail," *The Daily Star*, January 22, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/khokon-bakul-freed-from-jail-7940> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁶⁰ "Police obstruct Khaleda," *New Age*, December 29, 2013, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-12-29&nid=78548> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁶¹ "Shamsheer Mobin released," *New Age*, December 31, 2013, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-12-31&nid=78781#.UxS1nP3gLwI> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁶² "BNP leader Hafiz held," *The Daily Star*, December 30, 2013, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/bnp-leader-hafiz-held-4613> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ "Court grants 2-day remand to grill Hafiz Uddin," *New Age*, December 30, 2013, <http://newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2013-12-30&nid=78652#.UxS-pf3gLwI> (accessed March 4, 2014)

¹⁶⁵ First Information Report on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁶⁶ "HC grants bail to 4 BNP leaders," *The Daily Star*, February 4, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/hc-grants-bail-to-4-bnp-leaders-9843> (accessed March 4, 2014).

former member of parliament, Fazlul Haq Milon.¹⁶⁷ They were later “shown arrested” for involvement in a grenade attack on the office of the police commissioner.¹⁶⁸

Khandaker Mahbub Hossain told Human Rights Watch that the police did not question him. He said:

Nothing was asked of me. In the interrogation cell they just asked me about a statement I had made when I said that the police were not acting as the servants of the Bangladeshi people, but of the government. No investigation was done. In every case they have two or three hundred ‘unknown’ people in the FIRs. My name was not in the FIR, they had no allegation against me.¹⁶⁹

He was freed on bail on February 4, 2014.¹⁷⁰ Selima Rahman was released on January 16, 2014.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ “Mahbub, Selima, 2 more BNP leaders detained,” *New Age*, January 8, 2014,

http://newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-08&nid=79669#.UxQT5_3gLwl (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁶⁸ “Selima, Mahbub, Milon, Charged for bombing,” *BDnews24.com*, January 8, 2014,

<http://bdnews24.com/politics/2014/01/08/selima-mahbub-milon-charged-for-bombing> (accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch phone interview with Khandaker Mahbub Hossain, March 4, 2014.

¹⁷⁰ “BNP’s Moudud, Rafique, Mahbub freed,” *BDnews24.com*, February 4, 2013,

<http://bdnews24.com/politics/2014/02/04/bnps-moudud-rafiq-mahbub-freed>(accessed March 4, 2014).

¹⁷¹ “BNP leader Selima Rahman released,” *Dhaka Tribune*, January 18, 2014,

<http://www.dhakatribune.com/politics/2014/jan/18/bnp-leader-selima-rahman-released> (accessed March 4, 2014).

VI. Unlawful Destruction of Property

Human Rights Watch also investigated three sites where the evidence shows security forces unlawfully destroyed property. In all three cases, security forces, using a bulldozer, completely or partially destroyed the houses of opposition leaders and activists who were wanted by the authorities, seemingly as punishment when the security forces were not able to locate and detain them. Human Rights Watch is not aware of any official explanation or justification for this destruction.

On December 17, 2014, security forces destroyed the house of BNP leader and Agardari Union Parishad Chairman Anwarul Islam in Satkhira district. Several people who witnessed the destruction told Human Rights Watch that security forces including police, RAB, and BGB cordoned off the house around 8:30 a.m. and proceeded to destroy the house with bulldozers. One relative told Human Rights Watch:

Everybody was here, we all saw it, but nobody dared speak up. There were about 100 law enforcement agents here from RAB, police, and BGB, but many Awami League supporters participated in the destruction as well. It is useless for us to file a complaint. The government won't do anything about it in any case.¹⁷²

In February, Human Rights Watch examined and photographed Islam's destroyed house. The house is located close to the major road that passes through Agardari. The frame of the house was still standing, but the front had been significantly destroyed, bearing damage consistent with the use of a bulldozer. The house was uninhabitable.

Security forces detained Anwarul Islam on December 30, 2013. The authorities, however, claim that he was killed in a gunfight (see Chapter III on crossfire killings).

On January 1, 2014, security forces destroyed part of the Chhoton family house in Satkhira district and set fire to property, documents, and clothes. Security forces were searching for 15-year-old Abu Hanif, also known as Chhoton, accusing him of participating in recent

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Satkhira, February 8, 2014.

protests and setting fire to several motorcycles. Chhoton's mother told Human Rights Watch:

The security forces pointed guns at me and asked about my sons and husband. When I said they were not in the house they entered into my rooms, broke the closets, and took all the land registration documents into the courtyard and set them on fire. They also looted money from the drawers of the shelves. I was afraid so I went to my neighbor's house. After the evening prayer, I saw a bulldozer demolishing my house. They destroyed the fence and two rooms of my house. It took them about two hours. They were pushing me to call my sons and husband to come to the house.¹⁷³

Other neighbors and relatives provided similar accounts to Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch examined the destroyed section of the house, which was consistent with the use of bulldozers.

The authorities detained Chhoton on January 17, 2014. The following day he was killed in what the authorities claim was a gunfight (see Chapter III on crossfire killings).

On December 15, 2013, security forces destroyed parts of the house of Abdul Khaleq, the Jamaat leader in Satkhira district. According to the authorities, Khaleq is wanted in several criminal cases related to violence by opposition supporters. Neighbors told Human Rights Watch that security forces came to the area on December 15 and 16 with about 25 police vehicles and a bulldozer. An elderly neighbor told Human Rights Watch:

There was nobody home [at Khaleq's house]. I was standing in the street. When the police arrived and started shooting in the air I became afraid and moved further away. The bulldozer was in front and started destroying the house. It took them perhaps 30 minutes. They also tried to set fire to the house, but neighbors managed to extinguish the fire after they left.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with Abu Hanif's mother (name withheld), Satkhira, February 7, 2014.

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Satkhira, February 7, 2014.

Human Rights Watch confirmed that the kitchen, a toilet, and an older building had been destroyed. There were also marks from a fire inside another building, consistent with the information provided by the neighbors.

Journalists in Satkhira reported the deliberate destruction of at least two other houses in the district, but Human Rights Watch did not verify these incidents first-hand.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ According to an article, Mohiuddin Alamgir, "Panic grips Satkhira over joint forces drive," *New Age*, January 26, 2014, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-26&nid=81583#.UxDyuuNdWSo> (accessed February 28, 2014).

VII. Recommendations

To Bangladesh's Political Parties, particularly Jammāt-e-Islami, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, and the Awami League:

- Make clear and strong public statements, at the highest levels of each party, denouncing all forms of politically motivated violence. Dismiss party members found to be involved in planning or carrying out violence.
- Fully cooperate with any criminal investigation into crimes of violence.

To the Bangladeshi Government:

- Establish an independent, external accountability entity to conduct prompt, impartial, and independent investigations into all allegations of violations by law enforcement agencies including the police, Rapid Action Battalion, and Border Guards Bangladesh. Empower this mechanism to investigate and prosecute commanding officers and others in a position of authority who knew of abuses and failed to take action to prevent or punish abuses. The report of the mechanism should be made public. This entity should be charged with receiving complaints from the public.
- Make clear and strong public statements, at the highest political and institutional levels, condemning unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, and other violations by law enforcement agencies and committing to holding accountable those involved in planning, ordering, or carrying out violations.
- Ensure that all those responsible for abuses will be investigated and prosecuted in an independent, transparent, and credible manner.
- Ensure that all arrests are made in strict compliance with Bangladesh's obligations under the ICCPR, including that arrests be made only with necessary court-ordered warrants, that detainees be held only in recognized places of detention with prompt access to lawyers and family, and timely production before relevant court.
- End all disappearances and illegal arrests by security forces.
- Ensure the safety of detainees in government custody, including by prohibiting law enforcement agencies from taking detainees on nighttime operations where they are

often executed in “cross-fire killings.” Institute a zero-tolerance policy on custodial torture. Take steps to ensure regular independent monitoring of detainees in government custody, including by the National Human Rights Commission and qualified non-governmental organizations.

- Require each law enforcement agency to regularly provide parliament and the National Human Rights Commission with detailed information about numbers of arrests, numbers and types of police abuse or misconduct complaints received, status of the complaints investigated, numbers of officers disciplined and for what offenses, and the number of cases referred for prosecution and their status. Require that such information be made public.
- Establish and fully implement a policy based on international best practices, with input from victims of abuse and their families, to provide financial compensation to the victims of security force abuses. However, such compensation must not be a substitute for appropriate criminal investigations and prosecutions or internal discipline within law enforcement agencies.
- Investigate all allegations that members of law enforcement agencies and other public officials have intentionally acted to obstruct efforts by victims, family members, and others seeking justice for violations of human rights, and prosecute or discipline those responsible for such obstructions and any other attempts to obstruct justice, including tampering with evidence.
- Establish a comprehensive witness protection program to guarantee that anyone who files a complaint or is prepared to testify against an alleged human rights abuser is able to do so without fear of being subjected to retaliatory harassment or violence.
- Ensure that the National Human Rights Commission is allowed to act independently, is not subject to political pressure, and has an adequate, independent budget and resources so that it can conduct effective investigations into allegations of abuses by law enforcement agencies.

Regarding RAB¹⁷⁶

- Disband RAB and in its place create a an entirely civilian institution which puts human rights at its core in leading the fight against organized crime and terrorism. The new agency's officers and other members should no longer be drawn from the military, which is not properly trained in law enforcement.
- **Until RAB is disbanded:**
 - End the practice of seconding members of the armed forces to RAB and make necessary legal changes to prohibit the future use of serving soldiers for law enforcement duties.
 - Establish an independent commission to assess RAB's performance, to identify all those plausibly deemed to be involved in serious violations such as extrajudicial killings who should be excluded from a reformed RAB and prosecuted, and to develop an action plan to transform RAB into an agency that operates within the law and with full respect for international human rights norms. **The commission should:**
 - Be composed of respected members of law enforcement, independent judges and lawyers, and members of Bangladesh's human rights community.
 - Include the active participation of independent international experts on law enforcement and human rights.
 - Have full access to all relevant government documents.
 - Have the power to subpoena documents and compel witnesses to appear and give testimony.
 - Provide victim and witness protection as necessary.
 - Have a time limit of no more than six months to complete its inquiry and present its report, with concrete recommendations on RAB reform.

¹⁷⁶ For detailed recommendations on curbing RAB violations, see, for example, Human Rights Watch, *"Crossfire": Continued Human Rights Abuses by Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion*, ISBN 1-56432-767-1, May 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/05/10/crossfire-o>; Human Rights Watch, *Blood on the Streets: The Use of Excessive Force During Bangladesh Protests*, ISBN: 978-1-6231-30404, August 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/08/01/blood-streets>; Human Rights Watch, *Ignoring Executions and Torture: Impunity for Bangladesh's Security Forces*, ISBN: 1-56432-483-4, May 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2009/05/18/ignoring-executions-and-torture-o>; Human Rights Watch, *Judge, Jury, and Executioner: Torture and Extrajudicial Killings by Bangladesh's Elite Security Force*, ISBN: C1816, December 2006, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/12/13/judge-jury-and-executioner>

- Have the power to make public statements during and after its inquiry, including to answer the government’s response(s) to the commission’s recommendations.
- Have the power at any time during its mandate to publicly recommend the immediate suspension, pending investigation, of any current or former RAB member implicated in serious human rights violations.

Regarding International Cooperation

- Invite relevant United Nations special mechanisms, such as the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, to visit Bangladesh to conduct investigations and make recommendations.
- Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT).
- Thoroughly vet all Bangladeshi military and police who apply for UN peacekeeping missions or international training to ensure that they have not committed human rights violations, and ban those suspected of serious human rights violations.

Regarding Education

- Promptly rebuild all schools damaged or destroyed due to election-related violence, and replace destroyed educational material. During reconstruction, ensure that students continue their education at an alternative place or in an alternative manner.

To Bangladesh’s Bilateral and Multilateral Donors

- Press the government, through public and private diplomacy, to implement all the recommendations made in this report.
- Insist on full compliance by security forces with international human rights standards and the rule of law, including by:
 - Ending extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary arrests.
 - Ending arrests without warrants.
 - Taking detainees to unofficial places of detention.
 - Making the whereabouts of detainees known to lawyers, family, and the public.

- Publicly call on the government to disband RAB. End all training or institution building programs for RAB. *Until RAB is disbanded:*
 - Publicly insist that a commission on RAB reform be created, with terms of reference developed in consultation with victims, their families, and human rights NGOs, and support the commission’s work.
 - Press the government to take immediate steps to hold perpetrators within RAB’s ranks accountable.
 - Refuse to have any official or unofficial dealings with RAB until RAB ends its practices of torture and extrajudicial executions, begins to hold its officers accountable for human rights abuses, and has policies in place to prevent and respond effectively to any future abuses.
 - Ensure proper vetting of all participants in training and exchange programs in order to guarantee that RAB and other officers against whom there are credible allegations of involvement in human rights violations are barred from taking part.
 - Publicly raise in donor and UN forums, and in the UN Human Rights Council, the government’s continuing failure to keep its promise (made during the Bangladesh universal periodic review at the Human Rights Council) to implement a “zero tolerance” policy for extrajudicial executions, and insist on accountability.
 - Ensure the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) vets all Bangladesh military and law enforcement officials, including commanders, applying for UN peacekeeping missions, reviews the participation of Bangladesh officials already serving in peacekeeping operations, and bars all those credibly found or suspected to have committed, ordered, or tolerated serious human rights violations. Ensure the DPKO publicly informs the government of Bangladesh of the reason for the exclusion of any Bangladesh soldier or law enforcement official on human rights grounds.
 - Support civil society initiatives to bring pressure on security forces to cease violating human rights, seek government action to prosecute those responsible for violations, and convince the government and political parties to take legislative and other policy measures to address violations of human rights.
 - Provide funding and technical assistance to support a broad-based coalition of civil society organizations working against impunity, and to NGOs and civil society groups who support or participate in that coalition.

To the United States:

- Vigorously enforce the Leahy Law to deny US assistance and training to all Bangladeshi law enforcement units involved in serious human rights abuses. Publish details of the content and dates of all training provided by US officials, civilian and military, to Bangladeshi security forces.
- End all assistance to RAB, including work on establishing an internal affairs unit, which cannot succeed until there is a demonstrated political and institutional commitment to protecting rights and holding perpetrators of human rights abuses criminally accountable.

To the United Kingdom, other European Union governments, and Australia:

- Ensure that any security sector reform is focused on making security forces more respectful of international rights standards and subject to proper and transparent civilian oversight and accountability, without benefit to units or individuals responsible for gross human rights abuses.

To the United Nations and its entities:

- Continue to publicly voice its opposition to arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial executions by security forces, and continue to raise these concerns in meetings with the prime minister, cabinet members, and representatives of the military forces and police.
- The UN Human Rights Council should communicate its serious concerns to the Bangladesh government that issues raised at the universal periodic review session on Bangladesh remain largely unaddressed, and explicitly draw attention to continued extrajudicial executions, torture, and arbitrary detentions.
- DPKO should thoroughly review the participation in peacekeeping operations of all Bangladeshi soldiers and law enforcement officials, including commanders, to ensure that they have not committed, ordered, or tolerated serious human rights violations.

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DEMOCRACY IN THE CROSSFIRE

Opposition Violence and Government Abuses in the 2014 Pre- and Post- Election Period in Bangladesh

Violence in the months before and during parliamentary elections in Bangladesh in January 2014 left hundreds dead and injured across the country from all sides of the political spectrum in perhaps the deadliest year since Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971.

Members of the opposition, which had been calling for an election boycott, attacked and killed people who refused to honor blockades, as well as security forces and members of the ruling Awami League party. The government responded by deploying security forces to launch a brutal crackdown, leading to extra-judicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and unlawful destruction of private property. The long-standing impunity enjoyed by Bangladesh's law enforcement agencies fuels rampant violations. Despite hundreds of reported cases in recent years, no member of Bangladesh's notorious paramilitary unit, the Rapid Action Battallion, has been convicted and imprisoned for an unlawful killing.

Democracy in Crossfire, based on Human Rights Watch fact-finding missions to Bangladesh in December 2013 and February 2014, details government and opposition abuses connected to the disputed elections.

Human Rights Watch calls on Bangladesh's main political parties to make unequivocal public demands on their supporters to desist from violence. The government in particular has the burden to ensure accountability for its security forces and to provide answers, justice, and compensation to victims regardless of their party affiliation.



Election materials burn following an attack on a polling station in the northern town of Bogra, Bangladesh, on January 5, 2014.

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