

BRIEF TIMELINE

June 5	High Court reinstates quota system for public jobs. Student protests begin and gradually intensify
July 14-15	Chhatra League attacks begin incited by senior Awami League officials
July 16	Extrajudicial killing of Abu Sayed by police in Rangpur
July 17	Suppression of major student protest at Dhaka University
July 18	Police, Rab and BGB shoot protesters Orders to security forces to use maximum force and total internet shutdown
July 19	Significant increase in killings compared to July 18
July 20	Curfew and deployment of army. Violent clearance of Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Jatrabari (by police and Rab, supported by army). Mass arbitrary arrest campaign by police and Rab, supported by army.
Early August	Protest suppression reignite
August 4	March on Dhaka. Government plans to violently suppress it. Police and, in one documented case, also the army (Jamuna Future Park) shoot and kill protesters.
Afternoon of August 5	Sheikh Hasina flees. Killings of protesters continue. Revenge violence targeting Awami League supporters, police, media seen as supportive of former government and, in some cases, also members of distinct religious and indigenous groups.

Hasina oversaw killings

FROM PAGE 1

While launching the report at a press conference in Geneva yesterday, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said, "Crimes against humanity have been committed."

Additional criminal investigations are warranted to determine the extent to which they [serious human rights violations] may also amount to crimes against humanity and, torture (as a stand-alone international crime), as well as serious crimes under domestic law," the report said.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] has reasonable grounds to believe that these violations were carried out with the knowledge, coordination, and direction of the political leadership and senior security sector officials, in pursuance of a strategy to suppress the protests and related expressions of dissent."

The serious human rights violations and abuses committed by the security forces and armed Awami League supporters between July 15 and August 5 stemmed from a calculated effort to retain power at all costs, it said.

The mission interviewed 230 witnesses for the purposes of preparing the report. It assessed that as many as 1,400 people could have been killed during the uprising.

The report said Hasina and Asaduzzaman Khan led parallel efforts to coordinate the security and intelligence apparatus.

Both received regular reports on the situation on the ground from multiple sources. According to senior official testimony, reports provided to the prime minister by senior officials on July 21 and in early August specifically conveyed concern about excessive use of force."

The mission in its report elaborated the roles each security force and law enforcement agency as well as the Awami League played.

"From July 19, until the end of the protests, BGB, Rab and police fired lethal ammunition indiscriminately at protesters in Dhaka and elsewhere," it said, adding, "On July 20, the former government imposed a general curfew and deployed the army. The OHCHR documented three instances in which the army deliberately shot military rifles loaded with lethal ammunition at protesters. On July 20, in Mohammadpur and in front of the BTV, and on August 5, in front of the Jamuna Future Park.

The report named agencies that had directly engaged in perpetrating human rights violations – the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), National Security Intelligence (NSI), the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC), Detective Branch of police, Special Branch of police, and the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit (CTTC).

"They shared intelligence, including information obtained through surveillance in violation of the right to privacy, to enable the campaign of mass arbitrary arrests that took place in late July," said the report.

It said that in 2022 and 2023, the

OVERVIEW OF DEATHS, INJURIES AND ARRESTS

Based on data compiled and de-duplicated from several sources, including from civil society organisations and the Ministry of Health, OHCHR estimates there were as many as 1400 protest-related deaths, including at least 13 women during 15 July-5 August

The Ministry of Health has recorded 841 deaths related to the protests, however data is likely incomplete as medical staff were often overwhelmed by the influx of dead and injured, among other reasons, such that a number of cases were not properly recorded

At the time of finalisation of this report, there were 13,529 injuries recorded by the health ministry

One hospital in Dhaka treated 736 patients with eye injuries, of which 506 required emergency operations

11,702 arrests by police and Rab

Video and images captured during the protests show Bangladesh Police, BGB, RAB, Ansar/VDP and Army members wielding SKS, Type 56 and BD-08 rifles

These weapons are commonly used only by police, paramilitary and military forces, and not readily available to civilians in Bangladesh

CAUSES OF PROTEST-RELATED KILLINGS (based on examination by Dhaka Medical College Forensic Department of 130 deaths)

66% military rifles 12% shotguns with pellets 2% pistols 20% others

Insights from her inner circle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several senior officials gave crucial information to the UN Fact Finding Mission about Sheikh Hasina's actions during the July uprising.

They told the mission that Hasina on the night of July 10 authorised the director general of the DGFI to carry out secret negotiations with the student leaders.

After July 16, she designated civilian senior officials to negotiate with the students, namely her law minister, education minister, and state minister for information, in addition to the efforts of the DGFI, the officials told the mission.

The mission's report quoted a senior official as saying that the then prime minister felt that if they deployed their "heavy units then only the Jihadists will remain on the streets and other protesters would go home."

It learnt from officials that Hasina and several senior officials from the Prime Minister's Office regularly conferred in person and over the phone with senior security officials to directly supervise and direct their operations.

The UN team inspected call logs of the officials to confirm this.

The officials said Hasina received daily reports on protests from security officials and the three intelligence services – DGFI, NSI, and SB of Police – directly reported to her.

"On August 4, the then prime minister chaired a meeting of the

police, with the authorisation of the home ministry, ordered more than three million metal shot cartridges. This was over double the number of rubber bullets ordered during the same period.

The report said it was a strong indication of the high level of reliance on, and widespread use of, lethal metal shots by the police. Police officers in the field had broad discretion to decide when to deploy metal shots and when to use rubber bullets.

Abu Sayed, a student in Rangpur, was killed by lethal metal pellets resulting from at least two shots from a distance of approximately 14 metres, the mission found.

It said at least 40 metal pellets were found on the right side of his chest and 50 on the left, including in areas around the heart and lungs, and in the abdomen, causing internal bleeding.

The mission called him a victim of a deliberate extrajudicial killing by the police.

"In Bangladesh, shotguns are standard issue weapons in public order management. Police officers bearing them are deployed with ammunition cartridges containing up to two hundred 2.3mm metal pellets and with other cartridges filled with less lethal ammunition consisting of six to eight larger rubber bullets."

It said that in 2022 and 2023, the

National Security Council in which the chiefs of the army, Border Guard Bangladesh [BGB], police, intelligence agencies, and the Ministers of Home Affairs, Education and Foreign Affairs, among others, participated. They discussed reimposing a curfew and enforcing it to prevent the March on Dhaka," said the report quoting officials.

"A second meeting was held in the late evening of August 4 at the prime minister's residence... A plan was agreed on, and according to it, the army and BGB would deploy alongside police to block protesters from accessing central Dhaka, if necessary, by force," it added.

The plan was that the army and BGB were to block access routes into central Dhaka by deploying armoured vehicles and troops, while the police was to "control mobs," senior officials who were at the meetings told the mission.

The mission obtained copies of two WhatsApp messages the former director general of the Special Security Forces sent to the director general of the BGB at 00:55am on August 5, 2024.

The first message appeared to be from the protest leaders informing marchers about which routes to take to central Dhaka. The second message contained a video advising marchers how to circumvent the defence lines of the security forces.

The team spoke to an official who had personally called Hasina on August 5 to inform her that things were not going as planned.

At protesters. Witnesses and images also confirm the police shooting from the rooftop of Uttara Police Station.

"Hundreds of protesters suffered gunshot wounds, and several were shot dead. One nearby hospital recorded 91 injured patients and six deaths on that day, out of which five were students. Medical and ballistics information analysed by OHCHR confirmed that victims were shot with lethal ammunition commonly used by the police and Rab," it said.

One of those who died there was Mir Muddho, who suffered a fatal shot to the head.

The report details an incident in Savar. "Protesters, some carrying sticks, sought to block an important intersection on the Dhaka-Aricha highway. Police supported by the BGB were deployed in advance, presumably to prevent the road from being blocked. Awami League supporters armed with machetes, sticks, and shotguns lined up in front of the police.

"One of the local party leaders was armed with a pistol-calibre submachine gun that would ordinarily only be available to state forces."

At the press conference in Geneva, Rory Mungoven, chief of the Asia-Pacific Region of OCHCR, said, "Militarisation of policing is a massive problem in Bangladesh.... Politicisation of policing is one of the significant findings."

UN for swift probe into rights violations from August 5 to 15

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The UN has recommended prompt and independent investigations into human rights violations that took place from August 5 to 15 last year after the fall of Sheikh Hasina.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) made the recommendation in its fact-finding report titled "Human Rights Violations and Abuses related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh".

Sources had continued to report revenge violence, the UN said, adding that although incidents after August 15 fall outside the temporal scope of the report, the OHCHR nevertheless strongly recommends prompt and independent investigations into all reported incidents of this kind.

If left unaddressed, these incidents pose major risks to the country's social fabric, democratic culture and cohesion going forward, according to

the report.

Violent mobs stormed and burned down numerous police stations after Hasina fled to India. According to Bangladesh Police, 450 out of the country's 639 police stations were destroyed or damaged during attacks.

In many cases, the police officers fled or were allowed to leave by their superiors. In others, some officers were lynched or otherwise killed.

From August 5, enraged crowds also attacked Awami League officials and offices. In some cases, supporters of the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami were involved, according to witness testimony provided to OHCHR.

Violent crowds also vandalised, looted, or burned down official residences, homes and businesses belonging to Awami League leaders, government officials, or their close family members.

The report said that some Hindus, Ahmadiyya Muslims, and indigenous people from the Chittagong Hill

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UNDERLYING CAUSES OF VIOLATIONS AND SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

FROM PAGE 1

Implement Torture and Custodial Death (Prohibition Act); Reform police investigation techniques, orders, doctrines and training to reduce reliance on coerced confessions

3. Militarisation of policing

RECOMMENDATIONS

Disband Rapid Action Battalion. Confining functions of Border Guards Bangladesh and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence. Demilitarise control of Ansar/VDP

Only most exceptional deployment of Army to internal security, under civilian control

4. Politicisation of the security sector

RECOMMENDATIONS

National police commission for fair, transparent and merit-based recruitment, promotions, transfer and removal process

Independent commission to investigate police violations. Similar independent accountability and justice mechanisms for Armed Forces and BGB

5. Institutionalised impunity and a politically pliant justice sector

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fair and effective criminal justice for serious violations and revenge violence

Wider victim-centred process to prevent recurrence, enhance social cohesion and national healing, including truth-seeking, reparation, memorialisation, vetting of security sector

Establish independent public prosecution service and witness protection programme

Ensure independence of judiciary through genuinely independent mechanism for recruitment of judges, protection against intimidation, adequate remuneration and guaranteed tenure

Address due process and fair trial concerns related to the International Crimes Tribunal

Introduce a moratorium on the death penalty

6. Stifling of civil space and repressive legal framework

RECOMMENDATIONS

Repeal overly broad criminal provisions used to stifle critical media reporting and dissent

End unlawful surveillance and abolish the National Telecommunications Monitoring Centre

Amend Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulation Act to clearly regulate surveillance

Regulate Internet shutdowns: clear criteria, transparency, judicial oversight, proportionality

Refrain from political party bans undermining democracy and disenfranchising part of electorate. Protect journalists, political party activists, minority leaders and rights defenders

Ensure safe and enabling environment for free and genuine elections, including by special pre-election measures to ensure a level playing field for all political parties and candidates

Amend the Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act 2016 to ensure it is consistent with the right to freedom of association and other international human rights

Bring National Human Rights Commission into compliance with international standards

7. Structural discrimination and grievances about economic governance

RECOMMENDATIONS

Laws and regulations for substantive equality of men and women in political and public life

Take urgent measures to freeze, seize and repatriate ill-gotten gains, including through cooperation with foreign jurisdiction. Enforce anti-corruption and anti-cartel legislation. Enhance the independence and efficacy of the Anti-Corruption Commission

Enhance protection of workers, including through amendments to the Labour Act, make tax system more equitable and promote economic diversification