

# A FAIR AND TRANSPARENT TRIAL is necessary to ensure accountability

*In conversation with Noor Khan Liton, a human rights activist and a member of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances*



Noor Khan Liton

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What is the current status of human rights in the country, and what urgent issues need to be addressed?

**Noor Khan Liton (NKL):** Over the last 15-16 years, the country has experienced a period marked by authoritarian rule. In an effort to maintain their grip on power, the ruling regime resorted to various oppressive measures, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, persecution, systemic corruption, and the silencing of dissenting voices. Thousands of baseless cases were filed against individuals, some even posthumously, exposing the extent of human rights violations during this time. For instance,

there were incidents where cases were lodged against individuals who had been deceased for two or three years, falsely implicating them in recent events. This period overwhelmingly disregarded human rights, with grave implications for justice and accountability.

When political parties attempted to organise and criticise the regime, individuals were targeted, often under the guise of maintaining law and order. Many people were killed in so-called "crossfires," abducted, or disappeared. Families of abducted individuals were frequently threatened into silence. Some abductees were found dead, while those who returned



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- » It is critical to prioritise uncovering the fate of those who have disappeared, as claimed by their families and eyewitnesses.
- » Empowering the police to act independently and responsibly, while maintaining strict discipline, is vital to ensuring stability and public trust.
- » Separating the roles of the army and police from civilian affairs would better serve the public interest.
- » A dedicated and autonomous body is required to oversee law enforcement agencies, identify misconduct, and recommend measures to ensure those responsible face justice.
- » We must establish an independent Human Rights Commission that genuinely reflects the will of the people.

alive often refrained from speaking about their experiences, likely due to fear or coercion. Many remain missing to this day.

Now, it is critical to prioritise uncovering the fate of those who have disappeared, as claimed by their families and eyewitnesses. The fundamental question remains: Are they still alive? Answering this is a crucial human rights task. Additionally, allegations of extrajudicial killings and the experiences of those who returned alive after being disappeared must be thoroughly investigated. Those responsible—whether the prime minister, president, chiefs of law enforcement agencies, or other officials—must be identified and brought to justice. A fair and transparent trial is necessary to ensure accountability and send a strong message to society, state leaders, and law enforcement agencies that no one is above

the law. This would deter future violations and establish a precedent for justice.

Another pressing issue is restoring discipline within the police force, which, over the past 15 years, was frequently used as a tool of oppression against the people. The police force is still reeling from the setbacks caused by this misuse of power. To improve law and order and serve the public effectively, reforms are essential. Empowering the police to act independently and responsibly, while maintaining strict discipline, is vital to ensuring stability and public trust.

The prevailing sense of uncertainty among the populace also demands urgent attention. People are unsure about the future, and it is imperative to provide them with hope and a clear roadmap.

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