

# Human Rights Watch

## Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/29/bangladesh-stop-kneecapping-detainees>

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UN Should Be Invited to Investigate Security Forces, Require Reforms

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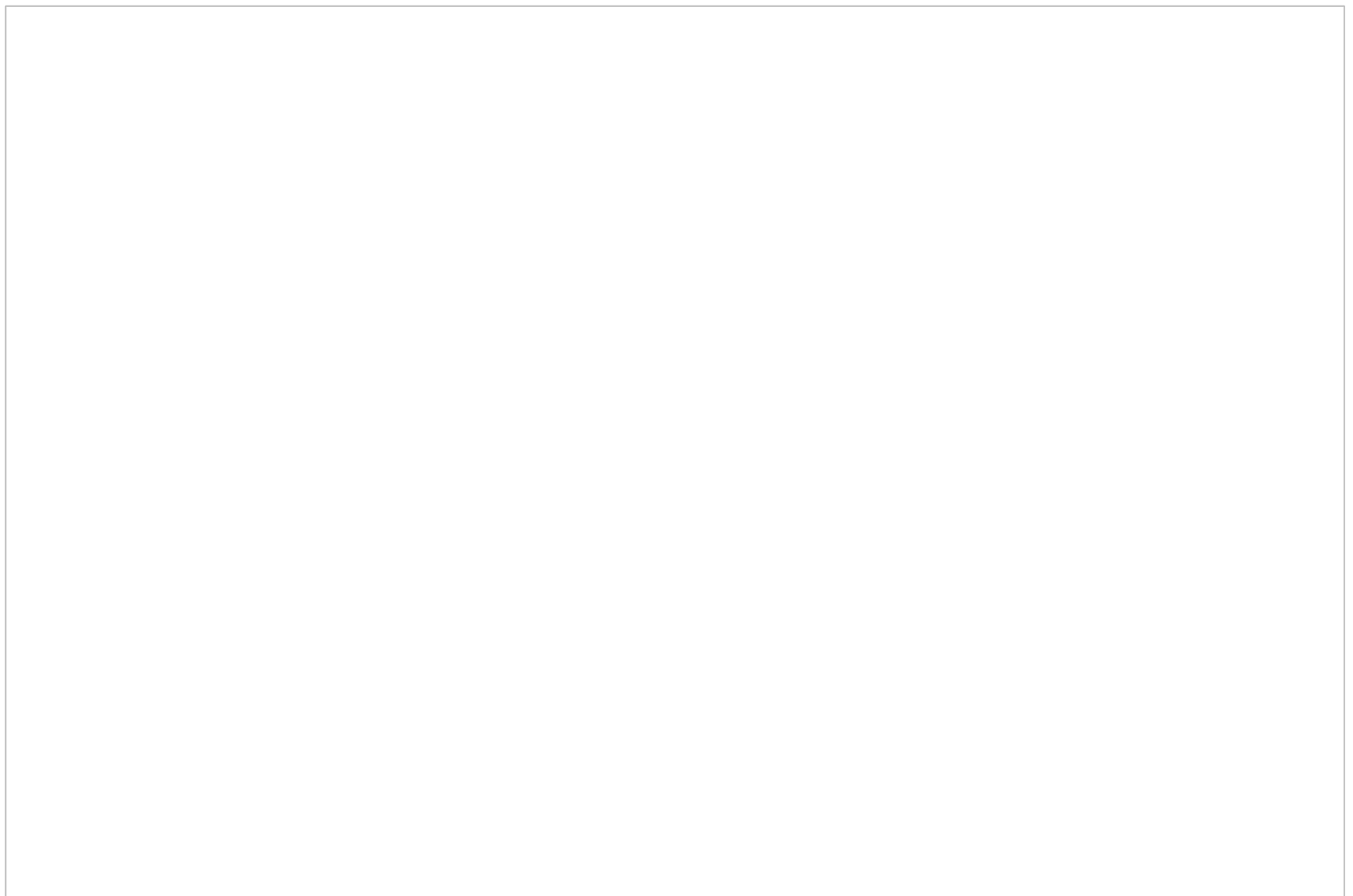


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(New York) Security forces in [Bangladesh](#) are deliberately shooting members and supporters of opposition parties in the leg, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. Victims explained that police shot them in custody and then falsely claimed that they were shot in self-defense, in crossfire with armed criminals, or during violent protests.



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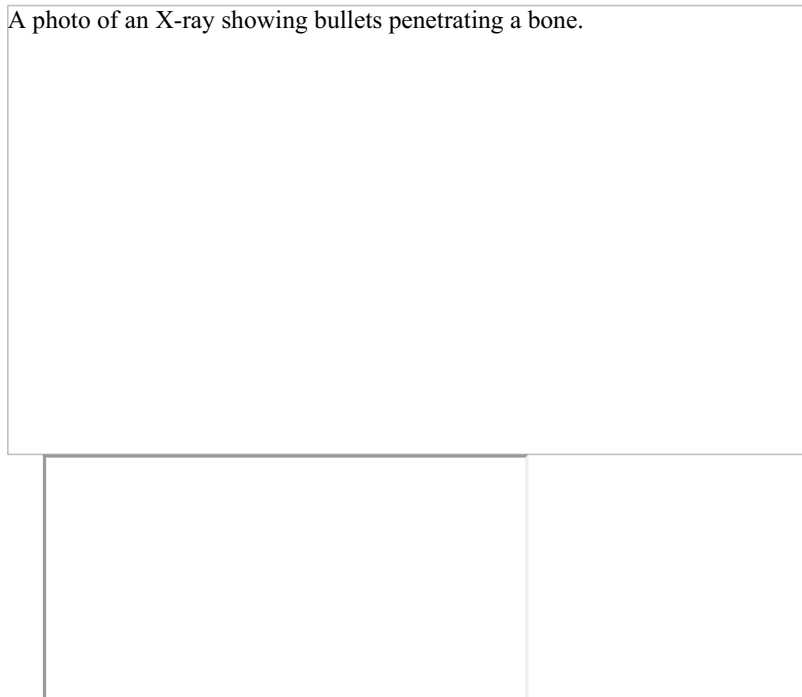
Mahbub Kabir, a marketing officer at apro-Jamaat daily newspaper, was reportedly stopped by police on his way to work and shot in the leg on March 18, 2013. 2013 BD Today

Security forces in Bangladesh have long killed detainees in fake crossfire killings, pretending the victim was killed when the authorities

took him back to the scene of the crime and were attacked by one of his accomplices, said [Brad Adams](#), Asia director. Now they're adopting tactics similar to those once used by the Irish Republican Army and engaging in kneecappings of people they have arrested, apparently because they belong to or support an opposition party.

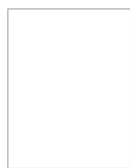
The 45-page report, [No Right to Live: Kneecapping and Maiming of Detainees by Bangladesh Security Forces](#), calls upon Bangladesh authorities to order prompt, impartial, and independent investigations into all alleged kneecappings and other deliberate infliction of serious injuries by members of the security forces. The government should also invite the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN special rapporteurs on torture and extrajudicial executions to investigate kneecappings and other alleged acts of torture and make appropriate recommendations to ensure justice, accountability, and security force reform.

A photo of an X-ray showing bullets penetrating a bone.



The report includes evidence from 25 individuals, mostly members and supporters of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami, who said that police shot them in the leg without provocation. Several of the victims are permanently disabled, including some who had their legs amputated after being shot. Many described being beaten before being shot.

Most victims were unwilling to be identified, fearing arbitrary arrest, disappearance, torture, or extrajudicial killing abuses that are [all too common in Bangladesh](#), particularly against opposition party members. Others fear legal retribution, as almost all are facing criminal cases. In two cases involving members of the media, the victims were willing to be identified in the report. Mahbub Kabir, who worked in the marketing department of the pro-Jamaat daily *Naya Diganta*, was captured and shot in front of witnesses, but the police later filed criminal cases against him. According to Mahbub Kabir, the officer who shot him later threatened him, saying, I have shot in your leg. If you speak out, then next time I will shoot in your eyes.



September 29, 2016

[No Right to Live](#)

Kneecapping and Maiming of Detainees by Bangladesh Security Forces

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[Download the summary and recommendations in Bengali](#)

Akram (pseudonym), a 32-year-old farmer, said that a police officer deliberately shot him in the leg after a raid in Chittagong: After beating me for a few minutes, the police tied me to a tree. Then [a police officer] shot me above the knee in my left leg. The officer, while denying the allegation, told a Bangladesh human rights organization that a dangerous criminal like Akram had no right to live. Admitting that he shot another criminal suspect in Chittagong a few months later during an alleged armed exchange, he acknowledged

the culture of extrajudicial killings in Bangladesh, saying: [The suspect] is still alive because he was arrested by the police. If the RAB [Rapid Action Battalion] or any other law enforcement agencies caught him, he would have been dead.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said that she has zero tolerance for extrajudicial killings or violence, but the fact that these abuses have only gotten worse since she came to power in 2009 makes it seem her government has infinite tolerance for state-sanctioned violence, Adams said.

Kneecappings appear to have started after violent street protests in early 2013. The protests followed the domestic International Crimes Tribunal sentencing of Delwar Hossain Sayedee to death for war crimes during Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence from Pakistan. Violence broke out again in the months preceding the January 2014 general elections when opposition supporters used petrol bombs and targeted the public to enforce strikes and economic blockades. Security forces responded fiercely, targeting both protesters and bystanders. Human Rights Watch [documented many cases](#) of arbitrary arrests, torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings during this period and since.

Activists say they believe Bangladesh authorities adopted the practice of kneecapping in part to dissuade people from participating in street protests.

They pushed me on the ground. And then they shot me. I was conscious. I heard one of them say, Shoot again. Then another person said, No need.

Hyder, 20, shot in March 2015

Human Rights Watch said that security officials are often under enormous pressure to prevent violence in demonstrations. However, they still have the responsibility to act within domestic and international law. Bangladesh is obliged to ensure that no one is subjected to torture, and that in the adjudication of a criminal charge, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing by a tribunal established by law, and presumed innocent until proven guilty. While Human Rights Watch is not in a position in every case to confirm or reject police claims that the victims were shot in self-defense or in crossfire during violent protests, all of the cases warrant rigorous, independent investigation and, as appropriate, criminal prosecution of the responsible police officers and commanders.

Instead of issuing a knee-jerk denial of these claims, the government should ask the United Nations for expert assistance and ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted, said Adams. Sheikh Hasina needs to make it clear that Bangladesh security forces cannot get away with killing and maiming citizens simply because they support the wrong political party.

#### **Selected Accounts**

One of the policemen was talking on his cellphone and asking a person on the other end whether they should injure or kill me. After he finished talking, the other police officers pushed me face down on the ground and shot me in my left leg. Then they put me back in the van and took me to hospital.

*-Alam, 35, shot in September 2015*

I just named two of my friends because I wanted the beating to stop. Then we stopped at a field and they blindfolded me. I had no idea what they were doing and I was shouting. They pushed me on the ground. And then they shot me. I was conscious. I heard one of them say, Shoot again. Then another person said, No need.

*-Hyder, 20, shot in March 2015*

A policeman put me into handcuffs and brought me out and made me stand. He then went behind me and shot me in my left leg. I must have fallen unconscious, because the next thing is that I found myself lying on a bed at National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation. Four days later, my left leg was amputated.

*-Anis, 45, shot in February 2013*

Kneecapping and Maiming of Detainees by Bangladesh Security Forces

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