



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“We Don’t Have Him”

Secret Detentions and Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh



“We Don’t Have Him”

**Secret Detentions and Enforced Disappearances
in Bangladesh**

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Summary

My brother asked, “Can I have your identity? What is your force? Are you RAB, CID, DB?” They did not identify themselves. He asked several times. They did not wear any uniform and they had no legal arrest warrant. Nothing. They just said, “Come with us.” My brother said, “I am a lawyer and I need to know these things.” And then they said, “We will give you five minutes to get ready. Get ready and come with us.”

–Sister of Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, a lawyer for Jamaat-e-Islami who has been “disappeared” since August 2016

Law enforcement forces, whether it is RAB, police, or any other one, it really doesn’t matter because they all are abiding by government orders. The policy of the present government is to arrest someone and “disappear” them. Some of the government forces are very rude and cruel. But it is the government policy that I blame.

–Father of Adnan Chowdhury, a Bangladesh Nationalist Party supporter who has been “disappeared” since December 2013

Since 2013, law enforcement authorities in Bangladesh have illegally detained scores of opposition activists and held them in secret without producing them before courts, as the law requires. In most cases, those arrested remain in custody for weeks or months before being formally arrested or released. Others however are killed in so-called armed exchanges, and many remain “disappeared.”

Bangladesh law enforcement agencies have a long history of human rights violations. The ruling Awami League party took office in January 2009 with the promise to end such abuses. However, according to Odhikar, a Dhaka-based human rights organization, Bangladesh law enforcement agencies have since disappeared over 320 people, including suspected criminals, militants, and, more recently, opposition members. Of these, 50 were later killed, and dozens remain disappeared. The rest were either released or formally produced in court as recent arrests.

Such disappearances continue, but many of the targets are now political opponents. In 2016, human rights organizations and the media documented over 90 people disappeared, of which 21 were killed. Nine remain disappeared at time of writing. In the first five months of 2017, Odhikar reported an additional 48 disappearances. In February 2017, the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances called on the Bangladesh government to halt the increasing number of enforced disappearances. In April 2017, Swedish Radio reported on a secretly recorded interview with a senior officer in the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), a counterterrorism unit of police and military, who admitted that the force routinely picks up people, kills them, and disposes of the bodies.

The Awami League has taken contradictory approaches to allegations of disappearances. In November 2016, confronted with cases of enforced disappearances mostly involving political opponents, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told Voice of America the allegations were baseless; those missing, he said, were hiding “to embarrass the government globally.” In March 2017, Law Minister Anisul Huq however acknowledged to the UN Human Rights Committee that disappearances had taken place, but claimed their numbers had been brought down to “a very low level.” Huq also said that Bangladeshi law did not recognize enforced disappearances, but “kidnapping or abductions” in the country’s “criminal environment” had been successfully investigated, and that the government had a “zero tolerance approach” toward law enforcement agencies committing crimes. “Nobody is above the law, nobody,” he said.

This report examines dozens of disappearances since the beginning of 2016, as well as the abduction of 22 activists from the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) between November 28 and December 11, 2013, just weeks before national elections in January 2014. Nineteen of those abducted in 2013 remain disappeared at time of writing. The report finds that state law enforcement agencies—particularly RAB and the Detective Branch (DB) of the police—have been involved in secret detentions and killings, despite public assertions to the contrary.

Among those picked up in 2016 whose whereabouts remain unknown are Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem and Amaan Azmi, sons of two prominent Jamaat-e-Islami opposition leaders convicted in recent trials for war crimes during Bangladesh’s independence campaign in 1971. In addition, 12 of the men killed following an illegal detention in 2016 were known activists of the opposition Jamaat.

For instance, Shahid Al Mahmud, a 24-year-old Jamaat-e-Islami activist, was picked up in front of family members on June 13, 2016. His father, Rajab Ali, described the arrest at a press conference five days later, and said he was worried that his son might be killed. On July 1, the family heard reports of two men killed in a gunfight. Aware of other cases of faked armed encounters, they went to the morgue and discovered Shahid's body. Police claimed that they had opened fire after coming under attack by criminals. Rajab Ali told Human Rights Watch that the police were lying: "The police abducted my son and staged a gunfight drama to justify the killing."

The 19 disappearance cases detailed in this report from 2013 all involve the BNP. The men were picked up in eight separate incidents after the BNP and its ally, Jamaat-e-Islami, launched violent protests involving arson and the use of crude bombs. Witness accounts indicate that RAB participated in at least three incidents in different parts of Dhaka in which eight BNP supporters were disappeared. In two other incidents involving the abduction of six men, witness accounts—including a sighting of the disappeared being escorted by a man with "DB" written on his vest, and another of the disappeared in a DB office—indicate the involvement of DB police officers.

Families of the disappeared have made repeated appeals to the government, visited DB and RAB offices, and sought police investigations. Some have filed cases before the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, while others have sought assistance from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), or filed habeas corpus petitions before the High Court.

Lack of Accountability

In almost all cases of enforced disappearances that Human Rights Watch documented, police did not allow the families to file a General Diary (GD)—the simplest way to report a crime or incident to the police—if the complaint contained an allegation that law enforcement authorities were involved. Police either allowed the families only to file a GD stating that the person was "kidnapped" by unidentified men, or more commonly to file a complaint saying that their family member was "missing."

Other than in a couple of cases, the allegations of the families and witnesses have been totally ignored, and there has been no police inquiry. In a few cases where investigations have occurred, the inquiry has been cursory, without any attempt to interview eyewitnesses.

Families had varying experiences with RAB and DB. One desperate father whose son has been missing since 2013 told Human Rights Watch:

Almost every day I visited the RAB or DB office. RAB guards treated me badly and asked me not to visit regularly. They scolded me and asked me, “Why are you disturbing us again and again.” I spent two months in this way.

On the other hand, the family members of Sajedul Islam Sumon, a well-known local BNP leader who was picked up in December 2013, had political connections that enabled them to contact senior RAB officers. The officers informally admitted that RAB had picked up Sumon and five other men. One former senior RAB-1 officer told the family that the men were brought into his custody immediately after being picked up, but were then removed by other RAB officials, and that he now assumed they had all been killed.

The NHRC and courts have been ineffective in dealing with these cases. The commission has not undertaken any investigations of its own. In one case in which the NHRC did intervene on behalf of a family, it was easily brushed off with vague reassurances.

Very few families of those who have been disappeared seek legal remedy. Several told Human Rights Watch they feared legal action would seriously jeopardize the safety of their relatives—most families hope that they will be released after a period of secret, illegal detention. Others said the courts were ineffective as state agencies deny their role.

Protecting Rights

Bangladesh faces serious security challenges. In addition to concern of renewed violent protests by political opponents, authorities are grappling with a surge in attacks by Islamic militants targeting foreigners, religious minorities, writers, bloggers, editors, and gay rights activists that between 2013 and 2016 killed over 50 people.

However, the state has a responsibility to ensure that the law enforcement response does not violate human rights. Enforced disappearances are prohibited under both international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Instead of accepting denials, the courts—if not the government—should order prompt, impartial, and independent investigations, and require that law enforcement authorities either release the missing persons, or provide answers to families about what happened and prosecute those responsible for the abuses.

The government should also invite the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN special rapporteurs to investigate serious human rights violations including disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and “kneecappings” and other alleged acts of torture, and make appropriate recommendations to ensure justice, accountability, and security force reform.

Key Recommendations

- Promptly investigate existing allegations of enforced disappearances, locate and release those held secretly by security forces, and prosecute the perpetrators. These should include politically motivated cases involving the disappearances of members or supporters of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami party.
- Investigate allegations of deaths of individuals in so-called crossfire or gunfights after they were already in security force custody, establish command responsibility, and prosecute those responsible.
- Make strong and repeated public statements at the highest government levels that make clear that all law enforcement authorities and investigation agencies should comply with the law and that all detained people must be brought to court within 24 hours.
- Immediately suspend, pending a full investigation, and remove from RAB, DB, and other law enforcement units or other position any individual for whom there exists credible evidence that they participated in an enforced disappearance. Work to disband RAB, which has been responsible for numerous and serious human rights violations, and replace with a non-military counterterrorism unit.
- Ensure serious and independent investigations by inviting the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant UN special procedures—including the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and the special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment—to visit Bangladesh to investigate and make appropriate recommendations to ensure justice and accountability, as well as reform of the security forces to act independently and professionally.

Methodology

This report has been researched and written by a consultant for Human Rights Watch.

It provides details of some of the over 90 reported disappearances that took place during 2016. Most of the interviews that form the basis of this part of the research were done by phone, with some additional interviews in person.

It also details 19 disappearances at the end of 2013. It uses material based on initial interviews from August to December 2014 by two journalists who worked at the time at the Bangladesh national newspaper *New Age*. On the first anniversary of the disappearances, the paper published a series of 10 articles.¹ As a consultant with Human Rights Watch, one of the journalists conducted further research from May to August 2016 to obtain new and updated information. The interviews took place primarily in Dhaka, but also with eyewitnesses who have since moved out of the city.

In some cases, names of interviewees have been withheld to reduce the likelihood of reprisals. Over 100 people, including family members and witnesses, were interviewed to document these cases. Interviews were conducted in Bengali and English.

Bangladeshi authorities did not respond to letters that Human Rights Watch submitted in April 2017 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.

¹ David Bergman and Muktadir Rashid, "Picked up a year ago, they're yet to return," *New Age*, November 28, 2014, <http://archive.newagebd.net/71268/picked-up-a-year-ago-theyre-yet-to-return> (accessed November 27, 2016).

I. Background

Bangladesh has a long history of human rights violations and lack of accountability for security forces.² However, the disappearance of 19 Dhaka-based opposition activists over a two-week period at the end of 2013 appears exceptional. The only comparable abuse was at the end of the country's independence war in December 1971, when Pakistan military, aided by local extremists, abducted and killed 17 academics and journalists in Dhaka over a four-day period.³

While extrajudicial killings, or deaths in so-called crossfire incidents, have persisted for years, the Awami League committed to end these abuses after it came to power in January 2009. However, over 320 people been “disappeared” by Bangladesh law enforcement agencies for various amounts of time since the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed took office, as reported by the nongovernmental organization Odhikar. Since 2013, in a new phenomenon in Bangladesh, many of those targeted have been members of the political opposition.

Many of those disappeared have not returned or were mysteriously killed, often in alleged gunfights.⁴ In 2016, there were confirmed reports of at least 90 disappearances.⁵ Odhikar

² See Human Rights Watch, *No Right to Live: “Kneecapping” and Maiming of Detainees by Bangladesh Security Forces*, September 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/09/28/no-right-live/kneecapping-and-maiming-detainees-bangladesh-security-forces>; *Democracy in the Crossfire: Opposition Violence and Government Abuses in the 2014 Pre- and Post- Election Period in Bangladesh*, April 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/04/29/democracy-crossfire/opposition-violence-and-government-abuses-2014-pre-and-post>; *Blood on the Streets: The Use of Excessive Force During Bangladesh Protests*, August 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/08/01/blood-streets/use-excessive-force-during-bangladesh-protests>; *“The Fear Never Leaves Me”: Torture, Custodial Deaths, and Unfair Trials after the 2009 Mutiny of the Bangladesh Rifles*, July 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/07/04/fear-never-leaves-me/torture-custodial-deaths-and-unfair-trials-after-2009-mutiny>; *“Crossfire”: Continued Human Rights Abuses by Bangladesh’s Rapid Action Battalion*, May 2011, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/05/10/crossfire/continued-human-rights-abuses-bangladeshs-rapid-action-battalion>; *Ignoring Executions and Torture: Impunity for Bangladesh’s Security Forces*, May 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/05/18/ignoring-executions-and-torture/impunity-bangladeshs-security-forces>; *The Torture of Tasneem Khalil: How the Bangladesh Military Abuses Its Power under the State of Emergency*, February 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/02/13/torture-tasneem-khalil/how-bangladesh-military-abuses-its-power-under-state>; *Judge, Jury, and Executioner: Torture and Extrajudicial Killings by Bangladesh’s Elite Security Force*, December 2006, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/12/13/judge-jury-and-executioner/torture-and-extrajudicial-killings-bangladeshs-elite>.

³ For a list of those killed in Dhaka from December 10-15, 1971, see the Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal judgment relating to these killings, *The Chief Prosecutor Vs. (1) Ashrafuzzaman Khan@ Naeb Ali Khan [absconded] & (2) Chowdhury Mueen Uddin [absconded]*, November 3, 2012, <http://www.ict-bd.org/ict2/ICT2%20judgment/CM%20&%20AK.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2016).

⁴ Data collated by Odhikar, a Dhaka-based human rights organization.

⁵ Ibid.

has reported 48 cases from January to May 2017. The total number is likely to be higher, as families or witnesses do not always report disappearances.

Political Background

The Awami League won an overwhelming majority of seats in the new parliament in the December 29, 2008 elections. Bangladesh has a deeply fractured political climate, and for the next five years, the main opposition parties—the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Jamaat-e-Islami—rarely attended parliament.⁶ On June 30, 2011, the government amended the constitution, removing provisions that the government would hand over power to a non-political caretaker administration three months before elections.⁷ The BNP and the Jamaat demanded the provision be reintroduced before the 2014 elections to ensure free and fair polling.

The government's refusal prompted the BNP and the Jamaat to lead an 18-party opposition alliance to organize a series of three-day *hartals* (national strikes) and blockades to press their demands. To enforce the strikes, many opposition party activists set fire to cars and government buildings, targeting public vehicles with crude bombs. On November 8, 2013, just after the BNP announced yet another three-day hartal, the government started to crack down on BNP leaders for alleged involvement in the violence.⁸

The opposition continued to call strikes. Related street violence and retaliation by security forces resulted in deaths and injuries. The opposition also announced a poll boycott. International diplomacy, including a visit by a senior United Nations official, failed to lead to an agreement. Elections took place on January 5, 2014, without the involvement of opposition candidates. Thus, more than half the seats were uncontested.⁹

⁶ Hasan Jahid Tusher and M Abul Kalam Azad, "Govt cancels lease of Khaleda's Cantt house," *The Daily Star*, April 9, 2009, <http://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-83375> (accessed November 27, 2016).

⁷ Shakhawat Liton and Rashidul Hasan, "Caretaker system abolished," *The Daily Star*, July 1, 2009, <http://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-192303> (accessed November 27, 2016). In reversing its own demands while in opposition, the Awami League government argued that the appellate division of the Supreme Court had earlier ruled that the caretaker government provisions were unconstitutional, that the election commission was now strong enough to hold a fair election, and that the problem with a caretaker government system was that it facilitated army intervention, as had happened in 2007, resulting in a two-year period of emergency rule.

⁸ "Govt goes hard on opposition," *The Daily Star*, November 9, 2013, <http://www.thedailystar.net/news/govt-goes-hard-on-opposition> (accessed November 27, 2016). As a result of the arrests, the opposition parties extended the hartal by a day.

⁹ Eighteen people were reportedly killed in election violence, in addition to attacks on minority communities perceived to be pro-government. See "Turnout low in deadliest polls," *The Daily Star*, January 6, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/turnout-low-in-deadliest-polls-5632> (accessed December 12, 2016). See also, Human Rights Watch, *Democracy in the Crossfire*.

Clashes between supporters of the Awami League and opposition parties started again in early 2015, on the anniversary of the controversial elections. By the end of February 2015, up to 120 people had been killed in the political violence.¹⁰ Toward the end of March 2015, under pressure, opposition parties stopped their strikes and picketing. However, a new crackdown on the opposition then began to unfold.¹¹

Attacks by Extremist Groups

In parallel to the conflict between the government and political opposition, Islamic militants have since 2013 carried out attacks that have killed over 50 people. The attacks took two different forms.

The motivation for one category of attacks, which were claimed by the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Ansar al-Islam, has been perceived insults to Islam.¹² These attacks include the hacking of Asif Mohiuddin, an outspoken atheist blogger, in January 2013;¹³ the killing of secular blogger and political activist Ahmed Rajib Haider in front of his family home in Dhaka the following month;¹⁴ the killing of blogger Avijit Roy, a US national of Bangladeshi origin, in February 2015 in a machete attack that also seriously injured his wife; and the death of seven more people in the months that followed, including two LGBT activists. Some of the targets were among the 84 people publicly named as atheists by extremist groups.¹⁵ Many bloggers and activists have gone into hiding, fled the country, or stopped writing.

A second type of attack, claimed by ISIS (also known as the Islamic State), has targeted foreigners in Bangladesh, as well as members of religious minority groups including

¹⁰ For a detailed breakdown, see “Political Crisis 2015 – analysis of deaths,” Bangladesh Politico, <http://bangladeshpolitico.blogspot.com/2015/01/political-crisis-2015-analysis-of-deaths.html> (accessed January 17, 2017).

¹¹ “Political Conflict, Extremism and Criminal Justice in Bangladesh,” International Crisis Group, April 11, 2016, <https://d2o71andvipowj.cloudfront.net/277-political-conflict-extremism-and-criminal-justice-in-bangladesh.pdf> (accessed January 16, 2017).

¹² “Special Report: Terror Rising in Bangladesh,” Insite Blog on Terrorism and Extremism, April 26, 2016, <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/categories/jihad/entry/410-the-rising-tide-of-terror-in-bangladesh> (accessed January 15, 2017).

¹³ Joshua Hammer, “The Imperiled Bloggers of Bangladesh,” *New York Times*, December 29, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/03/magazine/the-price-of-secularism-in-bangladesh.html> (accessed February 1, 2017).

¹⁴ Rajib Haider was not only an “atheist” blogger but also an organizer of the Shahbagh protests that started in February 2013 calling for the imposition of the death penalty on those convicted by the International Crimes Tribunal of crimes committed in the 1971 independence war.

¹⁵ Mukul Devichand, “‘Nowhere is safe’: Behind the Bangladesh blogger murders,” BBC, August 7, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-33822674> (accessed January 21, 2017).

Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Shia. These began in September 2015, when unknown attackers shot and killed Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella. In the following ten months, 19 people were killed in similar attacks. On July 1, 2016, militants attacked a café in the upscale Gulshan neighborhood of Dhaka, in which 18 foreign nationals, two Bangladeshis, and two police officers died.¹⁶ Although ISIS claimed responsibility for all these attacks, the government has denied an ISIS connection, as well as the group's presence in Bangladesh, and instead has blamed opposition parties and a revamped version of the local Islamist group Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), which police authorities term the neo-JMB.¹⁷

History of Disappearances and Extrajudicial Killings

One of the first well documented incidents of an apparent enforced disappearance in post-1971 Bangladesh is the case of Kalpana Chakma, an indigenous women's rights activist, who was picked up along with her two brothers from their home in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, allegedly by army officers on election day in 1996. The two brothers escaped after a few days, but Kalpana, a strong critic of the army's role in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, remains missing, presumed dead.¹⁸

In 2002, the then-ruling BNP started Operation Clean Heart to tackle crime, resulting in thousands of detentions and reports of over 40 deaths, many allegedly through torture.¹⁹ In 2004, the BNP government established RAB as an elite counterterrorism unit combining members of the armed forces and police.²⁰ In the first two years, Human Rights Watch

¹⁶ "Special Report: Terror Rising in Bangladesh," Insite Blog on Terrorism and Extremism, <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/categories/jihad/entry/410-the-rising-tide-of-terror-in-bangladesh>.

¹⁷ "Bangladesh PM Hasina smells link of BNP-Jamaat," *The Daily Star*, October 5, 2017, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/pm-smells-link-bnp-jamaat-152074> (accessed January 21, 2017).

¹⁸ "Kalpana Chakma – Information, disinformation, non-information," Amnesty International, June 14, 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2014/06/kalpana-chakma-information-disinformation-non-information/> (accessed November 27, 2016).

¹⁹ "Bangladesh: Revoke 'Shoot at sight,'" Human Rights Watch news release, June 4, 2003, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2003/06/04/bangladesh-revoke-shoot-sight>.

²⁰ The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) was formed in March 2004 as a composite force comprised of members from the military, police, and other law enforcement groups. Members are assigned from their parent organizations, which they return to after serving with the unit. The unit is regarded as an elite counterterrorism force and has targeted, apart from criminal suspects, alleged members of militant Islamist or left-wing groups. RAB has long been criticized for human rights violations and its failure to ensure accountability.

identified 367 people killed by RAB in alleged “crossfire.”²¹ In several cases, men were picked up by RAB, “disappeared,” and killed. RAB denied the detentions.²²

On January 11, 2007, following violent political protests around planned elections, the military stepped in, proclaiming a state of emergency, and established a caretaker government. In November 2008, near the end of the military-backed caretaker government, the human rights organization Odhikar found that 245 people had been killed in alleged “crossfires” or “gunfights,” and 38 people had allegedly been tortured to death since January 2007.²³

The Awami League came to power in January 2009 promising that “extrajudicial killings will be stopped.”²⁴ That commitment soon faltered.²⁵ In May 2011, a Human Rights Watch report found that since the Awami League took office, nearly 200 people had been killed in RAB operations.²⁶ Regardless of who has led them, governments in Bangladesh have justified extrajudicial killings as lawful self-defense.

As the Awami League’s term continued, law enforcement authorities started to increasingly target the opposition. While extrajudicial killings continued, reports of enforced disappearances, which until then were rare, increased.²⁷ Families and eyewitnesses have repeatedly made allegations against the Detective Branch (DB) of the police, in addition to RAB, for its alleged role in these disappearances.²⁸

²¹ Human Rights Watch, *Judge, Jury, and Executioner*.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 35. See, for example, the case of Sumon Ahmed Majumder killed in July 2004.

²³ “Report on 22 months of Emergency,” Odhikar, November 12, 2008, <http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/22-Months-State-of-Emergency-Report-2008.pdf> (accessed December 13, 2016).

²⁴ “Election Manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League – 2008, Bangladesh Awami League,” <https://albd.org/~parbonc/index.php/en/resources/articles/4070-election-manifesto-of-bangladesh-awami-league,-9th-parliamentary-election,-2008> (accessed November 25, 2016).

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, “*Crossfire*,” pp. 3-4.

²⁶ “Bangladesh: Broken Promises from Government to Halt RAB Killings,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 10, 2011, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/10/bangladesh-broken-promises-government-halt-rab-killings>.

²⁷ According to Odhikar, there were 3 disappearances in 2009, 18 in 2010, 31 in 2011, 26 in 2012, 53 in 2013, 39 in 2014, and 65 in 2015.

²⁸ The Detective Branch (DB), short for the Detective and Criminal Intelligence Division, is a branch of different police forces around the country. See “Detective & Criminal Intelligence Division,” Dhaka Metropolitan Police, <http://www.dmp.gov.bd/application/index/page/detective-criminal-division> (accessed November 27, 2016). Increasingly, DB officers have been identified as being involved in disappearances and killings.

In a few cases, those illegally detained have been released without ever being formally arrested. For instance, in two high profile disappearances, a witness at the International Crimes Tribunal in November 2012 and a BNP spokesperson in April 2015 were picked up and secretly detained in Bangladesh for around six weeks.²⁹ They were then discovered in Indian territory where they were arrested by Indian authorities for illegal entry. In a more recent case, the police “released” two men at a public meeting attended by the home minister who they said had handed themselves in and turned their back on militancy, though their current whereabouts remain uncertain. In May 2017, Muhammed Iqbal Mahmud, who had been picked up in Dhaka eight months earlier, was left blindfolded on the side of the Dhaka-Raipur road.³⁰

In most cases, the men remain in secret detention for weeks or months before the police suddenly claim to have arrested them the previous day. The men are then taken to the magistrate court and are remanded into police custody on the basis of a concocted story.

In other disappearances, the men’s fate is more serious—they are killed in alleged “gunfire” or their dead bodies are found. In 2016, this happened to 21 of those disappeared.³¹ For some, including the 19 disappeared in 2013 detailed in this report, their whereabouts remain unknown.

As of May 2016, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances had formally received information on 34 cases of alleged enforced disappearances in Bangladesh. In its annual report published in July 2016, the group reiterated “its regrets that no information has been received ... concerning the alleged frequent use of enforced disappearance as a tool by law enforcement agencies, paramilitary and armed forces to detain and even extrajudicially execute individuals.”³²

²⁹ “India: Protect Bangladesh War Crimes Trial Witness,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 16, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/16/india-protect-bangladesh-war-crimes-trial-witness>; David Bergman and Muktadir Rashid, “Anatomy of a Disappearance, and a Reappearance” *The Wire*, May 23, 2015, <http://thewire.in/2289/anatomy-of-a-disappearance-and-a-reappearance/> (accessed November 27, 2016).

³⁰ “Doctor Iqbal returns to home in Lakshmipur seven months after kidnapping,” *bdnews24.com*, June 1, 2017, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2017/06/01/kidnapped-doctor-iqbal-returns-to-home-in-lakshmipur-seven-months-after-kidnapping> (accessed June 15, 2017).

³¹ See, for example, “‘Missing Jamaat leader’ found dead in Jhenaidah,” *The Independent*, August 12, 2016, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/55492> (accessed November 27, 2016).

³² UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances,” A/HRC/33/51, July 28, 2016, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/167/14/PDF/G1616714.pdf> (accessed November 27, 2016), p. 19.

The Bangladesh government has also not responded to a request by the Working Group to visit Bangladesh, first sent on March 12, 2013, and resent on November 27, 2015. In February 2017, the group issued a statement, endorsed by four UN special rapporteurs, calling on the Bangladesh government to halt the increasing number of enforced disappearances and reveal the whereabouts of three sons of opposition leaders who had been abducted.³³

In April 2014, Swedish Radio reported that it had in its possession a secretly recorded interview with a senior RAB official, which it had authenticated, describing RAB's practice of disappearing and killing people. "Everyone is not an expert on forced disappearances. We have to make sure no clue is left behind," the RAB official is quoted as saying.³⁴

The government has failed to investigate allegations of disappearances and hold perpetrators to account. In 2014, for example, in response to questions about the 2013 disappearances detailed in this report, the state minister for home affairs, Asaduzzaman Khan, told *New Age* that though "one or two incidents" had happened at that time, "law men were not involved in any of those cases."³⁵

One exception to the lack of investigation occurred in Narayanganj district. Seven men, including an Awami League leader, were picked up by RAB officials in April 2014 over a dispute with a party competitor. A few days later, their bloated bodies floated to the surface of the Shitalakya River, triggering a media storm. The High Court intervened, and the eventual investigation and prosecution resulted in the conviction in January 2017 of 35 people for murder, including three RAB officers.³⁶

³³ "UN expert group urges Bangladesh to stop enforced disappearances," United Nations news release, February 24, 2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21220&LangID=E> (accessed February 28, 2017).

³⁴ "Exclusive: Officer exposes brutal killings by Bangladeshi Elite Police Unit RAB," Sveridge Radio, April 4, 2017, <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&artikel=6665807> (accessed 5 May, 2017).

³⁵ David Bergman and Muktadir Rashid, "Picked up a year ago, they're yet to return," *New Age*, November 28, 2014, <http://archive.newagebd.net/71268/picked-up-a-year-ago-theyre-yet-to-return/> (accessed November 27, 2016).

³⁶ "Narayanganj seven-murder sentences at a glance: 26 get death penalty," *bdnews24.com*, January 16, 2017, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2017/01/16/narayanganj-seven-murder-sentences-at-a-glance-26-get-death-penalty> (accessed April 28, 2017).

International and National Legal Standards

Although Bangladesh law does not contain any specific criminal offense of “enforced disappearance,” the Penal Code, 1860, contains offenses including “wrongful confinement”; “wrongful confinement in secret”; “abduction”; “kidnapping or abducting with intent secretly and wrongfully to confine person”; “kidnapping or abducting in order to subject person to grievous hurt, slavery”; and “wrongfully concealing or keeping in confinement, kidnapped or abducted person.”³⁷ Penalties for these offenses range from two to ten years’ imprisonment. In addition, the Torture and Custodial Death (Prohibition) Act, 2013, makes torture an offense punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment. Death by torture is punishable by a life sentence.³⁸

The Bangladesh constitution also imposes obligations on the state to protect the fundamental rights of every citizen, forbidding any action that is “detrimental to the life, liberty, body, reputation or property of any person.”³⁹ The state is further obligated to secure the right to life and personal liberty.⁴⁰

In early November 2016, Bangladesh’s highest court published guidelines requiring law enforcement officers to undertake a basic set of actions when arresting a person. They include an obligation to inform a close relative or friend of the arrested person about the time and place of the detention; to make clear the location where the person is being held; and to allow the arrested person access to a lawyer or relatives. Officers must prepare a memorandum of arrest to be signed by the arrested person and complete a case diary, which must be handed to a magistrate if the officer requests custody of a suspect for more than 24 hours, setting out the allegations and need for further investigation.⁴¹

³⁷ Penal Code, 1860, secs. 340, 346, 362, 365, 367, and 368, http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=11 (accessed January 15, 2017).

³⁸ See “Review of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prohibition) Act, 2013,” BLAST, December 2015, [https://www.blast.org.bd/content/publications/Review%20of%20The%20Torture%20&%20Custodial%20Death\(Prevention\)%20Act,%202013.pdf](https://www.blast.org.bd/content/publications/Review%20of%20The%20Torture%20&%20Custodial%20Death(Prevention)%20Act,%202013.pdf) (accessed March, 1, 2017).

³⁹ Constitution of Bangladesh, art. 31, http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/pdf_part.php?id=367 (accessed December 12, 2016).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, art. 32.

⁴¹ “Guidelines for the Law Enforcement Agencies,” *Bangladesh v. Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)*, Civil Appeal No.53 of 2004, May 24, 2016, http://www.supremecourt.gov.bd/resources/documents/734650_Civil_Appeal_No_53_of_2004_final_2016.pdf (accessed January 22, 2017), pp. 389-396.

In Bangladesh, a prosecutor must obtain a prior government “sanction” before lodging any criminal complaint against a state official, permission that is seldom granted.⁴² The law allows both police officers and the Rapid Action Battalion to escape prosecution if they can show that they acted in “good faith.”⁴³

Bangladesh is obliged to follow the standards set out in the 1992 UN General Assembly's Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (Declaration on Enforced Disappearances).⁴⁴ Although non-binding, the declaration reflects the consensus of the international community against this type of human rights violation and provides authoritative guidance as to the safeguards that must be implemented to prevent it. Bangladesh also has obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which enshrines the right to life, liberty, and security, and right to a fair trial.⁴⁵

Bangladesh is party to the Rome Statute setting up the International Criminal Court.⁴⁶ The statute includes enforced disappearances as one of the crimes against humanity over which the court has jurisdiction.⁴⁷ The statute defines “enforced disappearance of persons” as “the arrest, detention or abduction of persons by, or with the authorization, support or acquiescence of, a State or a political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons.”⁴⁸

⁴² Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, sec. 132 states: “No Prosecution against any person for any act purporting to be done under this Chapter shall be instituted in any Criminal Court, except with the sanction of the Government.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, sec. 132 (a) – (d). Armed Police Battalions Ordinance, 1979, sec. 13, as amended, states: “No Suit, prosecution or other legal proceedings shall be against any member of the Force for anything which is done or intended to be done in good faith under this Ordinance.” At the 119th meeting of the UN Human Rights Committee, the Bangladesh law minister claimed that this section did not provide any immunity to RAB officers, as it only applied in relation to acts done following orders of the government. See UN Web TV, “Consideration of Bangladesh – 119th session CCPR,” 2:22:40, March 7, 2017, <http://webtv.un.org/search/consideration-of-bangladesh-contd-3340th-meeting-119th-session-of-human-rights-committee/5350733542001> (accessed March 16, 2017).

⁴⁴ Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, adopted December 18, 1992, G.A. res. 47/133, 47 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 207, U.N. Doc. A/47/49 (1992). The Bangladesh government has not signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

⁴⁵ 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. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976. Bangladesh ratified the ICCPR in 2000, subject to reservations to arts. 10, 11, and 14.

⁴⁶ Ratified on March 23, 2010.

⁴⁷ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute), A/CONF.183/9, July 17, 1998, entered into force July 1, 2002, art. 7(1)(i).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, art. 7(2)(i).

Under the Rome Statute, enforced disappearances amount to a crime against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic “attack on a civilian population,” such as a state policy to plan and commit such crimes.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid., art. 8.

II. Ongoing Secret Detentions and Disappearances

Human rights organizations and media have documented over 90 people “disappeared” in 2016, of whom 21 were later found dead. The whereabouts of nine remain unknown at time of writing. The others, after varying periods of secret detention, were “released” before being formally arrested.

There have been additional reports of other disappearances involving people suspected of involvement in the Holey Artisan Bakery attack on July 1, 2016, or linked to the “neo-JMB,” which are not included in these numbers. For example, it was reported that alleged militants Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury and Nurul Islam Marjan were detained in state custody for significant periods of time before being killed in so-called counterterrorism operations on August 27, 2016, and January 7, 2017, respectively.⁵⁰

Killed Following Disappearances

The 21 men picked up and killed are set out in the table below. Twelve were Jamaat-e-Islami activists, three were Awami League members, one was a BNP activist, three were allegedly involved in murders, and two were alleged to be criminals.⁵¹ Below the table are further details on eight of the cases, based on interviews with families and witnesses.

⁵⁰ David Bergman, “Due process and Bangladesh Counter Terrorism Measures,” *The Wire*, October 8, 2016, <https://thewire.in/71832/due-process-bangladeshs-counter-terrorism-measures> (accessed January 10, 2017).

⁵¹ This list is based on a combination of cases documented by Odhikar and Human Rights Watch.

ILLEGALLY DETAINED AND KILLED IN 2016

Name	Date of detention	Date body was found	Summary of family allegations of pick up and death
Abu Huraira, 55	January 24	February 29	Abu Huraira, a teacher at Kuthi Durgapur Madrasa and a senior member of Jamaat-e-Islami in Jhenaidah, was picked up outside the school where he taught by men who identified themselves as DB members. His body was found a month later on the Jessore-Jhenaidah road. ⁵²
Mohammad Jasim Uddin, 23	February 12	March 2	Mohammad Jasim Uddin, a student at Jhenaidah Alia Madrasa and a leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing, was picked up in Dhaka by some men in plainclothes claiming to be police. His body was found in a field 20 days later bearing torture marks.
Mukul Rana (Sharif alias Saleh alias Arif)	February 23	June 19	Mukul Rana, accused of involvement in the killing of blogger Avijit Roy, was picked up and put in a microbus from Bashundia intersection in Jessore by men who self-identified as police. Four months later, police said his body was recovered after a gunfight. ⁵³
Abu Jar Gifari, 21 Shamim Mahmud, 23	March 18 March 25	April 13	Abu Jar Gifari, a Jamaat-e-Islami student leader in Jhenaidah, was picked up as he left the mosque after Friday prayers by four armed men in plainclothes, who identified themselves as police. Shamim Mahmud, also a Jamaat-e-Islami student activist, was picked up outside a grocery store by men claiming to be police. Nearly three weeks later, their bodies were recovered, allegedly with bullet wounds, near the cremation ground in Jessore Sadar Upazila.
Sohanur Rahman, 16	April 10	April 20	Sohanur Rahman, a supporter of the Jamaat-e-Islami, was arrested in Ishwarba village in Jhenaidah, in front of his younger brother. His body, with bullet injuries, was found 10 days later.
Shahid Al Mahmud, 24 Anisur Rahman, 26	June 13 June 16	July 1	Shahid Al Mahmud, a cattle farmer and Jamaat-e-Islami student activist, was picked up early in the morning from his house in Jhenaidah in front of his parents and taken away in a microbus. Anisur Rahman, also a student activist, was picked up three days later from a hostel in Dhaka. ⁵⁴ Their bodies were recovered two weeks later. Police claimed they were killed during a gunfight with criminals at the Tatultala-Naldanga road in Jhenaidah. ⁵⁵
Ibnul Islam Parvez, 27	June 16	July 2	Ibnul Islam Parvez, former president of the Jhenaidah district town unit Jamaat student wing, was picked up from a hostel in Dhaka (along with Anisur Rahman, see above). Two weeks later, the police said that Parvez's body was found in Aruakandi village following a gunfight. ⁵⁶

⁵² Interviews with two colleagues of Abu Huraira, February 15, 2017. See also, "Jamaat leader picked up 'by cops' found dead," *Daily Observer*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.observerb.com/2016/03/01/139188.php> (accessed January 15, 2017).

⁵³ "Now confusion over arrest of Mukul's relative," *The Daily Star*, June 22, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/confusion-over-arrest-mukuls-brother-law-1243570> (accessed January 15, 2017).

⁵⁴ "2 Shibir leaders detained weeks ago killed in 'gunfight,'" *New Age*, July 2, 2016, <http://archive.newagebd.net/238630/2-shibir-leaders-detained-weeks-ago-killed-gunfight/> (accessed January 15, 2016).

⁵⁵ Telephone interviews with Sabdar Rahman, Anisur's father, and Sharifur Rahman, Anisur's brother, January 26, 2017.

⁵⁶ "Another Shibir man killed in Gunfight," *New Age*, July 3, 2016, <http://newagebd.net/238813/another-shibir-man-killed-gunfight/> (accessed January 15, 2016).

Nurun Nabi, 28 Nurul Islam Rashed, 27	June 23	July 5	Nurun Nabi and Nurul Islam Rashed, suspected of involvement in the killing of a police officer's wife, were picked up by police from a house in the Millitarir Pool area in Chittagong where they were staying. Two weeks later, the police stated that their bodies were found following a gunfight at MBW Brick field close to the city. ⁵⁷
Saiful Islam, 25	July 1	July 19	Saiful Islam, an activist of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing, was picked up by police from his hostel in Jhenaidah along with four other students, and was seen the following day by his family at a police station. Nearly three weeks later, police claimed to have found his body close to Jhenaidah highway following a gunfight with criminals.
Faruk Hossain, 42	July 1	July 2	Faruk Hossain, claimed by police to be a member of a gang of robbers, was picked up in Jessore by four men on two motorbikes identifying themselves as police officers. Police later said his body was found following a gunfight. ⁵⁸
Oliullah Molla, 38	July 9	July 10	Oliullah Mollah, vice president of a local brick field workers' association and general secretary of his local unit of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in Satkhira, was picked up by police from the Paruli bazaar area. Police later said his body was found in Ganghati village following a gunfight.
Idris Ali, 56	August 4	August 12	Idris Ali, a madrasa teacher and Jamaat-e-Islami leader in Jhenaidah, was picked up by police while returning to his house at night. Eight days later, his body was found on the Harinakundu-Jhenaidah road with marks of torture.
Mohammad Zahurul Islam, 42	September 7	October 25	Mohammad Zahurul Islam, president of the Jhenaidah town unit of Jamaat-e-Islami and a lecturer at Keyarbazar College, was picked up on his way home for lunch in the Al Hera area by men claiming to be DB members. A month later, police said he was shot dead on the Jhenaidah town bypass road when they opened fire in self- defense. ⁵⁹
Tarique Hassan Shajib, 40	September 13	October 25	Tarique Hassan Shajib, member of Jamaat-e-Islami, was picked up just after midnight by men claiming to be police from Al Hera school in Jhenaidah town where the party often held meetings. His body was found on October 25 with that of Zahurul Islam, whose case is described above. ⁶⁰
Safinul Islam (alias Safin), 32	September 27	October 26	Safinul Islam, previously convicted in a murder case, was picked up from Dhaka by men identifiable as members of RAB. RAB denied the arrest that time, but a month later, claimed that he was killed in a gunfight at Dadrajonti village in Joypurhat. ⁶¹
Redwan Sabbir Abu Abdullah Soheli Rana	December 3	December 5	Redwan Sabbir, Abu Abdullah, and Soheli Rana, three Awami League youth wing activists, were picked up by a group of about 12 men, some wearing vests inscribed with "RAB," from a tea stall in Tokia Bazar in Natore, late at night. Their bodies, with bullet wounds, were found two days later in Dinajpur. ⁶²

⁵⁷ "2 suspects in Mitu murder case killed," *The Daily Star*, July 10, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/2-suspects-mitu-murder-case-killed-1251382> (accessed January 15, 2016).

⁵⁸ "'Abducted' man killed in 'gunfight'," *The Daily Star*, July 3, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/country/abducted-man-killed-gunfight-1249405> (accessed January 15, 2016).

⁵⁹ Telephone interview with family members. See also, "Two 'Jamaat men' killed in Jhenaidah 'gunfight'," *New Age*, October 25, 2016, <http://www.newagebd.net/article/1417/two-killed-in-jhenaidah-gunfight> (accessed January 15, 2017).

⁶⁰ Telephone interview with Mahfuza Khanum, Shajib's mother, February 15, 2017.

⁶¹ "Suspected criminal found in Joypurhat 'gunfight'," *Daily Observer*, October 26, 2016, <http://www.observerbd.com/details.php?id=40243> (accessed January 15, 2017).

⁶² "3 Jubo League men found shot dead," *The Daily Star*, December 6, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/three-jubo-league-men-found-dead-1325821> (accessed January 15, 2017).

Mohammad Jasim Uddin

Mohammad Jasim Uddin, a student at Jhenaidah Alia Madrasa, was acting president of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing in Ganna union unit in Jhenaidah district. According to his relatives, he no longer lived at his home in the Kalohati area of Jhenaidah town, fearing arrest. However, as his mother was sick, in February 2016 he decided to visit her. He was picked up soon after. His father, Khalil Rahman, said:

We had a conversation over the phone on February 11 when he reached Dhaka. He told me that he will come to Jhenaidah the next day, but would not stay long. But then we heard from a friend of Jasim's that he had been taken away by some men who claimed that they were police.⁶³

Soon after Jasim went missing, his older brother, Saifur Rahman, went to the Rajbari police station and local RAB offices, but they denied the arrest. On March 4, his family members were informed that a mutilated body had been found at Mostabapur field in Harinakundu Upazila. His brother identified his body. Jasim had been shot in the head, and his hands and legs were tied.⁶⁴ His mother said the family did not receive a postmortem report.⁶⁵

Abu Jar Gifari

Abu Jar Gifari, a third-year student at the Jessore MM College, was president of the local Jamaat-e-Islami student wing in Jhenaidah. Citing witnesses, Abu's father, Nur Islam, said that on March 18, 2016, his son was picked up by four armed men who identified themselves as DB members:

The men approached my son on two motorbikes as he came out of the mosque after attending *juma* prayer. They handcuffed him after he gave his name and dragged him onto a motorbike at gunpoint. Some local people tried to stop this happening but the men aimed their guns at the local

⁶³ Telephone interview with Khalil Rahman, October 3, 2016.

⁶⁴ "Bullet hit body of missing Shibir Leader found," *The Daily Star*, March 5, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/missing-shibir-leaders-bullet-hit-body-found-786493> (accessed January 9, 2017).

⁶⁵ Telephone interview with Rabeya Begum, January 22, 2017.

people and told people to not to interfere with them as they were performing their “administrative duty.”⁶⁶

Later that afternoon, Nur Islam went to the Kaliganj police station where officers denied having carried out any such operation.⁶⁷

Family members also met RAB officials who claimed to have no information regarding Abu’s whereabouts. “We were terrified and requested officials of law enforcement agencies not kill him in ‘crossfire.’ They however insisted that they did not pick him up,” his father said.

On the morning of April 13, the family was informed that two bodies had been found near the cremation ground in Jessore Sadar Upazila.⁶⁸ His father said:

We rushed there and witnessed the most heartbreaking scene. My son’s body was left there with another youth’s body. Both had bullet wounds and marks of torture.⁶⁹

The other body was that of Shamim Mahmud.

Shamim Mahmud

Shamim Mahmud, 23, a second-year student at KC College in Jhenaidah and an activist of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing, was detained on March 24, 2016. His father, Ruhul Amin, a madrasa teacher, said eyewitnesses told him that his son was sitting at a grocery store reading a newspaper in the afternoon when four men in plainclothes entered and picked him up at gunpoint. Ruhul Amin said:

When local people tried to rescue Shamim, the men said that they were police and threatened to open fire if anyone tried to stop their “operation.”

⁶⁶ Telephone interview with Nur Islam, October 7, 2016.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “Bullet hit bodies of two Shibir men found,” *The Daily Star*, April 14, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/bullet-hit-bodies-two-shibir-men-found-1208815> (accessed January 9, 2017).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Shamim was forcibly put on a motorbike. As the police motorbike went a few meters, Shamim tried to jump off. He was injured and the police still beat him. They took him away unconscious.⁷⁰

Family members went to the Kaliganj police station but officials did not allow them to lodge a GD, and denied that they were involved in picking up Shamim. Instead, they criticized the father for allowing his son to be involved in Jamaat politics. Family members searched for Shamim at the local RAB-6 office and other police stations with no luck. They also approached a local member of parliament. However, no one could provide information about Shamim's whereabouts.

Three weeks later, on April 13, Shamim's body was found along with that of Abu Jar Gifari near the cremation ground in Jessore. The family said that the body had bullet wounds and signs of torture.⁷¹

Sohanur Rahman

Sohanur Rahman, 16, a high school student in Jhenaidah and a supporter of the Jamaat-e-Islami, was picked up from Ishwarba village on April 10, 2016. Sohanur and his brother, Masud, were waiting for their mother to return from Dhaka when Sohanur was detained, according to their father Mohsin Ali. Mohsin said:

My younger son Masud said that at about 5:30 p.m., four people on “easy-bikes” [a three wheeled, battery powered vehicle] passed them but returned after some local people pointed them out. One man asked Sohanur his name and when he gave it to them, two people grabbed his shirt collar and dragged him to one of the easy-bikes. Local people rushed over to them and tried to stop the men from taking Sohanur away, but the men on bikes showed their weapons and introduced themselves as plainclothes police officers. Masud cried and requested the police not take his brother away. They told him that they were taking Sohanur to Kaliganj police station.⁷²

⁷⁰ Telephone interview with Ruhul Amin, October 3, 2016.

⁷¹ Telephone interview with Ruhul Amin, January 21, 2017.

⁷² Telephone interview with Mohsin Ali, October 3, 2016.

Locals identified two of the men as sub-inspectors from the Kaliganj police station. The next day, family members went to the police station. Police denied they had arrested Sohanur and did not initially allow the family members to file a GD, though they later allowed it.⁷³

Sohanur's family members also met with their local Awami League lawmaker, the Jhenaidah police superintendent, and the local RAB commander, but no one provided any information on Sohanur's whereabouts. On April 20, Sohanur's body was found in Kharagoda village, about 17 kilometers from their house.⁷⁴ His family said that his body showed signs of bullet injuries to the head. His father said that they asked for a copy of the postmortem report, but the police refused to provide one.⁷⁵

Shahid Al Mahmud

Shahid Al Mahmud, 24, was a cattle farmer and activist of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing. He lived with his parents in Badanpur village in Jhenaidah district. He was detained on June 13, 2016. His father, Rajab Ali, said the family was asleep when the police came:

Just after midnight, two men broke down the bamboo boundary, entered the compound of our house, and called out Shahid's name as though they were his political associates. My wife and I woke up and went out to the gate, and one of the two men, both dressed in civilian clothes, pulled out a gun and threatened us. I opened the door and men went and pulled Shahid from his room. They allowed him to change his clothes. He was dragged outside and taken into a black microbus. There were other men present, some wearing police uniforms.⁷⁶

⁷³ Telephone interview with Mohsin Ali, January 21, 2017.

⁷⁴ "Abducted college student found dead in Chudanga," *Daily Sun*, April 20, 2016, <http://www.daily-sun.com/post/129965/abducted-college-student-found-dead-in-chudanga> (accessed January 9, 2017).

⁷⁵ Telephone interview with Mohsin Ali, January 21, 2017.

⁷⁶ Telephone interviews with Rajab Ali, October 10, 2016, and January 2, 2017. See also, "Allegation of the killing of Shahid Al Mahmud by police 16 days after his disappearance: Fact finding report," *Odhikar*, September 8, 2016, <http://odhikar.org/allegation-of-the-killing-of-shahid-al-mahmud-by-police-16-days-after-his-disappearance/> (accessed December 27, 2016).

Shakib Al Hassan, who was staying at a neighboring house, said he saw his cousin Shahid being put into the microbus. The human rights group Odhikar interviewed a neighbor, Khabir Uddin, who said he recognized one of the arresting officers.⁷⁷

Abdur Rahim, Shahid's older brother, who lives in Jhenaidah town, said he rushed to the police station after he heard about the arrest, but police denied having any knowledge about it.⁷⁸ Later that day he went to other police stations, the local RAB-6, and DB offices, but they all denied any knowledge of the detention.

The following day, June 15, Abdur attempted to file a GD laying out what had happened to his brother and mentioning the police and name of the officer who witnesses claimed was present. He was refused:

The police refused to accept the GD saying that I cannot accuse plainclothes police officers of involvement and that I should fill in a "missing person" GD. I left the police station without filing anything.⁷⁹

On June 18, the family held a press conference at Jhenaidah Press Club where they described Shahid's detention.⁸⁰ On July 1, the family heard reports of two men killed in a "crossfire" incident. Aware of other cases of such faked armed encounters, they went to the morgue and discovered Shahid's body.

The police claimed that a team was patrolling Tatultala-Naldanga road in the early morning on July 1, when at about 3:30 a.m. some criminals hurled several bombs at the police vehicle.⁸¹ The police returned fire. After a 20-minute gun battle, two dead bodies were found, one of whom was Shahid. The police claimed to have recovered a firearm, two bullets, five sharp weapons, and five crude bombs from the spot. They also said that some

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch has not been able to speak to Khabir Uddin.

⁷⁸ Telephone interview with Abdur Rahim, January 2, 2017.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ "Father looking for missing child", *ManobJamin*, June 19, 2016, <http://www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=19186&cat=9/> (accessed January 21, 2017).

⁸¹ "Two Shibir Leaders killed in 'Shootout,'" *The Daily Star*, July 2, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/two-shibir-leaders-killed-shootout-1249009> (accessed January 9, 2017).

officers were wounded. Shahid's father said the police are lying. "The police abducted my son and staged a 'gunfight' drama to justify the killing."⁸²

Saiful Islam

Saiful Islam, 25, was a student in the Arabic Literature Department at the Islamic University in Kushtia and an activist of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing. He lived in a private hostel along with other party activists. Saiful's brother, Abdullah Al Azad, said that in the early morning of July 2, he received a telephone call from Saiful's brother-in-law.

He said that Saiful had called him and told him that he had been arrested and taken to Jhenaidah Sadar police station, and that the police said he will be released if his father and the ward chairman went to the police station.⁸³

Lutfur Islam, Saiful's father, said he immediately went to meet the local ward chairman to request his intervention. The chairman told them to go and speak to the police, promising to put in a word. Lutfur, along with a neighbor, Topon, went to the city police station. Saiful's father said that they saw Saiful in one of the cells: "We saw Saiful and some other students in police custody. My son insisted that police would release him if the chairman requested them to do so."⁸⁴

The police agreed that Lutfur could go outside the police station and buy some breakfast for his son. But when he returned, Saiful was gone.

When I returned to the police station, the cell where my son had been was empty. The police denied that they had arrested anyone named Saiful. When I insisted that I had seen him a few moments earlier, they said that I must have been mistaken and it was illusion.⁸⁵

⁸² Telephone interviews with Rajab Ali, October 10, 2016, and January 2, 2017.

⁸³ Telephone interviews with Abdullah Al Azad, October 24, 2016, and January 3, 2017. See also, "Shibir Man Killed in 'Gunfight,'" *The Daily Star*, July 20, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/shibir-man-killed-gunfight-1256257> (accessed January 3, 2017).

⁸⁴ Telephone interview with Lutfur Islam, October 23, 2016.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Four other students that had been picked up that morning were released in the afternoon. They told Saiful's family members that five of them, including Saiful, had been detained together and brought to the local police station. They did not know what happened to Saiful after they were released.

Fulhari Union Chairman Jamilur Rahman Bipul said that a police officer had called him and asked about Saiful. "I told the police officer that Saiful was a good person and was not involved with any criminal activities in localities. The policeman replied that Saiful was a Shibir activist in the town and the university area."⁸⁶

In subsequent days, Saiful's father went to the RAB and DB offices, but they all denied any knowledge of the arrest. On the morning of July 19, Saiful's family read on the Ekushey TV crawl that a person had been killed in a "gunfight" beside a graveyard in Ariakandi village. Worried, they went to the morgue, where they found Saiful's body.

The police claimed that at about 3 a.m., a police team was patrolling the Dhaka-Jhenaidah highway near Madhupur-Aruakandi graveyard when some criminals hurled crude bombs at the police vehicle. The law enforcers returned fire, triggering the "gunfight," and one of the criminals was shot by police. Others managed to flee, police said.⁸⁷

Oliullah Molla

Oliullah Molla, 38, general secretary of his local unit of BNP, was detained by police from the Paruli bazaar area in Satkhira on July 9, 2016.⁸⁸ When his relatives went to the local Shyamnagar police station, they said that the police confirmed the arrest but refused to let them to meet Oliullah. The family also said that local Awami League leaders demanded bribes to ensure his safety. His wife said the family began to fear for his safety:

At about 3:30 a.m. the following morning, I heard sounds of gunshots from a nearby area. I become frightened wondering whether Oliullah had been

⁸⁶ Telephone interview with Jamilur Rahman Bipul, October 23, 2016.

⁸⁷ "Shibir Man Killed in 'Gunfight'," *The Daily Star*, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/shibir-man-killed-gunfight-1256257>.

⁸⁸ Telephone interview with Salima Khatun, October 18, 2016.

shot. My fear was proven right as in the morning I was informed about the murder of my husband.⁸⁹

Sohidullah, Oliullah's brother, said that family members went to the hospital morgue and found that Oliullah had been shot in the head. They also saw that his right eye was out of its socket and his right hand was cut. Police, however, claimed that they were on duty in Ganghati village when at about 3:30 a.m. a group of men sped down the road on motorbikes. The police tried to stop them, but the men instead hurled bombs and opened fire on the police, resulting in a gunfight during which Oliullah was killed.⁹⁰

Idris Ali

Idris Ali, 56, a teacher at the Hossain Ali Aleem Madrasa at Harinakundu Upazila in the Jhenaidah, was a local Jamaat-e-Islami leader. At about 8 p.m. on August 4, 2016, Idris was on his motorbike returning to his house from the market when, according to witnesses, some plainclothes people from a police post stopped him and forcibly dragged him away.⁹¹

Family members went to their local police station after witnesses told them about the incident. But the officer-in-charge told them that the location where Idris was allegedly taken was not within the station's jurisdiction, and that they should go to the Shailkupa police station to file a GD. Officers there, however, declined to allow them to do so.

Idris's wife held a press conference on August 9 describing the disappearance. On the morning of August 12, the family was informed that the body of a missing madrasa teacher was found on the Harinakundu-Jhenaidah road. A family member said they went to the morgue:

We went there and found his mutilated body. After conducting autopsy and postmortem examinations, police claimed that it was a case of a road mishap, and Idris's motorcycle was found at the roadside. We, however, identified marks of severe torture on different parts of the body. There were

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "BNP activist killed in 'Shootout'," *The Daily Star*, July 11, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/bnp-activist-killed-shootout-1251886> (accessed January 9, 2017).

⁹¹ Telephone interview, details withheld, September 28, 2016.

marks of hammering behind the head. Tendons were slashed. All the parts of the body bore torture marks.⁹²

Police claimed that Idris Ali was wanted in several criminal cases, including for the murder of a police officer.⁹³

Continuing Disappearances

DISAPPEARED IN 2016, WHEREABOUTS REMAIN UNKNOWN		
Name	Pick up date	Summary
Moazzem Hossain Tapu, 28	January 26	Moazzem Hossain Tapu, an Awami League student wing activist, was picked up from an apartment in Bashundhara Residential Area in Dhaka belonging to a political rival from the same party. The men who picked him up introduced themselves to the building guard as law enforcement officials.
Bivas Sangma, 25 Probhat Marak, 50 Rajesh Marak, 22	April 14	At around 4 a.m. on April 14, about 12 men, some wearing black clothes inscribed with “RAB,” came to Gozni village in Sherpur and picked up Bivas Sangma, a student at Tinani Adarsha Degree College, and Probhat Marak, a day laborer, from their homes. The same day, Probhat’s son, Rajesh Marak, a student at a private university in Dhaka, was picked up near Bhaluka College in Mymensingh. ⁹⁴
Kamrul Islam Sikdar Musa	June 22	Law enforcement officials picked up Kamrul Islam Sikdrar Musa as he approached the house of a friend in the Kathgar area of Chittagong where his wife and children were staying. Police have said that Musa is suspected of killing a senior police official, though they deny picking him up. ⁹⁵
Yasin Mohammad Abdus Samad Talukder, 35	July 14	Yasin Mohammad, alleged by police to have been involved in Islamic militancy, was picked up by law enforcement officers from his parked car at the Kakoli bus stand in Dhaka.
Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, 32	August 9	Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, the son of an opposition politician, was picked up by law enforcement officers late at night from his home in Dhaka.
Amaan Azmi, 57	August 22	Amaan Azmi, the son of an opposition politician, was picked up by law enforcement officers from his home in Mogh Bazaar, Dhaka, in the evening.
Sheikh Mohammad Lotiful Khabir (alias Anowar Hossain), 45	November 10	Plainclothes dressed men, introducing themselves as from the “administration,” picked up Anowar Hossain, a homeopathic doctor, from his clinic next to his house in Boalia, Rajshai.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ “‘Missing Jamaat leader’ found dead in Ihenaidah.” *The Independent*. <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/55492>.

⁹⁴ “3 abducted indigenous people yet to be rescued,” *Observer*, April 19, 2016, <http://www.observerbd.com/2016/04/19/147397.php> (accessed January 12, 2017).

⁹⁵ “Musa was arrested a week ago,” *The Daily Star*, July 1, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/musa-was-arrested-week-ago-1248724> (accessed January 21, 2017).

Cases of nine men who were picked up in 2016 and remain disappeared at time of writing are set out in the table below.⁹⁶ Some of these people, by the time of publication, may have been released or killed. Below the table are further details of seven of the cases, based on interviews with families and witnesses.

Yasin Talukder

Yasin Mohammad Abdus Samad Talukder, 35, a physics teacher, lived in Dhaka in an apartment with his mother. A Bangladeshi national with dual British citizenship, Yasin went to school in Bangladesh, moved to the United Kingdom in 2001 for higher studies, and returned to Dhaka four years later after suffering an assault. His family has acknowledged that in 2011, British government intelligence officers asked him to attend a number of counterterrorism interviews at the British High Commission due to concerns about his alleged involvement in militancy, and that Yasin allowed the officers access to his computer.⁹⁷ According to his family, the intelligence officers concluded he was no threat. The British High Commission declined to respond to questions related to Yasin's background stating that "it cannot discuss individual consular cases."⁹⁸

On July 12, two days before Yasin was picked up, a national paper in Bangladesh published an article stating that Yasin was among the suspects listed in an FIR, filed five months earlier, for conspiring to attack private buildings.⁹⁹ Yasin's family question the authenticity of the allegation.

On the morning of July 14, 2016, Yasin had arranged to meet his cousin Sidrat near the Kakoli bus stand so they could drive together to attend a wedding.¹⁰⁰ At about 11:40 a.m., Yasin called his cousin to find out where he was. Sidrat said he was 10 minutes away. Soon after, Sidrat received another phone call from Yasin. He said:

⁹⁶ This list is based on a combination of cases documented by Odhikar and Human Rights Watch.

⁹⁷ David Bergman, "British-Bangladeshi Suspected of Militant Links Believed to Be In Secret Detention in Bangladesh," *The Wire*, November 4, 2016, <https://thewire.in/77772/british-bangladeshi-suspected-militant-links-detained-secretly-bangladesh-state-four-months/> (accessed January 10, 2017).

⁹⁸ Via email, December 5, 2016.

⁹⁹ "Gulshan Attack Militant Nibras: Case filed five months back, no effort to arrest," *Prothom Alo*, July 12, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Interview of Yasin's mother, Dhaka, October 29, 2016.

I could hear other people shouting. The conversations and shouting was not clear and Yasin was not responding to me. The call went on for three minutes and then the phone disconnected suddenly. When I called again, it was switched off. When I reached the bus stand, I found the car parked in the spot Yasin bhai told me it would be. When I saw he wasn't inside, I started to worry. I walked up and down, looking for my cousin. I then walked to the nearest ticket stall and asked the ticket seller if he knew where the driver of the car was. I asked loud enough hoping that people sitting nearby might volunteer information, but no one did. The ticket seller initially responded with a “don't know, he's probably around somewhere nearby,” but his demeanor pretty much confirmed my suspicion that something bad had happened. I walked to some further stalls and asked, but no one said anything. But I felt the initial ticket seller knew something. I went back to him and this time pressured him a bit more. Eventually he mentioned that a black microbus had parked beside the car and that some people had walked over to the car, and then the driver of the car [my cousin] got out and went with them to the microbus.¹⁰¹

Sidrat said he kept trying Yasin's phone and then called Yasin's mother and uncle. A police officer stationed at the local police post advised the family to go to Banani police station to file a GD. Yasin's mother said that while the Banani police station refused to accept the complaint, she was able to lodge a GD at the Bashantec police station where she lives.¹⁰² Yasin's mother also informed the British High Commission about what had happened to her son, and was advised to instruct a lawyer.

Two days after the incident, a man who gave his name as Sarwar Jahan and claimed to be from the Police Bureau of Investigation came to the apartment where Yasin and his mother lived. Yasin's mother described the visit:

¹⁰¹ Written interview with Sidrat, November 3, 2016.

¹⁰² Interview with Yasin's mother, Dhaka, October 29, 2016.

He asked me all kinds of questions but when I asked him, he did not say anything about my son being detained. I noticed however that the officer had a copy of my son's biometric mobile phone re-registration form.¹⁰³

Then on the night of July 21, seven days after Yasin was picked up, men from RAB came to the house.

They introduced themselves as Major Nahid and Major Masud. There were also other men with them. They took all my son's electronic equipment including his computers away with them. They did not give me any receipt.¹⁰⁴

The British High Commission has confirmed that Yasin was "detained in July 2016," and that the Foreign Office was "continuing to press the Bangladesh authorities for consular access."¹⁰⁵ However, the authorities deny that they have Yasin in custody.

Moazzem Hossain Tapu

Moazzem Hossain Tapu, 28, was a former president of the Rampura unit of the Chhatra League, the student wing of the Awami League, and was aspiring to be appointed to a higher political post.

In November 2015, as a result of a clash in Rampura between the local Awami League members, Tapu went into hiding in his home village in Faridganj, Chandpur district.¹⁰⁶ Two months later, on January 26, his mother, Saleha Begum, said that her son called her to say that he was back in Dhaka. He left Faridganj at about 8 a.m.

Tapu suddenly told me over the phone that he had reached Dhaka as his friends Imon and Tajul had arranged a meeting with members of the Jubo League to reach a mutual understanding and end old rivalries.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ David Bergman, "British-Bangladeshi Suspected of Militant Links Believed to Be In Secret Detention in Bangladesh," *The Wire*, <https://thewire.in/77772/british-bangladeshi-suspected-militant-links-detained-secretly-bangladesh-state-four-months>.

¹⁰⁶ Telephone interview with Moinul Hossain Opu, January 10, 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Telephone interview with Saleha Begum, January 10, 2017.

Later that night Tapu's brother, Moinul Hossain Opu, said that Imon phoned him to say that Tapu had been picked up from an apartment in Bashundhara Residential Area under Vatara police station. Moinul said:

We went to the apartment immediately. One of the guards there told us that three people in plainclothes went to the apartment and picked up my brother around midnight. When the guard tried to stop them, they introduced themselves as members of DB.¹⁰⁸

The family went to the Vatara police station to inquire about his whereabouts.¹⁰⁹ The sub-inspector on duty told them he had no information about Tapu, and they should inquire with the DB or RAB offices. On January 28, the family attempted to file a GD at the station, but the officers would not initially accept it, and asked the family to consult the DB or RAB.

On January 30, the family filed the GD. They followed up two days later, on February 1, filing a First Information Report (FIR) at the police station. They said they did so at the suggestion of the home minister, whom they met regarding Tapu's disappearance. Since several family members hold leadership positions in the Awami League, they have a relationship with the minister, they explained, and met him more than 20 times regarding the case. They added that he made several calls to different law enforcement agencies, including the DB, RAB, and Inspector General's Office on Tapu's behalf.

Based on information provided by the home minister, Tapu's family thinks that Tapu's friends and some Jubo League leaders were behind the disappearance, and they have filed an FIR alleging their involvement. They believe Jubo League leaders bribed an RAB unit to apprehend and detain Tapu, though they did not name police or RAB officers in their complaint.

The case is now being investigated by DB. The family has organized several press conferences seeking information, and complained about threats and demands for bribes.¹¹⁰ His mother Saleha Begum said: "We've never received an official

¹⁰⁸ Telephone interview with Moinul Hossain Opu, January 10, 2017.

¹⁰⁹ Telephone interview with Saleha Begum, January 10, 2017.

¹¹⁰ "BCL man missing for 18 days," *The Daily Star*, February 14, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/bcl-man-missing-18-days-510808> (accessed January 21, 2017).

acknowledgement that he is in custody. We don't know where he is being held. At least if there was a body, we would know what happened. We don't know if he's dead or alive."¹¹¹

Kamrul Islam Sikdar Musa

Kamrul Islam Sikdar Musa, a sand trader who also allegedly worked as a police informant, was suspected of involvement in the Chittagong murder of the wife of a senior counterterrorism officer.¹¹² On June 22, 2016, he was picked up in the Kathghar area of Chittagong as he approached a house where he thought it was safe to meet his wife and children, as arranged by a friend, but which in fact had been identified by the police. His wife, Panna Akhter, said:

I and my two children were surrounded by a police woman and seven or eight policemen in one of the three rooms of the apartment while my brother-in-law [Musa's brother] was kept separate in a second room. My brother-in-law had earlier been picked up and brought that morning by the police to the house.... One of the police officials then went out of the house, and after some time sent a message over police wireless which said that Musa is arrested. When we heard the words, I started crying. I repeatedly asked the police personnel why they have arrested my husband, and they responded by saying, "Don't you read the newspapers. Do not you see what's going on." I told them that I read many things but I want to know what was exact reason behind his arrest. Then the police said, "Do not worry, he will be released."¹¹³

Panna said that police have refused a GD and denied the arrest, and that authorities have threatened her since her husband's detention for being vocal about what happened to him.¹¹⁴ In early October, police announced a 500,000 taka (US\$6,200) reward for

¹¹¹ Telephone interview with Saleha Begum, January 10, 2017.

¹¹² "Wife of Police Super shot dead in Ctg," *The Daily Star*, June 5, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/country/police-officers-wife-shot-dead-ctg-1234663> (accessed January 17, 2017).

¹¹³ Telephone interview with Panna Akhter, January 14, 2017.

¹¹⁴ "Musa was arrested a week ago," *The Daily Star*, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/musa-was-arrested-week-ago-1248724>.

information leading to his arrest.¹¹⁵ Musa's wife called the reward a "farce" since he was picked up in June.¹¹⁶

Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem

Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, 32, is the son of Mir Quasem Ali, a prominent leader of the opposition Jamaat-e-Islami party who was convicted of war crimes in November 2014 and was facing execution when his son was picked up. Mir Ahmad is a Supreme Court lawyer who was involved in the legal team representing several men prosecuted by the International Crimes Tribunal, including his father. He was picked up from his house late on August 9, 2016, in the presence of his wife and sister, Tahera Tasnim, who said seven or eight men in civilian clothes came to the door around 11 p.m.:

He asked his wife to open the door and told us to behave normally. I was in the kitchen at this point. When the door was opened, the men asked my sister-in-law, "Where is your husband?" My brother then went to the door and the men said, "You have to come with us." My brother asked, "Can I have your identity? What is your force? Are you RAB, CID, DB?" They did not identify themselves. He asked several times. They did not wear any uniform and they had no legal arrest warrant. Nothing. They just said, "Come with us." My brother said, "I am a lawyer and I need to know these things." And then they said, "We will give you five minutes to get ready. Get ready and come with us." I said, "You cannot take my brother like this without any identity, in the dead of night. Come in the morning and take him." I stood in front of my brother and held the hand of one of the men. The man pulled away my hand and grabbed my brother. We were running behind him. It was total confusion. There was a white microbus and he was put in it. And the vehicle drove away.¹¹⁷

The following day, his wife filed a GD in Pallabi Thana but police refused to allow them to describe the men who took Mir Ahmad as law enforcement officials, and instead required

¹¹⁵ "Tk 5 lakh reward for capturing Musa," *Prothom Alo*, October 6, 2016, <http://en.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/news/124121/Tk-5-lakh-reward-for-capturing-Musa> (accessed January 21, 2017).

¹¹⁶ Telephone interview with Panna Akhter, January 18, 2017.

¹¹⁷ Telephone interview with Tahera Tasnim, August 10, 2016. Tahmina Akhter, Mir Ahmad's wife, provided a similar description in email correspondence on August 11, 2016. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

them to describe them simply as “civil-dressed” men. On December 22, 2016, she filed an FIR with the same police station.¹¹⁸

Mir Ahmad’s father, Quasem Ali, was hanged in September. Mir Ahmad was not able to meet his father before the execution or attend his father’s funeral.

In the weeks before his arrest, Mir Ahmad had told Human Rights Watch that he was worried that he might be arrested or disappeared. According to his family, a few days before he was picked up, on the same day that Humam Quader Chowdhury was detained (see below), RAB officers visited his apartment late at night.¹¹⁹

Amaan Azmi

Amaan Azmi, 57, a retired brigadier general, is the son of Ghulam Azam, a former leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami party who was convicted of war crimes and sentenced to death in 2013. Considering his age of 90, the court ruled that Azam would serve a life sentence rather than face execution. He died of a heart attack in prison in October 2014.

Amaan Azmi was picked up on the evening of August 22, 2016. About 30 men in civilian clothes entered his apartment building, telling staff that they were from DB. Abul Kalam Azad, an employee in the building, said that he saw security forces, most carrying firearms, with over a dozen vehicles cordoning the house:

I was downstairs and a few of the men started asking me about the whereabouts of Azmi sir. They initially introduced themselves as “people from administration,” and later they claimed they were DB. Azmi sir used to live on the top floor but they did not find him there. Since they could not find him, they blindfolded me and started beating me. I repeatedly said I did not know his whereabouts. At this point, some of the men asked me to give them the key to the empty apartment on the fifth floor. I replied that it was with the landlord. Then, they broke down the door and found Azmi sir. I heard sir say, “Since, you are going to take me, let me take some clothes.”

¹¹⁸ First Information Report, “Case 46 on 22/12/2016.” Copy of FIR on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Tahera Tasmin, Dhaka, January 15, 2017.

But, they did not allow Azmi sir to do so. They escorted him to one of the vehicles. When he was in the car, he was blindfolded.¹²⁰

Azmi's wife, mother, and several other staff who were present confirmed that the men said they were from DB. Azad said that the men also seized six cellphones from people in the house, as well as hard disks from the CCTV installed for neighborhood security. The family has had no news of him since. They said Azmi had been concerned about his safety in the months before his arrest.

Secret Detentions: Disappearances Before Formal Arrests

Among the disappearances in 2016 are the cases of men whose whereabouts were unknown, with authorities denying any knowledge of an arrest, until they were brought back into the formal legal system, weeks or months after the original pick up, with police claiming that they had been arrested "the previous night." They remained effectively disappeared until that time. In the cases of two men who were alleged to be militants, police brought them to a public meeting claiming they had surrendered. In May 2017, one man secretly detained in October 2016 was released outside Dhaka.¹²¹

Nur Mohammed

Nur Mohammed is a leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami in Jhenaidah district unit. His son, Mujahidul Islam, said that law enforcement officers picked up his father at about 1 p.m. on March 2, 2016, while going to the market on his motorcycle:

My father's bike was not running properly, so he went to a garage in Hatekhola for repairs. The friend who was with my father told me that four to five people approached him and handcuffed him, and they dragged him into an easy-bike. When local people tried to stop them, the men

¹²⁰ Telephone interview with Abul Kalam, August 23, 2016.

¹²¹ "CCTV footage shows police van at abduction spot," *Prothom Alo*, November 18, 2016, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/129525/CCTV-footage-shows-police-van-at-abduction-spot> (accessed January 21, 2017). He was released in Dhaka on May 31, 2017. "Doctor Iqbal returns to home in Lakshmipur seven months after kidnapping," *bdnews24.com*, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2017/06/01/kidnapped-doctor-iqbal-returns-to-home-in-lakshmipur-seven-months-after-kidnapping>.

introduced themselves as members of DB. Since then his whereabouts is unknown and his cell phone switched off. Police did not accept our GD.¹²²

Sixteen days later, police claimed that Nur was arrested on March 18 in the district of Satkhira where he was “in hiding,” and that his information led to the seizure of 15 hand bombs, 40 kilograms of explosives, and jihadist literature.¹²³ A case was filed against him for possessing explosives and for the murder of a homeopathy doctor in Jhenaidah in January, for which ISIS had previously claimed responsibility.¹²⁴

Noore Alam, Iftisham Ahmed Sami, and Nazim Uddin

Noore Alam, 23, a third-year student of chemistry at Nilphamari Government College, lived with his family in the Ukiler More area. On the night of April 11, 2016, he was picked up from his home by about 10 people who wore plainclothes and introduced themselves as officials from the “administration.” Kamrul Alam Nayan, his brother, said:

I was at the family shop next to our home. My brother was sleeping inside the house. Two people came to the shop after midnight and then two others joined them. They asked to buy a mobile charger. As we spoke, one of the men seized my phone and asked about my brother. I said that my brother was sleeping. When the men said that they wanted to talk to my brother, I asked them to come back in the morning. Then the four of them dragged me out of the shop, closed it, and forced me to our house. Four to six other men in plainclothes dress also joined them. They woke up my brother and gave him few minutes to dress. We asked for an arrest warrant or any legal documents, but the men assured us that they were officials from the “administration” and they were just taking my brother for interrogation, and that he will return in 20 minutes.¹²⁵

¹²² Telephone interview with Mujahidul Islam, January 13, 2017.

¹²³ “Missing Jamaat leader arrested,” *The Daily Star*, March 19, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/missing-jamaat-leader-arrested-1196212> (accessed January 16, 2017).

¹²⁴ “IS Takes credit for homeopaths killing in Jhenaidah,” *The Daily Star*, January 9, 2016, <http://archive.newagebd.net/191749/is-takes-credit-for-homeopaths-killing-in-jhenaidah/> (accessed January 16, 2017).

¹²⁵ Telephone interview with Kamrul Alam Nayan, October 18, 2016.

The men dragged Noore Alam into a waiting microbus. Nayan immediately went to the Nilphamari Sadar police station, but the police claimed that they had not carried out such an operation. Other family members went to local RAB and DB offices, which also denied they had detained Noore Alam. On April 12, his family filed a GD with the Sadar police station.

Iftisham Ahmed Sami, a third-year university student, lived with friends in Dhaka. About 4 a.m. on April 29, 2016, Sami's father, Iftekhar Ahmed Enam, received a phone call from his son's friend and roommate:

The friend informed me that about 10 to 15 plainclothes men who claimed to be from the "administration" broke into Sami's room and picked him up. A handcuffed young man, who was with the plainclothes people, pointed out Sami. The plainclothes men then asked Sami to change his clothes, and he was then handcuffed and taken to a car waiting outside.¹²⁶

In subsequent days, the father went to the Boalia police station and the local DB and RAB offices, but they all denied any involvement in the arrest.

Nazim Uddin, 42, returned in July 2015 from Malaysia to live in his home town of Jessore. His wife, Nazma Aktar, said that her husband was visiting a friend in Dhaka when he was detained in the Pallabi area on May 25 by three men in plainclothes who claimed to be from the "administration." She said:

The friend told me that they were on my husband's motorbike when the people in plainclothes intercepted them. Two people dragged my husband into a vehicle and the other one seized the motorbike.¹²⁷

Nazma looked for her husband in RAB and police stations in Dhaka, but no one provided any information. She filed a GD, although the police had initially refused.

On December 6, 2016, eight months after the first of these detentions, police announced that they had arrested Noore, Sami, and Nazim along with two other men they claimed

¹²⁶ Telephone interview with Iftekhar Ahmed Enam, December 11, 2016.

¹²⁷ Telephone interview with Nazma Akhter, December 11, 2016.

were members of the banned Islamic militant group Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami. When the three men were brought to court, they told the magistrate that they were picked up on earlier dates from different places, providing details. Kazi Shahabuddin Ahmed, assistant commissioner (prosecution), told the court that the five “Huji operatives knew how to concoct a story.”¹²⁸ The magistrate remanded all five to police custody.

Moulana Mohammad Akhter Hossain

Moulana Mohammad Akhter Hossain, a 28-year-old imam, was picked up by law enforcement officers on May 3, 2016. His brother, Mushfikur Rahman, witnessed the arrest:

It was around 9:30 p.m. I was asleep in my house at Sukhan Pukur village in Rangpur, when five to six men came and said that they wanted to talk to me and Akhter about the Union Parishad elections that had just taken place. I said that my brother was at his in-laws’ house in Birbiria. The men, dressed in plainclothes, then put me inside a white microbus, taking away my cell phone. I took the men to Akhter’s in-laws’ house. I was asked to call Akhter’s name. When Akhter’s wife Romana opened the door, we all went inside. The men then said that they were members of DB and that they needed to take Akhter away and talk to him, as he could help locate some other people, and that he would be returned after an hour.

Both of us were then taken inside the microbus. They told Akhter, who was anxious, to stay calm, as otherwise we would be blindfolded and handcuffed. The microbus then stopped in front of Pirgacha Union Parishad Office and the men told me to get off. They also returned my cell phone. I asked them to let my brother go along with me, but the men said, “We have your phone number and we will communicate with you when we need to.”¹²⁹

The next day, Akhter’s family searched for him at the police station and local DB and RAB offices. All denied involvement in his detention. On May 6, Mushfikur said he went to the Pirgachha police station to file a GD but was told he could only file a missing person

¹²⁸ “Five Huji Suspects Placed on Remand,” *The Daily Star*, December 13, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/five-huji-suspects-placed-remand-1329490> (accessed January 9, 2016).

¹²⁹ Telephone interview with Mushfikur Rahman, January 14, 2017.

complaint. Two months after he was disappeared, on July 1, police said Akhter was arrested in Dhaka, and that he was a member of the JMB.

Monirul Islam Babu, Abdullah Al Sayem Turjo and Shoaib Biswas

On May 12, 2016, Monirul Islam Babu, 28, Abdullah Al Sayem Turjo, 25, and Shoaib Biswas, 26, were picked up in and around Kalishpur in Khulna, where they are all from.¹³⁰ On June 12, one month later, the police claimed they were arrested in Dhaka for militancy.¹³¹

Shoaib Biswas, a teacher in the Arabic Department at Bismillah Nagar Madrasa, was detained in the morning on his way to work. His father, Maulana Abdus Sattar, spoke with his son when he was subsequently taken to court:

He told me that he was going to the madrasa on his bicycle when he was picked up by a few men in plainclothes and taken in a white microbus on which it was written, “Emergency Electricity.”¹³²

Abdullah Al Sayem Turjo is a teacher at the Bismillah Nagar Madrasa in Harintana, Khulna. His colleague, Mufti Hafizur Rahman, said:

On May 12 at around 6:15 p.m., both of us left the madrasa on our bicycles. When we reached close to Mostor intersection, a 50-year-old man blocked our way. A white microbus with a sticker “Emergency Electricity” was parked there. The person asked for our names. Then the man asked me to leave and told Turjo to stay. I saw some people came down from the microbus and grab Turjo and put him on the microbus. Then the microbus stopped in front of me and they took away my cell phone and left.¹³³

¹³⁰ “3 youths go missing being picked up by ‘detectives,’” *New Age*, May 19, 2016, <http://archive.newagebd.net/230836/3-youths-go-missing-being-picked-up-by-detectives/> (accessed January 17, 2017).

¹³¹ “Abducted a month back, trio arrested with machetes,” *TerrorismWatchBangladesh*, <http://www.terrorismwatchbangladesh.us/2016/06/abducted-month-back-trio-arrested-with.html>

¹³² Telephone interview with Maulana Abdus Sattar, January 12, 2017.

¹³³ Telephone interview with Mufti Hafizur Rahman, January 12, 2017.

The next day, Turjo's father filed a case at the Harintana police station alleging that some unknown people had kidnapped his son.¹³⁴

Monirul Islam Babu is an electrician who was picked up from his home. His mother, Khadiza Begum, witnessed the incident. She said:

At around 9 p.m. a man came to our home. When Monirul came out, the man asked whether he was Monirul. The man then left without saying anything. A few minutes later, over 10 people came to the house accompanied by the person who had come earlier. They forcibly took Monirul. When we tried to stop them, they claimed to be members of DB. Some of them had pistols in their waist. They told us that Monirul will be released after he had identified some people. They then dragged Monirul into a white microbus marked "Emergency Electricity." They asked us to communicate with Khalishpur police station and left quickly.¹³⁵

The following day, the family filed a GD with the Khalishpur police station. When he was eventually produced in court after a month-long secret detention, Monirul Islam spoke to his father and told him that "they were blindfolded inside the microbus and traveled a long way. They were kept in a dark room, but not blindfolded or handcuffed."¹³⁶

Rashidun Nabi Bhuiyan (Tipu)

Rashidun Nabi Bhuiyan, 31, also known as Tipu, was living at his village home in the district of Comilla. His wife, Tahera Taslima, said that on the night of May 19, 2016, some uniformed and plainclothes officers raided their house at about 1:30 a.m.:

We were woken by the sound of vehicles and people's voices, and then around 15 to 20 police and others stormed into our house. They showed me a photo and asked me, "Do you know that person?" I replied, "Yes, he is my husband." My husband then came out of the room. They tied his hands and blindfolded him. I went outside the house and urged them not to take him

¹³⁴ Telephone interview with Maulana Abdus Sattar, January 16, 2017.

¹³⁵ Telephone interview with Khadiza Begum, January 12, 2017.

¹³⁶ Telephone interview with Masudur Rahman, January 16, 2017.

away, and one of the police officials in uniform told me that my husband was a criminal who had killed two bloggers.¹³⁷

The following morning, Tipu's family members went to the local Nangalkot police station find out whether he had been detained. "The police insisted that they didn't know anything about the incident," his wife said.¹³⁸

In subsequent months, family members met police and RAB officials many times, but no one provided information on Tipu's whereabouts. On October 16, 2016, five months after Tipu's detention, police in Dhaka held a press conference claiming that he had been arrested the previous night at the Sayedabad bus station in Dhaka. Police claimed that Tipu was a leader of the Islamic militant organization, Ansar al-Islam, and that he led the team of five men who attacked Nazimuddin Samad, a university law student and secular activist, on April 6, 2016. Police said Tipu had confessed and had provided the names of his accomplices and information on the subsequent murder of gay rights activists, Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy, on April 28.

Brothers Ashfaq-e-Azam Apel and Azharul Hannan

Ashfaq-e-Azam Apel, 27, a recently graduated software engineer, lived in his family home in the city of Rangpur. His father, Shamsul Hoque, said that in the early hours of June 7, 2016, Ashfaq was picked up from the family home by law enforcement officials in front of him and three other family members. He said:

Plainclothes dressed men introducing themselves as from the "administration" came to our house between 1:30 a.m. and 1:45 a.m. As we opened the door, they—two of them carrying firearms—told me that they needed to interrogate my son and that he will be returned soon. I allowed them to take my son. They put my son into a microbus which was escorted by two motorbikes and another SUV. They took away his mobile phone.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Telephone interview with Tahera Taslima, September 28, 2016.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Telephone interview with Shamsul Hoque, June 11, 2016.

In the morning, the family went to the DB office in Rangpur and the local police station, but they all denied Ashfaq's arrest. The Kotwali police station refused to accept a GD from the father and so he instead filed a missing person report. "I also approached RAB-13 office but they also denied arresting my son," the father said. They said, "We don't have him."¹⁴⁰ On February 1, 2017, seven months after he was originally picked up, RAB said that they had arrested Ashfaq along with three other men following a raid on a hideout in Dhaka. RAB claimed that the men belonged to the JMB and that Ashfaq was "the group's IT expert. He was in charge of maintaining websites and providing technical support."¹⁴¹

Shamsul Hoque also said that on January 3, 2017, his younger son, Azharul Hannan, a marine engineer who was present when Ashfaq was picked up in June, was detained in Chittagong. Men put him in handcuffs when he stepped out of the Navy Fleet Club, a navy-run hotel, where he was attending a conference organized by the Military Institute of Science and Technology. Hoque said that police at Bandar police station refused to file a GD, citing an instruction from "high ups." The family have not heard anything more from him.¹⁴²

Rashid Gazi and Kamruzzaman Sagor

Rashid Gazi, 22, a second-year student at Jessore University Science and Technology, and Kamruzzaman Sagor, 22, a student at Jessore MM College, were staying at a private hostel when they were picked up on afternoon of June 19, 2016. Authorities denied the detention at first, and the students were held illegally for nearly a month. RAB eventually claimed that they were arrested on July 14.

Ripon Sardar, Rashid's uncle, talked with the two men when they were at the police station and when they were brought to court. Sardar said that they told him:

Five to six men in plainclothes, identifying themselves as members of DB, picked up them in a white microbus on June 19. They were blindfolded and handcuffed. The microbus stopped somewhere and another person in the same condition was put next to them. The three were taken into a room

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ "Neo-JMB IT expert and three others held in Dhaka," *Financial Express*, February 1, 2017 <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2017/02/01/60652/Neo-JMB-IT-expert-held> (accessed April 27, 2017).

¹⁴² Telephone interviews with Shamsul Hoque, January 16 and 18, 2017.

where they were kept blindfolded and handcuffed. A few days later, Rashid and Kamruzzaman heard some heated words exchanged which was followed by a gunshot. They never saw or heard the third person again.¹⁴³

Hasnat Karim and Tahmid Khan

Armed gunmen attacked the Holey Artisan Bakery on the night of July 1, 2016, killing more than 20 people and holding others inside hostage. The next morning, the hostages were rescued after security forces stormed the café, killing the gunmen. The hostages were taken to DB headquarters, where they were questioned by the authorities. This included Hasnat Karim, 47, who had gone to the restaurant with his wife and two children, and Tahmid Khan, 22, who had gone to the restaurant with two friends.

While all the other hostages were released, Karim and Khan were held illegally for a month with the authorities issuing contradictory statements about whether the men were in their custody. Karim has dual nationality with the UK, while Khan is a Canadian resident. On July 13, 2016, nearly two weeks into his illegal detention, Karim briefly met with his wife and mother.¹⁴⁴

On the evening of August 3, police informed the media that both men had been arrested in Dhaka that day on suspicion of involvement in the Holey attack. The following day, they were brought to a magistrate court which passed an order remanding both into police custody for eight days for questioning. In October, the police told the court that it no longer believed that Khan was involved in the Holey attack, but filed a case against him for “a lack of cooperation with the policing authority,” claiming that he failed to appear at two police interviews on July 10 and 21, a period when he was in state custody.¹⁴⁵ In April 2017, a court acquitted him of this charge. Karim, however, remains in jail on a case filed relating to the Holey attack.

¹⁴³ Telephone interview with Ripon Sardar, January 14, 2017.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with family members, August 9, 2016. See also, “Bangladesh: Charge or Release Holey Attack Hostages,” Human Rights Watch news release, July 15, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/15/bangladesh-charge-or-release-hole-attack-hostages>.

¹⁴⁵ Shanifa Nasser, “Tahmid Khan to return to Bangladesh court after acquittal on terror charges for ‘lack of cooperation,’” *CBC News*, October 3, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/tahmid-khan-to-return-to-bangladesh-court-after-acquittal-on-terror-charges-for-lack-of-cooperation-1.3789488> (accessed January 7, 2017).

Humam Quader Chowdhury

Humam Quader Chowdhury, 33, is the son of Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, a prominent leader of the BNP who was executed in November 2015 following his conviction for war crimes. Humam Chowdhury is also involved in BNP politics. On the morning of August 4, 2016, he was traveling with his mother to the Dhaka District Court where they were both due to attend a hearing involving a cybercrime case alleging their involvement in the leak of the judgment convicting Humam's father for war crimes.¹⁴⁶ Humam's mother, Farhat Quader Chowdhury, said:

It was about 11:30 in the morning. We were on the way to court. Just before you get to the court you have to turn right. The traffic signal was red, so we stopped. The road was quite crowded. A couple of men came up dressed in plainclothes, and opened the door on the right. They asked my son whether he was Humam Quader Chowdhury and he replied that he was Humam, but that he had to go to court. They said, "No, you are coming with us." Humam then got down from the car. I didn't know what to do. They did not seem to have a car—as far as I could see they were walking him down the road.¹⁴⁷

On February 24, 2017, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances issued a statement calling on the Bangladesh government to provide information as to the whereabouts of three men, including Humam.¹⁴⁸ A week later, on March 2, Humam was released blindfolded and disoriented on the roadside, close to his family home in Dhaka. Humam was unable to explain the location where he had been held.

¹⁴⁶ Humam and his mother were both prosecuted under the Information, Communication and Technology Act, 2006, for offenses involved in the leaking of a draft of the court judgment convicting Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury of crimes committed in the 1971 independence war. After Humam was secretly detained, the court, on September 15, 2016, acquitted both him and his mother. See "Salauddin Quader's wife, son acquitted in verdict leak case," Dhaka Tribune, September 15, 2016, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/09/15/salauddin-quaders-lawyer-gets-10yr-jail-verdict-leak-case/> (accessed December 18, 2016).

¹⁴⁷ Telephone interview with Farhat Quader Chowdhury, August 10, 2016. See also, David Bergman and Muktedir Rashid, "Bangladesh: Sons of convicted war criminals detained," *Al Jazeera*, August 11, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/bangladesh-sons-convicted-war-criminals-detained-160811134823481.html> (accessed December 18, 2016).

¹⁴⁸ "UN expert group urges Bangladesh to stop enforced disappearances," United Nations news release, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21220&LangID=E>.

Mohammad Akhtaruzzaman and Mohammad Hafizur Rahman

Mohammad Akhteruzzaman, 15, and Mohammad Hafizur Rahman, 17, both students at Kolabari Dakhil Madrasa at Ghoraghat in Dinajpur, were picked up within a week of each other. In November 2016, their fathers held a joint press conference at Dinajpur Press Club.

Akhtaruzzaman's father, Sarowar Hossain, an agricultural worker and small businessman, said that his son was picked up from his family house early in the morning on September 28, 2016, by law enforcement officials:

They said they wanted to question Akhtaruzzaman. I asked them what offense did Akhteruzzaman commit? But they did not answer. My son was sleeping in his grandfather's house. I woke him up and handed him over to the men.¹⁴⁹

On October 16, Sarowar Hossain filed a GD at his local police station in Ghoraghat Upazilla stating that his son had gone "missing." At the press conference on November 6, he appealed to the government for his son's return. At the same press conference, Zillur Rahman, father of Hafizur Rahman, said that his son was picked up on October 4:

At approximately 6 p.m., a group of people introducing themselves as members of a law enforcement force came to my grocery shop situated at Raniganj bazaar and, in my absence, took my son away.¹⁵⁰

On November 23, RAB brought both Akhtaruzzaman and Hafizur Rahman—along with one other man from the same madrasa—to an "anti-militancy" function in Rangpur, and said that the men were JMB operatives who had surrendered to the authorities. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan handed over a check for 500,000 taka (US\$6,200) to each of the men for their "rehabilitation."¹⁵¹ A RAB press release said that Hafizur Rahman and

¹⁴⁹ Statement of Sarowar Hossain, November 6, 2016. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁵⁰ Statement of Zillur Rahman, November 6, 2016. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁵¹ In July 2016, RAB announced that it would provide financial rewards to militants who surrendered to the authorities and provided information. In October, RAB announced that two militants would become the first to surrender as part of this scheme. See "Tk 10 lakh reward for militant who returns to normal life: Rab," *The Daily Star*, July 18, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/country/joint-drive-against-militants-underway-bogra-1255552>. See also, "Bangladesh: Two Militants Become First to Surrender Under Cash-Incentive Program," *BenarNews*, October 5, 2016, <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/militant-incentive-10052016151827.html> (accessed May 2, 2017).

Akhtaruzzaman were brainwashed and radicalized by a JMB recruiter and assigned to carry out subversive activities. They had decided to surrender to law enforcers after the Gulshan and Sholakia attacks, and family members who inspired them to surrender took the two young men to RAB, the release said.¹⁵²

Hafizur Rahman's father gave a different account of the Rangpur event, stating that he first came to know about the ceremony when RAB told him to be present. He said he does not know where his son has been kept since the ceremony:

I first spoke to my son on the phone 25 days after the ceremony and have since had further conversations. The last time he called me was on January 13, when he asked me about my health and hanged up. That's it. I have no idea where my son is.¹⁵³

Khairul Islam

Khairul Islam, 26, a student at the Islamic University of Technology, was living with his family in Gazipur. His father, Abul Kashem, said men wearing jackets with "DB" written on them came to their house around midnight on the evening of October 21, 2016:

They said that they were looking for Khairul. I asked them to show any warrant of arrest but they replied that the SP [police superintendent] has asked them to take him away.¹⁵⁴

However, seven days later, on October 28, 2016, police claimed to have arrested four suspected members of the banned organization Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Bangladesh (HuJI-B), along with 14 petrol bombs and four crude bombs in the Nandoain area of Gazipur city. One of them was Khairul, who had been in their custody one week already. The police superintendent in Gazipur said the members of the banned militant outfit were arrested

¹⁵² "3 JMB men surrender to Home Boss," *The Daily Star*, November 24, 2017, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/3-jmb-men-surrender-home-boss-1319554> (accessed January 17, 2017).

¹⁵³ Telephone interviews with Zillur Rahman, January 14 and 18, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Telephone interview with Abul Kashem, January 14, 2017.

during a raid at an abandoned cottage inside a forest in Joydevpur at about 8 p.m. the previous day.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ “Four Huji-B men held in Gazipur,” *The Daily Star*, October 29, 2016, <https://dev.thedailystar.net/backpage/four-huji-b-men-held-gazipur-1306099> (accessed January 17, 2017).

III. Cases of 19 “Disappeared” since 2013

The 19 cases of enforced disappearances that occurred over a two-week period at the end of 2013, described in detail below, show the failure of authorities to address allegations and ensure accountability.¹⁵⁶ Some of these men, all Dhaka-based supporters or activists of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, may have been involved in wrongful actions during the violent election-time protests that began a month before their disappearance. Their family members say that if suspected of criminal action, they should have been prosecuted. Their families have made repeated appeals to the government, visited DB and RAB offices, and sought police investigations.

November 28: Disappearance of Samarat Molla and Khaled Hossain Sohel

On the morning of November 28, 2013, six friends living in Old Dhaka had gone to visit a mutual friend imprisoned in Dhaka Central Jail. Five of them were picked up outside the jail by men in civilian clothes. The sixth member of the group was spared because he had left minutes earlier to perform his prayers.

This case is unusual as three of the friends, who were supporters rather than post-holders of the BNP, were later released and therefore became witnesses to the detention. The other two, Samarat Molla, 27, and Khaled Hossain Sohel, 28, who held posts in the student wing of the opposition BNP, remain disappeared at time of writing.

The Pick Up

On the morning of November 28, Samarat Molla, Khaled Hossain Sohel, and four other BNP supporters—named here “W,” “X,” “Y,” and “Z”—went to the Dhaka Central Jail to visit their mutual friend Sonjoy.¹⁵⁷ All of them lived in Sutrapur, an area in Old Dhaka.

The men came to the prison in two groups at around 11 a.m.: Y, W, and Z in one group, and Samarat, Sohel, and X in another. They obtained “jail tokens” and entered the prison at

¹⁵⁶ The human rights group Odhikar reported a total of 53 disappearances in 2013.

¹⁵⁷ The identities of the four men have been anonymized for their safety. Human Rights Watch reconstructed the detention based on their account.

around noon. Their friend Sonjoy, however, was not brought to the prison meeting room, and after 20 minutes they left the jail.

According to W, X, and Y—the men who were subsequently released—at around 1:15 p.m., Z wanted to say his prayers and went to a nearby mosque, leaving the five friends standing outside the jail. Y then told the others that he had some work and started to leave the prison area. As Y walked away, two men in civilian clothes approached him. He then walked back with about six men following him. Four men, who were all in civilian clothes and did not appear to have any weapons on them, asked each of them their names. “When Samarat Molla gave his name, it was clear from the men’s response that they were most interested in him,” one witness said. “They took all five of us to a silver colored microbus which was standing just outside the jail wall.”¹⁵⁸

According to Samarat Molla’s family members, W, X, and Y later told them that the men had beat up Samarat, accusing him of arson attacks.

After nine days, on December 7, W, X and Y, who were not BNP post-holders, were told that they would be released the following day. They were warned against talking about their detention. At about midnight, the three of them were put into a car. The car stopped after about an hour and a half, and they were pushed out of the vehicle and told to run. They later discovered they were in Bikrampur.¹⁵⁹



Khaled Hossain Sohel, disappeared since November 28, 2013. © Private



Samarat Molla, disappeared since November 28, 2013. © Private

¹⁵⁸ Interview with witness “W,” details withheld, Dhaka, October 21, 2014.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with witnesses, Dhaka, October 21, 2014.

Samarat Molla and Khaled Hossain Sohel remain disappeared.

State Response

A day before he was picked up, police had visited Khaled Hossain Sohel's house in Bangla Bazaar where he usually lived with his wife. The BNP student activist, who according to his family had no criminal cases filed against him, was residing elsewhere in order to avoid arrest. After the police left the house, Sohel's wife, Sayeed Shammi Sultana, said she phoned her husband to warn him.¹⁶⁰

Sultana discovered her husband was missing after his colleague, Selim Reza Pintu, said that Sohel's phone was not reachable.¹⁶¹ Fearing he had been arrested, family members and friends started contacting different police stations. Meanwhile, Samarat's family first heard that the men had been picked up by law enforcement authorities late at night on November 28 when they received a call from a friend.¹⁶²

The following day, Sultana lodged a missing person complaint at the Chowk Bazaar police station.¹⁶³ Meanwhile, Samarat's sister said that she was initially told she could not file a General Diary if she alleged detention by law enforcement authorities, and was told to come back the next day where she was only allowed to lodge a missing person GD.

Sohel's wife, Sultana, said that she and others assumed that DB officials were responsible as the men who took the five friends were not in uniform, which is usually true of the DB. However, at DB headquarters officers denied the men were in their custody. "The first question the police asked was whether they had any political affiliations. They seemed reluctant to speak to us and told us not to hang round here," Sultana said. She said she and other family members continued to visit the DB office. "The last time we went was the tenth day after they were taken [December 8], and were told not to bother coming."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Sayeed Shammi Sultana, Dhaka, May 9, 2016.

¹⁶¹ Pintu was subsequently picked up on December 11, see below.

¹⁶² Interview with Kaliz Fatima, Samarat's older sister, and Taslima Begum, Samarat's mother, Dhaka, October 10, 2016.

¹⁶³ Ibid. The GD, filed by Sultana at the Chowk Bazaar police station, states that her husband "went to Dhaka Central Jail ... to see a convict. Since then there is no news of him."

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Sayeed Shammi Sultana, Dhaka, May 9, 2016.

On December 8, three of the friends who had been taken with Sohel were released. One of the men phoned Sultana and she met with him to find out what had happened to her husband. All three are still in hiding at time of writing.

In May 2014, six months after the men disappeared, the police set up a 40-member anti-kidnapping team, and Sultana lodged an application.¹⁶⁵ Soon after, she met with an additional deputy commissioner of police who put her in touch with an official from DB. However, both families have received no further information about the whereabouts or fate of Samarat or Sohel.

December 2: Disappearance of Four Men from Shishu Park

In the early afternoon of December 2, 2013, seven activists of the BNP's student wing, all residents of the Bangshal area in Dhaka, congregated inside the Suhrawardy Udyan park in central Dhaka. They included Mahfuzur Rahman Sohel Sarkar, 35, the Chhatra Dal vice-president of Bangshal Thana; Habibul Bashar Zahir, 27, and Parvez Hossain, 27, the president and secretary of BNP ward 71; and Md Hossain Chanchal, 32, a student wing member.

Five of the activists—including the four men named above—walked to a nearby restaurant at an intersection in central Dhaka known as Shahbagh, while the other two went to the neighboring Shishu Park to purchase tickets so that after lunch they could meet inside.¹⁶⁶ As the five men left the Shahbagh restaurant and walked back toward Shishu Park, four of them—Sohel, Zahir, Parvez, and Chanchal—were picked up by law enforcement officers dressed in civilian dress and bundled into a microbus. Two of the three remaining men witnessed the detention and asked not to be identified. The four men who were picked up have not been seen since.

Habibul Bashar Zahir

¹⁶⁵ This was set up after seven men were picked up by RAB officers in Narayanganj and their bodies were found in April 2014. "DMP forms anti-kidnapping squad," *The Daily Star*, May 3, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/dmp-forms-anti-kidnapping-squad-22540> (accessed December 21, 2016).

¹⁶⁶ Three of the seven activists escaped arrest but witnessed the detention. These events have been reconstructed based on interviews with these three men.

The Pick Up

One of the men present at the restaurant, along with the other four who were disappeared, said that that the group had planned to meet at Shishu Park because they considered it safe. He said security forces caught up with them as they were leaving the restaurant:

I was the first to leave, and I noticed as I left that there were two minibuses parked ahead of us, but I got distracted because I received a phone call. I slowed down and the others went ahead of me. As they got closer to Shishu Park they came to an area of pavement where there are boundary railings of Shishu Park on the right and on the left, another set of railings which separate the pavement from the road. As they entered this area, I suddenly heard someone shouting, “Catch them, catch them.” The men could not escape as there were these railings on both sides. As this was happening, I had not quite reached the part of the pavement [with the railings] and so I could cross the road, which is what I did. I saw my friends being grabbed and put into a microbus by men dressed in plainclothes.¹⁶⁷

As soon as the vehicles disappeared, the witness called his political colleagues to warn them to stay away from Shishu Park.¹⁶⁸ One of the two men that had been waiting inside the main entrance of the park also witnessed the detention.¹⁶⁹



Mahfuzur Rahman Sohel Sarkar, disappeared since December 2, 2013. © Private



Habibul Bashar Zahir, disappeared since December 2, 2013. © Private

¹⁶⁷ Interviews, details withheld, November 25, 2014, and September 5, 2016.

¹⁶⁸ One of the men that he called, Ujjal, was picked up later that same day, but Ujjal was produced in court.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with witness, details withheld, November 24, 2014.

State Response

Sohel's father, Md Shamsul Rahman, said that he received a call from one of his son's colleagues who witnessed his son's detention. He said he then tried to find his son:

After I had finished the call, another son of mine called Sohel's phone. It was answered but there was a lot of noise and crying. I went to Shahbagh police station and asked whether four people had been taken, but the police denied this. I found someone who I knew at the police station, and he showed me the cells and said, "Look, he is not there." I tried to file a GD at the station but the police did not allow me to do that. I went the following day to the DB office but they said that they were not involved and had no information.¹⁷⁰

Rahman was later able to file a GD in his local police station in Bangshal, but the police only allowed him to file a missing person complaint, and not allege that his son was taken by law enforcement officers.¹⁷¹

Parvez's wife, Farzeena Akhter, said her husband had about six criminal cases lodged against him, which she claimed were all false allegations for his political activities.¹⁷² When she and other family members went to the DB office, they were not allowed into the building. The family filed a missing person GD on December 14, 2013, at the police station.



Md Hossain Chanchal, disappeared since December 2, 2013. © Private



Parvez Hossain, disappeared since December 2, 2013. © Private

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Shamsul Rahman, Dhaka, October 15, 2014.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. The GD, filed on January 7, 2014, at Bangshal Thana, states that Sohel "went out of the house but never came back.... Even after searching every possible place, we did not find any trace of him."

¹⁷² Interviews with Farzeena Akhter, Dhaka, October 15, 2014, and May 9, 2016.

Chanchal's wife, Reshma Akhter, said that when her husband, who she said had no criminal cases against him, did not return as planned for a family outing, she started calling him but his phone was switched off.¹⁷³ She finally called Anwar Hossain, Chanchal's brother. Anwar went to the police but was told that they had not arrested anyone by that name.¹⁷⁴ Chanchal's relatives also went to the DB and RAB offices, but the officials denied having him in custody. They lodged a missing person GD on December 22.

Zahir's brother, Kamal Hossain, who said that his brother had as many as 25 criminal cases of a "political" nature against him, said that the police only allowed him to file a missing person GD, which he did on December 14.¹⁷⁵

A day or two after the four men were picked up, a local businessman said he saw the four men detained at the DB office:

On December 3, I visited the DB office at about 3 p.m. to meet a friend of mine who worked there. While I was there, I saw a man detained inside the DB office. On the following day, Sohel's father came to meet me and said that his son and three others had been picked up by the police. Sohel's father showed me a photograph and I recognized him as being the same person who I had seen the previous day in the DB office. I returned to the DB office a day or so later to confirm this. I made another appointment with the DB officer. I did not go directly to his office but went to an area on the ground floor, and I saw about seven detained men. Subsequently, I saw the photographs of the three other men that were picked up and they were of the same men that I had seen inside.¹⁷⁶

The businessman then discovered that Sohel was thought to be "Chacha Sohel," someone the authorities considered to be "notorious" in the area.

¹⁷³ Interview with Reshma Akhter, Dhaka, May 16, 2016.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Anwar Hossain, Dhaka, October 15 2014.

¹⁷⁵ The GD, filed at the Bangshal police station by Zahir's older brother, Kamal Hossain, states: "My younger brother went out of the house just like every other day. Later on at 2 p.m. when I called his cell phone number he told me that he was in the TSC arena. Afterwards I found his phone switched off. After searching every possible place we have found no trace of him."

¹⁷⁶ Interview with witness, details withheld, Dhaka, October 9, 2016.

A senior police officer told me that there are strict instructions from the Prime Minister's Office that Chacha Sohel should not be released because of his crimes. He then told me not to get involved. I called a friend in the Detective Branch with the rank of inspector and he advised me not to call again on this matter to avoid trouble. I was frightened and stopped communication with the BNP people.¹⁷⁷

The businessman said that he also introduced the relatives of some of the families to a retired major, who said that he was willing to help intervene in the case.

On around the 13th of December, I brought the major [name withheld] to meet Sohel's father. The father explained what happened to his son and the three other men. The major then called one of his friends serving in DB, and it was on speakerphone and I heard what was said. One official said, "Yes, Sohel was in our custody and we kept him for observation." But he said that Sohel was no longer in the DB office, and that he did not where he is.¹⁷⁸

December 4: Disappearance of Six Men from Bashundhara

At about 8 p.m. on December 4, 2013, six men were picked up outside a building under construction in Dhaka's Bashundhara Residential Area.

The six men picked up were Sajedul Islam Sumon, 36, the general secretary of BNP ward 38 in Shaheen Bagh; Sumon's cousin, Zahidul Karim Tanvir, 33, whose family owned the under-construction property; Mazharul Islam Russel, 26, Md Al Amin, 26, and Asaduzzaman Rana, 27, three students at Jagannath University who were preparing to take the civil service examinations; and Abdul Quader Bhuiyan Masum, 22, a finance student at Titumir College. Sumon was the only post-holder for the BNP, and according to family

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

members, the only one with a criminal case filed against him; the others were all supporters and activists. There were two other men present at the time, but they managed to escape.

The Pick Up

One of the two men who escaped said that the meeting had been called by Sumon. RAB officers arrived soon after:

For 40 or 45 minutes we were chatting. We were talking about the momentum of protest. After that, four of the men left by foot, leaving four of us—Tanvir, Sumon, myself, and [name withheld] behind. Two of us then went to the other side of a cement mixing machine to have a smoke. Suddenly we saw vehicles approaching. There was more than one car, but I can't say exactly how many. There were some men in black uniforms who came out of the vehicles. They had weapons. The cars had their lights on so I could see the men, the color of their uniform. There was one car with "RAB-1" written on it. I am sure that it was definitely RAB because of the clothes, and because I saw RAB-1 logo on the car. I could make out that people were being taken into a vehicle and that it left.¹⁷⁹



Sajedul Islam Sumon, disappeared since December 4, 2013. © Private



Zahidul Karim Tanvir, disappeared since December 4, 2013. © Private

A construction worker at the site who witnessed the detention said he knew Tanvir because the family owned the property and had seen Sumon earlier. He said:

¹⁷⁹ Interviews, details withheld, Dhaka, November 30, 2014, and May 14, 2016.

Tanvir and Sumon were still standing there talking when the vehicles came. Four of the men [who came down from the vehicle] wore civil dress and another seven or eight were dressed in the black clothing of RAB, with a cloth around head. All the men had guns. Sumon and Tanvir were both beaten up before they were put in the car. “Why you are arresting us, we are not these type of people,” they said at the time of being picked up.¹⁸⁰

Six hours later, early the following morning, a contractor said he was returning from a night shift to Shaheen Bagh, the area where Sumon’s family lives, when he saw Sumon, whom he knew well, inside a car that he thought belonged to law enforcement authorities.¹⁸¹

State Response

Sumon was not at that time staying at his home in Shaheen Bagh because he feared arrest, and was instead living with his cousin, Tanvir, at their apartment in Bashundhara Residential Area. Sumon’s sister, Sanjida Islam, said that they first heard that Sumon had been picked up when her family in Shaheen Bagh received a call from her aunt, Tanvir’s mother:

My aunt said that it was RAB. Within half an hour my older sister, my husband, and my mother went to the RAB office in Uttara. I was



Mazharul Islam Russel, disappeared since December 4, 2013. © Private



Asaduzzaman Rana, disappeared since December 4, 2013. © Private

¹⁸⁰ Interview with construction worker, details withheld, November 23, 2014.

¹⁸¹ Interview with witness, details withheld, November 9, 2014. The contractor knew Sumon as he had been involved in organizing the marriage of his daughters. Shaheen Bagh is about 10 km from Bashundhara Residential Area where the six men were picked up.

pregnant at the time so I did not go. RAB people at the gate did not allow my family members in. The men at the reception denied they were involved in the detention. My sister, father, and mother stayed outside the RAB office throughout that night, and for the next three days one family member or the other was present outside the RAB office.¹⁸²

At about 11 p.m., one of the two men who had escaped being picked up came to their house through the back entrance. He told the family that Sumon had been taken away in RAB vehicles. The following day, Sanjida said that family members went to file a complaint with police:

The next day my mother and older sister went to our local police station in Tejgaon to file a GD but the police said that they had to go to the police station of the PO [place of occurrence]. They then went to Vatara police station but the duty officer refused to allow them to file the GD if they claimed that RAB had taken my brother. They said that they could only give a GD if they said that Sumon was missing. As we did not want to do that, we did not file a GD.¹⁸³

Through family connections, Sumon's family contacted a senior RAB officer [name withheld]:



Md. Al Amin, disappeared since December 4, 2013 © Private



Abdul Quader Bhuiyan Masum, disappeared since December 4, 2013. © Private

¹⁸² Interview with Sanjida Islam, Dhaka, September 22, 2014.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

He began to speak to my mother on the phone, and to send messages. He made her believe that Sumon was going to be released soon. He said for example one day, “He will be with you next time you say your prayers.” Many times, he said that they were going to release Sumon. But nothing happened. This went on for two months.¹⁸⁴

Family members continued go to the RAB-1 office and RAB headquarters. At the end of January, Sumon’s mother and sister were invited to the office to meet an RAB-1 officer. Sanjida said:

He admitted that Sumon had been detained. They praised my brother, saying that Sumon is good person, had a good reputation. He said that his boss had gone to see Sumon recently, to make sure he was all right in their custody. He suggested to us that we should communicate with Ziaul Ahsan, who was in charge of operations. He gave Ahsan’s land line and mobile number to my mother. When we met Ziaul Ahsan, he was very arrogant. He said, “Why are so many army officials calling about Sumon? We have told you that we don’t have him and that we are searching for him.”¹⁸⁵

The family gave its first written application to RAB on March 18, 2014, and has since given at least 12 further applications to RAB (most recently on August 21, 2016), and five to other government authorities, including the home ministry, police, and military intelligence. The family has also made a complaint to the National Human Rights Commission and filed a habeas corpus petition in court.

In May 2016, Sanjida met again with one of the RAB officials the family had met earlier, who had been a senior RAB-1 officer at the time of her brother’s disappearance, but had since left. He confirmed in a private meeting at a restaurant that RAB-1 had conducted the operation to pick up Sumon. He said that the six men had been in his custody and that he received an order to kill them, but he refused.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Based on notes taken by Sanjida immediately after the meeting.

According to Sanjida, the official said that RAB's counterterrorism branch—under the command of Lt. Col. Abul Kalam Azad,¹⁸⁷ who subsequently became head of RAB's intelligence wing—took the men from his custody. The official assumed they had been killed.¹⁸⁸ In August 2016, Sanjida met with Azad, but he denied any involvement and, according to Sanjida, said: “We are searching. I will try to let you know whether he is alive or anywhere else.”

Russel's sister, Nusrat Jahan Laboni, said she waited all night for her brother to come home, and in the morning discovered that his friends were missing as well.¹⁸⁹ Family members approached RAB, DB, and various police stations several times but no one had any information about the detentions.¹⁹⁰

Al Amin's father filed a missing person GD at Badda police station that covered the area where they lived.¹⁹¹ The family also managed to file a First Information Report on January 26, 2014.¹⁹² Al Amin's cousin, Yakoob, went to the construction site and the workers recognized his photograph, confirming that Al Amin was detained by RAB-1:

I asked the workers how they knew that it was specifically RAB-1. They said that the security guards who work in that area are a little educated. After Al Amin bhai and his friends were taken away by RAB, the workers went running toward the security guards, and the security guards told them that the vehicles had “RAB-1” written on them.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ Abul Kalam Azad died on March 31, 2017. RAB claimed that he had been killed when a bomb exploded during an anti-militant operation in Sylhet. See Kamrul Hasan and Arifur Rahman Rabi, “RAB intelligence chief Azad dies from Sylhet bomb injuries,” *The Dhaka Tribune*, March 31, 2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2017/03/31/rab-intelligence-chief-azad-dies-sylhet-blast-injuries> (accessed on May 5, 2017).

¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch carried out a detailed interview with Sanjida the day after the meeting, which took place on May 23, 2016. Copy of the text correspondence setting up the meeting on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁸⁹ Interviews with Nusrat Jahan Laboni, October 18, 2013, and May 6, 2016.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. On December 6, 2013, Russel's older brother filed a GD at the Tejgaon police station, stating that Russel had gone missing on December 4. “In the afternoon, he went out and did not come back,” it states. The GD is mistakenly dated November 6. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁹¹ On December 5, 2013, Al Amin's father filed a GD at the Badda police station, stating that Al Amin had gone missing the previous day. “At around 5 in the afternoon, my oldest son, Md Al Amin, left home to go to Bashundhara, and he did not return until now. His mobile phone is switched off,” it states. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁹² Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁹³ Interviews with Yakoob, Dhaka, May 5, 2014, and May 9, 2016.

Yakoob also went to the RAB office, where officials asked questions about witnesses to the abductions:

The RAB officer asked me if I had any record or proof with me about the complaint. I replied to them that I had a recording of the statement that the workers and the caretaker gave. I showed the officer the recording. He took a record of the recording. Then I left the office and came back home. Afterward I again contacted the officer to ask them if he has found anything about them yet. The officer replied that he will call us when it will be time. I called him three more times, but he couldn't tell me anything else.¹⁹⁴

Masum's mother, Ayesha Ali, said the family went to a number of police stations: "They said that no one had been arrested. On December 6, we went to file a GD in Tejgaon industrial area, but they only accepted a GD if we said that he was missing."¹⁹⁵

Rana's sister, Meenara Begum, said that she too went to the police and RAB offices after she heard of the detention. They also filed a police complaint reporting that Rana was missing.¹⁹⁶

Tanvir and Sumon are cousins. Tanvir's mother, Nilifur Rana, also said that she went with her relatives to meet with RAB and DB officers, but everyone denied the detention.¹⁹⁷

National Human Rights Commission

A year after the detentions, in December 2014, Sajedul Islam Sumon's family made a formal complaint to the National Human Rights Commission. On December 17, the then chair of the NHRC wrote to the most senior civil servant of the home ministry setting out the allegation and "appealing to the government to take necessary action to bring back the son of Hazera Khatun and the others to the parents," and to inform NHRC what action the ministry had taken by January 15, 2015.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Ayesha Ali, Dhaka, October 18, 2016.

¹⁹⁶ Interviews with Meenara Begum, Dhaka, October 18, 2014, and May 6, 2016. The GD is dated December 5, 2013, and was filed at the Mugda police station by Meenara Begum. "At around 5 p.m. he went out from my rented house, and until now has not returned home. I have tried to look for him in all possible places including relatives' homes but could not find any trace of him," it states. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Nilifur Rana, Dhaka, November 9, 2014.

¹⁹⁸ Full correspondence of the National Human Rights Commission on file with Human Rights Watch.

The ministry did not respond to this letter or to six other monthly reminders that the NHRC sent. However, on August 28, 2015, the ministry finally replied, stating that Sumon’s father had filed a case with the Vatara police station on January 26, 2014, and that the case was under investigation.¹⁹⁹ In a letter dated November 15, 2015, Sumon’s mother wrote that they had never filed a case of this kind because when they had gone to do so “the police refused to take the case.”²⁰⁰

The NHRC then wrote to the ministry stating that the police report did not contain any specific step as to “how you are trying to get the victims back,” and asked for a detailed report by December 20, 2015. On January 14, 2016, police sent a letter to Sumon’s mother asking her to come to the police station. This meeting never took place. Instead, Sumon’s family sent a note to the police setting out the details of Sumon’s disappearance.

Response from Courts

In March 2016, Sajedul Islam Sumon’s mother filed a habeas corpus petition before the High Court.²⁰¹ She said that her son was illegally detained by RAB. The petition said that authorities had shown no inclination to investigate the incident, and that the court should order government authorities to produce him before the court.

On March 10, 2016, the court passed a *rule nisi* calling upon the Bangladesh government and various policing bodies to “show cause as to why the arrest/abduction/causing disappearance of the petitioner’s son Sajedul Islam Sumon ... should not be declared to be illegal and without lawful jurisdiction,” and pass such orders as the court considers necessary.²⁰²

Following this order, the inspector general of police responded in an affidavit, “It was learnt from the respective units that neither Rapid Action Battalion nor any other unit of Bangladesh Police arrested said Sajedul Islam Sumon.”²⁰³ RAB also filed an affidavit with

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. The case that the ministry and police were referencing had been filed by Al Amin’s family.

²⁰¹ Writ Petition no. 2604/2016.

²⁰² Court order relating to WP 2604/2016, given by Justice Syed Muhammed Dastagir Husain and Justice AKM Shahidul Huq, October 1, 2016.

²⁰³ Affidavit in opposition filed by inspector general of police in WP 2604/2016, in response to order of court.

the court stating, “RAB-1 did not pick up or arrest the petitioner’s son Sajedul Islam Sumon and others,” and that “we are trying to find out the victims.”²⁰⁴

There had been no further court hearing at time of writing, since the High Court passed its order.

Al Amin’s family was the only one to file an FIR involving the abduction.²⁰⁵ His nephew, Yakoob Ali, said that some six months after the case was filed, an officer from the Vatara police station called and asked if the family had received news about Al Amin. “I said that it was the police that were supposed to be the ones providing the information.”²⁰⁶

In response to the court order following the habeas corpus application by Sajedul Islam Sumon’s family, the police filed documents relating to its investigation into Al Amin’s family’s FIR with the court. These stated that after Al Amin’s father filed a case in January 2014, a police inspector had prepared a draft map; taken statements from the petitioner, people in the surrounding area, and a witness; and had collected the victim’s mobile phone records. Police said that three investigating officers had been assigned to, and then taken off, the case. The letter concluded by saying the investigation revealed that along with Al Amin, Sajedul Islam Sumon had been abducted by “an organized criminal gang” that they were trying to identify and catch. It stated: “The case is under investigation and we are deploying modern technologies.”²⁰⁷

Dhaka Metropolitan Police authorities also said that on November 19, 2014, the investigation responsibility was transferred to the Detective Branch of the police.²⁰⁸ In April 2016, following the March court order seeking state response to the habeas corpus petition, DB officials contacted Al Amin’s family and asked to get more information about the incident. Al Amin’s cousin said that the whole exercise was cruel and farcical: “I felt it

²⁰⁴ Affidavit in opposition filed by Lieutenant Colonel Tuhin Mohammad Masud, commanding officer, RAB-1, in WP 2604/2016, in response to order of court, April 4, 2016.

²⁰⁵ Case no. 24, Vatara police station, January 26, 2014.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Yakoob Ali, Dhaka, May 7, 2017.

²⁰⁷ Letter from Zuhair Hossain Khan, detective and crime department north sub-inspector, Uttara Zonal team, to joint commissioner (crime), detective and criminal information department, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, April 11, 2016, annexed to affidavit in opposition filed by the inspector general of police.

²⁰⁸ Documents annexed to the inspector general of police’s affidavit in opposition.

was like a joke—him coming after three years and asking about [my cousin] like this. He said, ‘Don’t worry, you will get justice.’”

December 5: Disappearance of Adnan Chowdhury

Early on December 5, RAB men came to the house of Adnan Chowdhury, 28, woke him up, and took him away in front of his father and wife.

The Pick Up

Chowdhury, a BNP supporter, lived with his wife and parents in Shaheen Bagh, the same area of Dhaka where Sajedul Islam Sumon lived.

Marjina Sultana Tonni, his wife, said that Adnan came home late the night of December 4 after visiting the family of local political leader, Sajedul Islam Sumon, who had been picked up along with five party colleagues.²⁰⁹ Later that night, there was loud knocking, and Adnan’s father, Ruhul Amin Chowdhury, answered the door. He told Human Rights Watch:



Adnan Chowdhury, disappeared since December 5, 2013. © Private

There was a knock on the door at about 2 a.m. When I asked, one of them said that they were from the “administration.” I did not want to open the door, but he said that they were from a government force and so “I must open the door.” There were perhaps 15 to 20 people who came into the house. One of them asked, “Where is Adnan sleeping?” I showed them the room. Some of the men were wearing RAB uniforms with “RAB” written on it on both the front and back. Not all of them were wearing a uniform, some were wearing civil clothes. They told me to sit down in another room.²¹⁰

Adnan’s wife said that soon after, some of the men entered their bedroom. She said:

²⁰⁹ Interview with Marjina Sultana Tonni, Dhaka, October 18, 2014.

²¹⁰ Interviews with Ruhul Amin Chowdhury, Dhaka, October 23, 2014, and May 6, 2016.

When the men opened our door, they asked me to leave the room. I then heard them telling Adnan to change his clothes. I heard some of the men say, “We should talk to his wife and show some sympathy,” but they didn’t talk to me. Some of the men were wearing black uniforms, the uniform of RAB. Others wore civil dress. One had a jacket with the letters “RAB” written on it in yellow. I saw about 5 or 6 people. Some searched the rooms. At one point, one of the men said, “We will send him back.” Another man said to me, “Don’t worry.”²¹¹

Ruhul Amin Chowdhury said the officials asked Adnan some questions and then took him away. Some of the other men also searched the rest of the house, and questioned their tenants. He said that his son “was surprised, but did not appear afraid.” He saw that the forces had arrived in at least two minibuses and a jeep.²¹²

Adnan was a BNP supporter, but he was not particularly politically active. According to his father, Adnan already had a visa and was planning to migrate to Malaysia for work. “Adnan probably didn’t think it was so serious. He didn’t realize that Sumon will be taken and that they will come after him right away,” Ruhul Amin Chowdhury said. “None of us imagined that something like this can happen. That people will disappear.”²¹³

State Response

The next morning, when Adnan, who did not have any criminal cases filed against him according to his family, did not return home, his father went to the RAB-2 office, the DB office, and the Tejgaon police station to look for this son, but no one could provide information.

I went back a number of times [to the police station] over the next month to file a GD, but they did not let me file one if I alleged that RAB was involved. I then agreed to drop the word “RAB” and instead put “law enforcement

²¹¹ Interview with Marjina Sultana Tonni, Dhaka, October 18, 2014.

²¹² Interview with Ruhul Amin Chowdhury, Dhaka, October 23, 2014.

²¹³ Ibid., Dhaka, April 5, 2015.

agency,” but the police still did not allow me to file a GD. As a result, I did not file a GD.²¹⁴

Adnan’s father said that authorities violated his trust:

I was sure that if they [RAB] don’t find anything against Adnan, they will let him go. They said, “We are taking him. We will bring him back.” They betrayed us. They said that they were going to return my son, but they told lies. After the day I visited RAB-1 and RAB-2, I lost all faith in them and did not visit them again. I personally handed over my son to RAB and now they are denying that, so why should I go to them?²¹⁵

Another eyewitness saw Adnan in security force custody when Mohammad Kawser, 22, was detained shortly afterward.

December 5: Disappearance of Mohammad Kawser

Shortly after RAB picked up Adnan Chowdhury, they brought him to identify Mohammad Kawser, 22, a driver who lived in a room in a compound in West Nakhalpara, a short walk from Adnan’s house.

The Pick Up

The gate of the West Nakhalpara compound where Kaswer lived with his wife and child was locked on the night of December 5. The caretaker, who had the key to the gate, said he was asleep at about 3 a.m. when he was woken up by 10 to 15 men asking him to open the gate. They entered the compound. “Many of the men were wearing black uniforms and some had the words ‘RAB’ written on their back,” he said.²¹⁶

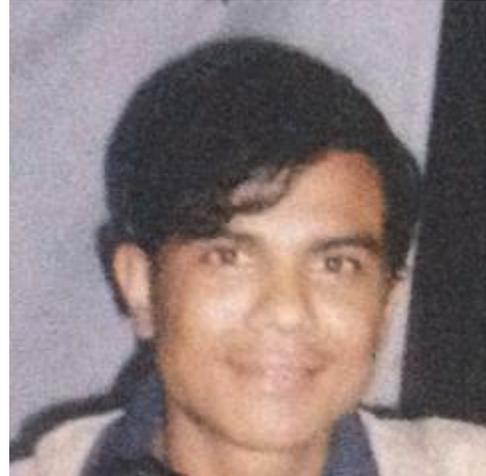
The men went to Kawser’s room. His wife and child were in Barisal with her parents, and two friends were sharing his room that night. One said:

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Interview with witness, details withheld, Dhaka, November 7, 2014.

Kawser came back from work at around midnight with a friend. Until about 1:30 in the morning, we were watching TV and chatting inside the room. Then we all fell asleep. Suddenly we heard someone beating very loudly at the door. I said to Kawser, “Open the door.” But he did not wake up. The other friend opened it and as soon as he opened it about eight or ten people entered the room and put on the light. Two of the men wore black clothes, and the others wore civil dress. Some had RAB vests.²¹⁷



Mohammad Kawser, disappeared since December 5, 2013. © Private

The witness said he saw Adnan, who had just been picked up by RAB officers.

They told Adnan to come inside. They used his name which is how I knew. The men were beating us and getting us to wake up as we were still half asleep. Adnan was in handcuffs and they were beating him, slapping him about. Then they asked Adnan, “Who is Kawser?” and he pointed him out. Then both were beaten. They were both screaming. Then the officers searched the room, and took the SIM cards from our phones. The men perhaps stayed for at most 15 minutes and then took Kawser and Adnan out of the room. They told me and Kaswer’s friend to stay inside. Later, we tried to come out, but the doors had been locked from the outside. We heard the forces beating and shouting at both of them outside.²¹⁸

State Response

Kawser’s mother, Komla Akhter, works in a garment factory and lived in the Farmgate area of Dhaka. She said that one of Kawser’s friends informed her of his detention early in the morning. She went to the Tejgaon police station, where she stayed the whole day: “I tried to lodge a GD but the police refused to accept a complaint that mentioned RAB.”²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Interviews with witness, details withheld, Dhaka, November 8 and 28, 2014.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Interview with Komla Akhter, Dhaka, October 19, 2014.

December 6: Disappearance of Munna and Jhontu

On the evening of December 6, 2013, BNP student activists Nizam Uddin Munna and Tariqul Islam Jhontu were picked up by law enforcement officers at Mollartek bazaar, near Dhaka's international airport. Their whereabouts remain unknown at time of writing.

The Pick Up

Nizam Uddin Munna, 24, was the joint secretary of the BNP student wing at Biman Bandar Thana in Dhaka. Tariqul Islam Jhontu, 28, was the joint secretary of the BNP student wing at Tejgaon College where he was studying. According to his family, Jhontu had three criminal cases lodged against him related to his political activities.

Between 9 and 9:30 p.m. on December 6, Jamal, a local businessman, was walking home after closing his shop when he saw his friend, Jhontu, in front of a laundry shop on the opposite side of the road. Jamal said he spoke briefly to Jhontu before heading home.²²⁰ At about 10 p.m., Mohammad Joshimuddin, the laundry shop owner, was returning to his shop when he saw Jhontu being detained by men in plainclothes. He said:

I saw Jhontu handcuffed and being held by one or two men. I have known Jhontu for around seven years as he is a customer. The men holding Jhontu were in plainclothes, and I am not sure whether they had any weapons. I walked past them without saying anything. I was very scared.²²¹



Nizam Uddin Munna, disappeared since December 6, 2013. © Private



Tariqul Islam Jhontu, disappeared since December 6, 2013. © Private

²²⁰ Interview with Jamal, Dhaka, November 25, 2014.

²²¹ Interview with Mohammad Joshimuddin, Dhaka, October 25, 2014.

Joshimuddin said that after he entered his shop, some men arrived and searched the shop. “They were asking me whether Jhontu kept anything here or not, and they searched everywhere, but did not find anything.”²²² He then saw Jhontu being bundled into a microbus parked down the road. Joshimuddin said that he did not know the contact details of Jhontu’s family, so he contacted Jamal, Jhontu’s friend who owned the shop across the street. Jamal said he informed Jhontu’s family.²²³

Nizam Uddin Munna went outside to buy medicine and vegetables at about 6:30 p.m. on the same day. Three hours later, Munna called his father, Shamsuddin, and asked him to collect the purchases from him. Shamsuddin said he witnessed his son’s arrest:

I met Munna, who gave me a small bag of vegetables and my medicine. All the shops were closed, with only roadside lights on. Then Munna received a call on his mobile. He did not answer, and instead started walking in the direction of a white large microbus, a Mitsubishi, which was standing in front of Halima Pharmacy, which was closed. When my son walked away, I was curious and walked in the same direction to see what Munna was doing. Then I saw about five plainclothes dressed men, carrying weapons, grab Munna and push him into the microbus. Seeing this, I ran toward the microbus and shouted, “Where are you taking my son?” One of the men replied, “There is an allegation against your son.” I asked the men, “Who are you?” One man replied that they were from RAB, but another replied they were from DB. The whole incident hardly took less than a minute. I was pushed away and the microbus moved away with the door open.²²⁴

State Response

Hasina Begum, Jhontu’s mother, said that early the next morning, Jamal, after hearing about the arrest, came and told the family that it was likely that DB had Jhontu in custody.²²⁵ Family members then went to the laundry shop and heard what had happened the night before.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Interview with Jamal, Dhaka, November 25, 2014.

²²⁴ Interview with Shamsuddin, Dhaka, May 14, 2016.

²²⁵ Interview with Hasina Begum, Dhaka, October 16, 2014.

Saiful Islam Mithu, Jhontu's younger brother, went to the court assuming that Jhontu would be brought there, but he was not.²²⁶ He also tried to file a police complaint:

On December 9, after spending the whole day in court, I went to Dokinkan police station. I wanted to mention in a GD that DB had taken my brother but the police officer on duty did not allow this. The duty officer said, "If you want to accuse a law enforcing agency of taking your brother, then you have to specify the name of the person in the DB team member who had picked him up. Otherwise you just file a GD saying that your brother is missing." Since I had no idea about the exact identity of the people who had taken my brother I just filed a GD, stating that my brother had gone missing.²²⁷

Jhontu's brother said he went to several police stations over the next few days but none had any information. He said he went to the RAB offices at least six times, but was not allowed to meet anyone.²²⁸

Munna's father said he decided to go immediately to the RAB office after witnessing his son's arrest. The guards would not let him in, but he waited outside the gates from about 10 p.m. to midnight. He said he then went to the DB office, and waited in front of the gate all night, trying to look into every vehicle that came and went. He then tried to lodge a police complaint, but was not allowed:

I approached the local police station. The duty officer told me that the police would not allow a complaint against RAB or any law enforcing agency. I was told that if I wanted to file a GD I would have to describe that my son went missing.²²⁹

²²⁶ Interviews with Saiful Islam Mithu, Dhaka, October 25, 2014, and May 16, 2016.

²²⁷ On December 9, 2013, Jhunta's mother, Hasina Begum, filed a GD at Dokinkan police station stating that her son had gone missing. "Around 10:30 at night on 6.12.13, he went out of the home to go to the shop, and never returned," it states. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

²²⁸ Interviews with Saiful Islam Mithu, Dhaka, October 25, 2014, and May 16, 2016.

²²⁹ Interview with Shamsuddin, Dhaka, May 14, 2016.

December 7: Disappearance of Sujon and Farhad

On December 7, 2013, Mahabub Hasan Sujon, president of the BNP student wing in Sabujbagh Thana in Dhaka, and Kazi Farhad, president of one of its wards, were taken from a farmhouse in Sonargaon, an area just outside Dhaka. The two men had arrived there two days earlier and were planning to return the next morning. They remain disappeared.



Mahabub Hasan Sujon, disappeared since December 7, 2013. © Private

The Pick Up

Azad Md Sadequl Islam, a childhood friend of Sujon, said he received a call on December 5. Sujon, he said, was worried about being arrested, and asked if he could stay at Azad's farmhouse in Sonargaon with his BNP friends for a few days over the weekend.²³⁰ Azad joined them at the farmhouse but left for Dhaka in the evening of December 7, as he had work the following day. Later that night, one of his farmworkers called him to tell him police had taken Sujon away:



Kazi Farhad, disappeared since December 7, 2013. © Private

I asked him if it was police, or DB, or RAB, but he couldn't tell for sure. He said that men were in civilian clothes and had claimed to be police. He said when Sujon asked them to show the arrest papers, one of the policemen must have hit him, because the laborers heard Sujon cry out.²³¹

One of the workers who witnessed the arrest said that five or six plainclothes men knocked on their door when they were sleeping:

²³⁰ Interview with Azad Md Sadequl Islam, Dhaka, October 20, 2014.

²³¹ Ibid.

They told us that they were police. We opened the door and they asked for Sujon. We told them that Sujon is not in our room. After that, they went to the room where Sujon was. Our room was then locked from the outside. They didn't let us out. When they were leaving, they unlocked our door. We saw that Sujon was wearing pants so we assumed that he had changed from his lungi which he was wearing earlier.²³²

There was one later sighting of Sujon. A businessman who lived in Fakirapool close to where Sujon and Farhad rented property said that a couple of days after the two men were taken, he saw police take Sujon back to the rented property where they had lived.

I was having tea at a street stall. I saw a group of plainclothes men, some carrying guns, coming into the alley. Along with the men I saw Sujon, whom I knew as he had lived in the area. They took him to building no. 266 which was where Sujon used to live. All the men were in plainclothes except one man who wore a jacket with "DB" written on it. I saw that Sujon was handcuffed, and someone was holding his hand, directing him forward. The men stayed in the building for over an hour and came out with bags of material. Sujon was then taken to a white microbus that was parked in front of the Asma Hotel. I heard later that they had knocked down the door of the apartment where Sujon used to live.²³³

State Response

Sujon's father, Abdul Jalil Khan, said he did not like his son's involvement in politics. He said that his son had about 14 "political" cases lodged against him in different police stations alleging involvement in violence. He first heard from Azad that Sujon had been picked up by law enforcement authorities, and then he started looking for his son. He said:

Azad called me to say that his workers had informed him that Sujon and his colleague Farhad had been picked up by law enforcement officers. I expected that Sujon and his friends would be brought before court the next

²³² Interview with witness, Dhaka, October 20, 2014.

²³³ Interview with witness, Dhaka, December 1, 2014.

day, so my younger son went to the district court in Old Dhaka in the morning, but Sujon was not produced there.²³⁴

Meanwhile, Sujon's wife and cousin went to the DB office, but they said that they had no information. A few days later the family filed a GD. Sujon's father said:

They only allowed us to file a missing person GD, not one claiming him to be taken by law enforcement officers. The police said that we could file a case against the house owner [Azad] from where he was taken, but not against police or any other law enforcement agency.²³⁵

Sujon's family received information from different sources that suggested that DB was involved with the detention. His cousin Shakil said that he went to the DB office a number of times, but received no new information. One of those times was around February 2014. Shakil said:

I met the assistant commissioner and he also denied knowledge of the incident and suggested that I should meet RAB and go and speak to Colonel Zia. He said if there is a crossfire probably RAB will know about it. He also said that if Sujon was taken by a law enforcement person, "I see very little chance that he is alive."²³⁶

Farhad's sister filed a GD at the Sabujbagh police station.²³⁷ His wife, Farhana, said that she heard via a relative who was connected to the Prime Minister's Office that it was DB officials that had had arrested him.²³⁸ DB denies this.

²³⁴ Interview with Abdul Jalil Khan, Dhaka, October 20, 2014.

²³⁵ Ibid. The GD was filed on December 11 at Sabujbagh police station by Sujon's father. It states that Sujon "went outside the house to buy warm clothes for his kids but he has not returned since then, and there is no trace of him after searching all probable places."

²³⁶ Interview with Shakil, Dhaka, October 20, 2014.

²³⁷ GD filed on December 10, 2013, by Khusdia Akhter Shila. It states, "My brother Kazi Farhad left home for work and until this day he has not returned and his mobile is also switched off."

²³⁸ Telephone interview with Farhana, November 11, 2014.

December 12: Disappearance of Selim Reza Pintu

In the early morning of December 12, 2013, law enforcement officers arrested Selim Reza Pintu, secretary of the student wing of the BNP in Sutrapur, from his brother's house in Mirpur, Dhaka. According to his family, he had a number of criminal cases against him, involving alleged vandalism. Five of his political colleagues from the area had previously been picked up on November 28, though three of them were subsequently released. He has not been seen since.



Selim Reza Pintu, disappeared since December 12, 2013. © Private

The Pick Up

The political situation and arrest of BNP supporters meant that Pintu and his wife, Tarannum Nahas, had been living in an apartment in Mirpur belonging to a relative, rather than their own in Sutrapur. On December 12, security officers came searching for Pintu in the middle of night. According to his brother, Aslam Reza Mintu, five or six men with weapons made the arrest, claiming they were from the “administration.” Tarannum Nahas, who was in the room with her husband, said Pintu realized that security forces had come for him and decided not to contest his detention:

Pintu was sleeping, and when he heard the noise he knew what was happening and opened the door to the room. As soon as he opened the door they asked whether he was Pintu. He said, “Yes, I am Pintu.” Then two of the men grabbed him. Another man entered the room and asked where were Pintu’s mobiles. He had four phones and they took two of them. The other two were in my bag. Pintu asked who the men were. They said, “We are from the administration.” He asked to see their ID cards, and they said, “It will not be a problem. You will be safe with us.” My husband did not put up any resistance.²³⁹

²³⁹ Interview with Tarannum Nahas, Dhaka, October 23, 2014.

State Response

Family members went to the local police station the next morning. His sister, Rehana Banu Munni, said:

They behaved badly toward us and would not initially allow us to file a GD. They said wait for some time. The police did not want to file a GD making an allegation against law enforcement people. However, after a few days a journalist, who was a friend of my brother, came and he helped us to get a GD filed mentioning that he was taken by law enforcement officials.²⁴⁰

The GD filed on December 13 states that at 1:15 a.m. on December 12: “Some 6/7 civil dressed men came to our house and identified themselves to have the authority from the government. Then they came inside our house and took my older brother Selim Reza Pintu, 31, away with them in a gray car Dhaka Metro 5070. Afterward we looked for him everywhere in the locality but we could not find him.”²⁴¹

Pintu’s sister visited different police stations and RAB and DB headquarters. When police set up an anti-kidnapping squad in May 2014, she submitted details of his case.²⁴² She subsequently met Sanwar Hossain, an additional commissioner responsible for the new squad, who told her to “be patient.” She also submitted an application to a senior RAB officer. The family did not receive any further information.

²⁴⁰ Interviews with Rehana Banu Munni, Dhaka, September 27, 2014, and May 30, 2016.

²⁴¹ Of all the GDs filed relating to the sequence of disappearances in this two-week period, this is the only one in which the police allowed the family to mention that law enforcement authorities were allegedly involved in the initial pick up. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

²⁴² “DMP forms anti-kidnapping squad,” *The Daily Star*, <http://www.thedailystar.net/dmp-forms-anti-kidnapping-squad-22540>.

IV. Recommendations

To the Bangladesh Government

Investigations and Prosecutions

- Promptly investigate existing allegations of enforced disappearances, locate and release those held illegally by security forces, and prosecute the perpetrators. These should include politically motivated cases involving members or supporters of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami party.
- Investigate allegations of deaths of individuals in so-called crossfire or gunfights after they were already in security force custody, and prosecute officers responsible for these deaths.
- Instruct police stations to accept complaints, including General Diaries and First Information Reports, from family members containing allegations against law enforcement authorities including the DB and RAB. Encourage and empower police to respond to complaints and investigate allegations of enforced disappearances.
- Ensure serious and independent investigations by inviting the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant United Nations special procedures—including the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and the special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment—to visit Bangladesh to investigate and make appropriate recommendations to ensure justice and accountability, as well as reform of the security forces to act independently and professionally.
- Respond speedily to various queries forwarded by the National Human Rights Commission.
- Respond promptly to queries from the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.
- Prosecute fully law enforcement authority officers of all ranks, including those with superior authority, who are found to be responsible for enforced disappearances. Punish commanding officers and others in a position of government authority who ordered or knew of these abuses.

- Immediately suspend, pending a full investigation, and remove from RAB, DB, and other law enforcement facilities any individual for whom there exists credible evidence that they participated in an enforced disappearance.
- Work to disband RAB, which has been responsible for numerous and serious human rights violations, and replace with a non-military counterterrorism unit.

Protection

- Make strong and repeated public statements at the highest government levels that make clear that all law enforcement authorities and investigation agencies should comply with the law, and that all detained people must be brought to court within 24 hours.
- Ensure that the police, RAB, DB, and other law enforcement agencies comply with the legally mandated guidelines set out in the judgment of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court given in May 2016.²⁴³ In particular:
 - Ensure that a relative or friend of the detained person is informed within 12 hours of the arrest about the time and place of arrest and place of detention.²⁴⁴
 - Allow an arrested person to consult a lawyer of their choice or meet any of their nearest relations.²⁴⁵
- Ensure that independent, qualified forensic experts examine all suspicious deaths to determine exact cause of death.
- Establish an independent commission of inquiry to investigate all cases of disappearances and custodial deaths; ensure it is mandated to recommend cases for prosecution.
- Ensure that people whom state authorities detain are held in known places of detention.
- Expand the mandate of the National Human Rights Commission to ensure unfettered and unannounced access to all places of detention, as well as sufficient powers of investigation.

²⁴³ “Guidelines for the Law Enforcement Agencies,” *Bangladesh v. Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)*, Civil Appeal No. 53 of 2004, May 24, 2016, http://www.supremecourt.gov.bd/resources/documents/734650_Civil_Appeal_No_53_of_2004_final_2016.pdf, p. 389.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, sec. (ii), p. 389.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, sec. (ix), p. 391.

Law Reform

- Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and make the requisite changes in the law.

International Cooperation

- Agree to the multiple requests made by UN special mechanisms to visit Bangladesh to conduct investigations and make recommendations.
- Invite the special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to visit Bangladesh to conduct investigations and make recommendations.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).
- Thoroughly vet all Bangladeshi military and police who apply for UN peacekeeping missions to ensure that they or the unit to which they are attached have not committed human rights violations.

To the National Human Rights Commission

- Strenuously press the government to allow investigations into cases of disappearances and extrajudicial killings.
- Demand that the government respond in a timely and transparent manner to requests for information on cases presented to them.
- Call for free and unfettered access to all places of detention countrywide.
- Call for a list of all places of detention, and ensure that detainees are not being held in secret or unknown locations.

To Bangladesh's Bilateral and Multilateral Donors including the United States, United Kingdom, China, and India

- Use public and private diplomacy to press the Bangladesh government to implement all recommendations made in this report.

- Refuse to work with RAB, DB, or other law enforcement or counterterror operations until they cease enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, and agree to measures with both internal and external monitoring to ensure accountability for law enforcement personnel found to be involved in human rights violations.

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“We Don’t Have Him”

Secret Detentions and Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh

Bangladesh law enforcement authorities have detained hundreds of people since 2013, including scores of opposition activists. Those arrested are often held in secret detention for weeks or months before being formally charged or released. Some have been killed in alleged armed exchanges, while many remain disappeared. Although the ruling Awami League took office in January 2009 with a promise to end such abuses, human rights organizations have since documented over 320 disappearances by the country’s law enforcement agencies.

“*We Don’t Have Him*” documents dozens of the over 90 cases of enforced disappearances in 2016, including 21 detainees who were later killed in alleged gunfights, and 9 who remain disappeared. It also details the abductions by law enforcement of 19 opposition party activists in late 2013, whose whereabouts are still unknown. Drawing from interviews with over 100 people, including witnesses and family members, the report outlines how security forces, including the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and the Detective Branch (DB) of the police, have allegedly been involved in secret detentions and killings, contrary to their public denials. The documented cases highlight Bangladesh’s ongoing lack of accountability for security force abuses.

Human Rights Watch calls on the Bangladesh government to promptly investigate allegations of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, locate and release those held illegally by security forces, and prosecute the perpetrators. The government should also invite the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN special rapporteurs to investigate serious human rights violations and make appropriate recommendations to ensure justice, accountability, and security force reform.



Relatives hold portraits of disappeared family members at an event calling for the end of enforced disappearances, killings, and abductions, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, August 30, 2014.

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