

# Oppression in New Level - Women are Targeted Continuously in Bangladesh



## **Introduction**

Bangladesh, passing the last few months of the tenure of current Awami League regime has been somehow witnessing succumbing situation with overwhelming lack of political tolerance, absence of necessary and effective institutions to ensure a democratic polity and blatant violations of human rights. Those still remain the biggest hurdles for democracy in Bangladesh. The present reality of Bangladesh demonstrates that while a representative government is essential for democratic practice, is not enough if the Executive, Judiciary and the Legislative fail to play their respective roles to ensure constitutional and international norms of human rights. In such situation an undemocratic and dictatorial nature of power manifests in many different ways and abuses the state machinery for partisan and narrow political gain. Some continuous incidents have shaken the base of democracy and justice yet again are enclosed herewith that will represent the scenario of the socio-political environment of Bangladesh and will show how people supporting a particular opposition party have been subjected to severe human rights violations by the ruling government.

### **Incident One - Arrest of 20 Female Students and Inhuman treatment**

Police had arrested 20 young female students and another old woman (Wife of detained Jamaat Leader Abdul Kader Mollah) on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2012 from an apartment at Maghbazar, Dhaka. Several reports have it that 20 activists of Chhatri Shangstha, female student outfit of Jamaat-e-Islami (“Jamaat”) Bangladesh, have been arrested. This is an escalation of the already torturous regime in place to disturb Opposition especially Jamaat’s activities.

A Police team led by AC Shibly Noman of Ramna Zone and OC of Ramna Police Station Shah Alam took an operation at an apartment at Maghbazar where the Central Office of that

organization is located. They searched the whole place for more than 4-5 hours and then arrested the girls.<sup>1</sup> Besides, breaking all the customs and laws, no female Police were deployed during the operation on those female students.<sup>2</sup>



Despite of a huge dissatisfaction and countrywide protest, the Govt. nailed down its autocratic disposition again by placing 21 female Islamist student party members on a two-day remand through Magistrate Court orders, all of whom except one – are students from the top universities of the country.<sup>3</sup> They were arrested last Monday on fictitious and vague charges which only stated “they were involved with subversive activities”. The investigation officer of the case had sought 10-day remand for all of them. There was only one who was spared of remand and she is Habiba Nasrin Kanta, a six-month pregnant young lady – but the Court rejected her plea of bail as she was escorted to prison by heavy police barricade. However, that pregnant girl was forced by pushing to get into the Eighth Floor at the CMM Court Building. Police didn’t allow her to use the lift for her.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2012/12/18/178464#.UNkJLGFLLiZQ>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.dailysangram.com/news\\_details.php?news\\_id=104207](http://www.dailysangram.com/news_details.php?news_id=104207)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/new/?p=68529>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2012/12/22/179093#.UNkOJW\\_FWto](http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2012/12/22/179093#.UNkOJW_FWto)

There was no proof whatsoever of any anti-government activities in the incident, let alone it being subversive. All that the police could get hold of in the Central Office of *Bangladesh Islami Chhatrishangstha* were – Quranic texts, literatures and the student wings’ work processes. Adding on to the ironic situation – this organization has been known to be shy of any public display of activities and have not been active at all in the political arena, unlike the male counterparts i.e Shibir. There hasn't been any single report of any unlawful activities by this group so far. So the arrests have come as a shock to many.<sup>5</sup>



However, internal sources have claimed during the ‘remand’ they were asked to remove their hijab/niqab (covering of the head and/or face) and the interrogating Police Officer banged them against the floor by holding on to their hair. They were also arrested on vague charges of vandalism and anti-government activities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.dailysangram.com/news\\_details.php?news\\_id=104207](http://www.dailysangram.com/news_details.php?news_id=104207)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2012/12/22/179093#.UNkOJW\\_FWto](http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2012/12/22/179093#.UNkOJW_FWto)

## **Incident Two - Sting Operation and Severe Torture on Students**

Improvising a new method on the continuous Witch Hunting process against the Opposition, Police has arrested 37 Shibir Leaders in a single Sting Operation on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2012, Thursday. Police arrested the President of Dhaka City West branch of Islami Chhatra Shibir Sazzad Hossain.<sup>7</sup> He was severely tortured and forced to call his Secretary, and he was subsequently arrested. And then Police used their mobile phones to track and call several Shibir Leaders. They were also arrested and then, severe and inhuman torture began.<sup>8</sup>



One of them had his whole body smashed and yet he was alive & made to walk. Another had his hand hit bad and fractured. Five of them had their eyes poked into and severely injured. Most of them had their nails pulled out. All in a single day. This was the state of the arrested students when they were brought before the court on Saturday (22 December 2012). Adding on to that - a further 3-day remand in detention was approved by the court. And remand under the current

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2012-12-22/news/315101>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2012/12/22/179087#.UNkOy2\\_FWto](http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2012/12/22/179087#.UNkOy2_FWto)



Government rule meant more detention torture coming up. This is not the first time this has happened.

The charges that have been brought up against these students are related to ‘anarchy created’ during the general strike called by the Opposition in protest of ‘Government atrocities’ and ‘autocratic policy formulation’. However, during the protest rallies brought out during the strike – police, in assistance with the pro-Government members, had fired rubber bullets and live ammunition which turned the encounter violent.



More than 20,000 Opposition members have been rounded during the last 3 years-tenure of the current Government with vague charges imposed upon them. 20,000 are from the group *Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami* itself.

### **Incident Three - Arrest of 22 Female Students**

On 28<sup>th</sup> August 2013, Wednesday, at around 2.00pm Police arrested Twenty-two female students from a house of Poikkha-Hosnabad village at Muladi upazila in Barisal district. Several reports say these young 22 female are students and activists of Islami Chhatri Sangstha, student outfit of Jamaat. The arrestees and their guardians claimed that they joined an Eid reunion program at the house.<sup>9</sup> This is another escalation of the already torturous regime in place to disturb Opposition especially Jamaat's activities.



*Photo: The Daily Star*

Of the twenty-two female students, one is the graduate student of a university at Barisal town and president of Chhatri Sangstha Barisal district unit, and others are students in various schools

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/22-islami-chhatri-sangstha-activists-held-sent-to-jail/>

and colleges of Gachhua union of Muladi upazila. Report says amongst them at least eight are children according to the laws of the country.<sup>10</sup>

Police said the students were “involved with subversive activities”—a common statement that police usually use to legalize the incidents of arrest. Actually police found there nothing that can be a criminal offence and subsequently shown them arrested under section 54 of Criminal Procedure Code that has been considered as the mostly misused law on arrest which empowers police the power of arrest without warrant. Police produced them in the Judicial Magistrate’s Court on 29<sup>th</sup> August. Senior Judicial Magistrate Shahinur Akhter refused bail prayers of the arrestees and sent them to jail and fixed 1<sup>st</sup> September for next hearing.

The Court granted bail all of them on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2013. In the meantime the jail authority found seven of them as ‘children’ and already sent those to Juvenile Reformation Center at Gazipur district which more than 300 kilometers away from Barisal. However, it causes another procedural harassment for these children.

This is one of the many examples of arrest of the opposition party only because to harass, inhumane treatment and even to torture them without any specific allegations. These incidents prove intentional and politically-motivated activities of the present government that actually an alarming situation for the democracy and signs of continuous human rights violations by the government.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.rtnn.net/newsdetail/detail/1/4/69407#.UiboNzY3ASk>



## Conclusion

As a democratic country, Bangladesh is now at a political crossroads. The autocratic activities of the present govt. are leading the country to jeopardy. If the Parliament majority is used as a political weapon to demolish all oppositions and to formulate the Constitution of the Country for their own accord, then it will worsen the already dismal socio-political situations of our country, the crisis will touch the sky. The image of our country to the outer world is also a matter of concern. All of the issues must be solved politically with a fair intention. Only then, the development of democracy in Bangladesh can be achieved.

## Recommendations

Bangladesh is a state party of many International Conventions and the provision of those instruments are binding on Bangladesh. But, they are being violated every day by the present Govt such as-

The attack on peaceful meetings and arbitrary arrests violates some very basic human rights which Bangladesh is committed to protect but violating frequently. Bangladesh is a signatory of **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 1966** which incorporated certain fundamental human rights. Under article 21 of this covenant, Bangladesh cannot impose any unreasonable restriction on the right of peaceful assembly held in accordance with law.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Article 21 of ICCPR: *The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.*

Afflicting the rally participants, police also disrespected the *rights of protection from torture and cruel treatment*.<sup>12</sup>

Bangladesh is a state party of Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), 1984 that bars it to take initiatives that tend to form any kind of torture.<sup>13</sup> Instead of implementing, the existing Govt. is increasing the torture with brutal style on the oppositions. This is really very unacceptable and Govt. should immediately stop these violations.

Again, a speedy trial is one of the fundamental rights of a citizen.<sup>14</sup> And under ICCPR, the Bangladesh government must ensure a fair and public trial for anyone charged with a criminal offense<sup>15</sup>, and such a trial must take place "without undue delay." But it's being fearfully seen that, the Govt. is delaying the trial.

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<sup>12</sup> Article 7 of ICCPR: *No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*

<sup>13</sup> Article 2 of CAT

<sup>14</sup> Article 35 of the Constitution of Bangladesh ensures it.

<sup>15</sup> Article 14 of the ICCPR