

WANTED PUBLIC SAFETY

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Seventy-four people (and counting) have been killed so far since Thursday, 28 February, after the International Crimes Tribunal sentenced Delwar Hossain Sayedee to death. Following the sentencing of Quader Mollah and the beginning of the Shahbag movement, Jamaat-Shibir activists went on a rampage, announcing hartals, attacking law enforcers and civilians alike with lethal weapons which included grenades and firearms.

Opposition leader Khaleda Zia during these troubled times, expressed her concern over the deaths resulting from the clashes between the police and rioters, characterising the deaths as "genocide and terrorism" being carried out by the government, calling her own hartal in a show of protest.

"Announcing hartals and deploying law enforcers to manage the resulting violence is not a solution to the problem," says Adilur Rahman Khan, Secretary of the Executive Committee of Odhikar, a renowned human rights organisation. "In fact, this is just a vicious cycle. Over a hundred people, some of whom are not even political activists have lost their lives during these clashes. We, at Odhikar believe that these extra-judicial killings are a gross violation of human rights and we are in dire need of an investigation into these incidents."



PHOTO: STAR FILE

The rising death toll has brought into question the need for law enforcement officers to use lethal force to control rioters even when alternative methods have been successfully used in the past. "The police cannot always use alternative methods to control rioters," says former Inspector General (IG) of police, Nurul Huda. "Rubber bullets can be used in certain cases when the crowd is not that violent, and in these recent riots we have seen that the crowd is bent on causing substantial harm. According to the figures given by the Home Minister, 10 percent of the casualties so far have been police personnel. As for pepper spray, it is only effective when used within close range of the target and getting that close is not always possible and can be potentially dangerous. Pepper spray is used to temporarily immobilise someone within close range. To handle an extremely dangerous crowd, lethal weapons are being used, but as a last resort."

According to the Penal Code, police, like all other civilians have a right to private defense of body and property, "When the police exercise that right that should be perfectly in order" says Huda.