

Political Violence in Bangladesh: Understanding its Impact on Human Security

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Abstract: In recent years, Bangladesh has been portrayed by the international media as a hotbed of political and religious violence. It has become a dominant language of interaction between political parties in Bangladesh. The multifaceted violence that proliferated during the various phases of the political life of Bangladesh has manifold implications for the country. Most importantly, it has affected individual, community, and other entity of the society. Confrontational politics, however, impacts human security directly and indirectly. In this backdrop, this paper attempts to examine the extent to which political violence affects human security. Taking up various types of violent political activities of Bangladesh into consideration, the study reveals that political violence lies at the heart of human security challenges in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Political Violence, Factionalism, Conflict, Human Security, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

'I want guarantee of my right to life and protection against death and injury by violence'
'I want enforcement of law and justice, without being harassed'
'I want freedom of right to protest and expression without being deterred'

If any statistically significant number of randomly selected citizens of today's Bangladesh were asked what they wanted in life, they would most likely give one or a combination of the above responses (Iftekaruzzaman: 2005). There could definitely be other concerns, but the main theme in any event would be that the individual citizens have a feeling of insecurity in terms of personal, political, community security and of being deprived of their basic human rights. What follows here is an attempt to elaborate this theme. The paper first offers a brief conceptual overview of political violence, which is followed by an attempt to relate concerns of human security with implications of political violence. Finally it goes on to examine the extent to which political violence has become a source of human insecurity in Bangladesh.

The paper is based on research and review of the relevant literature on human security and violence as well as secondary analysis of National Survey on Human Security in Bangladesh (2008) conducted by Saferworld Bangladesh Chapter, political violence database, and diagnostic studies. The analysis also draws from some of the Reports conducted by UNDP and other domestic and International organizations on relevant sectors.

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2. Political Violence: An agony for Bangladesh Politics

Definitions of political violence vary considerably. It is one of the means by which people and governments seek to achieve political goals. Political violence has been defined in various ways. Sreeradha Datta has defined political violence as “acts carried out by individuals or groups with an explicit desire of accomplishing a particular political objective or directed at the party in power to secure political concessions or compromises that are otherwise not possible”. It can be considered as “unconventional collective action taken by people making claims on each other or the state that leads to physical damage inflicted on persons and/or objects”. Many groups and individuals believe their political systems consistently fail to respond to their political demands. As a result, they believe violence is not only justified but also necessary in order to achieve their political objectives. By the same token, many governments around the world believe they need to use violence in order to intimidate their citizens into acquiescence. At other times, governments use force in order to defend their country from outside invasion or other threats of force. In effect, citizens, groups or governments in different contexts use political violence (Islam: 2011). It is the hallmark of weakly institutionalized polities.

The starkest manifestation of such violence is armed conflict in the form of civil war (Besley and Persson: 2010). It includes protest actions that often transform into violence such as, arson, vandalizing, gun-fighting, hartals, blockade and other non-parliamentary methods adopted by political parties. Political violence, in Bangladesh, may be categorized in the following line: first, violent political protest such as militant procession, march and demonstration. Second, Violent unlawful activities e.g. breaking law and order, blocking roads and highway in extra-legal fashion, vandalizing private and public vehicles, business shops and shopping malls, set fire on the street and vehicles, blasting bomb etc. Third, violent physical attacks i.e. physical attacks on political opponent, police¹, and pedestrians and so on. Fighting groups frequently use local and domestic arms like machete, axe, knife, piece of bricks and stones, choppers etc. in this study, political conflict, confrontational politics and political violence are used interchangeably.

In a nutshell, political violence, refers to acts carried out by individuals or group of individuals and law enforcing agencies with an explicit desire of accomplishing a particular partisan objective in violent manner. Additionally, the discussion of political violence in Bangladesh refers to violent tactics employed by political parties and groups opposed to the government and vice versa. It involves also politically motivated activities – physical attacks, harassment, forceful and unlawful detention, disappearance,

¹ Physical attacks, harassment, arbitrary detention, torture in the name of remand and interrogation, repression in police custody, politically motivated disappearance, by law enforcing agencies on political activists are also considered political violence in this undertaking

suppression in police custody in the plea of remand and interrogation – of law enforcing agencies. To say that implications of political violence are most unbearable for Bangladesh is to state the obvious. Indeed, it is the vitiating climate that enables political groups to resort to violence in order to express and achieve their political ends. It is a key national concern, a challenge to political system, a formidable impediment to governance and democratic conventions.

Before moving on to analyze human security implications of political violence in Bangladesh we briefly discuss the concept of human security as an effort to relate human security with violence. Discussion in the following section, therefore, involves the theoretical framework of human security.

3. Human Security: Theoretical Framework

There is no single internationally agreed definition of human security, and a multitude of definitions are available. The idea of human security first came to prominence with the publication of the 1994 United Nations (UN) Human Development Report entitled ‘New Dimensions of Human Security’. It is an extremely wide concept, which has various advantages and disadvantages (SAFERWORLD: 2008). UNDP went on to give the following definition:

Human security can be said to have two main aspects. It means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities. Such threats can exist at all levels of national income and development (UNDP: 1994).

The 1994 HDR highlighted two major components of human security: ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’. These freedoms, from the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are part of the four human freedoms that President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously referred to in a speech in 1941. He was advocating a world founded on: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear (Norton: 1997). Subsequent debate in the 1990s added the freedom ‘to live in dignity’.

The 1994 HDR was more specific, listing seven essential dimensions of human security:

- Economic
- Food
- Health
- Environmental
- Personal
- Community
- Political

Table I: Possible Types of Human Security Threats

Type of Security	Examples of Main Threats
Economic security	Persistent poverty, unemployment
Food security	Hunger, famine
Health security	Deadly infectious diseases, unsafe food, malnutrition, lack of access to basic health care
Environmental security	Environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters, pollution
Personal security	Physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence, child labor
Community security	Inter-ethnic, religious and other identity based tensions
Political security	Political repression, human rights abuses

Source: Human Security in Theory and Practice, Human Security Unit, United Nations, 2009.

This list is neither comprehensive nor definitive, and the UN Charter refers more flexibly to ‘fundamental freedoms’. National and regional HDRs aiming to address varying categories of threats and values can use the human security approach in analyzing the topic. Human security is a flexible approach and can be tailored to different contexts and topics, according to the specific context. No matter which topic is addressed, a guiding principle of the human security approach is that it requires understanding the particular threats experienced by particular groups of people, as well as the participation of those people in the analysis process. Threats to human security can exist at all levels of development. They can emerge slowly and silently or appear suddenly and dramatically (Gómez and Gasper: 2013).

Central to the approach is the idea that people have ‘the right to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair... with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential’ (UN General Assembly: 2012). Academic debates further elaborate the issue. In their references to human security academics may be divided in two groups: those authors who respectively adopt narrow conceptualizations versus those who adopt a broader view. Advocates of a narrow focus on human security (Krause, Mack, Macfarlane, Paris, Buzan) refute a broad definition, interpreting human security more as freedom from physical violence. These different interpretations are discussed below. According to Ellen Seidensticker, human security diminishes ‘excessive’ state discretion in the promotion of human rights. In reality, ‘national security arguments are often used to justify the suppression of human rights. The incorporation of the traditional notion of state security into human rights law frequently qualifies rights to allow for state discretion’. Seidensticker believes that human security would be able to ‘resolve conflicts between different human rights, i.e. the need to suppress some human

rights in order to protect others' (Seidensticker, E. 2002). As Caroline Thomas further explains:

Human security describes a condition of existence in which basic material needs are met, and in which human dignity, including meaningful participation in the life of the community, can be realized. Such human security is indivisible; it cannot be pursued by or for one group at the expense of another (Thomas, C. 2001).

Roland Paris points out that the meaning of human security made by the 1994 statement was unclear and broad, however it does offer a single definition of the human development concept (Paris, R.: 2004). S. Neil Macfarlane points out that the core of human security is a shift in the referent of the concept of security from the state to the individual, especially vulnerable groups such as women and children (Neil Macfarlane, S.: 2004). In this sense, 'state sovereignty and the primacy of the state are justified only to the extent that the state's claim to protect the people within its boundaries is credible, since the only irreducible locus of sovereignty is the individual human being'. Barry Buzan argues that human security redirects 'security thinking and policy around the individual as the referent object. This is normatively attractive, but analytically weak'. Typically, citizens support state systems that control territory, state independence and foreign relations. 'The human security approach reverses this equation: the state – and state sovereignty – must serve and support the people from which it draws its legitimacy'. This may lead to a situation where the sovereignty of states reluctant or unable to accomplish 'certain basic standards' may be jeopardized. Buzan postulates that the use of military force for human protection might be the bleak illustration of such a concept (Buzan, B.: 2004).

Comparatively, advocating the broad focus, several academics propose that poverty, health and environmental problems, for example, be included in the definition. The Commission of Human Security shares this approach. Taylor Owen laconically concludes the discussion, saying that 'narrow proponents have sacrificed non-violent threats for policy utility, and broad proponents have sacrificed some analytic rigor and policy clarity for inclusiveness' (Owen, T.: 2004). The problem remains – several academics included many threats, other proposed the exact list of threats that 'focus on more development-oriented, rather than violence-based concerns'. Owen suggests returning to UNDP roots by saying that the UNDP definition is actually much clearer than has been reported and that it has been unjustly dismissed as unworkable. He suggests the following definition: 'human security is the protection of the vital core of all human lives from critical and pervasive environmental, economic, food, health, personal and political threats'. It is very close to the UNDP definition of human security that proposed 'safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression', along with 'protection from sudden and hurtful disruption in the patterns of daily life'.

In practice, the United Nations Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals are the key steps in realizing a broad 'UNDP' conceptualization of human security. However, the goals cover only part of human security which, in its broad sense, includes

the wider range of threats to people (UNESCO: 2004). It is apparent from above discussion that human security, roughly, have two dimensions: a. **Freedom from Want** – related to food, health, environment and economic security and b. **Freedom from Fear** – containing political, physical and community security. In this study, Human security means predominantly freedom from fear. Before moving on to look at the extension of human insecurity in Bangladesh, it is useful to look briefly at two related terms: community security and armed violence.

As discussed above, security is a complicated and constantly shifting dynamic that spans the individual (human security), the community (community security) and the state (national security). While distinctions can be drawn between these various aspects, they should not be considered to be exclusive of each other. For example, if people feel safe and included as a member of their local community, they are more likely to feel safe as individuals. This is because threats to individual security can most effectively be addressed at the local level, because local agencies (both governmental and non-governmental) are generally more aware of, and responsive to, local needs. Any analysis of human security therefore also needs to consider the ‘human security of communities.

A secure community might be described as one in which all its members, including the vulnerable, live without significant fear of crime, violence, intimidation, disorder, or anti-social behavior (Alkire, S.: 2003). ‘the intentional and illegitimate use of armed force with small arms, light weapons and anti-personnel mines, threatened or actual, against a person, group, community or state that results in death, injury and/or psycho-social harm and that can undermine prospects for development (OECD: 2007). Armed violence reduction and prevention (AVP) thus refers to measures and strategies to lessen the prevalence and impact of armed violence. This requires a focus both on small arms and on the underlying, structural causes of violence and human insecurity.

‘Beyond the limited scale of incidents of domestic violence are the more corrosive effects of organized/ disorganized criminal violence and political violence by a range of parties, including the government. Individuals may be guilty of violating criminal law and criminal organizations may exhibit trans-national elements. Political parties may be responsible for significant breaches of human rights. Alternatively, actors within armed political resistance movements may also engage in organized criminal activity, in part to finance their activities. In principle, state institutions have established responsibilities for addressing armed criminal violence, even if such powers may be abused’.

From above discussion, human security may be defined in following manner. It is a comprehensive security concept, and under the purview the term a variety of security dimensions are designed to deal with security issues which can broadly be classified as freedom from want and freedom from fear.

4. Bangladesh in Global Security Index

In global security indexes, Bangladesh depicts a gloomy picture. It stands at the worsened part of every index. It reveals that Bangladesh human security situation is very low. The country ranked 19th in the index of politically instable countries (table-2). The index put the country in the category of very high risk regimes.

Table-2: The Political Instability Index

Rank	Country	<u>Underlying vulnerability</u>	<u>Economic distress</u>	<u>Index score</u>	<u>2007 score</u>
1	Zimbabwe	7.5	10.0	8.8	8.8
2	Chad	7.1	10.0	8.5	7.5
3	Congo (Democratic Republic)	8.3	8.0	8.2	7.2
4	Cambodia	7.9	8.0	8.0	6.0
4	Sudan	7.9	8.0	8.0	7.0
6	Iraq	8.8	7.0	7.9	7.9
7	Cote d'Ivoire	7.5	8.0	7.8	7.8
7	Haiti	7.5	8.0	7.8	6.8
7	Pakistan	7.5	8.0	7.8	5.8
7	Zambia	7.5	8.0	7.8	6.8
7	Afghanistan	7.5	8.0	7.8	6.8
7	Central African Republic	7.5	8.0	7.8	5.8
13	North Korea	5.4	10.0	7.7	3.7
14	Bolivia	8.3	7.0	7.7	5.7
14	Ecuador	8.3	7.0	7.7	6.7
16	Angola	6.3	9.0	7.6	5.6
16	Dominican Republic	6.3	9.0	7.6	5.6
16	Ukraine	6.3	9.0	7.6	4.6
19	Bangladesh	7.1	8.0	7.5	4.5

Source: The Economist, 2009

In the list, most instable country is Zimbabwe. Also in another list – political stability index prepared by The Global Economy.com – Bangladesh scores low. It ranked 174 out

of 194 countries above only 20 countries from the lowest one – Syria. The index shows Singapore as the most politically stable country which essentially ranked 1 while the most instable country is Syria which ranked 194(The Economist: 2009).

Table-3: Politically Stability Index 2016

Rank	Country	Value
174	Bangladesh	-1.24
175	Philippines	-1.33
176	Kenya	-1.30
177	Egypt	-1.42
178	Mali	-1.55
179	Lebanon	-1.56
180	Ethiopia	-1.57
181	C.A. Republic	-1.74
182	Nigeria	-1.85
183	Ukraine	-1.89
184	Turkey	-2.00
185	Burundi	-2.08
186	DR Congo	-2.20
187	Libya	-2.21
188	Iraq	-2.28
189	Somalia	-2.33
190	Sudan	-2.38
191	Pakistan	-2.47
192	Afghanistan	-2.75
193	Yemen	-2.79
194	Syria	-2.91

Source: The Global Economy.com

Table-4: south Asia peace rankings

COUNTRY	OVERALL RANK	OVERALL SCORE	CHANGE IN SCORE	REGIONAL RANK
Bhutan	13	1.445	-0.033	1
Nepal	78	2.026	0.058	2
Bangladesh	83	2.045	0.003	3
Sri Lanka	97	2.133	-0.053	4
India	141	2.566	0.006	5
Pakistan	153	3.145	-0.001	6
Afghanistan	160	3.538	0.010	7

Source: Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)

Also in Human security index shows that the country's performance is poor and ranked 142 out of 188 country that clearly reveals the lower in position (UNDP: 2015). Bangladesh is, however, placed in a better position in global peace index and consequently in higher grade amongst South Asian Countries (IEP: 2016).

5. Dimensions of human insecurity in Bangladesh: “Freedom from Fear”

Politics and the political system in Bangladesh are directly and indirectly responsible for many aspects of human security. The regular violations of the rights of persons and property (that are often formally protected in law) are very often the direct result of violence or expropriation carried out through the political process. These violations are not associated with particular parties as they happen irrespective of the party in power. In this section, we focus on the direct effects of politics and the political system. However, the drivers of this category of insecurity have important crosscutting effects on almost all of our other categories. For instance, the instability of property rights, the violence and insecurity related to land and asset grabbing, many of the insecurities caused by the interventions and failures of the administrative and judicial systems, and many of the attacks on the land and assets of vulnerable groups including religious and ethnic minorities are related to the accumulation strategies of political factions (Khan: 2005). Following discussion would measure different types of clash/violence separately that incur human insecurity.

5.1 Human Insecurity due to violence during Hartal

The right to expression of views, including dissent, through public demonstrations and social mobilization is a democratic right enshrined in international law and practiced throughout the world -- from demonstrating against multilateral trade regimes, to rallying for the protection of the environment, to protesting against illegitimate regimes. The voicing of differing views and political debate over policies is a healthy feature of any modern democracy. As the Human Development Report 2002 notes:

Changes in the world have shifted human development priorities and made political freedom, participation and collective action much more important as public policy issues.... Open space for free political debate and the diverse ways in which people can express their views are the essence of democratic life and are what make decision making work in democracies.

In this context, the right to call ‘a hartal’ -- a particular form of protest used in Bangladesh -- could be viewed as a legitimate democratic right. However, when this right impinges on the rights of individuals to earn a living and to go about their daily lives in peace and security, a situation of ‘conflict of competing rights’ arises. Hartals are often called in ‘the name of the people’, but it is ordinary people whose movements are restricted, property endangered, and progress curbed. Children miss school, the sick miss treatment, and business miss targets. In addition, the reality in Bangladesh is that the success of hartals often rests on coercion, or even the use of payment to ‘hired hands’ by hartal organisers to mobilise support (UNDP: 2005).

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At the same time, hartals can also be viewed as a ‘symptom’ of the frustration of opposition parties at the lack of space for them to play a constructive role in democratic dialogue and the ‘winner takes all’ style of successive Governments. In this respect, promoting a more constructive role for opposition in Parliament, and enabling greater freedom of expression through peaceful demonstrations and through the media could take away much of the impetus for hartals.

In Bangladesh, however, Hartal (Strike) has been recurrent and the most mentionable forms of political violence which has directly linkage to the killing of political activists either by rival groups or law enforcer agencies. It is evident, through Hartal, political parties want two types of desired result creating dreadful atmosphere among masses and making government incapacitated. Fear feeling, insecurity, threat to life and Hartal, therefore, go hand by hand. There are huge evidences of lethal mayhem in Hartal. A research related to Hartal shows that, from 1947 to 2015, due to Hartal 655 people are killed, 25,000 injured and 17,000 arrested (Majumdar: 2015). Following the

independence, three decades experienced a low trend of Hartal, while so called democratic regime showed more evidences of killings, injuries and losses of property and economic life (see table-1 & 2). The average cost of hartals to the economy during the 1990s is found to be 4.5% of the GDP (table-2).

Table-5: Statistics of Hartal 1947-2017 (Only National level)

1947-1971	47
1972-1975	5
1975-1982	6
1982-1990	72
1990-1995	81
1996-2001	45
2001-2007	130
Total	386

Source: Majumdar, A. Badiul, “Hartal noy, proyojon songlap o somojota”, Daily Prothom Alo, Dhaka, November 14, 2015

Table-6: Yearly cost of Hartals, Millions Taka

	GDP ¹	GDP/ day	Hartal days ²	GDP loss of hartals	GDP loss, %
90/91	1,325,226	4,477	1	4,477	0.3
91/92	1,392,005	4,703	5	23,514	1.6
92/93	1,455,680	4,918	7	34,425	0.2
93/94	1,515,139	5,119	13	66,543	4.4
94/95	1,589,762	5,371	27	145,012	9.1
95/96	1,663,241	5,619	28	157,334	9.5
96/97	1,762,847	5,956	7	41,689	2.4
97/98	1,844,436	6,231	8	49,850	2.7
98/99	1,934,370	6,535	28	182,981	9.5
99/2000	1,934,291	6,535	15	98,022	5.1
Average	1,641,700	5,546	14	80,385	4.5

Source: UNDP, Beyond Hartal, Dhaka: UNDP Bangladesh, 2005

1. Constant market prices

2. National, Note: Half-day hartals are counted as full days

People are social beings, and hartals affect individuals as well as society as a whole. Disruption in mobility and financial loss in terms of increases in expenditures and decreases in income are perceived to be the major effects of hartals on personal life.

5.2 Human Insecurity caused by Intra party conflict

Inner party conflict is also responsible for human insecurity in Bangladesh. In factionalism, only during January-September 2017, in 185 incidents a total of 32 people are killed, 2483 are injured (see table-3). In the aforementioned period, Awami League (AL) vs. Awami League (AL) conflict claimed the most lives (26) while 1917 were wounded in 115 clashes. The second most incidents (20) are recorded between Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) vs. Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) which cost 2 lives and injured 156 people.

Table-7: Intra Party Clash, January-September 2017

	Incident	Injured	Killed
AL - AL	115	1917	26
AL- Awami Jubo League	2	42	3
AL- Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)	7	45	1
Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) - Awami Jubo League	5	38	
Awami Jubo League - Awami Jubo League	7	33	1
Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)- Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)	20	156	2
BNP-BNP	18	170	
BNP - Bangladesh Jatiyotabadi Chatra Dal (JCD)	1		
Jatiyotabadi Jubo Dol-Jatiyotabadi Jubo Dol	10	82	
Total	185	2483	32

Source: Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), political violence: January-September, 2017

170 people get injured in 18 intra party conflicts of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). In the said period of time, for Bangladesh Jamaat Islami (BJI) and Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), no factional feuds are found.

5.3 Inter party clash puts human security in threat

Inter party conflict in Bangladesh is a commonplace. Evidences are available of such occurrence where many lives are lost (see table-4). Only in nine months of 2017, the country experienced 22 sanguinary inter party clash that claimed 2 lives and injured more 297 people. During these battle civilian lives come under high risks. Civilian cannot come out of home for their regular business. Country becomes paralyzed. The activists of

the party in power appeared with sticks, iron rod and fire arms on the street, rail station, steamer ghat, bus station to prevent people from coming out (Prothom Alo: 2013). The most gruesome example of such heinous events is Biswajit Das killing on broad day light by Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) who was wrongly perceived to be the activist of Bangladesh Chhatra Shibir (BICS) (Daily Star: 2012).

Table-8: Inter Party Conflict, January-September 2017

Parties	incident	injured	dead
AL-BNP	9	107	
AL-Jashad	4	70	2
AL-Japa	2	40	
Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) - Jatiyotabadi Jubo Dol	3	13	
Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)-BNP	1	15	
Countrywide Hartal (1.5 day)	3	52	
Total	22	297	2

Source: Ain O Salish Kendra, 2017

5.4 Human insecurity in clashes between Law Enforcer Agencies and Political Parties

In Bangladesh, clashes between law enforcer agencies and activists of political parties are prominent particularly the parties in opposition. In the name of restoring law and order the government agencies members attacked on general demonstration, strike, protest and other types of democratic rally.

Table-9: Law Enforcing Agency's clashed with political parties, January-September, 2017

	Incident	Injured	Dead
BNP-Police	13	156	
Shibir-Police	1	3	
Awami League-Police	2	26	
CPB-Bashad-Police	1	13	
Violence in UP Election	26	440	7
Violence in Municipal Election	2	30	
Violence in By-Election	1	1	
Violence in Upzilla Parishod Election	3	57	2
Total	49	726	9

Source: Ain O Salish Kendra, 2018

In less than a year, Ain O Salish Kendra – Dhaka based rights organization – recorded 49 cases in which 726 people got injured and died more 9 (table-5) . The most violent events are documented between BNP vs. police. Also, there are few example of Awami League vs. police incidents. As mentioned earlier, during these fights, not only political activists are affected but also civilian people become victims. This is very difficult to identify who is political activist and who is not. Any civilian citizen might be victim of a sudden chaos. Human security, therefore, is highly challenged by these violence.

5.5 Human Insecurity: ‘Enforced Disappearance’ and Secret Detention

‘Enforced disappearance’ is particularly a heinous violation of human rights and an international crime. It affects victims in many different ways, including constant fear for their lives. Their families go through an emotional roller-coaster of hope and despair, waiting for news that might never come. The disappeared person is removed from the protection of law, a fundamental right. In recent years, instances of enforced disappearance are on the rise in Bangladesh. People are abducted and disappearing from various place in broad day light by the men claiming to be members of law enforcement agencies. Some are recovered as dead after they were abducted. In many cases, families of the disappeared claim that law enforcing agencies picked up the victims. However, the law enforcing agencies deny any knowledge about the disappeared (Odhikar: 2018).

Table-10: Enforced Disappearances (2009 - 2017): State Agencies Responsible

Year(s)	No. of the disappeared persons	Allegedly disappeared by						
		RAB	Police	RAB-DB Police	DB Police	Industrial Police	Ansar-Police	Other Law Enforcement
2017	86	13	21	1	18	0	0	33
2016	91	27	15	2	23	0	0	24
2015	66	24	6	3	24	0	1	8
2014	39	25	2	3	8	0	0	1
2013	54	23	1	0	17	0	0	13
2012	26	10	1	2	6	1	0	6
2011	31	14	2	0	11	0	0	4
2010	18	14	2	0	2	0	0	0
2009	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	414	153	50	11	109	1	1	89

Source: Odhikar-2018

5.6 Human security deteriorated in Police Custody

For many years, torture has been the most widespread and persistent human rights violation in Bangladesh but has been routinely ignored by successive governments since Bangladesh's independence in 1971. Children, women, the elderly, opposition politicians, criminal suspects, and innocent bystanders in the streets, have all been victims of torture. Perpetrators are most often police personnel but members of the armed forces carrying out law enforcement duties have also been involved in torture. Methods of torture have included beating with rifle butts, iron rods, bamboo sticks, or bottles filled with hot water so they do not leave marks on the body, hanging by the hands, rape, "water treatment" in which hose pipes are fixed into each nostril and taps turned on full for two minutes at a time, the use of pliers to crush fingers, and electric shocks. Successive governments in Bangladesh have failed to prevent torture, despite provisions in the Constitution of Bangladesh and their obligation to provide durable and effective protection against torture to the people in the country under treaties which Bangladesh has ratified.

Table-11: Death in Jail 2001-2018

Year (s)	Jail Custody
2017	58
2016	63
2015	51
2014	54
2013	59
2012	63
2011	105
2010	60
2009	50
2008	66
2007	87
2006	62
2005	76
2004	80
2003	90
2002	107
2001	72
Total	1203

Source: Odhikar, 2018 <http://odhikar.org/statistics/statistics-on-death-in-jail/>

Impunity is one of the major reason why torture continues. Government authorities have persistently failed to bring perpetrators of torture to justice. Allegations of torture are rarely investigated, particularly when victims are members of opposition parties. On the rare occasions when allegations of torture have been investigated, this has usually been due to a public outcry generated by the death of the victim. In other cases, victims who have filed complaints about torture in police custody have been put under pressure to withdraw the case. This has most often been done by threats and intimidation, but in some instances, money has been offered to the victim in return for the withdrawal of the case as "out of court settlement". Furthermore, judicial proceedings against a public employee - including a police officer - can proceed only if the government authorizes that proceeding. In practice, the government rarely does so.

5.7 Insecurity grows in higher educational Institutions

The Bangladesh Human Security Assessment 2005 (BHSA2005) argues that factional political competition was a 'cross-cutting driver of insecurity' which has politicized the administrative and judicial systems and adversely affected many aspects of daily life. The higher education system is just one element of this wider politicization, yet it is one that is particularly high-profile and deserves special attention due to the important role that universities play within society, both as educators of the future elite of the country and as cauldrons of political activity.

Student politics have played an important role in national history dating back to the Bengali Language Movement, in the early days of East Pakistan. They championed the education movement in 1962, six point movement in 1966 and liberation of independence in 1971 along with political parties. Yet as factional competition has developed between the main parties in Bangladesh, it has also been transposed into university life. After independence, student politics has started to be criminalized and violent. The three biggest parties in Bangladesh all have powerful student wings: the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL, linked to the AL); the *Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal* (JCD or 'National Student Party', linked to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party or BNP); and the *Islami Chhatra Shibir* (ICS or 'Islamic Students Camp', which is considered the student wing of *Jamaat-e-Islami* although no formal linkage exists) (Saferworld: 2008).

Deadly clashes and conflicts have been a regular fashion amongst student organizations, mainly for establishing dominance on campus of educational institution. Evidences are available e.g. in July 2006 BCL and JCD fought openly with ICS in clashes at Jagannath University which left over 100 people injured (Daily Star: 2006) while in December 2006 the BCL and JCD battled each other with 'blank gunshots and blasted hand bombs and used lethal weapons and brickbats'. Student politics appears to remain volatile, with fresh reports of clashes between student groups emerging. On 10 February 2008, for example, clashes broke out between BCL and ICS which were reported to have caused at least 40 injuries (Daily Star: 2008).

The universities in Bangladesh are severely suffering from accommodation crisis in addition to other hurdles. So as to get a seat in hall or dormitory, therefore, students are often to show political allegiances to the party in power. The clashes between the groups

not only upsets the loggerheads but also the university life of ordinary students. Additionally, this criminalized political system, thus, exposes student to extracurricular business like *hartals* (a kind of strike). A great number of students get involved in this poisonous political competition and ultimately destroy their life. Because those who are engaged in student politics do not get time to study, to go to class, seminar and in other academic activities, instead they get busy with non-educational, unlawful and illegal activities e.g. taking drugs, controlling of drug business, tender and extortion etc.

Demonstrations, strikes, and blockades cause massive interruption to the education system. More serious disturbances (such as those in August 2007) can result in universities being closed for several weeks or for a month. This occurs so recurrently that study courses and examinations almost always fall behind their original schedule and are constantly being rearranged. Consequently, the student falls into session jam² which roughly disrupts the continuity and quality of the education and also generates an uncertain atmosphere for students and faculties alike. Thus, university violence is a substantial cause for concern as it threatens the physical and emotional security of both those directly involved in student politics, and also those that are not. It also impressively diminishes the competence of educational institutions to be able to ensure the provision of adequate education and a safe social environment within which students can pursue opportunities and choices, free from external influence.

Though, this cloudy environment demands strict decision and punishment of those who are perpetrator very few steps have been taken by authority – universities and political parties³. This is because both the political parties and student groups are reciprocally receiving incentives. Parties are seeking support from the student in terms of picketing in *Hartal* (strike), participating in party rally, showdown and in such other programs, in exchange of that assistance students receive rewards such as higher post in the party and economic support – often illegal. So, politicization of the campuses of educational institutions continues and it gets more criminalized day by day. Consequently, violence continues causing both short-term political insecurity and long-term damage to human development because people's education has suffered.

5.8 Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

The constitution provides for the rights to life and personal liberty. There were numerous evidences, however, that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings (US State Department: 2017). Doubtful deaths are recorded during raids, arrests, and other law enforcement operations. Security forces are frequently killing accused in the name of gunfight, crossfire, encounter, remand and interrogation. These terms used to characterize exchanges of gunfire between the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) or other police units and criminal gangs. The media also sometimes used these terms to describe

² Session jam is a very usual scenery in the higher educational institutions of Bangladesh due to political conflicts amongst the student groups.

³ In most of the cases, the perpetrator are spared of punishment, instead they got higher position in their party as if it is a promotion and reward for his/her heroic job!

legitimate uses of police force. Human rights organizations and media outlets claimed many of these “crossfire” incidents actually constituted extrajudicial killings. In some cases human rights organizations claimed law enforcement units detained, interrogated, and tortured suspects, brought them back to the scene of the original arrest, executed them, and ascribed the death to lawful self-defense in response to violent attacks. A domestic human rights organization, Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), reported that security forces killed 162 individuals in “crossfire.” Another domestic human rights organization, Odhikar, reported that security forces killed 118 individuals extra-judicially in the first 10 months of the year. According to US state department:

“On May 12, RAB forces allegedly shot and killed Rakibul Hasan Bappi and Lalon Molla in Goalanda Upazila, Rajbari District. According to RAB, the men died during a gunfight that occurred during a RAB raid of a meeting of the Purba Banglar Communist Party, a banned organization. Family members of the suspects claimed law enforcement arrested and detained the individuals months prior to the alleged May 12 incident. The circumstances of the encounter remained disputed. ASK stated that law enforcement personnel killed up to 53 detainees in custody during the year, while Odhikar reported that security forces killed six detainees in the first six months of the year (US State Department: 2017).”

Another example exposes unlawful operation of police. A woman Anita Vattayacharya was subjected to torture by police during remand. The same news was also published in the Daily Prothom Alo and Daily Manabjamin on the same date. According to the news report, Anita was taken for three days remand as a suspected accused of a criminal case. During remand Office-in-charge (Investigation), Mr. Monirul Islam and Sub-Inspector Hasina Akhter alias Akhi of Katwali police Station, Sylhet tortured Anita in an inhuman manner. O.C Monirul pushed wine to her stomach inserting a pipe into her throat. He also put the boot on her throat to give confessional statements about the abduction. Even he threatened her to rape. Sub-Inspector Hasina Akhter Akhi severely assaulted on her sensitive organ. Moreover Anita was subjected to torture in various manners. Due to the continuous torture in three days remand Anita became critically sick and she was sent to the court by the police. As per direction of the learned Magistrate police took Anita to Osmani Medical Collage and Hospital for medical treatment. But avoiding the advice of the on-duty doctor to admit Anita in the hospital, police took her to Sylhet Central Jail after giving some minor treatment. Jail authority refuse to receive Anita, but later on they received her and admitted her to Osmani Medical College and Hospital (Ain O Salish Kendra: 2018).

The government and its agents committed numerous arbitrary or unlawful killings. In the very recent anti-drug drive, security forces have killed more than 30 alleged drug dealers in gun battles in few weeks with right activists warning a campaign of extrajudicial killings may be under way. Unlawful and extra judicial killing occurs, now, in regular fashion.

5.9 Human insecurity derived from arbitrary arrest or detention for political purpose

Arbitrary arrest and detention are prohibited by the constitution of Bangladesh and it protected the individual rights to life and liberty (Bangladesh Constitution: 2015). However, these very fundamental rights are not only denied but also frequently violated by law enforcing agencies under the purview of Special Powers Act 1974 permitting them to arrest and detain an individual without an order from a magistrate or a warrant if authority perceive the individual may constitute a threat to security and public order. This is the commonplace in Bangladesh. Law enforcing agencies are violating fundamental and universal human rights of the people in regular fashion as if it is a usual and lawful activities. Police and RAB are badly accused of violating human rights in raids, regular operation, custody, remand, investigation and interrogation. Physical torture and repression are common phenomena in police custody and remand. Deaths, crossfire and disappearances are also recorded by reports of rights organizations. The act is extensively mentioned by law enforcer agencies in justifying their arbitrary arrest and detention. Although constitution offer the right to any person to challenge the lawfulness of his/her arrest or detention in court, but the arrestees and detainees are usually denied to this protection and constitutional rights. Government is accused of enforced disappearance of civil society members, writers, journalists, literary and members of the opposition party. Detention and arrests are recurrently denied by authority. The inspector General of Police is informed all significant uses of force by police, including actions that resulted in serious physical injury or death, trigger an automatic internal investigation but government does not release any statistics of extra judicial killings. Instances are very few where the accused security personnel are brought to the book and punishment. Security forces committing unlawful activities and abuses laws with impunity. Plaintiffs were reluctant to accuse police in criminal cases due to lengthy trial procedures and fear of retribution⁴. Reluctance to bring charges against police also perpetuated a climate of impunity. Officers loyal to the ruling party occupied many of the key positions in the law enforcement agencies. Internal Enquiry Cell within RAB that deals with cases of rights abuses are directly supported by government. Findings of the reports are rarely published publicly by the security apparatus. The accused, therefore, goes beyond punishment.

6. Conclusion

Political violence is nothing new, nor is it peculiar to any particular context. It exists in greater or lesser degree in all countries of the world, irrespective of political and economic system, big or small, developed or developing. What is striking about Bangladesh is that it affects almost everything – e.g. business, economy, daily life – in the society, and it is hardly ever that who commits violence is punished either by concerned political party or court. On the contrary, the activists who actively engaged in violence are rewarded in terms of higher position in party or government than previous one. Given that violence is the other name of investment for making quick position in the party, and in the absence of effective deterrence against violence it has become so widespread that even the common citizens are affected by it. The paramount causes for fear feeling among almost every citizen of today's Bangladesh are politically motivated

⁴ Examples are abundant where police denied filing any case against the security officer, in some cases against those who are more powerful than plaintiffs. Not only that, although case is filed against any security member the proceedings of that case goes motionless. Ultimately justice is denied and perpetrator got released.

disappearance whether by law enforcing agency men or goons backed by party in power, arbitrary arrest and detention, killing opponents.

Political insecurity lies at the heart of many human security challenges. Factional political competition not only directly generates violence in the form of clashes between activists and *hartals* that shut down much of Dhaka, but it has also politicized many aspects of life and drives many other forms of insecurity: the threat of violence and instability in higher education; the fear that property will be appropriated by those with strong political links with the party in power; and the lowering of standards in the civil service when public service appointments are made for political reasons rather than on merit. More generally, zero-sum thinking diverts most of politicians' energy into this factional competition, as a result of which insufficient attention is paid to governing the country.

Illegal weapons are readily available, as shown by official statistics and media reports. Illegal weapons are a significant factor in various types of political insecurity. They are used as a tool of intimidation by people affiliated to political parties, particularly in universities. Though few in number, religious and left-wing extremists can use weapons in terrorist acts and cause major insecurity. The easy availability of weapons is also a boon to criminal gangs and those involved in drug pushing and human trafficking. Whatever way confrontational politics is interpreted, it is a key obstacle to democratic development and human security. It increases social injustice and human insecurity. It is also a key impediment to the realization of programs and initiatives that promoting human security, which cannot be achieved without effectively uprooting violence. It undermines development efforts in key sectors identified within MDG such as economic growth, education, health, trade and the environment. As we have seen above, violence prevents ordinary citizens to go to work, students to school and exam hall, public officers to offices, businessmen to deal. It increases fear feelings and anxiety among masses – e.g. guardians got anxious for their children who go outside during violence – despair among business community.

Political clash, when it is pervasive, does not take place overnight. It does take time to entrench, it takes connivance and participation of people in positions of power – people who are powerful politically, economically and socially - whether at the national or local levels. By the same token it can't also be addressed overnight without comprehensive efforts and without the fullest commitment of those in positions of power. Coming out from this culture of confrontational politics is a highly challenging task because of the links of violence with power⁵, at whatever level it may take place. It is also widely believed that political good will can stop this heinous characteristics of Bangladesh politics. What is beyond any doubt, however, is the need for a political commitment of all parties. No anti-violent initiative can succeed without such political determination and indeed role models at the highest level. But when the political will is absent or not strong enough and when the key institutions mentioned above are not independent and effective enough, the ultimate source of strength against violence is the people – their awareness

⁵ In Bangladesh, political parties and their activists hold a stereotype idea that showing of muscle power in the street is the best way to assume the office and to keep in the power. Almost all political parties, therefore, try to display the muscle power. Even, for a position in the party they have to fight with their own party men. Example of such types of violence are available which is discussed above. The man who will survive in the struggle will win the party post. Rather, it is alleged that party leaders in the highest position command such type of heinous activities.

and participation in the form of a social movement with active support of the media. It must be fought comprehensively and strategically. The main challenge is to create an environment in which those who are responsible would be punished by a court of law and party. The longer it takes to creating such conditions the further will be the goals of reducing ferocity and human insecurity.

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