

Bangladesh: Alarming Rise in ‘Disappearances’
Human Rights Watch
26 April 2012

The Bangladesh government should immediately order an independent and impartial investigation into the growing number of cases where opposition members and political activists have vanished without trace, Human Rights Watch said today. The most recent episode, on April 17, 2012, involved Elias Ali, secretary of the Sylhet Division of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Ali’s case is part of an alarming rise in such incidents, including those of opposition members and political activists. Human Rights Watch recently expressed concern over the April 4 abduction and subsequent death of Aminul Islam, a prominent labor rights activist. Ain-O-Sailash Kendra, a leading human rights group in Bangladesh, has documented the disappearance of least 22 people in 2012 alone. According to Odhikar, another Dhaka-based human rights group, more than 50 people have disappeared since 2010.

“The rise in disappearances, particularly of opposition members and activists, requires a credible and independent investigation,” said Brad Adams [4], Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “The government has taken no serious steps to ensure such an investigation of these disappearances nor to prevent them in the first place.”

Ali and his driver, Ansar Ali, have both vanished. The police found Ali’s abandoned car and mobile phone in a parking lot near his house in Banani in central Dhaka at around midnight on April 17. There has been no sign of Ali or his driver since.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called on the police to investigate Ali’s disappearance, but also said that she believed Ali and his driver were “hiding” at his party’s orders to create a situation that would allow the opposition to blame the government.

Human Rights Watch has long documented abductions and killings by Bangladeshi security forces, especially the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). In its World Report 2012 [5], Human Rights Watch noted that although the number of RAB killings had dropped following domestic and international criticism, there had been a sharp increase in enforced disappearances, with persons disappearing after last being seen in the custody of security agencies leading to concerns that security agencies have replaced one form of abuse with another. Bangladeshi authorities routinely refuse to confirm the detention or fate of those persons who disappear after being seen in their custody.

Under international law, an enforced disappearance is any form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the state or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the state, followed by a refusal to

acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person.

Home Minister Sahara Khatun, speaking in January, dismissed Human Rights Watch's allegations of possible security force involvement in abuses and laid the entire blame for disappearances on criminal elements.

“The government of Sheikh Hasina has made repeated promises to end abuses and ensure justice and accountability,” Adams said. “But in spite of these public pledges, the government consistently dismisses or ignores evidence of abuses by the security forces. This is why an independent investigation into all cases of disappearances is urgently required.”

Human Rights Watch further expressed concern about apparent excessive use of force by the security forces against protesters throughout Bangladesh during a general strike called by the BNP to protest Ali's disappearance. Since April 21, two protesters, Monwar Miya and another who is yet to be identified, have been killed in clashes between protesters and security forces. Reportedly, thousands more protesters have been injured and about one thousand have been arrested. Human Rights Watch called on the government to ensure a full and effective investigation into the two deaths, and ensure security forces only use the minimum necessary force to deal with violent crimes, as set out in the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

“While the police are allowed to stop protesters from committing acts of criminal violence, they must not use excessive force to quell the protests,” Adams said.

Source URL: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/04/26/bangladesh-alarmed-rise-disappearances>

Links:

[1] <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/04/26/bangladesh-alarmed-rise-disappearances>

[2]

[http://twitter.com/share?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Fnews%2F2012%2F04%2F26%2Fbangladesh-alarmed-rise-](http://twitter.com/share?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Fnews%2F2012%2F04%2F26%2Fbangladesh-alarmed-rise-disappearances&count=horizontal&via=&text=Bangladesh%3A%20Alarmed%20Rise%20in%20%2E%80%98Disappearances%2E%80%99&counturl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Fnews%2F2012%2F04%2F26%2Fbangladesh-alarmed-rise-disappearances)

[disappearances&count=horizontal&via=&text=Bangladesh%3A%20Alarmed%20Rise%20in%20%2E%80%98Disappearances%2E%80%99&counturl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Fnews%2F2012%2F04%2F26%2Fbangladesh-alarmed-rise-disappearances](http://twitter.com/share?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Fnews%2F2012%2F04%2F26%2Fbangladesh-alarmed-rise-disappearances&count=horizontal&via=&text=Bangladesh%3A%20Alarmed%20Rise%20in%20%2E%80%98Disappearances%2E%80%99&counturl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Fnews%2F2012%2F04%2F26%2Fbangladesh-alarmed-rise-disappearances)

[3]

[http://www.facebook.com/plugins/like.php?href=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Fnews%2F201](http://www.facebook.com/plugins/like.php?href=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Fnews%2F2012%2F04%2F26%2Fbangladesh-alarmed-rise-disappearances&layout=button_count&show_faces=false&action=recommend∓colorscheme=light&width=150&height=21&font=&locale=)

[2%2F04%2F26%2Fbangladesh-alarmed-rise-](http://www.facebook.com/plugins/like.php?href=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Fnews%2F2012%2F04%2F26%2Fbangladesh-alarmed-rise-disappearances&layout=button_count&show_faces=false&action=recommend∓colorscheme=light&width=150&height=21&font=&locale=)

[disappearances&layout=button_count&show_faces=false&action=recommend∓colorscheme=light&width=150&height=21&font=&locale=](http://www.facebook.com/plugins/like.php?href=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Fnews%2F2012%2F04%2F26%2Fbangladesh-alarmed-rise-disappearances&layout=button_count&show_faces=false&action=recommend∓colorscheme=light&width=150&height=21&font=&locale=)

[4] <http://www.hrw.org/bios/brad-adams>

[5] <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012>