principle - by the state minister for home affairs who defended the killings by saying: "Criminals can have no human rights." This despite the fact that some of the victims were innocent bystanders, including a child and an old man, or who were arrested on the basis of mistaken identification.

Ironically, these extra-legal processes have continued even during the tenure of the caretaker government. Press releases issued by RAB acknowledged that 109 personnel faced administrative disciplinary processes, but there was no accounting for the deaths perpetrated by RAB personnel. Nor, indeed, were any of the victims compensated. Three individual cases were filed against RAB. In one case, the High Court issued a *suo motu* rule, following the disappearance and abduction of Kishore Kumar Das, to question RAB's treatment of persons in custody. In a public interest litigation, the High Court also questioned RAB 's powers of arrest and detention.

Extremist militancy: Since 1999, bomb and grenade explosions, reportedly caused by religious extremists, have targeted secular cultural programs and institutions, opposition party leaders and offices, public meetings by opposition parties and political leaders. Official silence regarding these events was matched by resounding denials by ruling party leaders, and in Rajshahi a senior police officer went so far as to publicly to support the militants. It was only after synchronized bombings in 63 districts on August 17, 2005, which aroused national and international concern, that the government started investigation and prosecution.

Between December 2005 and October 2006, over 300 militants including six top leaders of the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh were arrested, and four organizations were banned. Two hundred and forty one cases were filed and 29 persons were sentenced to life imprisonment or capital punishment. The convicted have testified to their involvement in different acts of torture and death, but no information has been made public regarding their links with political forces within the country, the region and internationally. Six members of the Majlis-e-Shura of the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh were sentenced to capital punishment, but again the silence on the content of their "confessions" has raised fears that the masterminds and complex networks behind these episodes would continue to haunt politics in Bangladesh.

Since the elections in 2001, religious minorities, including Hindus and Christians, have been at the receiving end of orchestrated violence, which included attacks on their places of worship, seizure of property or land, rape, intimidation of young women, or false cases. Many had to migrate from their villages, or send their children away to live with relatives, to ensure their security.

Political violence: Political violence between cadres of the Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, and the Jamaat-e-Islami has been common in the last decade, and the tempo has risen fatally. At least three leading members of the Awami League were killed in the last two years, and many have been assaulted, arrested or intimidated. Shibir cadres (affiliated to the Jamaat-e-Islami) accused of the murder of a professor in Rajshahi University, have, however, managed to evade trial. Political confrontation preceding the formation of the caretaker government in October/November led to around 50 deaths.

Right to liberty

The culture of tolerance, allowing for dissent, has been bypassed as law enforcement forces have acted brutally to silence dissent and suppress political protests. Leading members of the opposition parties and members of parliament, such as Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Asaduzaman Noor, were seriously injured in police assaults during demonstrations and had to be hospitalized. Women political activists participating in rallies were particularly vulnerable to assaults and sexual harassment by police and others. During political rallies organized by the main opposition party, on March 12, 2006, several young women were manhandled, assaulted, and arrested.

The right to assembly and movement was violated by law enforcement agencies who imposed section 144 on 93 occasions in 6 districts, followed by pre-emptive mass arrests of over 28,000 persons. Most of the arrested were ordinary citizens, such as transport workers and day labourers; not only were they deprived of their liberty, but their families had to spend days to obtain their bail.

Rights of minorities

Since the elections in 2001, religious minorities, including Hindus and Christians, have been at the receiving end of orchestrated violence, which included attacks on their places of worship, seizure of property or land, rape, intimidation of young women, or false cases. Many had to migrate from their villages, or send their children away to live with relatives, to ensure their security. Hindus have complained that the repeal of the Vested Property Act in 2001 has not helped in recovery of their properties, which continue to be appropriated by powerful individuals.

Discrimination against religious minorities is evident in their low participation in political and other decision-making institutions, and their poor access to bank loans and other economic opportunities. They have also been subjected to violence