

INTRODUCTION

Report Summary

- ▶ At the invitation of the Interim Government of Bangladesh OHCHR conducted an independent fact-finding inquiry into alleged human rights violations and abuses that occurred between 1 July and 15 August 2024, in the context of the widespread protests and their immediate aftermath.
- ▶ OHCHR finds that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the former Government and its security and intelligence apparatus, together with violent elements associated with the Awami League, **systematically engaged in serious human rights violations, including hundreds of extrajudicial killings, other use of force violations involving serious injuries to thousands of protesters, including children, extensive arbitrary arrest and detention and torture and other forms of ill-treatment.**
- ▶ OHCHR finds that **female protesters were specifically subjected to sexual and gender-based violence** and in some documented cases, sexual assault perpetrated by Awami League supporters.
- ▶ OHCHR has reasonable grounds to believe that these **violations were carried out with the knowledge, coordination and direction of the political leadership and senior security sector officials**, as a strategy to suppress the protests.
- ▶ These **serious human rights violations also raise concerns from the perspective of international criminal law, so that additional criminal investigations are warranted** to determine the extent to which they may also amount to crimes against humanity and, torture (as a stand-alone international crime), as well as serious crimes under domestic law.
- ▶ In early August 2024, crowds **engaged in retaliatory killings and other serious revenge violence targeting**, in particular, Awami League officials and real or perceived supporters of the Awami League, the police and the media seen as supportive of the Awami League.
- ▶ During and after the protests, **members of the Hindu community, Ahmadiyya Muslims and indigenous groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, were also subject to violent attacks by mobs**, including burning of homes and some attacks on places of worship.

Methodology

- ▶ This report is principally based on more than:
 - ▶ **230** confidential in-depth interviews

with victims, witnesses, student and other protest leaders, human rights defenders and others. An additional 36 officials, including former senior officials, were also interviewed.
- ▶ OHCHR conducted forensic analysis of:
 - ▶ **153** medical case files

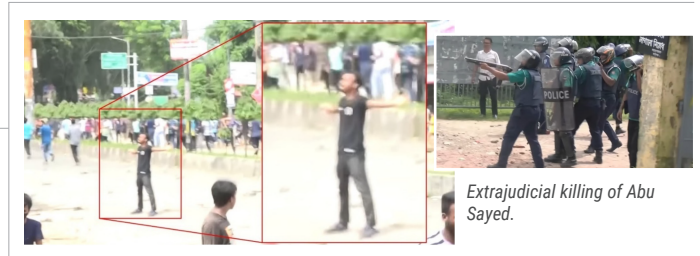
with consent, as well as ammunition remnants
- ▶ OHCHR conducted a digital forensic analysis of:
 - ▶ **1000s** of photos, videos, records and files

from witnesses, victims and other sources
- ▶ OHCHR received:
 - ▶ **959** submissions from individuals and organisations

all of which have been reviewed and preserved according to standard methodology.

CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

Timeline of select events and escalation of repression



MAIN FINDINGS

Overview of deaths, injuries and arrests

- Based on data compiled and de-duplicated from several sources, including from civil society organisations and the Ministry of Health, **OHCHR estimates there were as many as:**

1400 protest-related deaths
including at least **13 women** during the period of 15 July to 5 August 2024.

12% approximate ratio of children among total deaths

- The Ministry of Health has **recorded 841 deaths** related to the protests, however data is likely incomplete as **medical staff were often overwhelmed by the influx of dead and injured, among other reasons, such that a number of cases were not properly recorded**

- At the time of finalisation of this report there were:

13,529 injuries recorded by Ministry of Health
including at least **390 women** and 4 persons listed as "other."

- One hospital in Dhaka treated **736 patients with eye injuries**, out of which **506 required emergency operations**.

11,702 arrests by police and Rapid Action Battalion

- Based on analysis of information provided by Dhaka Medical College on 130 deaths, **more than three quarters (78%) were caused by firearms, including military rifles and shotguns loaded with lethal metal pellets**
- These weapons are commonly used only by police, paramilitary and military forces, and **not readily available to civilians in Bangladesh**
- Video and images captured during the protests show **Bangladesh Police, BGB, RAB, Ansar/VDP and Army members wielding SKS, Type 56 and BD-08 rifles**

Summary of main violations

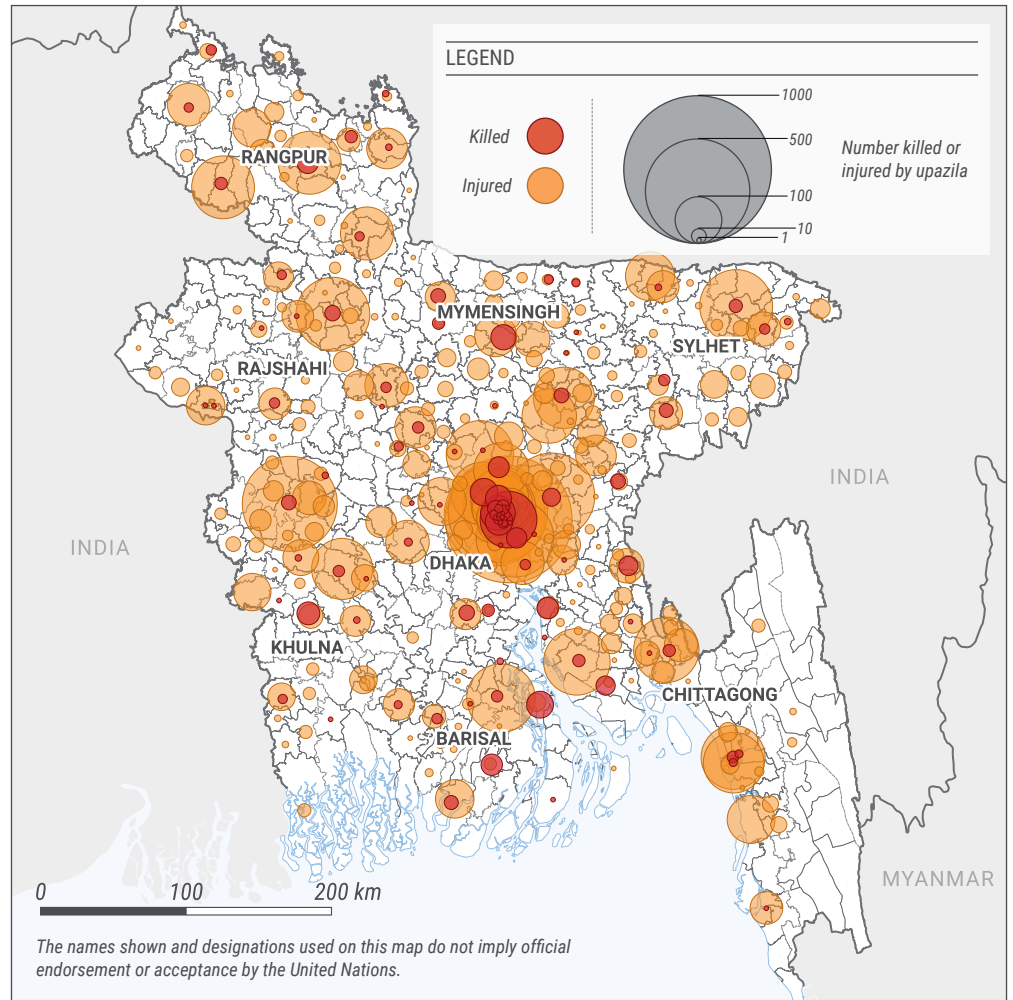
Violations and abuses during the protests

- Incited violence by armed Awami League supporters
- Use of force violations by Police, RAB and BGB, including extrajudicial killings
- Involvement of the Army in use of force violations
- Use of helicopters to intimidate and deploy possibly unlawful force
- Obstruction of medical care and denial of necessary medical documentation
- Mass arbitrary arrests, detention without due process, and torture and ill-treatment
- Intimidation and attacks on journalists
- Unjustified Internet shutdowns, lacking due process
- Violations and abuses targeting women and girls protesting
- Violations and abuses against children

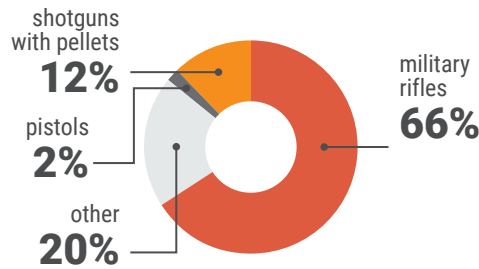
Violations and abuses in the aftermath of the protests

- Revenge abuses targeting police, Awami League members, people perceived as affiliated with the Awami League and media
- Abuses against indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts
- Attacks on Hindu homes, businesses and places of worship, and related displacement
- Attacks on Ahmadiyya Muslims

Distribution of deaths and injuries recorded by the Ministry of Health in the context of the protests



Causes of protest-related killings



Based on examination by Dhaka Medical College Forensic Department of 130 deaths.



X-ray images of victim who suffered eye, head and torso injuries from police firing metal pellet-loaded shotguns.

1 Use of military rifles and metal pellet-loaded shotguns in public order management

Recommendations

- ▶ Prohibit use of shotgun pellets or other lethal ammunition to disperse crowds and immediately cease equipping the police with metal pellet ammunition for public order management
- ▶ Reform public order management emphasizing less lethal tactics and de-escalatory approach

2 Outdated laws enabling the use of disproportionate force

Recommendations

- ▶ Replace Police Act 1861 and Police Regulations Bengal with human rights-compliant laws
- ▶ Order police to cease practices of mass criminal charges and mass arrests
- ▶ Implement Torture and Custodial Death (Prohibition Act); Reform police investigation techniques, orders, doctrines and training to reduce reliance on coerced confessions

3 Militarization of policing

Recommendations

- ▶ Disband Rapid Action Battalion. Confine functions of Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI). Demilitarize control of Ansar/VDP
- ▶ Only most exceptional deployment of Army to internal security, under civilian control

4 Politicization of the security sector

Recommendations

- ▶ National police commission for fair, transparent and merit-based police recruitment, promotions, transfer and removal process
- ▶ Independent commission to investigate police violations. Similar independent accountability and justice mechanisms for Armed Forces and BGB

5 Institutionalized impunity and a politically pliant justice sector

Recommendations

- ▶ Fair and effective criminal justice for serious violations and revenge violence
- ▶ Wider victim-centered process to prevent recurrence, enhance social cohesion and national healing, including truth-seeking, reparation, memorialization, vetting of security sector
- ▶ Establish independent public prosecution service and witness protection programme
- ▶ Ensure independence of judiciary through genuinely independent mechanism for recruitment of judges, protection against intimidation, adequate remuneration and guaranteed tenure
- ▶ Address due process and fair trial concerns related to International Crimes Tribunal
- ▶ Introduce a moratorium on the death penalty

6 Stifling of civil space and repressive legal framework

Recommendations

- ▶ Repeal overly broad criminal provisions used to stifle critical media reporting and dissent.
- ▶ End unlawful surveillance and abolish the National Telecommunications Monitoring Centre
- ▶ Amend Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulation Act to clearly regulate surveillance
- ▶ Regulate Internet shutdowns: clear criteria, transparency, judicial oversight, proportionality
- ▶ Refrain from political party bans undermining democracy and disenfranchising part of electorate. Protect journalists, political party activists, minority leaders and rights defenders
- ▶ Ensure a safe and enabling environment for free and genuine elections, including by special pre-election measures to ensure a level playing field for all political parties and candidates
- ▶ Amend the Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act 2016 to ensure it is consistent with the right to freedom of association and other international human rights
- ▶ Bring National Human Rights Commission into compliance with international standards

7 Structural discrimination and grievances about economic governance

Recommendations

- ▶ Laws and regulations for substantive equality of men and women in political and public life
- ▶ Take urgent measures to freeze, seize and repatriate ill-gotten gains, including through cooperation with foreign jurisdiction. Enforce anti-corruption and anti-cartel legislation. Enhance the independence and efficacy of the Anti-Corruption Commission.
- ▶ Enhance protection of workers, including through amendments to the Labour Act, make tax system more equitable and promote economic diversification