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Secret Detentions and Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh

Bangladesh law enforcement authorities have illegally detained hundreds of people since 2013, including scores of opposition activists, and held them in secret detention. The Bangladesh government should immediately stop this widespread practice of enforced disappearances, order prompt, impartial, and independent investigations into these allegations, provide answers to families, and prosecute security forces responsible for such egregious rights violations.

Relatives hold portraits of disappeared family members at an event calling for the end of enforced disappearances, killings, and abductions, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, August 30, 2014. 2014 Zakir Hossain Chowdhury/ ZUMA Wire/Alamy

Bangladesh law enforcement authorities have illegally detained hundreds of people since 2013, including scores of opposition activists, and held them in secret detention. The Bangladesh government should immediately stop this widespread practice of enforced disappearances, order prompt, impartial, and independent investigations into these allegations, provide answers to families, and prosecute security forces responsible for such egregious rights violations.

My brother asked, Can I have your identity? What is your force? Are you RAB, CID, DB? They did not identify themselves. He asked several times. They did not wear any uniform and they had no legal arrest warrant. Nothing. They just said, Come with us. My brother said, I am a lawyer and I need to know these things. And then they said, We will give you five minutes to get ready. Get ready and come with us.

Sister of Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, a lawyer for Jamaat-e-Islami who has been disappeared since August 2016

Law enforcement forces, whether it is RAB, police, or any other one, it really doesn't matter because they all are abiding by government orders. The policy of the present government is to arrest someone and disappear them. Some of the government forces are very rude and cruel. But it is the government policy that I blame.

Father of Adnan Chowdhury, a Bangladesh Nationalist Party supporter who has been disappeared since December 2013

Since 2013, law enforcement authorities in Bangladesh have illegally detained scores of opposition activists and held them in secret without producing them before courts, as the law requires. In most cases, those arrested remain in custody for weeks or months before being formally arrested or released. Others however are killed in so-called armed exchanges, and many remain disappeared.

Bangladesh law enforcement agencies have a long history of human rights violations. The ruling Awami League party took office in January 2009 with the promise to end such abuses. However, according to Odhikar, a Dhaka-based human rights organization, Bangladesh law enforcement agencies have since disappeared over 320 people, including suspected criminals, militants, and, more recently, opposition members. Of these, 50 were later killed, and dozens remain disappeared. The rest were either released or formally produced in court as recent arrests.

Such disappearances continue, but many of the targets are now political opponents. In 2016, human rights organizations and the media documented over 90 people disappeared, of which 21 were killed. Nine remain disappeared at time of writing. In the first five months of 2017, Odhikar reported an additional 48 disappearances. In February 2017, the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary

Disappearances called on the Bangladesh government to halt the increasing number of enforced disappearances. In April 2017, Swedish Radio reported on a secretly recorded interview with a senior officer in the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), a counterterrorism unit of police and military, who admitted that the force routinely picks up people, kills them, and disposes of the bodies.

The Awami League has taken contradictory approaches to allegations of disappearances. In November 2016, confronted with cases of enforced disappearances mostly involving political opponents, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told Voice of America the allegations were baseless; those missing, he said, were hiding to embarrass the government globally. In March 2017, Law Minister Anisul Huq however acknowledged to the UN Human Rights Committee that disappearances had taken place, but claimed their numbers had been brought down to a very low level. Huq also said that Bangladeshi law did not recognize enforced disappearances, but kidnapping or abductions in the country's criminal environment had been successfully investigated, and that the government had a zero tolerance approach toward law enforcement agencies committing crimes. Nobody is above the law, nobody, he said.

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This report examines dozens of disappearances since the beginning of 2016, as well as the abduction of 22 activists from the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) between November 28 and December 11, 2013, just weeks before national elections in January 2014. Nineteen of those abducted in 2013 remain disappeared at time of writing. The report finds that state law enforcement agencies particularly RAB and the Detective Branch (DB) of the police have been involved in secret detentions and killings, despite public assertions to the contrary.

Among those picked up in 2016 whose whereabouts remain unknown are Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem and Amaan Azmi, sons of two prominent Jamaat-e-Islami opposition leaders convicted in recent trials for war crimes during Bangladesh's independence campaign in 1971. In addition, 12 of the men killed following an illegal detention in 2016 were known activists of the opposition Jamaat.

For instance, Shahid Al Mahmud, a 24-year-old Jamaat-e-Islami activist, was picked up in front of family members on June 13, 2016. His father, Rajab Ali, described the arrest at a press conference five days later, and said he was worried that his son might be killed. On July 1, the family heard reports of two men killed in a gunfight. Aware of other cases of faked armed encounters, they went to the morgue and discovered Shahid's body. Police claimed that they had opened fire after coming under attack by criminals. Rajab Ali told Human Rights Watch that the police were lying: The police abducted my son and staged a gunfight drama to justify the killing.

The 19 disappearance cases detailed in this report from 2013 all involve the BNP. The men were picked up in eight separate incidents after the BNP and its ally, Jamaat-e-Islami, launched violent protests involving arson and the use of crude bombs. Witness accounts indicate that RAB participated in at least three incidents in different parts of Dhaka in which eight BNP supporters were disappeared. In two other incidents involving the abduction of six men, witness accounts including a sighting of the disappeared being escorted by a man with DB written on his vest, and another of the disappeared in a DB office indicate the involvement of DB police officers.

Families of the disappeared have made repeated appeals to the government, visited DB and RAB offices, and sought police investigations. Some have filed cases before the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, while others have sought assistance from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), or filed habeas corpus petitions before the High Court.

In almost all cases of enforced disappearances that Human Rights Watch documented, police did not allow the families to file a General Diary (GD) the simplest way to report a crime or incident to the police if the complaint contained an allegation that law enforcement authorities were involved. Police either allowed the families only to file a GD stating that the person was kidnapped by unidentified men, or more commonly to file a complaint saying that their family member was missing.

Other than in a couple of cases, the allegations of the families and witnesses have been totally ignored, and there has been no police inquiry. In a few cases where investigations have occurred, the inquiry has been cursory, without any attempt to interview eyewitnesses.

Families had varying experiences with RAB and DB. One desperate father whose son has been missing since 2013 told Human Rights Watch:

On the other hand, the family members of Sajedul Islam Sumon, a well-known local BNP leader who was picked up in December 2013, had political connections that enabled them to contact senior RAB officers. The officers informally admitted that RAB had picked up Sumon and five other men. One former senior RAB-1 officer told the family that the men were brought into his custody immediately after being picked up, but were then removed by other RAB officials, and that he now assumed they had all been killed.

The NHRC and courts have been ineffective in dealing with these cases. The commission has not undertaken any investigations of its own. In one case in which the NHRC did intervene on behalf of a family, it was easily brushed off with vague reassurances.

Very few families of those who have been disappeared seek legal remedy. Several told Human Rights Watch they feared legal action would seriously jeopardize the safety of their relatives most families hope that they will be released after a period of secret, illegal detention. Others said the courts were ineffective as state agencies deny their role.

Bangladesh faces serious security challenges. In addition to concern of renewed violent protests by political opponents, authorities are grappling with a surge in attacks by Islamic militants targeting foreigners, religious minorities, writers, bloggers, editors, and gay rights activists that between 2013 and 2016 killed over 50 people.

However, the state has a responsibility to ensure that the law enforcement response does not violate human rights. Enforced disappearances are prohibited under both international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Instead of accepting denials, the courts if not the governments should order prompt, impartial, and independent investigations, and require that law enforcement authorities either release the missing persons, or provide answers to families about what happened and prosecute those responsible for the abuses.

The government should also invite the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN special rapporteurs to investigate serious human rights violations including disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and kneecappings and other alleged acts of torture, and make

appropriate recommendations to ensure justice, accountability, and security force reform.

This report has been researched and written by a consultant for Human Rights Watch.

It provides details of some of the over 90 reported disappearances that took place during 2016. Most of the interviews that form the basis of this part of the research were done by phone, with some additional interviews in person.

It also details 19 disappearances at the end of 2013. It uses material based on initial interviews from August to December 2014 by two journalists who worked at the time at the Bangladesh national newspaper *New Age*. On the first anniversary of the disappearances, the paper published a series of 10 articles.^[1] As a consultant with Human Rights Watch, one of the journalists conducted further research from May to August 2016 to obtain new and updated information. The interviews took place primarily in Dhaka, but also with eyewitnesses who have since moved out of the city.

In some cases, names of interviewees have been withheld to reduce the likelihood of reprisals. Over 100 people, including family members and witnesses, were interviewed to document these cases. Interviews were conducted in Bengali and English.

Bangladeshi authorities did not respond to letters that Human Rights Watch submitted in April 2017 requesting information about the specific cases documented in this report. For information on the authorities versions of the cases, we therefore have relied on news accounts giving details of their responses, where such accounts are available.

Bangladesh has a long history of human rights violations and lack of accountability for security forces.^[2] However, the disappearance of 19 Dhaka-based opposition activists over a two-week period at the end of 2013 appears exceptional. The only comparable abuse was at the end of the country's independence war in December 1971, when Pakistan military, aided by local extremists, abducted and killed 17 academics and journalists in Dhaka over a four-day period.^[3]

While extrajudicial killings, or deaths in so-called crossfire incidents, have persisted for years, the Awami League committed to end these abuses after it came to power in January 2009. However, over 320 people been disappeared by Bangladesh law enforcement agencies for various amounts of time since the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed took office, as reported by the nongovernmental organization Odhikar. Since 2013, in a new phenomenon in Bangladesh, many of those targeted have been members of the political opposition.

Many of those disappeared have not returned or were mysteriously killed, often in alleged gunfights.^[4] In 2016, there were confirmed reports of at least 90 disappearances.^[5] Odhikar has reported 48 cases from January to May 2017. The total number is likely to be higher, as families or witnesses do not always report disappearances.

The Awami League won an overwhelming majority of seats in the new parliament in the December 29, 2008 elections. Bangladesh has a deeply fractured political climate, and for the next five years, the main opposition parties the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Jamaat-e-Islami rarely attended parliament.^[6] On June 30, 2011, the government amended the constitution, removing provisions that the government would hand over power to a non-political caretaker administration three months before elections.^[7] The BNP and the Jamaat demanded the provision be reintroduced before the 2014 elections to ensure free and fair polling.

The governments refusal prompted the BNP and the Jamaat to lead an 18-party opposition alliance to organize a series of three-day *hartals* (national strikes) and blockades to press their demands. To enforce the strikes, many opposition party activists set fire to cars and government buildings, targeting public vehicles with crude bombs. On November 8, 2013, just after the BNP announced yet another three-day *hartal*, the government started to crack down on BNP leaders for alleged involvement in the violence.^[8]

The opposition continued to call strikes. Related street violence and retaliation by security forces resulted in deaths and injuries. The opposition also announced a poll boycott. International diplomacy, including a visit by a senior United Nations official, failed to lead to an agreement. Elections took place on January 5, 2014, without the involvement of opposition candidates. Thus, more than half the seats were uncontested.^[9]

Clashes between supporters of the Awami League and opposition parties started again in early 2015, on the anniversary of the controversial elections. By the end of February 2015, up to 120 people had been killed in the political violence.^[10] Toward the end of March 2015, under pressure, opposition parties stopped their strikes and picketing. However, a new crackdown on the opposition then began to unfold.^[11]

In parallel to the conflict between the government and political opposition, Islamic militants have since 2013 carried out attacks that have killed over 50 people. The attacks took two different forms.

The motivation for one category of attacks, which were claimed by the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Ansar al-Islam, has been perceived insults to Islam.^[12] These attacks include the hacking of Asif Mohiuddin, an outspoken atheist blogger, in January 2013;^[13] the killing of secular blogger and political activist Ahmed Rajib Haider in front of his family home in Dhaka the following month;^[14] the killing of blogger Avijit Roy, a US national of Bangladeshi origin, in February 2015 in a machete attack that also seriously injured his wife; and the death of seven more people in the months that followed, including two LGBT activists. Some of the targets were among the 84 people publicly named as atheists by extremist groups.^[15] Many bloggers and activists have gone into hiding, fled the country, or stopped writing.

A second type of attack, claimed by ISIS (also known as the Islamic State), has targeted foreigners in Bangladesh, as well as members of religious minority groups including Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Shia. These began in September 2015, when unknown attackers shot and killed Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella. In the following ten months, 19 people were killed in similar attacks. On July 1, 2016, militants attacked a caf in the upscale Gulshan neighborhood of Dhaka, in which 18 foreign nationals, two Bangladeshis, and two police officers died.^[16] Although ISIS claimed responsibility for all these attacks, the government has denied an ISIS connection, as well as the groups presence in Bangladesh, and instead has blamed opposition parties and a revamped version of the local Islamist group Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), which police authorities term the neo-JMB.^[17]

One of the first well documented incidents of an apparent enforced disappearance in post-1971 Bangladesh is the case of Kalpana Chakma, an indigenous women's rights activist, who was picked up along with her two brothers from their home in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, allegedly by army officers on election day in 1996. The two brothers escaped after a few days, but Kalpana, a strong critic of the army's role in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, remains missing, presumed dead.^[18]

In 2002, the then-ruling BNP started Operation Clean Heart to tackle crime, resulting in thousands of detentions and reports of over 40 deaths, many allegedly through torture.^[19] In 2004, the BNP government established RAB as an elite counterterrorism unit combining members of the armed forces and police.^[20] In the first two years, Human Rights Watch identified 367 people killed by RAB in alleged crossfire.^[21] In several

cases, men were picked up by RAB, disappeared, and killed. RAB denied the detentions.[\[22\]](#)

On January 11, 2007, following violent political protests around planned elections, the military stepped in, proclaiming a state of emergency, and established a caretaker government. In November 2008, near the end of the military-backed caretaker government, the human rights organization Odhikar found that 245 people had been killed in alleged crossfires or gunfights, and 38 people had allegedly been tortured to death since January 2007.[\[23\]](#)

The Awami League came to power in January 2009 promising that extrajudicial killings will be stopped.[\[24\]](#) That commitment soon faltered.[\[25\]](#) In May 2011, a Human Rights Watch report found that since the Awami League took office, nearly 200 people had been killed in RAB operations.[\[26\]](#) Regardless of who has led them, governments in Bangladesh have justified extrajudicial killings as lawful self-defense.

As the Awami Leagues term continued, law enforcement authorities started to increasingly target the opposition. While extrajudicial killings continued, reports of enforced disappearances, which until then were rare, increased.[\[27\]](#) Families and eyewitnesses have repeatedly made allegations against the Detective Branch (DB) of the police, in addition to RAB, for its alleged role in these disappearances.[\[28\]](#)

In a few cases, those illegally detained have been released without ever being formally arrested. For instance, in two high profile disappearances, a witness at the International Crimes Tribunal in November 2012 and a BNP spokesperson in April 2015 were picked up and secretly detained in Bangladesh for around six weeks.[\[29\]](#) They were then discovered in Indian territory where they were arrested by Indian authorities for illegal entry. In a more recent case, the police released two men at a public meeting attended by the home minister who they said had handed themselves in and turned their back on militancy, though their current whereabouts remain uncertain. In May 2017, Muhammed Iqbal Mahmud, who had been picked up in Dhaka eight months earlier, was left blindfolded on the side of the Dhaka-Raipur road.[\[30\]](#)

In most cases, the men remain in secret detention for weeks or months before the police suddenly claim to have arrested them the previous day. The men are then taken to the magistrate court and are remanded into police custody on the basis of a concocted story.

In other disappearances, the mens fate is more serious they are killed in alleged gunfire or their dead bodies are found. In 2016, this happened to 21 of those disappeared.[\[31\]](#) For some, including the 19 disappeared in 2013 detailed in this report, their whereabouts remain unknown.

As of May 2016, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances had formally received information on 34 cases of alleged enforced disappearances in Bangladesh. In its annual report published in July 2016, the group reiterated its regrets that no information has been received concerning the alleged frequent use of enforced disappearance as a tool by law enforcement agencies, paramilitary and armed forces to detain and even extrajudicially execute individuals.[\[32\]](#)

The Bangladesh government has also not responded to a request by the Working Group to visit Bangladesh, first sent on March 12, 2013, and resent on November 27, 2015. In February 2017, the group issued a statement, endorsed by four UN special rapporteurs, calling on the Bangladesh government to halt the increasing number of enforced disappearances and reveal the whereabouts of three sons of opposition leaders who had been abducted.[\[33\]](#)

In April 2017, Swedish Radio reported that it had in its possession a secretly recorded interview with a senior RAB official, which it had authenticated, describing RABs practice of disappearing and killing people. Everyone is not an expert on forced disappearances. We have to make sure no clue is left behind, the RAB official is quoted as saying.[\[34\]](#)

The government has failed to investigate allegations of disappearances and hold perpetrators to account. In 2014, for example, in response to questions about the 2013 disappearances detailed in this report, the state minister for home affairs, Asaduzzaman Khan, told *New Age* that though one or two incidents had happened at that time, law men were not involved in any of those cases.[\[35\]](#)

One exception to the lack of investigation occurred in Narayanganj district. Seven men, including an Awami League leader, were picked up by RAB officials in April 2014 over a dispute with a party competitor. A few days later, their bloated bodies floated to the surface of the Shitalakkya River, triggering a media storm. The High Court intervened, and the eventual investigation and prosecution resulted in the conviction in January 2017 of 35 people for murder, including three RAB officers.[\[36\]](#)

Although Bangladesh law does not contain any specific criminal offense of enforced disappearance, the Penal Code, 1860, contains offenses including wrongful confinement; wrongful confinement in secret; abduction; kidnapping or abducting with intent secretly and wrongfully to confine person; kidnapping or abducting in order to subject person to grievous hurt, slavery; and wrongfully concealing or keeping in confinement, kidnapped or abducted person.[\[37\]](#) Penalties for these offenses range from two to ten years imprisonment. In addition, the Torture and Custodial Death (Prohibition) Act, 2013, makes torture an offense punishable by up to five years imprisonment. Death by torture is punishable by a life sentence.[\[38\]](#)

The Bangladesh constitution also imposes obligations on the state to protect the fundamental rights of every citizen, forbidding any action that is detrimental to the life, liberty, body, reputation or property of any person.[\[39\]](#) The state is further obligated to secure the right to life and personal liberty.[\[40\]](#)

In early November 2016, Bangladeshs highest court published guidelines requiring law enforcement officers to undertake a basic set of actions when arresting a person. They include an obligation to inform a close relative or friend of the arrested person about the time and place of the detention; to make clear the location where the person is being held; and to allow the arrested person access to a lawyer or relatives. Officers must prepare a memorandum of arrest to be signed by the arrested person and complete a case diary, which must be handed to a magistrate if the officer requests custody of a suspect for more than 24 hours, setting out the allegations and need for further investigation.[\[41\]](#)

In Bangladesh, a prosecutor must obtain a prior government sanction before lodging any criminal complaint against a state official, permission that is seldom granted.[\[42\]](#) The law allows both police officers and the Rapid Action Battalion to escape prosecution if they can show that they acted in good faith.[\[43\]](#)

Bangladesh is obliged to follow the standards set out in the 1992 UN General Assembly's Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (Declaration on Enforced Disappearances).[\[44\]](#) Although non-binding, the declaration reflects the consensus of the international community against this type of human rights violation and provides authoritative guidance as to the safeguards that must be implemented to prevent it. Bangladesh also has obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which enshrines the right to life, liberty, and security, and right to a fair trial.[\[45\]](#)

Bangladesh is party to the Rome Statute setting up the International Criminal Court.[\[46\]](#) The statute includes enforced disappearances as one of

the crimes against humanity over which the court has jurisdiction.[\[47\]](#) The statute defines enforced disappearance of persons as the arrest, detention or abduction of persons by, or with the authorization, support or acquiescence of, a State or a political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons.[\[48\]](#)

Under the Rome Statute, enforced disappearances amount to a crime against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population, such as a state policy to plan and commit such crimes.[\[49\]](#)

Human rights organizations and media have documented over 90 people disappeared in 2016, of whom 21 were later found dead. The whereabouts of nine remain unknown at time of writing. The others, after varying periods of secret detention, were released before being formally arrested.

There have been additional reports of other disappearances involving people suspected of involvement in the Holey Artisan Bakery attack on July 1, 2016, or linked to the neo-JMB, which are not included in these numbers. For example, it was reported that alleged militants Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury and Nurul Islam Marjan were detained in state custody for significant periods of time before being killed in so-called counterterrorism operations on August 27, 2016, and January 7, 2017, respectively.[\[50\]](#)

The 21 men picked up and killed are set out in the table below. Twelve were Jamaat-e-Islami activists, three were Awami League members, one was a BNP activist, three were allegedly involved in murders, and two were alleged to be criminals.[\[51\]](#) Below the table are further details on eight of the cases, based on interviews with families and witnesses.

ILLEGALLY DETAINED AND KILLED IN 2016:

Name
Date of detention
Date body was found
Summary of family allegations of pick up and death
Abu Huraira, 55
January 24
February 29
Abu Huraira, a teacher at Kuthi Durgapur Madrasa and a senior member of Jamaat-e-Islami in Jhenaidah, was picked up outside the school where he taught by men who identified themselves as DB members. His body was found a month later on the Jessore-Jhenaidah road. [52]
Mohammad Jasim Uddin, 23
February 12
March 2
Mohammad Jasim Uddin, a student at Jhenaidah Alia Madrasa and a leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing, was picked up in Dhaka by some men in plainclothes claiming to be police. His body was found in a field 20 days later bearing torture marks.
Mukul Rana (Sharif alias Saleh alias Arif)
February 23
June 19
Mukul Rana, accused of involvement in the killing of blogger Avijit Roy, was picked up and put in a microbus from Bashundia intersection in Jessore by men who self-identified as police. Four months later, police said his body was recovered after a gunfight. [53]
Abu Jar Gifari, 21
Shamim Mahmud, 23
March 18
March 25
April 13
Abu Jar Gifari, a Jamaat-e-Islami student leader in Jhenaidah, was picked up as he left the mosque after Friday prayers by four armed men in plainclothes, who identified themselves as police. Shamim Mahmud, also a Jamaat-e-Islami student activist, was picked up outside a grocery store by men claiming to be police. Nearly three weeks later, their bodies were recovered, allegedly with bullet wounds, near the cremation ground in Jessore Sadar Upazila.
Sohanur Rahman, 16
April 10
April 20
Sohanur Rahman, a supporter of the Jamaat-e-Islami, was arrested in Ishwarba village in Jhenaidah, in front of his younger brother. His body, with bullet injuries, was found 10 days later.

Shahid Al Mahmud, 24

Anisur Rahman, 26

June 13

June 16

July 1

Shahid Al Mahmud, a cattle farmer and Jamaat-e-Islami student activist, was picked up early in the morning from his house in Jhenaidah in front of his parents and taken away in a microbus. Anisur Rahman, also a student activist, was picked up three days later from a hostel in Dhaka.[\[54\]](#) Their bodies were recovered two weeks later. Police claimed they were killed during a gunfight with criminals at the Tatultala-Naldanga road in Jhenaidah.[\[55\]](#)

Ibnul Islam Parvez, 27

June 16

July 2

Ibnul Islam Parvez, former president of the Jhenaidah district town unit Jamaat student wing, was picked up from a hostel in Dhaka (along with Anisur Rahman, see above). Two weeks later, the police said that Parvez's body was found in Aruakandi village following a gunfight.[\[56\]](#)

Nurun Nabi, 28

Nurul Islam Rashed, 27

June 23

July 5

Nurun Nabi and Nurul Islam Rashed, suspected of involvement in the killing of a police officer's wife, were picked up by police from a house in the Millitarir Pool area in Chittagong where they were staying. Two weeks later, the police stated that their bodies were found following a gunfight at MBW Brick field close to the city.[\[57\]](#)

Saiful Islam, 25

July 1

July 19

Saiful Islam, an activist of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing, was picked up by police from his hostel in Jhenaidah along with four other students, and was seen the following day by his family at a police station. Nearly three weeks later, police claimed to have found his body close to Jhenaidah highway following a gunfight with criminals.

Faruk
Hossain, 42

July 1

July 2

Faruk Hossain, claimed by police to be a member of a gang of robbers, was picked up in Jessore by four men on two motorbikes identifying themselves as police officers. Police later said his body was found following a gunfight.[\[58\]](#)

Oliullah
Molla, 38

July 9

July 10

Oliullah Mollah, vice president of a local brick field workers association and general secretary of his local unit of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in Satkhira, was picked up by police from the Paruli bazaar area. Police later said his body was found in Ganghati village following a gunfight.

Idris Ali, 56

August 4

August 12

Idris Ali, a madrasa teacher and Jamaat-e-Islami leader in Jhenaidah, was picked up by police while returning to his house at night. Eight days later, his body was found on the Harinakundu-Jhenaidah road with marks of torture.

Mohammad Zahurul
Islam, 42

September 7

October 25

Mohammad Zahurul Islam, president of the Jhenaidah town unit of Jamaat-e-Islami and a lecturer at Keyarbazar College, was picked up on his way home for lunch in the Al Hera area by men claiming to be DB members. A month later, police said he was shot dead on the Jhenaidah town bypass road when they opened fire in self- defense.[\[59\]](#)

Tarique Hassan Shajib, 40

September 13

October 25

Tarique Hassan Shajib, member of Jamaat-e-Islami, was picked up just after midnight by men claiming to be police from Al Hera school in Jhenaidah town where the party often held meetings. His body was found on October 25 with that of Zahurul Islam, whose case is described above.[\[60\]](#)

Safinul Islam (alias Safin), 32

September 27

October 26

Safinul Islam, previously convicted in a murder case, was picked up from Dhaka by men identifiable as members of RAB. RAB denied the arrest that time, but a month later, claimed that he was killed in a gunfight at Dadrajonti village in Joypurhat.[\[61\]](#)

Redwan Sabbir

Abu Abdullah

Sohel Rana

December 3

December 5

Redwan Sabbir, Abu Abdullah, and Sohel Rana, three Awami League youth wing activists, were picked up by a group of about 12 men, some wearing vests inscribed with RAB, from a tea stall in Tokia Bazar in Natore, late at night. Their bodies, with bullet wounds, were found two days later in Dinajpur.[\[62\]](#)

Mohammad Jasim Uddin, a student at Jhenaidah Alia Madrasa, was acting president of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing in Ganna union unit in Jhenaidah district. According to his relatives, he no longer lived at his home in the Kalohati area of Jhenaidah town, fearing arrest. However, as his mother was sick, in February 2016 he decided to visit her. He was picked up soon after. His father, Khalil Rahman, said:

Soon after Jasim went missing, his older brother, Saifur Rahman, went to the Rajbari police station and local RAB offices, but they denied the arrest. On March 4, his family members were informed that a mutilated body had been found at Mostabapur field in Harinakundu Upazila. His brother identified his body. Jasim had been shot in the head, and his hands and legs were tied.[\[64\]](#) His mother said the family did not receive a postmortem report.[\[65\]](#)

Abu Jar Gifari, a third-year student at the Jessore MM College, was president of the local Jamaat-e-Islami student wing in Jhenaidah. Citing witnesses, Abus father, Nur Islam, said that on March 18, 2016, his son was picked up by four armed men who identified themselves as DB members:

Later that afternoon, Nur Islam went to the Kaliganj police station where officers denied having carried out any such operation.[\[67\]](#)

Family members also met RAB officials who claimed to have no information regarding Abus whereabouts. We were terrified and requested officials of law enforcement agencies not kill him in crossfire. They however insisted that they did not pick him up, his father said.

On the morning of April 13, the family was informed that two bodies had been found near the cremation ground in Jessore Sadar Upazila.[\[68\]](#) His father said:

The other body was that of Shamim Mahmud.

Shamim Mahmud, 23, a second-year student at KC College in Jhenaidah and an activist of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing, was detained on March 24, 2016. His father, Ruhul Amin, a madrasa teacher, said eyewitnesses told him that his son was sitting at a grocery store reading a newspaper in the afternoon when four men in plainclothes entered and picked him up at gunpoint. Ruhul Amin said:

Family members went to the Kaliganj police station but officials did not allow them to lodge a GD, and denied that they were involved in picking up Shamim. Instead, they criticized the father for allowing his son to be involved in Jamaat politics. Family members searched for Shamim at the local RAB-6 office and other police stations with no luck. They also approached a local member of parliament. However, no one could provide information about Shamims whereabouts.

Three weeks later, on April 13, Shamims body was found along with that of Abu Jar Gifari near the cremation ground in Jessore. The family said that the body had bullet wounds and signs of torture.[\[71\]](#)

Sohanur Rahman, 16, a high school student in Jhenaidah and a supporter of the Jamaat-e-Islami, was picked up from Ishwarba village on April 10, 2016. Sohanur and his brother, Masud, were waiting for their mother to return from Dhaka when Sohanur was detained, according to their father Mohsin Ali. Mohsin said:

Locals identified two of the men as sub-inspectors from the Kaliganj police station. The next day, family members went to the police station. Police denied they had arrested Sohanur and did not initially allow the family members to file a GD, though they later allowed it.[\[73\]](#)

Sohanurs family members also met with their local Awami League lawmaker, the Jhenaidah police superintendent, and the local RAB commander, but no one provided any information on Sohanurs whereabouts. On April 20, Sohanurs body was found in Kharagoda village, about 17 kilometers from their house.^[74] His family said that his body showed signs of bullet injuries to the head. His father said that they asked for a copy of the postmortem report, but the police refused to provide one.^[75]

Shahid Al Mahmud, 24, was a cattle farmer and activist of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing. He lived with his parents in Badanpur village in Jhenaidah district. He was detained on June 13, 2016. His father, Rajab Ali, said the family was asleep when the police came:

Shakib Al Hassan, who was staying at a neighboring house, said he saw his cousin Shahid being put into the microbus. The human rights group Odhikar interviewed a neighbor, Khair Uddin, who said he recognized one of the arresting officers.^[77]

Abdur Rahim, Shahids older brother, who lives in Jhenaidah town, said he rushed to the police station after he heard about the arrest, but police denied having any knowledge about it.^[78] Later that day he went to other police stations, the local RAB-6, and DB offices, but they all denied any knowledge of the detention.

The following day, June 15, Abdur attempted to file a GD laying out what had happened to his brother and mentioning the police and name of the officer who witnesses claimed was present. He was refused:

On June 18, the family held a press conference at Jhenaidah Press Club where they described Shahids detention.^[80] On July 1, the family heard reports of two men killed in a crossfire incident. Aware of other cases of such faked armed encounters, they went to the morgue and discovered Shahids body.

The police claimed that a team was patrolling Tatultala-Naldanga road in the early morning on July 1, when at about 3:30 a.m. some criminals hurled several bombs at the police vehicle.^[81] The police returned fire. After a 20-minute gun battle, two dead bodies were found, one of whom was Shahid. The police claimed to have recovered a firearm, two bullets, five sharp weapons, and five crude bombs from the spot. They also said that some officers were wounded. Shahids father said the police are lying. The police abducted my son and staged a gunfight drama to justify the killing.^[82]

Saiful Islam, 25, was a student in the Arabic Literature Department at the Islamic University in Kushtia and an activist of the Jamaat-e-Islami student wing. He lived in a private hostel along with other party activists. Saifuls brother, Abdullah Al Azad, said that in the early morning of July 2, he received a telephone call from Saifuls brother-in-law.

Luftur Islam, Saifuls father, said he immediately went to meet the local ward chairman to request his intervention. The chairman told them to go and speak to the police, promising to put in a word. Luftur, along with a neighbor, Topon, went to the city police station. Saifuls father said that they saw Saiful in one of the cells: We saw Saiful and some other students in police custody. My son insisted that police would release him if the chairman requested them to do so.^[84]

The police agreed that Luftur could go outside the police station and buy some breakfast for his son. But when he returned, Saiful was gone.

Four other students that had been picked up that morning were released in the afternoon. They told Saifuls family members that five of them, including Saiful, had been detained together and brought to the local police station. They did not know what happened to Saiful after they were released.

Fulhari Union Chairman Jamilur Rahman Bipul said that a police officer had called him and asked about Saiful. I told the police officer that Saiful was a good person and was not involved with any criminal activities in localities. The policeman replied that Saiful was a Shibir activist in the town and the university area.^[86]

In subsequent days, Saifuls father went to the RAB and DB offices, but they all denied any knowledge of the arrest. On the morning of July 19, Saifuls family read on the Ekushey TV crawl that a person had been killed in a gunfight beside a graveyard in Ariakandi village. Worried, they went to the morgue, where they found Saifuls body.

The police claimed that at about 3 a.m., a police team was patrolling the Dhaka-Jhenaidah highway near Madhupur-Aruakandi graveyard when some criminals hurled crude bombs at the police vehicle. The law enforcers returned fire, triggering the gunfight, and one of the criminals was shot by police. Others managed to flee, police said.^[87]

Oliullah Molla, 38, general secretary of his local unit of BNP, was detained by police from the Paruli bazaar area in Satkhira on July 9, 2016.^[88] When his relatives went to the local Shyamnagar police station, they said that the police confirmed the arrest but refused to let them to meet Oliullah. The family also said that local Awami League leaders demanded bribes to ensure his safety. His wife said the family began to fear for his safety:

At about 3:30 a.m. the following morning, I heard sounds of gunshots from a nearby area. I become frightened wondering whether Oliullah had been shot. My fear was proven right as in the morning I was informed about the murder of my husband.^[89]

Sohidullah, Oliullahs brother, said that family members went to the hospital morgue and found that Oliullah had been shot in the head. They also saw that his right eye was out of its socket and his right hand was cut. Police, however, claimed that they were on duty in Ganghati village when at about 3:30 a.m. a group of men sped down the road on motorbikes. The police tried to stop them, but the men instead hurled bombs and opened fire on the police, resulting in a gunfight during which Oliullah was killed.^[90]

Idris Ali, 56, a teacher at the Hossain Ali Aleem Madrasa at Harinakundu Upazila in the Jhenaidah, was a local Jamaat-e-Islami leader. At about 8 p.m. on August 4, 2016, Idris was on his motorbike returning to his house from the market when, according to witnesses, some plainclothes people from a police post stopped him and forcibly dragged him away.^[91]

Family members went to their local police station after witnesses told them about the incident. But the officer-in-charge told them that the location where Idris was allegedly taken was not within the stations jurisdiction, and that they should go to the Shailkupa police station to file a GD. Officers there, however, declined to allow them to do so.

Idriss wife held a press conference on August 9 describing the disappearance. On the morning of August 12, the family was informed that the body of a missing madrasa teacher was found on the Harinakundu-Jhenaidah road. A family member said they went to the morgue:

Police claimed that Idris Ali was wanted in several criminal cases, including for the murder of a police officer.[\[93\]](#)

Cases of nine men who were picked up in 2016 and remain disappeared at time of writing are set out in the table below.[\[94\]](#) Some of these people, by the time of publication, may have been released or killed. Below the table are further details of five of the cases, based on interviews with families and witnesses.

DISAPPEARED IN 2016, WHEREABOUTS REMAIN UNKNOWN:

Name

Pick up date

Summary

Moazzem Hossain Tapu, 28

January 26

Moazzem Hossain Tapu, an Awami League student wing activist, was picked up from an apartment in Bashundhara Residential Area in Dhaka belonging to a political rival from the same party. The men who picked him up introduced themselves to the building guard as law enforcement officials.

Bivas Sangma, 25

Probhat Marak, 50

Rajesh Marak, 22

April 14

At around 4 a.m. on April 14, about 12 men, some wearing black clothes inscribed with RAB, came to Gozni village in Sherpur and picked up Bivas Sangma, a student at Tinani Adarsha Degree College, and Probhat Marak, a day laborer, from their homes. The same day, Probhat's son, Rajesh Marak, a student at a private university in Dhaka, was picked up near Bhaluka College in Mymensingh.[\[95\]](#)

Kamrul Islam Sikdar Musa

June 22

Law enforcement officials picked up Kamrul Islam Sikdar Musa as he approached the house of a friend in the Kathgar area of Chittagong where his wife and children were staying. Police have said that Musa is suspected of killing a senior police official, though they deny picking him up.[\[96\]](#)

Yasin Mohammad Abdus Samad Talukder, 35

July 14

Yasin Mohammad, alleged by police to have been involved in Islamic militancy, was picked up by law enforcement officers from his parked car at the Kakoli bus stand in Dhaka.

Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, 32

August 9

Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, the son of an opposition politician, was picked up by law enforcement officers late at night from his home in Dhaka.

Amaan Azmi, 57

August 22

Amaan Azmi, the son of an opposition politician, was picked up by law enforcement officers from his home in Mogh Bazaar, Dhaka, in the evening.

Sheikh Mohammad Lotiful Khabir (alias Anowar Hossain), 45

November 10

Plainclothes dressed men, introducing themselves as from the administration, picked up Anowar Hossain, a homeopathic doctor, from his clinic next to his house in Boalia, Rajshai.

Yasin Mohammad Abdus Samad Talukder, 35, a physics teacher, lived in Dhaka in an apartment with his mother. A Bangladeshi national with dual British citizenship, Yasin went to school in Bangladesh, moved to the United Kingdom in 2001 for higher studies, and returned to Dhaka four years later after suffering an assault. His family has acknowledged that in 2011, British government intelligence officers asked him to attend a number of counterterrorism interviews at the British High Commission due to concerns about his alleged involvement in militancy, and that Yasin allowed the officers access to his computer.[\[97\]](#) According to his family, the intelligence officers concluded he was no threat. The British High Commission declined to respond to questions related to Yasin's background stating that it cannot discuss individual consular cases.[\[98\]](#)

On July 12, two days before Yasin was picked up, a national paper in Bangladesh published an article stating that Yasin was among the suspects listed in an FIR, filed five months earlier, for conspiring to attack private buildings.[\[99\]](#) Yasin's family questioned the authenticity of the allegation.

On the morning of July 14, 2016, Yasin had arranged to meet his cousin Sidrat near the Kakoli bus stand so they could drive together to attend a

wedding. [100] At about 11:40 a.m., Yasin called his cousin to find out where he was. Sidrat said he was 10 minutes away. Soon after, Sidrat received another phone call from Yasin. He said:

Sidrat said he kept trying Yasins phone and then called Yasins mother and uncle. A police officer stationed at the local police post advised the family to go to Banani police station to file a GD. Yasins mother said that while the Banani police station refused to accept the complaint, she was able to lodge a GD at the Bashantec police station where she lives. [102] Yasins mother also informed the British High Commission about what had happened to her son, and was advised to instruct a lawyer.

Two days after the incident, a man who gave his name as Sarwar Jahan and claimed to be from the Police Bureau of Investigation came to the apartment where Yasin and his mother lived. Yasins mother described the visit:

Then on the night of July 21, seven days after Yasin was picked up, men from RAB came to the house.

The British High Commission has confirmed that Yasin was detained in July 2016, and that the Foreign Office was continuing to press the Bangladesh authorities for consular access. [105] However, the authorities deny that they have Yasin in custody.

Moazzem Hossain Tapu, 28, was a former president of the Rampura unit of the Chhatra League, the student wing of the Awami League, and was aspiring to be appointed to a higher political post.

In November 2015, as a result of a clash in Rampura between the local Awami League members, Tapu went into hiding in his home village in Faridganj, Chandpur district. [106] Two months later, on January 26, his mother, Saleha Begum, said that her son called her to say that he was back in Dhaka. He left Faridganj at about 8 a.m.

Later that night Tapus brother, Moinul Hossain Opu, said that Imon phoned him to say that Tapu had been picked up from an apartment in Bashundhara Residential Area under Vatara police station. Moinul said:

The family went to the Vatara police station to inquire about his whereabouts. [109] The sub-inspector on duty told them he had no information about Tapu, and they should inquire with the DB or RAB offices. On January 28, the family attempted to file a GD at the station, but the officers would not initially accept it, and asked the family to consult the DB or RAB.

On January 30, the family filed the GD. They followed up two days later, on February 1, filing a First Information Report (FIR) at the police station. They said they did so at the suggestion of the home minister, whom they met regarding Tapus disappearance. Since several family members hold leadership positions in the Awami League, they have a relationship with the minister, they explained, and met him more than 20 times regarding the case. They added that he made several calls to different law enforcement agencies, including the DB, RAB, and Inspector Generals Office on Tapus behalf.

Based on information provided by the home minister, Tapus family thinks that Tapus friends and some Jubo League leaders were behind the disappearance, and they have filed an FIR alleging their involvement. They believe Jubo League leaders bribed an RAB unit to apprehend and detain Tapu, though they did not name police or RAB officers in their complaint.

The case is now being investigated by DB. The family has organized several press conferences seeking information, and complained about threats and demands for bribes. [110] His mother Saleha Begum said: Weve never received an official acknowledgement that he is in custody. We dont know where he is being held. At least if there was a body, we would know what happened. We dont know if hes dead or alive. [111]

Kamrul Islam Sikdar Musa, a sand trader who also allegedly worked as a police informant, was suspected of involvement in the Chittagong murder of the wife of a senior counterterrorism officer. [112] On June 22, 2016, he was picked up in the Kathghar area of Chittagong as he approached a house where he thought it was safe to meet his wife and children, as arranged by a friend, but which in fact had been identified by the police. His wife, Panna Akhter, said:

Panna said that police have refused a GD and denied the arrest, and that authorities have threatened her since her husbands detention for being vocal about what happened to him. [114] In early October, police announced a 500,000 taka (US\$6,200) reward for information leading to his arrest. [115] Musas wife called the reward a farce since he was picked up in June. [116]

Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, 32, is the son of Mir Quasem Ali, a prominent leader of the opposition Jamaat-e-Islami party who was convicted of war crimes in November 2014 and was facing execution when his son was picked up. Mir Ahmad is a Supreme Court lawyer who was involved in the legal team representing several men prosecuted by the International Crimes Tribunal, including his father. He was picked up from his house late on August 9, 2016, in the presence of his wife and sister, Tahera Tasnim, who said seven or eight men in civilian clothes came to the door around 11 p.m.:

The following day, his wife filed a GD in Pallabi Thana but police refused to allow them to describe the men who took Mir Ahmad as law enforcement officials, and instead required them to describe them simply as civil-dressed men. On December 22, 2016, she filed an FIR with the same police station. [118]

Mir Ahmads father, Quasem Ali, was hanged in September. Mir Ahmad was not able to meet his father before the execution or attend his fathers funeral.

In the weeks before his arrest, Mir Ahmad had told Human Rights Watch that he was worried that he might be arrested or disappeared. According to his family, a few days before he was picked up, on the same day that Humam Quader Chowdhury was detained (see below), RAB officers visited his apartment late at night. [119]

Amaan Azmi, 57, a retired brigadier general, is the son of Ghulam Azam, a former leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami party who was convicted of war crimes and sentenced to death in 2013. Considering his age of 90, the court ruled that Azam would serve a life sentence rather than face execution. He died of a heart attack in prison in October 2014.

Amaan Azmi was picked up on the evening of August 22, 2016. About 30 men in civilian clothes entered his apartment building, telling staff that they were from DB. Abul Kalam Azad, an employee in the building, said that he saw security forces, most carrying firearms, with over a dozen vehicles cordoning the house:

Azmis wife, mother, and several other staff who were present confirmed that the men said they were from DB. Azad said that the men also seized

six cellphones from people in the house, as well as hard disks from the CCTV installed for neighborhood security. The family has had no news of him since. They said Azmi had been concerned about his safety in the months before his arrest.

Among the disappearances in 2016 are the cases of men whose whereabouts were unknown, with authorities denying any knowledge of an arrest, until they were brought back into the formal legal system, weeks or months after the original pick up, with police claiming that they had been arrested the previous night. They remained effectively disappeared until that time. In the cases of two men who were alleged to be militants, police brought them to a public meeting claiming they had surrendered. In May 2017, one man secretly detained in October 2016 was released outside Dhaka.[\[121\]](#)

Nur Mohammed is a leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami in Jhenaidah district unit. His son, Mujahidul Islam, said that law enforcement officers picked up his father at about 1 p.m. on March 2, 2016, while going to the market on his motorcycle:

Sixteen days later, police claimed that Nur was arrested on March 18 in the district of Satkhira where he was in hiding, and that his information led to the seizure of 15 hand bombs, 40 kilograms of explosives, and jihadist literature.[\[123\]](#) A case was filed against him for possessing explosives and for the murder of a homeopathy doctor in Jhenaidah in January, for which ISIS had previously claimed responsibility.[\[124\]](#)

Noore Alam, 23, a third-year student of chemistry at Nilphamari Government College, lived with his family in the Ukiler More area. On the night of April 11, 2016, he was picked up from his home by about 10 people who wore plainclothes and introduced themselves as officials from the administration. Kamrul Alam Nayan, his brother, said:

The men dragged Noore Alam into a waiting microbus. Nayan immediately went to the Nilphamari Sadar police station, but the police claimed that they had not carried out such an operation. Other family members went to local RAB and DB offices, which also denied they had detained Noore Alam. On April 12, his family filed a GD with the Sadar police station.

Iftisham Ahmed Sami, a third-year university student, lived with friends in Dhaka. About 4 a.m. on April 29, 2016, Sami's father, Iftekhar Ahmed Enam, received a phone call from his son's friend and roommate:

In subsequent days, the father went to the Boalia police station and the local DB and RAB offices, but they all denied any involvement in the arrest.

Nazim Uddin, 42, returned in July 2015 from Malaysia to live in his home town of Jessore. His wife, Nazma Aktar, said that her husband was visiting a friend in Dhaka when he was detained in the Pallabi area on May 25 by three men in plainclothes who claimed to be from the administration. She said:

Nazma looked for her husband in RAB and police stations in Dhaka, but no one provided any information. She filed a GD, although the police had initially refused.

On December 6, 2016, eight months after the first of these detentions, police announced that they had arrested Noore, Sami, and Nazim along with two other men they claimed were members of the banned Islamic militant group Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami. When the three men were brought to court, they told the magistrate that they were picked up on earlier dates from different places, providing details. Kazi Shahabuddin Ahmed, assistant commissioner (prosecution), told the court that the five Huji operatives knew how to concoct a story.[\[128\]](#) The magistrate remanded all five to police custody.

Moulana Mohammad Akhter Hossain, a 28-year-old imam, was picked up by law enforcement officers on May 3, 2016. His brother, Mushfikur Rahman, witnessed the arrest:

It was around 9:30 p.m. I was asleep in my house at Sukhan Pukur village in Rangpur, when five to six men came and said that they wanted to talk to me and Akhter about the Union Parishad elections that had just taken place. I said that my brother was at his in-laws house in Birbiria. The men, dressed in plainclothes, then put me inside a white microbus, taking away my cell phone. I took the men to Akhters in-laws house. I was asked to call Akhters name. When Akhters wife Romana opened the door, we all went inside. The men then said that they were members of DB and that they needed to take Akhter away and talk to him, as he could help locate some other people, and that he would be returned after an hour.

Both of us were then taken inside the microbus. They told Akhter, who was anxious, to stay calm, as otherwise we would be blindfolded and handcuffed. The microbus then stopped in front of Pirgacha Union Parishad Office and the men told me to get off. They also returned my cell phone. I asked them to let my brother go along with me, but the men said, We have your phone number and we will communicate with you when we need to.[\[129\]](#)

The next day, Akhters family searched for him at the police station and local DB and RAB offices. All denied involvement in his detention. On May 6, Mushfikur said he went to the Pirgachha police station to file a GD but was told he could only file a missing person complaint. Two months after he was disappeared, on July 1, police said Akhter was arrested in Dhaka, and that he was a member of the JMB.

On May 12, 2016, Monirul Islam Babu, 28, Abdullah Al Sayem Turjo, 25, and Shoaib Biswas, 26, were picked up in and around Kalishpur in Khulna, where they are all from.[\[130\]](#) On June 12, one month later, the police claimed they were arrested in Dhaka for militancy.[\[131\]](#)

Shoaib Biswas, a teacher in the Arabic Department at Bismillah Nagar Madrasa, was detained in the morning on his way to work. His father, Maulana Abdus Sattar, spoke with his son when he was subsequently taken to court:

Abdullah Al Sayem Turjo is a teacher at the Bismillah Nagar Madrasa in Harintana, Khulna. His colleague, Mufti Hafizur Rahman, said:

On May 12 at around 6:15 p.m., both of us left the madrasa on our bicycles. When we reached close to Mostor intersection, a 50-year-old man blocked our way. A white microbus with a sticker Emergency Electricity was parked there. The person asked for our names. Then the man asked me to leave and told Turjo to stay. I saw some people came down from the microbus and grab Turjo and put him on the microbus. Then the microbus stopped in front of me and they took away my cell phone and left.[\[133\]](#)

The next day, Turjos father filed a case at the Harintana police station alleging that some unknown people had kidnapped his son. [\[134\]](#)

Monirul Islam Babu is an electrician who was picked up from his home. His mother, Khadiza Begum, witnessed the incident. She said:

The following day, the family filed a GD with the Khalishpur police station. When he was eventually produced in court after a month-long secret

detention, Monirul Islam spoke to his father and told him that they were blindfolded inside the microbus and traveled a long way. They were kept in a dark room, but not blindfolded or handcuffed.[\[136\]](#)

Rashidun Nabi Bhuiyan, 31, also known as Tipu, was living at his village home in the district of Comilla. His wife, Tahera Taslima, said that on the night of May 19, 2016, some uniformed and plainclothes officers raided their house at about 1:30 a.m.:

We were woken by the sound of vehicles and peoples voices, and then around 15 to 20 police and others stormed into our house. They showed me a photo and asked me, Do you know that person? I replied, Yes, he is my husband. My husband then came out of the room. They tied his hands and blindfolded him. I went outside the house and urged them not to take him away, and one of the police officials in uniform told me that my husband was a criminal who had killed two bloggers.[\[137\]](#)

The following morning, Tipus family members went to the local Nangalkot police station find out whether he had been detained. The police insisted that they didnt know anything about the incident, his wife said.[\[138\]](#)

In subsequent months, family members met police and RAB officials many times, but no one provided information on Tipus whereabouts. On October 16, 2016, five months after Tipus detention, police in Dhaka held a press conference claiming that he had been arrested the previous night at the Sayedabad bus station in Dhaka. Police claimed that Tipu was a leader of the Islamic militant organization, Ansar al-Islam, and that he led the team of five men who attacked Nazimuddin Samad, a university law student and secular activist, on April 6, 2016. Police said Tipu had confessed and had provided the names of his accomplices and information on the subsequent murder of gay rights activists, Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy, on April 28.

Ashfaq-e-Azam Apel, 27, a recently graduated software engineer, lived in his family home in the city of Rangpur. His father, Shamsul Hoque, said that in the early hours of June 7, 2016, Ashfaq was picked up from the family home by law enforcement officials in front of him and three other family members. He said:

In the morning, the family went to the DB office in Rangpur and the local police station, but they all denied Ashfaqs arrest. The Kotwali police station refused to accept a GD from the father and so he instead filed a missing person report. I also approached RAB-13 office but they also denied arresting my son, the father said. They said, We dont have him.[\[140\]](#)

On February 1, 2017, seven months after he was originally picked up, RAB said that they had arrested Ashfaq along with three other men following a raid on a hideout in Dhaka. RAB claimed that the men belonged to the JMB and that Ashfaq was the groups IT expert. He was in charge of maintaining websites and providing technical support.[\[141\]](#)

Shamsul Hoque also said that on January 3, 2017, his younger son, Azharul Hannan, a marine engineer who was present when Ashfaq was picked up in June, was detained in Chittagong. Men put him in handcuffs when he stepped out of the Navy Fleet Club, a navy-run hotel, where he was attending a conference organized by the Military Institute of Science and Technology. Hoque said that police at Bandar police station refused to file a GD, citing an instruction from high ups. The family have not heard anything more from him.[\[142\]](#)

Rashid Gazi, 22, a second-year student at Jessore University Science and Technology, and Kamruzzaman Sagor, 22, a student at Jessore MM College, were staying at a private hostel when they were picked up on afternoon of June 19, 2016. Authorities denied the detention at first, and the students were held illegally for nearly a month. RAB eventually claimed that they were arrested on July 14.

Ripon Sardar, Rashids uncle, talked with the two men when they were at the police station and when they were brought to court. Sardar said that they told him:

Armed gunmen attacked the Holey Artisan Bakery on the night of July 1, 2016, killing more than 20 people and holding others inside hostage. The next morning, the hostages were rescued after security forces stormed the caf, killing the gunmen. The hostages were taken to DB headquarters, where they were questioned by the authorities. This included Hasnat Karim, 47, who had gone to the restaurant with his wife and two children, and Tahmid Khan, 22, who had gone to the restaurant with two friends.

While all the other hostages were released, Karim and Khan were held illegally for a month with the authorities issuing contradictory statements about whether the men were in their custody. Karim has dual nationality with the UK, while Khan is a Canadian resident. On July 13, 2016, nearly two weeks into his illegal detention, Karim briefly met with his wife and mother.[\[144\]](#)

On the evening of August 3, police informed the media that both men had been arrested in Dhaka that day on suspicion of involvement in the Holey attack. The following day, they were brought to a magistrate court which passed an order remanding both into police custody for eight days for questioning. In October, the police told the court that it no longer believed that Khan was involved in the Holey attack, but filed a case against him for a lack of cooperation with the policing authority, claiming that he failed to appear at two police interviews on July 10 and 21, a period when he was in state custody.[\[145\]](#) In April 2017, a court acquitted him of this charge. Karim, however, remains in jail on a case filed relating to the Holey attack.

Humam Quader Chowdhury, 33, is the son of Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, a prominent leader of the BNP who was executed in November 2015 following his conviction for war crimes. Humam Chowdhury is also involved in BNP politics. On the morning of August 4, 2016, he was traveling with his mother to the Dhaka District Court where they were both due to attend a hearing involving a cybercrime case alleging their involvement in the leak of the judgment convicting Humams father for war crimes.[\[146\]](#) Humams mother, Farhat Quader Chowdhury, said:

On February 24, 2017, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances issued a statement calling on the Bangladesh government to provide information as to the whereabouts of three men, including Humam.[\[148\]](#) A week later, on March 2, Humam was released blindfolded and disoriented on the roadside, close to his family home in Dhaka. Humam was unable to explain the location where he had been held.

Mohammad Akhteruzzaman, 15, and Mohammad Hafizur Rahman, 17, both students at Kolabari Dakhil Madrasa at Ghoraghat in Dinajpur, were picked up within a week of each other. In November 2016, their fathers held a joint press conference at Dinajpur Press Club.

Akhteruzzamans father, Sarowar Hossain, an agricultural worker and small businessman, said that his son was picked up from his family house early in the morning on September 28, 2016, by law enforcement officials:

On October 16, Sarowar Hossain filed a GD at his local police station in Ghoraghat Upazilla stating that his son had gone missing. At the press conference on November 6, he appealed to the government for his sons return. At the same press conference, Zillur Rahman, father of Hafizur

Rahman, said that his son was picked up on October 4:

At approximately 6 p.m., a group of people introducing themselves as members of a law enforcement force came to my grocery shop situated at Raniganj bazaar and, in my absence, took my son away.[\[150\]](#)

On November 23, RAB brought both Akhtaruzzaman and Hafizur Rahman along with one other man from the same madrasa to an anti-militancy function in Rangpur, and said that the men were JMB operatives who had surrendered to the authorities. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan handed over a check for 500,000 taka (US\$6,200) to each of the men for their rehabilitation.[\[151\]](#) A RAB press release said that Hafizur Rahman and Akhtaruzzaman were brainwashed and radicalized by a JMB recruiter and assigned to carry out subversive activities. They had decided to surrender to law enforcers after the Gulshan and Sholakia attacks, and family members who inspired them to surrender took the two young men to RAB, the release said.[\[152\]](#)

Hafizur Rahman's father gave a different account of the Rangpur event, stating that he first came to know about the ceremony when RAB told him to be present. He said he does not know where his son has been kept since the ceremony:

Khairul Islam, 26, a student at the Islamic University of Technology, was living with his family in Gazipur. His father, Abul Kashem, said men wearing jackets with DB written on them came to their house around midnight on the evening of October 21, 2016:

However, seven days later, on October 28, 2016, police claimed to have arrested four suspected members of the banned organization Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Bangladesh (HuJI-B), along with 14 petrol bombs and four crude bombs in the Nandoain area of Gazipur city. One of them was Khairul, who had been in their custody one week already. The police superintendent in Gazipur said the members of the banned militant outfit were arrested during a raid at an abandoned cottage inside a forest in Joydevpur at about 8 p.m. the previous day.[\[155\]](#)

The 19 cases of enforced disappearances that occurred over a two-week period at the end of 2013, described in detail below, show the failure of authorities to address allegations and ensure accountability.[\[156\]](#) Some of these men, all Dhaka-based supporters or activists of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, may have been involved in wrongful actions during the violent election-time protests that began a month before their disappearance. Their family members say that if suspected of criminal action, they should have been prosecuted. Their families have made repeated appeals to the government, visited DB and RAB offices, and sought police investigations.

On the morning of November 28, 2013, six friends living in Old Dhaka had gone to visit a mutual friend imprisoned in Dhaka Central Jail. Five of them were picked up outside the jail by men in civilian clothes. The sixth member of the group was spared because he had left minutes earlier to perform his prayers.

This case is unusual as three of the friends, who were supporters rather than post-holders of the BNP, were later released and therefore became witnesses to the detention. The other two, Samarat Molla, 27, and Khaled Hossain Sohel, 28, who held posts in the student wing of the opposition BNP, remain disappeared at time of writing.

On the morning of November 28, Samarat Molla, Khaled Hossain Sohel, and four other BNP supporters named here W, X, Y, and Z went to the Dhaka Central Jail to visit their mutual friend Sonjoy.[\[157\]](#) All of them lived in Sutrapur, an area in Old Dhaka.

The men came to the prison in two groups at around 11 a.m.: Y, W, and Z in one group, and Samarat, Sohel, and X in another. They obtained jail tokens and entered the prison at around noon. Their friend Sonjoy, however, was not brought to the prison meeting room, and after 20 minutes they left the jail.

According to W, X, and Y the men who were subsequently released at around 1:15 p.m., Z wanted to say his prayers and went to a nearby mosque, leaving the five friends standing outside the jail. Y then told the others that he had some work and started to leave the prison area. As Y walked away, two men in civilian clothes approached him. He then walked back with about six men following him. Four men, who were all in civilian clothes and did not appear to have any weapons on them, asked each of them their names. When Samarat Molla gave his name, it was clear from the men's response that they were most interested in him, one witness said. They took all five of us to a silver colored microbus which was standing just outside the jail wall.[\[158\]](#)

According to Samarat Molla's family members, W, X, and Y later told them that the men had beat up Samarat, accusing him of arson attacks.

After nine days, on December 7, W, X and Y, who were not BNP post-holders, were told that they would be released the following day. They were warned against talking about their detention. At about midnight, the three of them were put into a car. The car stopped after about an hour and a half, and they were pushed out of the vehicle and told to run. They later discovered they were in Bikrampur.[\[159\]](#)

Samarat Molla and Khaled Hossain Sohel remain disappeared.

A day before he was picked up, police had visited Khaled Hossain Sohel's house in Bangla Bazaar where he usually lived with his wife. The BNP student activist, who according to his family had no criminal cases filed against him, was residing elsewhere in order to avoid arrest. After the police left the house, Sohel's wife, Sayeed Shammi Sultana, said she phoned her husband to warn him.[\[160\]](#)

Sultana discovered her husband was missing after his colleague, Selim Reza Pintu, said that Sohel's phone was not reachable.[\[161\]](#) Fearing he had been arrested, family members and friends started contacting different police stations. Meanwhile, Samarat's family first heard that the men had been picked up by law enforcement authorities late at night on November 28 when they received a call from a friend.[\[162\]](#)

The following day, Sultana lodged a missing person complaint at the Chowk Bazaar police station.[\[163\]](#) Meanwhile, Samarat's sister said that she was initially told she could not file a General Diary if she alleged detention by law enforcement authorities, and was told to come back the next day where she was only allowed to lodge a missing person GD.

Sohel's wife, Sultana, said that she and others assumed that DB officials were responsible as the men who took the five friends were not in uniform, which is usually true of the DB. However, at DB headquarters officers denied the men were in their custody. The first question the police asked was whether they had any political affiliations. They seemed reluctant to speak to us and told us not to hang round here, Sultana said. She said she and other family members continued to visit the DB office. The last time we went was the tenth day after they were taken [December 8], and were told not to bother coming.[\[164\]](#)

On December 8, three of the friends who had been taken with Sohel were released. One of the men phoned Sultana and she met with him to find out what had happened to her husband. All three are still in hiding at time of writing.

In May 2014, six months after the men disappeared, the police set up a 40-member anti-kidnapping team, and Sultana lodged an application.^[165] Soon after, she met with an additional deputy commissioner of police who put her in touch with an official from DB. However, both families have received no further information about the whereabouts or fate of Samarat or Sohel.

In the early afternoon of December 2, 2013, seven activists of the BNPs student wing, all residents of the Bangshal area in Dhaka, congregated inside the Suhrawardy Udyan park in central Dhaka. They included Mahfuzur Rahman Sohel Sarkar, 35, the Chhatra Dal vice-president of Bangshal Thana; Habibul Bashir Zahir, 27, and Parvez Hossain, 27, the president and secretary of BNP ward 71; and Md Hossain Chanchal, 32, a student wing member.

Five of the activists including the four men named above walked to a nearby restaurant at an intersection in central Dhaka known as Shahbagh, while the other two went to the neighboring Shishu Park to purchase tickets so that after lunch they could meet inside.^[166] As the five men left the Shahbagh restaurant and walked back toward Shishu Park, four of them Sohel, Zahir, Parvez, and Chanchal were picked up by law enforcement officers dressed in civilian dress and bundled into a microbus. Two of the three remaining men witnessed the detention and asked not to be identified. The four men who were picked up have not been seen since.

One of the men present at the restaurant, along with the other four who were disappeared, said that the group had planned to meet at Shishu Park because they considered it safe. He said security forces caught up with them as they were leaving the restaurant:

As soon as the vehicles disappeared, the witness called his political colleagues to warn them to stay away from Shishu Park.^[168] One of the two men that had been waiting inside the main entrance of the park also witnessed the detention.^[169]

Sohel's father, Md Shamsul Rahman, said that he received a call from one of his sons' colleagues who witnessed his son's detention. He said he then tried to find his son:

Rahman was later able to file a GD in his local police station in Bangshal, but the police only allowed him to file a missing person complaint, and not allege that his son was taken by law enforcement officers.^[171]

Parvez's wife, Farzeena Akhter, said her husband had about six criminal cases lodged against him, which she claimed were all false allegations for his political activities.^[172] When she and other family members went to the DB office, they were not allowed into the building. The family filed a missing person GD on December 14, 2013, at the police station.

Chanchal's wife, Reshma Akhter, said that when her husband, who she said had no criminal cases against him, did not return as planned for a family outing, she started calling him but his phone was switched off.^[173] She finally called Anwar Hossain, Chanchal's brother. Anwar went to the police but was told that they had not arrested anyone by that name.^[174] Chanchal's relatives also went to the DB and RAB offices, but the officials denied having him in custody. They lodged a missing person GD on December 22.

Zahir's brother, Kamal Hossain, who said that his brother had as many as 25 criminal cases of a political nature against him, said that the police only allowed him to file a missing person GD, which he did on December 14.^[175]

A day or two after the four men were picked up, a local businessman said he saw the four men detained at the DB office:

The businessman then discovered that Sohel was thought to be Chacha Sohel, someone the authorities considered to be notorious in the area.

The businessman said that he also introduced the relatives of some of the families to a retired major, who said that he was willing to help intervene in the case.

At about 8 p.m. on December 4, 2013, six men were picked up outside a building under construction in Dhaka's Bashundhara Residential Area.

The six men picked up were Sajedul Islam Sumon, 36, the general secretary of BNP ward 38 in Shaheen Bagh; Sumon's cousin, Zahidul Karim Tanvir, 33, whose family owned the under-construction property; Mazharul Islam Russel, 26, Md Al Amin, 26, and Asaduzzaman Rana, 27, three students at Jagannath University who were preparing to take the civil service examinations; and Abdul Quader Bhuiyan Masum, 22, a finance student at Titumir College. Sumon was the only post-holder for the BNP, and according to family members, the only one with a criminal case filed against him; the others were all supporters and activists. There were two other men present at the time, but they managed to escape.

One of the two men who escaped said that the meeting had been called by Sumon. RAB officers arrived soon after:

A construction worker at the site who witnessed the detention said he knew Tanvir because the family owned the property and had seen Sumon earlier. He said:

Six hours later, early the following morning, a contractor said he was returning from a night shift to Shaheen Bagh, the area where Sumon's family lives, when he saw Sumon, whom he knew well, inside a car that he thought belonged to law enforcement authorities.^[181]

Sumon was not at that time staying at his home in Shaheen Bagh because he feared arrest, and was instead living with his cousin, Tanvir, at their apartment in Bashundhara Residential Area. Sumon's sister, Sanjida Islam, said that they first heard that Sumon had been picked up when her family in Shaheen Bagh received a call from her aunt, Tanvir's mother:

At about 11 p.m., one of the two men who had escaped being picked up came to their house through the back entrance. He told the family that Sumon had been taken away in RAB vehicles. The following day, Sanjida said that family members went to file a complaint with police:

Through family connections, Sumon's family contacted a senior RAB officer [name withheld]:

Family members continued to go to the RAB-1 office and RAB headquarters. At the end of January, Sumon's mother and sister were invited to the office to meet an RAB-1 officer. Sanjida said:

The family gave its first written application to RAB on March 18, 2014, and has since given at least 12 further applications to RAB (most recently on August 21, 2016), and five to other government authorities, including the home ministry, police, and military intelligence. The family has also made a complaint to the National Human Rights Commission and filed a habeas corpus petition in court.

In May 2016, Sanjida met again with one of the RAB officials the family had met earlier, who had been a senior RAB-1 officer at the time of her brothers disappearance, but had since left. He confirmed in a private meeting at a restaurant that RAB-1 had conducted the operation to pick up Sumon. He said that the six men had been in his custody and that he received an order to kill them, but he refused.[\[186\]](#)

According to Sanjida, the official said that RABs counterterrorism branch under the command of Lt. Col. Abul Kalam Azad, [\[187\]](#) who subsequently became head of RABs intelligence wing took the men from his custody. The official assumed they had been killed. [\[188\]](#) In August 2016, Sanjida met with Azad, but he denied any involvement and, according to Sanjida, said: We are searching. I will try to let you know whether he is alive or anywhere else.

Russels sister, Nusrat Jahan Laboni, said she waited all night for her brother to come home, and in the morning discovered that his friends were missing as well. [\[189\]](#) Family members approached RAB, DB, and various police stations several times but no one had any information about the detentions. [\[190\]](#)

Al Amins father filed a missing person GD at Badda police station that covered the area where they lived. [\[191\]](#) The family also managed to file a First Information Report on January 26, 2014. [\[192\]](#) Al Amins cousin, Yakoob, went to the construction site and the workers recognized his photograph, confirming that Al Amin was detained by RAB-1:

Yakoob also went to the RAB office, where officials asked questions about witnesses to the abductions:

Masums mother, Ayesha Ali, said the family went to a number of police stations: They said that no one had been arrested. On December 6, we went to file a GD in Tejgaon industrial area, but they only accepted a GD if we said that he was missing. [\[195\]](#)

Ranas sister, Meenara Begum, said that she too went to the police and RAB offices after she heard of the detention. They also filed a police complaint reporting that Rana was missing. [\[196\]](#)

Tanvir and Sumon are cousins. Tanvirs mother, Nilifur Rana, also said that she went with her relatives to meet with RAB and DB officers, but everyone denied the detention. [\[197\]](#)

A year after the detentions, in December 2014, Sajedul Islam Sumons family made a formal complaint to the National Human Rights Commission. On December 17, the then chair of the NHRC wrote to the most senior civil servant of the home ministry setting out the allegation and appealing to the government to take necessary action to bring back the son of Hazera Khatun and the others to the parents, and to inform NHRC what action the ministry had taken by January 15, 2015. [\[198\]](#)

The ministry did not respond to this letter or to six other monthly reminders that the NHRC sent. However, on August 28, 2015, the ministry finally replied, stating that Sumons father had filed a case with the Vatura police station on January 26, 2014, and that the case was under investigation. [\[199\]](#) In a letter dated November 15, 2015, Sumons mother wrote that they had never filed a case of this kind because when they had gone to do so the police refused to take the case. [\[200\]](#)

The NHRC then wrote to the ministry stating that the police report did not contain any specific step as to how you are trying to get the victims back, and asked for a detailed report by December 20, 2015. On January 14, 2016, police sent a letter to Sumons mother asking her to come to the police station. This meeting never took place. Instead, Sumons family sent a note to the police setting out the details of Sumons disappearance.

In March 2016, Sajedul Islam Sumons mother filed a habeas corpus petition before the High Court. [\[201\]](#) She said that her son was illegally detained by RAB. The petition said that authorities had shown no inclination to investigate the incident, and that the court should order government authorities to produce him before the court.

On March 10, 2016, the court passed a *rule nisi* calling upon the Bangladesh government and various policing bodies to show cause as to why the arrest/abduction/causing disappearance of the petitioners son Sajedul Islam Sumon should not be declared to be illegal and without lawful jurisdiction, and pass such orders as the court considers necessary. [\[202\]](#)

Following this order, the inspector general of police responded in an affidavit, It was learnt from the respective units that neither Rapid Action Battalion nor any other unit of Bangladesh Police arrested said Sajedul Islam Sumon. [\[203\]](#) RAB also filed an affidavit with the court stating, RAB-1 did not pick up or arrest the petitioners son Sajedul Islam Sumon and others, and that we are trying to find out the victims. [\[204\]](#)

There had been no further court hearing at time of writing, since the High Court passed its order.

Al Amins family was the only one to file an FIR involving the abduction. [\[205\]](#) His nephew, Yakoob Ali, said that some six months after the case was filed, an officer from the Vatura police station called and asked if the family had received news about Al Amin. I said that it was the police that were supposed to be the ones providing the information. [\[206\]](#)

In response to the court order following the habeas corpus application by Sajedul Islam Sumons family, the police filed documents relating to its investigation into Al Amins familys FIR with the court. These stated that after Al Amins father filed a case in January 2014, a police inspector had prepared a draft map; taken statements from the petitioner, people in the surrounding area, and a witness; and had collected the victims mobile phone records. Police said that three investigating officers had been assigned to, and then taken off, the case. The letter concluded by saying the investigation revealed that along with Al Amin, Sajedul Islam Sumon had been abducted by an organized criminal gang that they were trying to identify and catch. It stated: The case is under investigation and we are deploying modern technologies. [\[207\]](#)

Dhaka Metropolitan Police authorities also said that on November 19, 2014, the investigation responsibility was transferred to the Detective Branch of the police. [\[208\]](#) In April 2016, following the March court order seeking state response to the habeas corpus petition, DB officials contacted Al Amins family and asked to get more information about the incident. Al Amins cousin said that the whole exercise was cruel and farcical: I felt it was like a joke him coming after three years and asking about [my cousin] like this. He said, Dont worry, you will get justice.

Early on December 5, RAB men came to the house of Adnan Chowdhury, 28, woke him up, and took him away in front of his father and wife.

Chowdhury, a BNP supporter, lived with his wife and parents in Shaheen Bagh, the same area of Dhaka where Sajedul Islam Sumon lived.

Marjina Sultana Tonni, his wife, said that Adnan came home late the night of December 4 after visiting the family of local political leader, Sajedul Islam Sumon, who had been picked up along with five party colleagues. [\[209\]](#) Later that night, there was loud knocking, and Adnans father, Ruhul Amin Chowdhury, answered the door. He told Human Rights Watch:

Adnans wife said that soon after, some of the men entered their bedroom. She said:

Ruhul Amin Chowdhury said the officials asked Adnan some questions and then took him away. Some of the other men also searched the rest of the house, and questioned their tenants. He said that his son was surprised, but did not appear afraid. He saw that the forces had arrived in at least two minibuses and a jeep.[\[212\]](#)

Adnan was a BNP supporter, but he was not particularly politically active. According to his father, Adnan already had a visa and was planning to migrate to Malaysia for work. Adnan probably didnt think it was so serious. He didnt realize that Sumon will be taken and that they will come after him right away, Ruhul Amin Chowdhury said. None of us imagined that something like this can happen. That people will disappear.[\[213\]](#)

The next morning, when Adnan, who did not have any criminal cases filed against him according to his family, did not return home, his father went to the RAB-2 office, the DB office, and the Tejgaon police station to look for this son, but no one could provide information.

Adnans father said that authorities violated his trust:

Another eyewitness saw Adnan in security force custody when Mohammad Kawsar, 22, was detained shortly afterward.

Shortly after RAB picked up Adnan Chowdhury, they brought him to identify Mohammad Kawser, 22, a driver who lived in a room in a compound in West Nakhhalpara, a short walk from Adnans house.

The gate of the West Nakhhalpara compound where Kaswer lived with his wife and child was locked on the night of December 5. The caretaker, who had the key to the gate, said he was asleep at about 3 a.m. when he was woken up by 10 to 15 men asking him to open the gate. They entered the compound. Many of the men were wearing black uniforms and some had the words RAB written on their back, he said.[\[216\]](#)

The men went to Kawzers room. His wife and child were in Barisal with her parents, and two friends were sharing his room that night. One said:

The witness said he saw Adnan, who had just been picked up by RAB officers.

Kawzers mother, Komla Akhter, works in a garment factory and lived in the Farmgate area of Dhaka. She said that one of Kawzers friends informed her of his detention early in the morning. She went to the Tejgaon police station, where she stayed the whole day: I tried to lodge a GD but the police refused to accept a complaint that mentioned RAB.[\[219\]](#)

On the evening of December 6, 2013, BNP student activists Nizam Uddin Munna and Tariqul Islam Jhontu were picked up by law enforcement officers at Mollartek bazaar, near Dhakas international airport. Their whereabouts remain unknown at time of writing.

Nizam Uddin Munna, 24, was the joint secretary of the BNP student wing at Biman Bandar Thana in Dhaka. Tariqul Islam Jhontu, 28, was the joint secretary of the BNP student wing at Tejgaon College where he was studying. According to his family, Jhontu had three criminal cases lodged against him related to his political activities.

Between 9 and 9:30 p.m. on December 6, Jamal, a local businessman, was walking home after closing his shop when he saw his friend, Jhontu, in front of a laundry shop on the opposite side of the road. Jamal said he spoke briefly to Jhontu before heading home.[\[220\]](#) At about 10 p.m., Mohammad Joshimuddin, the laundry shop owner, was returning to his shop when he saw Jhontu being detained by men in plainclothes. He said:

Joshimuddin said that after he entered his shop, some men arrived and searched the shop. They were asking me whether Jhontu kept anything here or not, and they searched everywhere, but did not find anything.[\[222\]](#) He then saw Jhontu being bundled into a microbus parked down the road. Joshimuddin said that he did not know the contact details of Jhontus family, so he contacted Jamal, Jhontus friend who owned the shop across the street. Jamal said he informed Jhontus family.[\[223\]](#)

Nizam Uddin Munna went outside to buy medicine and vegetables at about 6:30 p.m. on the same day. Three hours later, Munna called his father, Shamsuddin, and asked him to collect the purchases from him. Shamsuddin said he witnessed his sons arrest:

Hasina Begum, Jhontus mother, said that early the next morning, Jamal, after hearing about the arrest, came and told the family that it was likely that DB had Jhontu in custody.[\[225\]](#) Family members then went to the laundry shop and heard what had happened the night before. Saiful Islam Mithu, Jhontus younger brother, went to the court assuming that Jhontu would be brought there, but he was not.[\[226\]](#) He also tried to file a police complaint:

Jhontus brother said he went to several police stations over the next few days but none had any information. He said he went to the RAB offices at least six times, but was not allowed to meet anyone.[\[228\]](#)

Munnas father said he decided to go immediately to the RAB office after witnessing his sons arrest. The guards would not let him in, but he waited outside the gates from about 10 p.m. to midnight. He said he then went to the DB office, and waited in front of the gate all night, trying to look into every vehicle that came and went. He then tried to lodge a police complaint, but was not allowed:

On December 7, 2013, Mahabub Hasan Sujon, president of the BNP student wing in Sabujbagh Thana in Dhaka, and Kazi Farhad, president of one of its wards, were taken from a farmhouse in Sonargaon, an area just outside Dhaka. The two men had arrived there two days earlier and were planning to return the next morning. They remain disappeared.

Azad Md Sadequul Islam, a childhood friend of Sujon, said he received a call on December 5. Sujon, he said, was worried about being arrested, and asked if he could stay at Azads farmhouse in Sonargaon with his BNP friends for a few days over the weekend.[\[230\]](#) Azad joined them at the farmhouse but left for Dhaka in the evening of December 7, as he had work the following day. Later that night, one of his farmworkers called him to tell him police had taken Sujon away:

One of the workers who witnessed the arrest said that five or six plainclothes men knocked on their door when they were sleeping:

There was one later sighting of Sujon. A businessman who lived in Fakirapool close to where Sujon and Farhad rented property said that a couple of days after the two men were taken, he saw police take Sujon back to the rented property where they had lived.

Sujons father, Abdul Jalil Khan, said he did not like his sons involvement in politics. He said that his son had about 14 political cases lodged

against him in different police stations alleging involvement in violence. He first heard from Azad that Sujon had been picked up by law enforcement authorities, and then he started looking for his son. He said:

Meanwhile, Sujons wife and cousin went to the DB office, but they said that they had no information. A few days later the family filed a GD. Sujons father said:

Sujons family received information from different sources that suggested that DB was involved with the detention. His cousin Shakil said that he went to the DB office a number of times, but received no new information. One of those times was around February 2014. Shakil said:

Farhads sister filed a GD at the Sabujbagh police station. [237] His wife, Farhana, said that she heard via a relative who was connected to the Prime Ministers Office that it was DB officials that had arrested him. [238] DB denies this.

In the early morning of December 12, 2013, law enforcement officers arrested Selim Reza Pintu, secretary of the student wing of the BNP in Sutrapur, from his brothers house in Mirpur, Dhaka. According to his family, he had a number of criminal cases against him, involving alleged vandalism. Five of his political colleagues from the area had previously been picked up on November 28, though three of them were subsequently released. He has not been seen since.

The political situation and arrest of BNP supporters meant that Pintu and his wife, Tarannum Nahas, had been living in an apartment in Mirpur belonging to a relative, rather than their own in Sutrapur. On December 12, security officers came searching for Pintu in the middle of night. According to his brother, Aslam Reza Mintu, five or six men with weapons made the arrest, claiming they were from the administration. Tarannum Nahas, who was in the room with her husband, said Pintu realized that security forces had come for him and decided not to contest his detention:

Pintu was sleeping, and when he heard the noise he knew what was happening and opened the door to the room. As soon as he opened the door they asked whether he was Pintu. He said, Yes, I am Pintu. Then two of the men grabbed him. Another man entered the room and asked where were Pintus mobiles. He had four phones and they took two of them. The other two were in my bag. Pintu asked who the men were. They said, We are from the administration. He asked to see their ID cards, and they said, It will not be a problem. You will be safe with us. My husband did not put up any resistance. [239]

Family members went to the local police station the next morning. His sister, Rehana Banu Munni, said:

The GD filed on December 13 states that at 1:15 a.m. on December 12: Some 6/7 civil dressed men came to our house and identified themselves to have the authority from the government. Then they came inside our house and took my older brother Selim Reza Pintu, 31, away with them in a gray car Dhaka Metro 5070. Afterward we looked for him everywhere in the locality but we could not find him. [241]

Pintus sister visited different police stations and RAB and DB headquarters. When police set up an anti-kidnapping squad in May 2014, she submitted details of his case. [242] She subsequently met Sanwar Hossain, an additional commissioner responsible for the new squad, who told her to be patient. She also submitted an application to a senior RAB officer. The family did not receive any further information.

This report was researched and written by David Bergman, a consultant with the Asia Division at Human Rights Watch. Research assistance was provided by Iqbal Mahmud. Priyanka Motaparthi, senior researcher in the Emergencies Division, provided additional input. The report was edited by Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director; Clive Baldwin, senior legal advisor; and Danielle Haas, senior editor in the Program Office. Tejshree Thapa, senior South Asia researcher, provided additional review. Production assistance was provided by Shayna Bauchner, Asia Division coordinator; Olivia Hunter, publications and photography associate; Fitzroy Hepkins, administrative manager; and Jose Martinez, senior publications coordinator.

We would like to thank the witnesses and families of victims who spoke to us despite fear of state retribution.

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- [146] Humam and his mother were both prosecuted under the Information, Communication and Technology Act, 2006, for offenses involved in the leaking of a draft of the court judgment convicting Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury of crimes committed in the 1971 independence war. After Humam was secretly detained, the court, on September 15, 2016, acquitted both him and his mother. See Salauddin Quaders wife, son acquitted in verdict leak case, Dhaka Tribune, September 15, 2016, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2016/09/15/salauddin-quaders-lawyer-gets-10yr-jail-verdict-leak-case/> (accessed December 18, 2016).
- [147] Telephone interview with Farhat Quader Chowdhury, August 10, 2016. See also, David Bergman and Muktedir Rashid, Bangladesh: Sons of convicted war criminals detained, *Al Jazeera*, August 11, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/bangladesh-sons-convicted-war-criminals-detained-160811134823481.html> (accessed December 18, 2016).
- [148] UN expert group urges Bangladesh to stop enforced disappearances, United Nations news release, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21220&LangID=E>.
- [149] Statement of Sarowar Hossain, November 6, 2016. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.
- [150] Statement of Zillur Rahman, November 6, 2016. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.
- [151] In July 2016, RAB announced that it would provide financial rewards to militants who surrendered to the authorities and provided information. In October, RAB announced that two militants would become the first to surrender as part of this scheme. See Tk 10 lakh reward for militant who returns to normal life: Rab, *The Daily Star*, July 18, 2016, <http://www.thedailystar.net/country/joint-drive-against-militants-underway-bogra-1255552>. See also, Bangladesh: Two Militants Become First to Surrender Under Cash-Incentive Program, *BenarNews*, October 5, 2016, <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/militant-incentive-10052016151827.html> (accessed May 2, 2017).
- [152] 3 JMB men surrender to Home Boss, *The Daily Star*, November 24, 2017, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/3-jmb-men-surrender-home-boss-1319554> (accessed January 17, 2017).
- [153] Telephone interviews with Zillur Rahman, January 14 and 18, 2017.
- [154] Telephone interview with Abul Kashem, January 14, 2017.
- [155] Four Huji-B men held in Gazipur, *The Daily Star*, October 29, 2016, <https://dev.thedailystar.net/backpage/four-huji-b-men-held-gazipur->

[1306099](#) (accessed January 17, 2017).

[156] The human rights group Odhikar reported a total of 53 disappearances in 2013.

[157] The identities of the four men have been anonymized for their safety. Human Rights Watch reconstructed the detention based on their account.

[158] Interview with witness W, details withheld, Dhaka, October 21, 2014.

[159] Interview with witnesses, Dhaka, October 21, 2014.

[160] Interview with Sayeed Shammi Sultana, Dhaka, May 9, 2016.

[161] Pintu was subsequently picked up on December 11, see below.

[162] Interview with Kaliz Fatima, Samarats older sister, and Taslima Begum, Samarats mother, Dhaka, October 10, 2016.

[163] Ibid. The GD, filed by Sultana at the Chowk Bazaar police station, states that her husband went to Dhaka Central Jail to see a convict. Since then there is no news of him.

[164] Interview with Sayeed Shammi Sultana, Dhaka, May 9, 2016.

[165] This was set up after seven men were picked up by RAB officers in Narayanganj and their bodies were found in April 2014. DMP forms anti-kidnapping squad, *The Daily Star*, May 3, 2014, <http://www.thedailystar.net/dmp-forms-anti-kidnapping-squad-22540> (accessed December 21, 2016).

[166] Three of the seven activists escaped arrest but witnessed the detention. These events have been reconstructed based on interviews with these three men.

[167] Interviews, details withheld, November 25, 2014, and September 5, 2016.

[168] One of the men that he called, Ujjal, was picked up later that same day, but Ujjal was produced in court.

[169] Interview with witness, details withheld, November 24, 2014.

[170] Interview with Shamsul Rahman, Dhaka, October 15, 2014.

[171] Ibid. The GD, filed on January 7, 2014, at Bangshal Thana, states that Soheli went out of the house but never came back. Even after searching every possible place, we did not find any trace of him.

[172] Interviews with Farzeena Akhter, Dhaka, October 15, 2014, and May 9, 2016.

[173] Interview with Reshma Akhter, Dhaka, May 16, 2016.

[174] Interview with Anwar Hossain, Dhaka, October 15 2014.

[175] The GD, filed at the Bangshal police station by Zahirs older brother, Kamal Hossain, states: My younger brother went out of the house just like every other day. Later on at 2 p.m. when I called his cell phone number he told me that he was in the TSC arena. Afterwards I found his phone switched off. After searching every possible place we have found no trace of him.

[176] Interview with witness, details withheld, Dhaka, October 9, 2016.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Interviews, details withheld, Dhaka, November 30, 2014, and May 14, 2016.

[180] Interview with construction worker, details withheld, November 23, 2014.

[181] Interview with witness, details withheld, November 9, 2014. The contractor knew Sumon as he had been involved in organizing the marriage of his daughters. Shaheen Bagh is about 10 km from Bashundhara Residential Area where the six men were picked up.

[182] Interview with Sanjida Islam, Dhaka, September 22, 2014.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid.

[185] Ibid.

[186] Based on notes taken by Sanjida immediately after the meeting.

[187] Abul Kalam Azad died on March 31, 2017. RAB claimed that he had been killed when a bomb exploded during an anti-militant operation in Sylhet. See Kamrul Hasan and Arifur Rahman Rabi, RAB intelligence chief Azad dies from Sylhet bomb injuries, *The Dhaka Tribune*, March 31, 2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2017/03/31/rab-intelligence-chief-azad-dies-sylhet-blast-injuries> (accessed on May 5, 2017).

[188] Human Rights Watch carried out a detailed interview with Sanjida the day after the meeting, which took place on May 23, 2016. Copy of the text correspondence setting up the meeting on file with Human Rights Watch.

[189] Interviews with Nusrat Jahan Laboni, October 18, 2013, and May 6, 2016.

[190] Ibid. On December 6, 2013, Russels older brother filed a GD at the Tejgaon police station, stating that Russel had gone missing on December 4. In the afternoon, he went out and did not come back, it states. The GD is mistakenly dated November 6. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

[191] On December 5, 2013, Al Amins father filed a GD at the Badda police station, stating that Al Amin had gone missing the previous day. At around 5 in the afternoon, my oldest son, Md Al Amin, left home to go to Bashundhara, and he did not return until now. His mobile phone is switched off, it states. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

[192] Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

[193] Interviews with Yakoob, Dhaka, May 5, 2014, and May 9, 2016.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Interview with Ayesha Ali, Dhaka, October 18, 2016.

[196] Interviews with Meenara Begum, Dhaka, October 18, 2014, and May 6, 2016. The GD is dated December 5, 2013, and was filed at the Mugda police station by Meenara Begum. At around 5 p.m. he went out from my rented house, and until now has not returned home. I have tried to look for him in all possible places including relatives homes but could not find any trace of him, it states. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

[197] Interview with Nilifur Rana, Dhaka, November 9, 2014.

[198] Full correspondence of the National Human Rights Commission on file with Human Rights Watch.

[199] Ibid.

[200] Ibid. The case that the ministry and police were referencing had been filed by Al Amins family.

[201] Writ Petition no. 2604/2016.

[202] Court order relating to WP 2604/2016, given by Justice Syed Muhammed Dastagir Husain and Justice AKM Shahidul Huq, October 1, 2016.

[203] Affidavit in opposition filed by inspector general of police in WP 2604/2016, in response to order of court.

[204] Affidavit in opposition filed by Lieutenant Colonel Tuhin Mohammad Masud, commanding officer, RAB-1, in WP 2604/2016, in response to order of court, April 4, 2016.

[205] Case no. 24, Vatara police station, January 26, 2014.

[206] Interview with Yakoob Ali, Dhaka, May 7, 2017.

[207] Letter from Zuhair Hossain Khan, detective and crime department north sub-inspector, Uttara Zonal team, to joint commissioner (crime), detective and criminal information department, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, April 11, 2016, annexed to affidavit in opposition filed by the inspector general of police.

[208] Documents annexed to the inspector general of polices affidavit in opposition.

[209] Interview with Marjina Sultana Tonni, Dhaka, October 18, 2014.

[210] Interviews with Ruhul Amin Chowdhury, Dhaka, October 23, 2014, and May 6, 2016.

[211] Interview with Marjina Sultana Tonni, Dhaka, October 18, 2014.

[212] Interview with Ruhul Amin Chowdhury, Dhaka, October 23, 2014.

[213] Ibid., Dhaka, April 5, 2015.

[214] Ibid.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Interview with witness, details withheld, Dhaka, November 7, 2014.

[217] Interviews with witness, details withheld, Dhaka, November 8 and 28, 2014.

[218] Ibid.

[219] Interview with Komla Akhter, Dhaka, October 19, 2014.

[220] Interview with Jamal, Dhaka, November 25, 2014.

[221] Interview with Mohammad Joshimuddin, Dhaka, October 25, 2014.

[222] Ibid.

[223] Interview with Jamal, Dhaka, November 25, 2014.

[224] Interview with Shamsuddin, Dhaka, May 14, 2016.

[225] Interview with Hasina Begum, Dhaka, October 16, 2014.

[226] Interviews with Saiful Islam Mithu, Dhaka, October 25, 2014, and May 16, 2016.

[227] On December 9, 2013, Jhuntas mother, Hasina Begum, filed a GD at Dokinkan police station stating that her son had gone missing. Around 10:30 at night on 6.12.13, he went out of the home to go to the shop, and never returned, it states. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

[228] Interviews with Saiful Islam Mithu, Dhaka, October 25, 2014, and May 16, 2016.

[229] Interview with Shamsuddin, Dhaka, May 14, 2016.

[230] Interview with Azad Md Sadequl Islam, Dhaka, October 20, 2014.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Interview with witness, Dhaka, October 20, 2014.

[233] Interview with witness, Dhaka, December 1, 2014.

[234] Interview with Abdul Jalil Khan, Dhaka, October 20, 2014.

[235] Ibid. The GD was filed on December 11 at Sabujbagh police station by Sujons father. It states that Sujon went outside the house to buy warm clothes for his kids but he has not returned since then, and there is no trace of him after searching all probable places.

[236] Interview with Shakil, Dhaka, October 20, 2014.

[237] GD filed on December 10, 2013, by Khusdia Akhter Shila. It states, My brother Kazi Farhad left home for work and until this day he has not returned and his mobile is also switched off.

[238] Telephone interview with Farhana, November 11, 2014.

[239] Interview with Tarannum Nahas, Dhaka, October 23, 2014.

[240] Interviews with Rehana Banu Munni, Dhaka, September 27, 2014, and May 30, 2016.

[241] Of all the GDs filed relating to the sequence of disappearances in this two-week period, this is the only one in which the police allowed the family to mention that law enforcement authorities were allegedly involved in the initial pick up. Copy on file with Human Rights Watch.

[242] DMP forms anti-kidnapping squad, *The Daily Star*, <http://www.thedailystar.net/dmp-forms-anti-kidnapping-squad-22540>.

[243] Guidelines for the Law Enforcement Agencies, *Bangladesh v. Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)*, Civil Appeal No. 53 of 2004, May 24, 2016, http://www.supremecourt.gov.bd/resources/documents/734650_Civil_Appeal_No_53_of_2004_final_2016.pdf, p. 389.

[244] Ibid., sec. (ii), p. 389.

[245] Ibid., sec. (ix), p. 391.

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