

# LIRES

SAPRAN'S BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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# Content

- 5** Editorial
- 7** Human Rights Violation Tracker  
**Human Rights Violation and Criminal Offence Index (July, 2025): Trends, Incidents and Accountability**
- 14** Seminar  
**Massacre, Enforced Disappearances, and the Culture of Fear: The Demand for Human Dignity and Justice**
- 18** Panel Discussion  
**The Horrors of Pellet Guns**
- 22** Op-Ed  
**The Hidden Lethality of Pellet Guns: How Chhorra Guli Inflicts Social Death on Protesters**
- 29** Workshop  
**Human Rights Violation Documentation Organized by Sapran**
- 31** Panel Discussion  
**Anatomy of Headshot: State-sponsored Violence and the Lethal Suppression of Protesters during the July Uprising**
- 37** Focus Group Discussion  
**“When Less-Lethal Becomes Lethal”: Sapran Urges State Transparency and Victim Documentation at UN Rapporteur Discussion**
- 41** UN Panel Discussion  
**How to Change Security Forces from Being Forces of Power to Forces of Service**

Content

# Editorial

Welcome to the inaugural edition of LIVES, Sapran's bi-monthly newsletter dedicated to chronicling our work, sharing insights, and fostering critical reflection on the intersecting struggles for justice, rights, and the protection of all forms of life in Bangladesh and beyond.

The months of June and July were momentous for Sapran. We launched a series of foundational initiatives that reflected upon the July–August 2024 Mass Uprising, also referred to as the Monsoon Uprising. In its aftermath, we knew that it was not enough to simply document what had happened. We also needed to ask why it unfolded the way it did. At Sapran, we do not merely record violations; we critically examine the underlying structures and systems that give rise to them. This inaugural edition of LIVES captures the essence of that commitment to bear witness intentionally, to hold those in power accountable, and to imagine what comes next.

As Bangladesh navigates a transitional period of introspection, reckoning and seeking reform, Sapran has attempted to engage with the ongoing conversations around restorative justice in post-authoritarian Bangladesh. In a series of public interventions, from seminars, survivor-led panel discussions to theoretical analyses and documentation workshops, Sapran has tried to contribute to understanding the complex realities of state repression, while remaining in solidarity with ongoing efforts toward healing, accountability, and meaningful change.

Our seminar on enforced disappearances unveiled the silenced wounds of the victims' families for over a decade, unveiling the mechanisms by which silence, stigma, and dehumanization have been employed as tools of governance during 15 years of authoritarianism. In early 2025, Sapran launched a research project on the use of pellet guns during the July–August mass uprising. That project, now completed, culminated in a comprehensive research report (currently awaiting publication) and a widely-read op-ed in the Daily Star that debunked the “less-lethal” myth of pellet guns and positioned them as an instrument of social death; designed to maim, silence, and erase dissent without triggering global outrage. Drawing on survivor testimonies, medical evidence, and critical political theory, we made the case for a permanent national ban on pellet guns and called for sweeping reforms in how state violence is addressed and remembered.

Building on this momentum, Sapran initiated a second and ongoing project in 2025 focused on the targeted use of lethal headshots by law enforcement and state-backed groups during the same uprising. As part of this effort, we presented a position paper which revealed alarming patterns of extrajudicial executions by Bangladeshi law enforcement and the Awami League. The findings suggest a deliberate strategy of suppression backed by state directives and impunity. We

are now in the process of drafting a full-length research report to complete this project, which will be published in the coming months. In parallel, our hands-on skill-development workshop on human rights documentation equipped our research team with essential tools to monitor, verify, and document state violence; strengthening local capacities for accountability and justice.

Together, these projects are not isolated acts of protest or critique. They are pieces of a larger, urgent mission of building collective memory, challenging impunity, and redefining what justice can look like in Bangladesh. From our completed work into the indiscriminate use of pellet guns to our ongoing work uncovering the pattern of targeted headshots, and from survivor-led panels to grassroots documentation training, all projects reflect our conviction that truth-telling is resistance and that accountability is the bedrock on which a democracy worth building is built.

At Sapran, through our work, we hope to foster a culture of truth and accountability in a landscape too frequently shaped by silence and forgetting. Our goal is simple: not just to counter state violence, but to help shape a future where justice is real, dignity is guaranteed, and hope is something we can act upon; not just dream about.

Raise your voice. Break the silence. Safeguarding all LIVES.

Warm regards,  
***The Editorial Team***  
***LIVES***  
***Sapran***



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## Human Rights Tracker

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# Human Rights Violation and Criminal offence Index (July, 2025): Trends, Incidents and Accountability

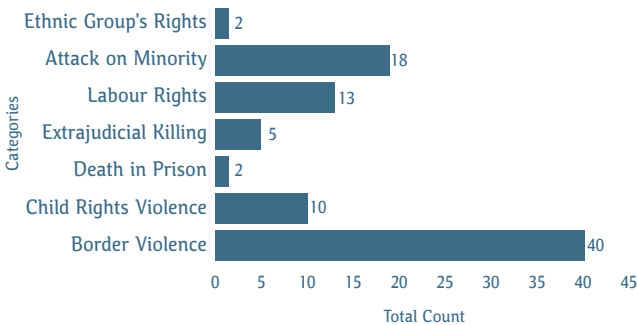
In July 2025, Bangladesh was characterized by a complex environment of security threats and rights-related issues, with a variety of events such as criminal activity, human rights abuses, and politically motivated violence. These reported cases indicate the continued societal and institutional pressures that require critical examination. This discussion classifies the events into three intersecting groups, namely, criminal activity, human rights violations, and politically motivated events. The most common were criminal offenses, but there were also specific trends within each category that require further consideration. It is worth noting that more traditional crimes were accompanied by frequent reports of violence against vulnerable populations and restrictions on basic freedoms. This information provides a useful perspective of exploring the wider implications on governance, community security and institutional responsibility. Putting these events into the context of the ongoing political transition in Bangladesh, we will be able to evaluate their immediate effect and their role in the changing sociopolitical environment in the country.

## Methodology

This report records human rights violations and criminal abuses in Bangladesh in the month of July 2025 on the basis of systematic observation of six newspapers that are widely read and editorially credible: Prothom Alo, Daily Manab Zamin, Samakal, Jugantor, The Daily Star and The Business Standard. The reported cases were documented based on victim reports, the police report, and description of the event in the news articles and then classified into three categories: criminal acts (e.g. murder, rape, kidnapping, road accidents), human rights violations (e.g. extrajudicial killings, assault on minorities, labor abuses), and political violence (e.g. protest suppression, arrests). Cases that overlapped with each other like murder after rape were recorded in both appropriate categories to give a complete coverage. Although the methodology is transparent and cross-referenced to limit media bias, its main limitations are noted, such as underreporting in sensitive spheres (Prantiik News and other reliable media sources were consulted), and the inconsistency between police reports and the actual legal verdicts.

## Human Rights Violations in July 2025

The month of July 2025 in Bangladesh witnessed persistent human rights concerns, with documented cases reflecting systemic challenges in safeguarding fundamental freedoms. Key incidents included extrajudicial killings, attacks on marginalized communities, and restrictions on labor rights, alongside recurring reports of custodial deaths and suppression of dissent. Press freedom violations, particularly assaults on journalists, further highlighted the fragile environment for civic expression. This analysis examines these trends through verified media reports, highlighting both immediate incidents and their broader implications for accountability and justice in Bangladesh.

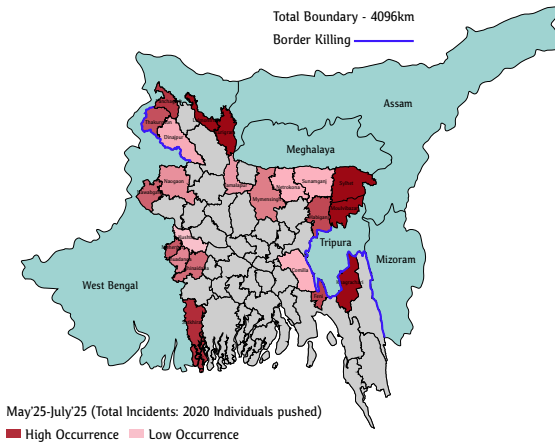


Human Rights Violations in July 2025

The bar chart depicting human rights violations in Bangladesh during July 2025 reveals a concerning pattern of abuses, particularly in border regions and against vulnerable populations. Border violence, which recorded the highest number of incidents, includes both border killings and forced push-ins highlighting the severity of cross-border tensions. On July 31, for instance, 27 people, including 17 women, were forcibly repatriated by India's Border Security Force (BSF) in separate incidents in Naogaon and Panchagarh, and later detained by Bangladesh's Border Guard (BGB), highlighting the vulnerability of marginalized border communities. Border violence in July 2025 encompassed 8 cases of border killings, 27 cases of border push-ins, and 5 other incidents, totaling 40 cases. Attacks on minorities were the second most reported category, often driven by communal unrest, such as the July 29 attack in Rangpur's Gangachara, where 12-20 Hindu homes were vandalized following an alleged Facebook post. Other violations included labor rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, child rights violence, and deaths in custody, reflecting broader institutional failures and a lack of effective accountability. The data depicts the urgent need for targeted policy interventions and stronger protection mechanisms.

### Cases of Border Violences

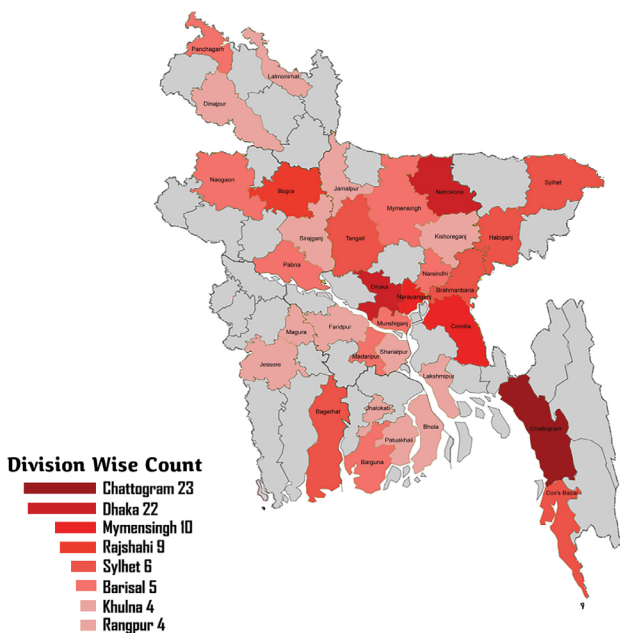
(Border Pushed-in, Border Killings and Others)  
from May25-July25



This thematic choropleth map shows reported cases of border violence including push-ins, killings, and related incidents along the India-Bangladesh border from May to July 2025. Dark red districts (e.g., Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Khagrachari, Dinajpur, Satkhira) illustrate high occurrences, while lighter red areas indicate fewer incidents. Blue lines indicate sections where border killings occurred. The data notes 2,020 individuals were pushed across the border in this period, with violence concentrated in key hotspots along Tripura, Meghalaya, and West Bengal border stretches.

## Cases of Rape, Sexual Assault and GBV across Districts

This report provides an overview of documented cases of sexual assault, rape, and gender-based violence (GBV) across various districts in July 2025. The data highlights the widespread nature of these crimes, with incidents reported in multiple regions. For example, on July 29, 2025, in Cumilla's Burichang upazila, a woman and her teenage daughter were found dead in their home, with the husband fleeing amid suspicions of familial homicide linked to financial distress.



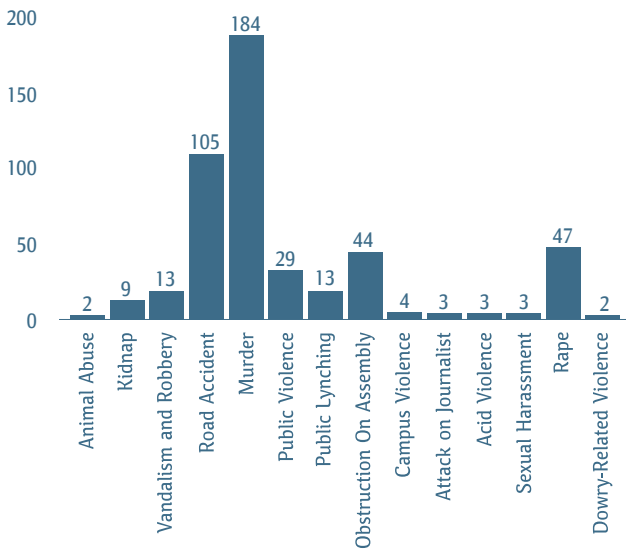
District-wise Distribution of Sexual Assault, Rape and GBV Cases

The choropleth map of Bangladesh depicts the district-wise distribution of sexual assault, rape, and gender-based violence (GBV) cases reported in July 2025, using shades of red to indicate severity. Chattogram Division recorded the highest number of cases (23), concentrated in Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Cumilla, and Brahmanbaria, followed closely by Dhaka Division (22), with significant incidents in Dhaka city, Narayanganj, Tangail, and Munshiganj. Mymensingh Division reported 10 cases, driven significantly by Netrokona (7), highlighting regional vulnerability. Moderate numbers were reported in Rajshahi (9), Sylhet (6), and Barisal (5), while Khulna and Rangpur reported fewer cases (4 each), with scattered incidents in districts like Bagerhat, Panchagarh, and Lalmonirhat.

Urban centers generally showed higher counts, potentially due to population density, mobility, and greater access to reporting mechanisms, whereas many rural and peripheral districts remain grey indicating underreporting or lack of documentation. The map illustrates the need for targeted interventions in high-incidence areas, improvements in reporting infrastructure, and context-sensitive strategies to address the structural and cultural drivers of GBV across both urban and rural landscapes.

## Criminal Offenses and Other Occurrences in July 2025

The criminal offense data for July 2025 in Bangladesh reveals a diverse range of incidents, from violent crimes to public disorder. Road accidents emerged as the most frequently reported issue, followed by rape and obstruction of assembly, indicating significant challenges in public safety, gender-based violence, and freedom of protest. The dataset also highlights concerning trends such as public lynching, vandalism, and attacks on journalists, reflecting broader societal and institutional vulnerabilities. This analysis examines these patterns to identify key areas requiring policy and enforcement attention.



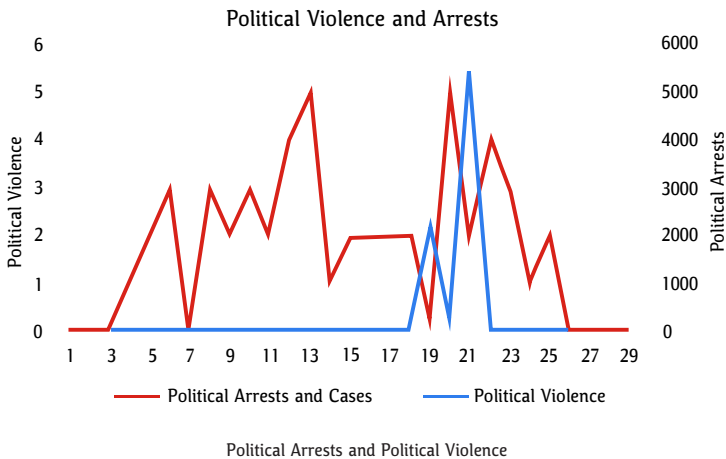
Criminal Offenses & Others in July 2025

The graph illustrates criminal activities in Bangladesh with murder (184 cases) and road accidents (105 cases) leading the list as a sign of the underlying problems in the areas of public safety, law enforcement, and traffic control. Rape (47 cases)

and obstruction on assembly (44 cases) are close behind, indicating continued issues with gender-based violence and the stifling of political or civic expression. It is worth noting that there is public violence (29 cases) that entails family feuds, street fights, and wider community violence, which shows an unstable social climate. There are instances of mob justice (13) and vandalism and robbery (13) that suggest that there is still a problem with mob justice and crimes involving property. In spite of being fewer in numbers, acid violence (3), sexual harassment (3), and attacks on journalists (3) are also critically important because they are targeted against vulnerable people and freedom of the press. Collectively, the data presents a distressing image of institutionalized violence and social instability and requires immediate changes in the systems of legal accountability and policing, as well as the protection of victims.

## Political Violence & Political Arrests

During the interim government period, reports documented instances of arrests linked to political activities, with some cases raising due process concerns. The legal framework inherited from previous administrations continued to be applied in certain situations. These developments occurred within Bangladesh's complex transitional context, where balancing security imperatives with rights protections remained an ongoing challenge. Thus, the data on political violence and arrests in July 2025 reflects ongoing tensions, with reported incidents of detentions and clashes amid Bangladesh's charged political environment. This section examines the documented cases to identify patterns and implications.



During July in Bangladesh, political violence and arrests showed a sharp escalation between the 14th and 22nd. The highest number of political violence incidents occurred on July 14 (5 incidents) and again on July 22 (4 incidents),

while political arrests and cases peaked dramatically on July 21, with over 5,000 reported. Notably, arrests remained low in early July despite earlier spikes in violence, indicating a delayed but intense state response. After July 22, both political violence and arrests declined sharply, suggesting the crackdown may have subdued further unrest. The graph highlights a clear pattern where state action followed or coincided with peaks in political unrest and arbitrary arrests. For example, on July 21, 2025, police filed four new cases implicating 5,400 unnamed individuals in murder charges related to the Gopalganj violence.

## Trends, Analysis and Accountability

The available data paints a concerning picture of systemic challenges during Bangladesh's interim period, where patterns of repression and violence persisted due to the political transition. The continued use of sweeping legal actions like mass indictments demonstrated how institutional mechanisms for suppression remained operational, while violence against minorities and border communities revealed deep-seated societal fractures. Criminal trends reflected not just law-and-order issues but also underlying governance failures in public safety and justice delivery. Most critically, the interim administration's inability to break from past practices whether in arbitrary detentions, security force abuses, or suppression of dissent highlighted how deeply embedded structures of authoritarian control resist superficial political changes. These patterns collectively suggest that without comprehensive institutional reforms addressing both state violence and societal impunity, Bangladesh's cycle of repression is likely to continue regardless of formal changes in government. The persistence of such issues across regime changes underscores that meaningful progress requires dismantling the very architectures of power that enable systemic rights violations.

To conclude, the patterns observed during Bangladesh's interim period reveal a troubling continuity of systemic rights violations, demonstrating that mere political transitions are insufficient to dismantle entrenched structures of repression. The persistence of arbitrary arrests, violence against marginalized groups, and institutional impunity portrays the need for comprehensive reforms not just changes in leadership, but a fundamental restructuring of governance, justice, and security frameworks. Without addressing these root causes, cycles of state and societal violence will endure, leaving the promise of meaningful democracy unfulfilled. The path forward demands not just accountability for past abuses, but the creation of institutions resilient enough to prevent their recurrence.



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## Seminar

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# Massacre, Enforced Disappearances, and the Culture of Fear: The Demand for Human Dignity and Justice

On **Wednesday, December 11, 2024**, an insightful seminar titled **“Massacre , Enforced Disappearances, and the Culture of Fear: The Demand for Human Dignity and Justice”** was organized by Sapran at the Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium, University of Dhaka. The event brought together prominent human rights activists, researchers, writers, victims’ families, and intellectuals to discuss and demand swift justice for all extrajudicial killings committed under the fascist regime, and to advocate for the protection of human dignity in a new Bangladesh.

The session commenced with **Farhad Mazhar**, poet and philosopher, posing a question to the audience: although there are numerous international laws to ensure human rights, why does enforced disappearance remain prevalent in countries like ours? He reflected on how the concept of human rights has evolved and been integrated into national policies, yet instead of declining, enforced disappearances have increased significantly. He stated that the most painful



Experts urged for the protection of human rights

aspect of such disappearances is that families are left without any knowledge of where their loved ones are or what has happened to them. This leads to lifelong trauma, and only the victims can truly comprehend the depth of sorrow and suffering involved.

Sharing his personal experience, he revealed that he too was forcibly taken by law enforcement, and upon return, was so traumatized that he could not even speak to doctors. He attempted suicide twice, unable to bear the psychological impact of being dehumanized. He emphasized that during torture, the notion of human dignity is completely destroyed, yet human dignity lies at the heart of all human rights laws. Furthermore, he explained that governments often resort to torture or enforced disappearance to extract information, particularly when institutions are weak and ineffective. Additionally, such tactics are used to maintain political power by instilling fear and silencing the opposition. He concluded by stating that we must recognize the importance of human dignity through the lens of the tortured. We have the right to know where our loved ones are, how they are, and the right to truth. Today, we must collectively urge the government to adopt policies that ensure access to truth in every aspect of life.

Following this, **Yasmin Ara**, researcher and activist, shared findings from her research, highlighting the lived experiences of women whose family members have been forcibly disappeared. She narrated the story of a mother whose husband was taken despite having a two-year-old child, as the child has never seen his father and does not even know whether he is alive. Many of these women had never imagined engaging with public institutions or protesting in the streets, yet now they are fighting on all fronts to bring back their husbands or fathers. Ms. Yasmin emphasized that the ruling party has never acknowledged the occurrence of enforced disappearances, leaving families without answers or legal

recourse. One woman shared that before her husband was taken, she never had to step outside alone. Now, she knows every corner of Dhaka, having returned from the village with her baby in search of him. This was not the return she wanted.

Ms. Yasmin noted that the dominant narrative around enforced disappearances tends to focus on political conflict, rarely highlighting the gendered and emotional toll on women and families. Her research centers on these often-silenced voices, women who now carry the burden of both seeking justice and maintaining their families. Many are left unsupported by extended relatives, who fear state reprisal or disputes over inheritance. These women endure social stigma, isolation, and transgenerational trauma affecting their children as well. They relentlessly gather evidence, stand outside courts, and continue to speak out, despite being dismissed or unheard. Ms. Yasmin concluded that their stories reflect not only a struggle for justice, but also a fight to reclaim dignity in a system that refuses to acknowledge their pain.

Following this, **Sanjida Islam Tuli**, organizer of “Mayer Daak”, spoke powerfully about the lasting trauma inflicted by state-enforced disappearances not only on the disappeared individuals, but also on their families. Drawing from her direct experiences with victims’ families, she shed light on the brutality of these oppressions, including the existence of secret detention cells and the deep psychological wounds they leave behind.

*“A culture of fear has been cultivated under 15 years of authoritarian rule. Incidents such as the Shapla Chatter massacre and the Narayanganj seven-murder case serve as emblematic of the state’s strategy of silencing dissent and the process of dehumanisation.”*

- Sanjida Islam Tuli, Organizer of “Mayer Daak”

She emphasized how the regime systematically violated human rights and eroded freedom of speech, urging the public to resist silence and speak out against such atrocities.

Building on this, **Nur Khan Liton**, human rights activist, emphasized in his speech that state-sponsored violence in Bangladesh cannot be viewed as isolated incidents. “Massacres cannot be confined to a single timeline,” he stated, asserting that the entire 15-year fascist regime has been marked by ongoing atrocities. He highlighted how freedom of speech has been systematically suppressed, and how activists attempting to work through various platforms were silenced or restricted. Mr. Liton cited numerous cases of enforced disappearances, where individuals were abducted, their bodies later dumped with no means for families or citizens to seek justice. He specifically mentioned Aynaghor, a secret detention facility, as a symbol of the state’s hidden machinery of oppression. He concluded by acknowledging the July Uprising, led by students, as a powerful moment that shattered the culture of fear. He stressed that this collective defiance is exactly

what the nation needs to reclaim justice and human dignity.

Concluding the series of reflections, **Alhaj Shahidul Islam Bhuiyan**, the father of Farhan Faiyaz, spoke about the July uprising and the crucial role students played in breaking the fascist regime. He shared how his son Farhan Faiyaz's dreams were shattered in what was supposed to be a hopeful July movement. He described how the firing during the protests created a culture of fear. He emphasized that the kind of massacre and human rights violations witnessed during July were unprecedented in his life. He also reflected on the 15 years of oppression under the fascist regime, detailing the various atrocities that took place during this dark period. Recalling how Farhan Faiyaz was killed, he demanded justice and called for a proper trial. He urged society to be awakened and united in seeking accountability.

The seminar “Massacre, Enforced Disappearances, and the Culture of Fear” served as a powerful call for justice, truth, and the restoration of human dignity in Bangladesh. Through heartfelt testimonies, critical reflections, and courageous demands, speakers underscored the urgent need to break the silence around state-sponsored violence and enforced disappearances. As survivors, families, and activists continue their struggle, the event reminded us that reclaiming justice begins with acknowledging truth and standing in solidarity against fear and impunity.



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## Panel Discussion

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### The Horrors of Pellet Guns

On Wednesday, **March 05, 2025**, an insightful panel discussion titled “**The Horrors of Pellet Guns**” was organized by Sapran at Bishwo Shahitto Kendro, Bangla Motor, Dhaka. The event brought together victims of pellet gun violence, prominent human rights activists, researchers, and lawyers, who shared testimonies, analyses, and reflections on the brutal consequences of pellet gun usage during the July Uprising. Together, they highlighted the physical, psychological, and social impacts of these weapons, condemned the indiscriminate use of force against civilians, and collectively demanded a complete and permanent ban on the use of pellet guns in Bangladesh’s protests and public gatherings.

The program began with the screening of a documentary that presented the devastating stories of 11 survivors whose lives were forever changed by pellet gun injuries. The discussion was opened by **Waliul Hasan**, a student of Nawab Habibullah Model School and College and a survivor of pellet gun injuries. Sharing his experience, Waliul described how more than 200 pellets had pierced his hands, some embedding deep into his bones, making it impossible for doctors to remove them.



Experts discussing pellet gun violence

Waliul recounted the horror of July 21, when 50 to 100 police officers suddenly opened fire in front of Zamzam Tower in Uttara. He was shot from just two meters away and saw blood gushing from his hands as he tried to protect himself.

*“I have to live with these pellets for the rest of my life. But is this even called living?”*

- Waliul Hasan, Victim of Pellet gun, 24' Uprising

Another survivor, **Nur Hossain**, shared how he lost vision in one eye after being shot with pellets in Mirpur. He explained that he could not even tell his mother who lives in the village, because she would not be able to bear the grief.

The discussion featured reflections from prominent human rights activists, who expressed their outrage at the scale of violence used during the July uprising. **Shahidul Alam**, renowned photographer and social activist, a recipient of the Ekushey Padak, stated,

*“It is because young people have sacrificed their lives that we have the freedom we enjoy today. I have witnessed the Liberation War in 1971 and the oppression during the Ershad regime, but I have never seen this level of brutality.”*

- Shahidul Alam, Photographer and Social Activist

Referring to research on the Hong Kong protests, he mentioned that 15 percent of protesters there were injured by pellet guns and 20 percent of those injured had died. He expressed grave concern that the authorities in Bangladesh still proceeded to use such a weapon, despite knowing its consequences.

**Huma Khan**, Senior Human Rights Adviser at the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office in Bangladesh, stated that the use of pellet guns reflects a much deeper and systemic problem. She emphasized the need to not only ban these weapons but also to comprehensively reform all violent methods of protest suppression. Khan warned that banning a single weapon is not enough, as other excessive and disproportionate tactics could continue to maim civilians for life without accountability. She further called for Bangladesh's law enforcement agencies to align their crowd control practices with international human rights standards.

**Sara Hossain**, senior advocate, stressed the importance of holding perpetrators accountable. She pointed out that even the existing laws in Bangladesh were not followed when pellet guns were used.

*“Our constitution guarantees protection from indiscriminate firing and requires proportional use of force. However, these constitutional safeguards have been systematically ignored.”*

-Sara Hossain, Barrister, Supreme Court, Bangladesh

She emphasized that it is not enough to call for future reforms, but also essential to ensure accountability for the violence that has already taken place.

**Khandaker Raquib**, a PhD researcher at the University of California, Irvine, described the use of pellet guns as a deliberate strategy of controlling civilians by maiming rather than killing them outright. He explained how the state aimed to cripple protesters both physically and mentally by not only injuring them but also by denying them medical care. He referred to this as a form of life where people are forced to live with unbearable suffering, their existence reduced to something worse than death.

Several survivors echoed these concerns. They spoke about how their hopes of pursuing education and building a future had been shattered. Many highlighted the injustice of their suffering being used for political games, and criticized the biased role of certain media outlets. One survivor asked, “Why do political leaders continue to fight for power while students like Abu Sayed and Mughdho lose their lives in the streets? Is this the justice we deserve?”

In his closing remarks, **Bhuiyan Asaduzzaman** of Sapran reaffirmed the organization's commitment to stand by the people. He said, “Sapran does not serve any ruling authority but exists to uphold the rights and dignity of the citizens.”

The event concluded with a lively question-and-answer session, where participants discussed the roles and responsibilities of journalists, lawyers, and law enforcement agencies in mass movements. There was a collective demand for

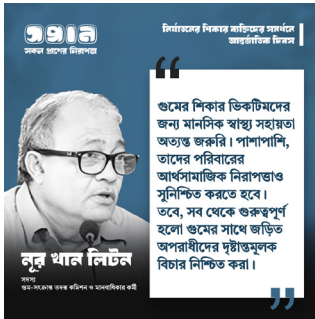
structural reforms and justice for those who had been harmed.

The discussion served as a searing reminder of the state's brutal suppression of dissent and the urgent need to end the use of pellet guns. It called for justice for the victims and demanded institutional accountability, legal reforms, and the recognition of every citizen's right to live free from state violence. The testimonies revealed that the July Uprising was not only a fight for democracy but also a fight for dignity, a struggle that continues to this day.

## Social Media Advocacy

# International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

On 26 June 2025, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, Sapran launched a social media solidarity campaign featuring visuals and quotes from human rights activists, calling for justice.



গণতন্ত্রের শিকারের ক্ষতিগ্রস্তদের সমর্থনে  
আন্তর্জাতিক দিন

“  
গুমের শিকার ভিকটিমদের  
জন্য মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সহায়তা  
অত্যন্ত জরুরি। পাশাপাশি,  
তাদের পরিবারের  
আর্থনামাজিক নিরাপত্তাও  
সুনিশ্চিত করতে হবে।  
তবে, সব থেকে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ  
হলো গুমের সাথে জড়িত  
অপরাধীদের দৃষ্টান্তমূলক  
বিচার নিশ্চিত করা।  
”

**নূর খান নিহাট**  
সাবেক  
১৯৮১-১৯৮৯ সালে তৎকালীন ৭ জনসভ্যিকের কর্মী



গণতন্ত্রের শিকারের ক্ষতিগ্রস্তদের সমর্থনে  
আন্তর্জাতিক দিন

International Day in Support of  
Victims of Torture

“  
The mental, physical  
and social wounds  
need to heal. The  
wounds are raw. We  
need closure. Never  
again must we allow  
forced disappearance,  
extra judicial killings  
and state repression.  
Never again.  
”

**SHAHIDUL ALAM**  
Human Rights Activist  
Founder of Drik and Pathbhala



গণতন্ত্রের শিকারের ক্ষতিগ্রস্তদের সমর্থনে  
আন্তর্জাতিক দিন

International Day in Support of  
Victims of Torture

“  
We are at a transitional  
moment in Bangladesh  
in which it is imperative  
to ensure justice and  
accountability for those  
responsible for gross  
human rights  
violations.  
The search for truth  
must identify how such  
violations occurred,  
while ensuring that  
justice itself does not  
create a new cycle of  
injustice and violence.  
The mass killings and  
injuries of women, men  
and children during the  
July Uprising reflect  
disproportionate and  
excessive use of force  
against protesters that  
must never be repeated.  
Standing by victims  
and survivors and their  
families, and ensuring  
rehabilitation and  
reparation, is critical to  
healing and justice.  
”

**BARRISTER SARA HOSSAIN**  
Senior Advocate  
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Op-Ed

## The Hidden Lethality of Pellet Guns: How Chhorra Guli Inflicts Social Death on Protesters

### The Quiet Horror of “Less-Lethal” Repression

Imagine a weapon so “magical” it allows a regime to crush dissent without creating martyrs. A device so surgically cruel that it disables without killing. It leaves no corpses, no funerals, no international headlines. Just silence, trauma, broken dreams, and ruined lives. For authoritarian regimes, this is more than just a tool; it’s a “eureka” weapon. In Bangladesh, that weapon has a familiar name: the pellet gun, or chhorra guli.

In the hands of the Awami League regime, chhorra guli became the state’s preferred instrument of repression. During the July–August 2024 mass uprising, it was deployed for a precise purpose: not to kill, but to maim. Marketed deceptively as “less-lethal,” these weapons blinded protesters, shredded limbs, and psychologically shattered an entire generation. The pellet gun doesn’t provoke martyrdom or backlash. Instead, it manufactures social death, physically broken, economically ruined, politically erased. No coffins, just crutches. No heroes, only trauma. It is violence with plausible deniability, repression dressed as “restraint”. This is what makes the pellet gun so appealing to autocrats, it looks “humane”

on paper, but performs like a calibrated instrument of terror on the ground. It is a weapon that mutilates while masquerading as mercy.

This piece traces that contradiction. Through survivor testimonies, medical evidence, and political theory, we expose the “less-lethal” lie. The pellet gun is not just a tool for crowd control or riot management; it is a weapon of silence, suffering, and state-sanctioned amnesia.



Journalist **Mehedi Hasan**, killed by pellet gun fire on 18 July 2024.

Photo: Palash Khan/ The Daily Star

## **Bodies That Survive, Lives That Don't**

During the 2024 mass uprising, the Bangladesh government's preferred weapon for crowd control was not tear gas or lathi charges; it was the pellet gun. Marketed as “less-lethal,” this weapon became a frontline tool in a campaign of deliberate mutilation carried out by law enforcement. According to the 2025 UN OHCHR fact-finding report, 736 civilians were treated for pellet-related eye injuries at the National Institute of Ophthalmology in Dhaka, with 504 requiring emergency surgery. In Sylhet, the Osmani Medical College Hospital handled 64 metal shot injuries, 36 of which were to the eyes. These were not warning shots or accidents. They were targeted acts to disable, terrify, and permanently incapacitate.

Sapran, a human rights think tank, conducted a study on the deployment and aftermath of pellet guns titled “Deadly in Disguise: The Use of Pellet Guns Against Civilians During the July–August 2024 Mass Uprising in Bangladesh”. Drawing on testimonies from survivors and frontline doctors, our findings expose a system designed to produce suffering while avoiding accountability.

For example, Mainuddin, a father of three and the sole breadwinner of his family, explained:

*“My eldest daughter is a 9th grader. I have two elderly parents who need me. But I’ve lost my job. My family now takes care of me, I’m bedridden, and we have no income. How do you think I’m doing mentally?”*

-Mainuddin, Victim of Pellet gun, 24’ July Uprising

One particularly harrowing case is that of 23 year old Khokon Chandra Barman, shot in the face from a very close range during the 5 August 2024 massacre outside the Jatrabari Police Station. His injuries completely obliterated his upper lip, nose, palate, and gums. The Health Ministry under the Interim Government’s guidance had arranged for the initial phase of his advanced reconstructive surgery in Moscow last May. Khokon described his experience of seeing the Jatrabari police indiscriminately shoot civilians at a media interview:

*“The police came out of the Jatrabari Station and fired at us like we were birds.” He added, “They didn’t fire to disperse us, they fired to destroy us.”*

Khokon’s life will never be the same again. Today, he lives with profound disfigurement and permanent nerve damage, a living testament to the irreversible physical damage metal pellets can cause to the human body.

For others, the psychological damage is accompanied by intense survivor’s guilt. Sajjad, a high school student, mourned:

*“It would’ve been better if I died... The doctors say maybe in three years I can lift a cup with this hand. But I can’t even hold anything now. What kind of life is this?”*

-Sajjad, Victim of Pellet gun, 24’ July Uprising



A protester critically injured by pellet gun fire

Photo: The Daily Star

The physical toll is severe. Many victims underwent multiple surgeries, and in most cases, doctors were unable to remove all the pellets from their bodies. The remaining metal fragments became a permanent internal threat; causing chronic infections, nerve damage, or future health crises. One doctor described these fragments as *“a permanent source of mental and physical suffering.”*

Young people were disproportionately targeted. Doctors expressed alarm at treating victims as young as 10 or 12 years old. Female patients were reported to exhibit even greater psychological distress. Many suffered not only pain but intense shame, isolation, and long-term trauma.

The story of Himel, a young protester from Tangail, is particularly disturbing. Shot from the second floor of a local police station while trying to secure the release of detained students, he now carries 300–400 pellets in his face and neck.

*“I can no longer see in both eyes,” he said. “All the pellets are still inside me.”*

Another victim, Raisul Rahman Ratul, a college student, was shot after Friday prayers in Azampur, Uttara. As he tried to talk to the police, he was grabbed and shot at point-blank range in the abdomen. He underwent multiple surgeries, but only 45–50 pellets out of 250 could be removed. 55% of his abdomen was surgically excised.

*“My kidneys are damaged. I’m in pain all the time. I was supposed to take my HSC exams this year. Now I can’t even prepare.”*

-Raisul Rahman Ratul, Victim of Pellet gun, 24’ July Uprising

Abdullah, a high school student from Enayetpur, missed months of school due to pellet injuries. His mother shared:

*“He was supposed to move to 9th grade, but he’s still in bed. Doctors say he might never walk again.”*

Sajjad, another teenage victim from Natun Bazar, described:

*“This arm still hurts... I can’t even carry my school bag. My mom carries it for me now.”*

These testimonies reflect a coordinated strategy to maim instead of kill; to neutralize protesters without creating martyrs.

One interviewed human rights activist emphasized that this is not merely a failure of law, it is the result of deliberate policy. Despite existing legal frameworks requiring proportionality and regulation in the use of force, pellet guns were deployed indiscriminately and without oversight.

This is why the state prefers pellet guns, they represent a politics of invisibilized cruelty. They are not merely weapons of law enforcement, they are instruments of authoritarian governance calibrated for modern optics. These testimonies lay bare what statistics and reports often obscure. Pellet guns are not “less-lethal.” They are intentionally crippling. They create a landscape of broken bodies, abandoned families, and silenced dissent.

## **Maiming as Governance across the World: The Hidden Strategy Behind Pellet Guns**

The use of pellet guns by authoritarian regimes was a deliberate strategy. This is violence rebranded, refined, and made palatable to a public conditioned to equate state brutality with death alone. As political theorists like Jasbir K. Puar and Achille Mbembe argue, the power of the modern state lies not only in its capacity to kill, but in choosing who suffers, for how long, and how silently. Puar’s theory of the “right to maim” shows that states increasingly choose injury over execution. A dead protester can become a martyr, a rallying cry but a blinded or paralyzed student becomes a burden, forgotten, disempowered. Pellet guns produce precisely this kind of injury: one that incapacitates but does not inspire.



CT scan reveals the silent agony—like many other victims, **Md Mijanur Rahman Badol** still has gun pellets lodged in his face and skull

Photo: MD Mijanur Rahman Badol/ The Daily Star

Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics sharpens this insight: pellet victims are kept biologically alive but rendered socially dead. Unable to study, work, or participate, their prolonged survival becomes a condition of extended suffering. These are not collateral damage; they are calculated acts of repression. Maimed bodies in hospital beds, blindfolded eyes, shattered limbs become silent warnings to society: “This is what happens when you resist.” And because these injuries are less visible than coffins and funerals, they often escape both national outrage and global condemnation.

However, Bangladesh is not the only country where pellet guns have been used by the state to repress dissent. From authoritarian regimes to so-called “liberal democracies”, their deployment reveals a global pattern of state violence masked as “restraint”. In Indian-administered Kashmir, over 6,000 people were injured by pellet fire in July 2016 alone, many permanently blinded, including children and bystanders. Iran’s security forces deliberately targeted the faces of women and students during the 2022 “Women, Life, Freedom” protests. In Palestine and Lebanon, Israeli forces employed pellet-like projectiles to maim civilians, including health workers and children, under a strategy designed to disable resistance without mass death. Chilean protests in 2019 left over 400 protesters with eye injuries; U.S. law enforcement used similar weapons during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, resulting in over 115 cases of severe trauma. From Bahrain to Egypt, pellet injuries have been met with impunity, not reform. These cases underscore a transnational logic: to harm without killing, suppress without scandal. In this global matrix of repression, pellet guns thus serve a double purpose: they enforce control while minimizing accountability. They do not reduce violence, they optimize it for deniability. And in doing so, they expose the cruel genius of modern authoritarianism: the ability to break bodies while claiming restraint.

## **Legal Contradictions and the Crisis of Conscience**

The deployment of pellet guns during the 2024 mass uprising was not just a humanitarian catastrophe, rather was a legal and moral collapse. Although there are numerous domestic laws, constitutional safeguards, and international agreements in place to regulate the use of force, the state ignored these protections and used force without accountability, disregarding the basic principles of lawful, proportionate, and responsible policing. Both national and international laws clearly state that force should only be used when absolutely necessary, applied in a measured way, and only after all other options have been exhausted. Yet for many protesters and bystanders, pellets were the first response. Victims, including children and passersby, were shot at point-blank range without giving any warning, often in the face, chest, or abdomen. This conduct blatantly violated the right to life and protection from torture under the ICCPR (Articles 6 and 7), the Convention Against Torture, and also breached the standards outlined in Police Regulation Bengal 1943 (PRB 153C).

These were not isolated accidents. The injuries, blindness, amputations, embedded shrapnel were systematic, widespread, and predictably catastrophic. As such, they are not mere excesses, but evidence of premeditated, unlawful violence, in direct breach of the UN Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons (2020) and the domestic laws of Bangladesh.

The damage went far beyond physical wounds. Many young survivors were emotionally traumatized, yet the Hasina government offered no support. Financial burdens increased as some lost their jobs, others had to quit school, and many fell

into heavy debt just to pay for their medical care. Despite causing this suffering, the regime provided no compensation, no medical assistance, and no help to rebuild their lives, failing both its responsibilities under international law and its constitutional duty to protect human dignity.

Healthcare professionals were placed in an ethical crisis. Moreover, numerous victims fled medical facilities to evade surveillance or retaliatory actions, thereby infringing upon Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which guarantees the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The obstruction of access to medical care and the intimidation of healthcare providers constitute violations of this right. Such actions further breach Article 3 (right to life, liberty, and security of person) and Article 5 (prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Concurrently, activists and journalists documenting these abuses were subjected to harassment, surveillance, and silencing tactics. The intent extended beyond inflicting physical harm to include the deliberate destruction of evidence.

The legal framework exists but has been hollowed out, bypassed, and weaponized. The result is a country where violence is normalized, law is ornamental, and justice remains out of reach for the wounded, the abandoned, and the silenced.

### **From Silence to Ban**

The use of pellet guns during the 2024 uprising was a deliberate authoritarian strategy to crush the people's resistance without triggering the global outcry that mass killings might. These weapons may not always kill, but they kill futures, destroy bodies, silence movements, and normalize state violence. In defiance of international law and Bangladesh's own constitutional commitments, pellet guns have been used to blind children, disable workers and silence youth. This is not restraint, but calculated repression, violence masked as discipline.

We must reject the myth of "less-lethal." There is nothing less harmful about a weapon that leaves people unable to walk, study, or see. Pellet guns are not tools of order; they are tools of institutionalized mutilation.

It is time to call pellet guns what they truly are: state-sanctioned weapons of maiming and fear. To allow their continued use is to accept repression as policy. We must urgently, and unequivocally, demand a permanent ban on pellet guns in Bangladesh.

*This op-ed was originally published in The Daily Star on July 5, 2025.*



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## Workshop

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### Workshop on Human Rights Violation Documentation Organized by Sapran

On July 3, 2024, Sapran hosted a vital workshop titled “**Methods of Human Rights Violation Documentation,**” facilitated by our Research Assistant, **Nusrat Jahan Nisu**. The session centered on effective strategies for systematically recording human rights violations and monitoring criminal incidents occurring within a specific timeframe.

Nisu guided participants through practical techniques to document abuses, ranging from gathering credible evidence to organizing and securely storing records. Emphasis was given on establishing a detailed monthly tracking system for human right violations and criminal offenses, enabling a clearer understanding of emerging trends and recurring patterns.

A key highlight of the workshop was that such documentation plays an important role in promoting transparency and accountability. This reinforces a crucial check and balance mechanism, strengthening democratic oversight and promoting justice. Sapran remains committed to building the capacity of human rights defenders and fostering effective mechanisms for accountability.



Sapran's Research Assistant **Nusrat Jahan Nisu** leading the workshop on Human Rights Violations Documentation

## Key Takeaways from the Workshop on Human Rights Violation Documentation:

### 1. Basic Understanding of Human Rights Violations and Criminal Offences

The workshop clarified the difference between general criminal offences and human rights violations. While crimes may be committed by individuals, human rights abuses often involve state actors or institutions failing to uphold their responsibilities. Recognizing this distinction helps in categorizing incidents and pursuing appropriate legal or advocacy actions.

### 2. Importance of Documentation and Archiving

Participants learned how to document abuses systematically using credible evidence such as testimonies, photos, reports, and media coverage. Proper archiving methods were emphasized to ensure secure storage and easy retrieval of records. Special attention was given to confidentiality and accuracy to protect victims and strengthen credibility.

### 3. Methodology of Documentation

A structured approach was introduced for recording incidents, including using timelines, case categorization, and monthly monitoring systems. This methodology helps track the scale and frequency of violations over time. Participants were also guided on safeguarding sensitive data while maintaining transparency and professional standards.

### 4. Accountability, Trend Analysis, and Legal Assessment

Effective documentation provides tools to hold state actors accountable by using verified cases in advocacy, legal, and international forums. Tracking violations reveals recurring patterns and systemic failures, offering insights into the law-and-order situation of the state. Such analysis promotes transparency, strengthens democratic oversight, and fosters justice.



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## Panel Discussion

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### **Anatomy of Headshot: State-sponsored Violence and the Lethal Suppression of Protesters during the July Uprising**

On **Wednesday, July 9, 2025**, Sapran hosted a panel discussion titled, **“The Anatomy of Headshot: State-sponsored Violence and the Lethal Suppression of Protesters during the July Uprising”** at Bishwa Sahitto Kendro, Bangla Motor, Dhaka. The panel discussion brought together the family members of victims, academics, legal experts and journalists as panelists to discuss the systematic use of targeted headshots by the state forces and allied actors during the 2024 Monsoon Uprising. The event highlighted how, during the mass uprising of July-August 2024, law enforcement agencies and state-backed groups systematically targeted protesters with headshots. The discussion also critically examined the unregulated use of lethal force by security forces, the prevailing culture of impunity, and how a fascist state ideology enables and legitimizes such violence and brutality.

The session opened with an introductory statement by Sapran’s researcher **Nusrat Jahan Nisu**, who outlined the organization’s mission to document state violence and advocate for justice and accountability. Following her remarks, a short but harrowing video was screened, presenting graphic footage of state-executed “headshots” during the uprising visually underscoring the brutality

faced by unarmed civilians and setting a somber tone for the discussion that followed.

On behalf of Sapran, researcher **Zeba Sajida Saraf** presented the key findings of the position paper titled **“They Aimed at Our Heads: Anatomy of Targeted Headshots & State-sponsored Violence in Bangladesh’s 2024 Mass Uprising.”** She explained how authoritarian regimes strategically use violence as a tool to suppress dissent and consolidate power, and discussed the policy recommendations proposed by Sapran. The position paper examined the systematic use of targeted headshots by Bangladeshi law enforcement and pro-government groups during the July-August 2024 pro democracy uprising. She explained how these killings were not accidental but part of a state-orchestrated strategy to terrorize dissenters and maintain authoritarian control. The paper focused on eyewitness accounts, forensic evidence, and reports from international human rights organizations to highlight the deliberate nature of these atrocities.

The key findings suggest that, during the uprising, state forces deliberately used headshots as a method of repression, with 51 out of 54 documented headshot killings occurring in Dhaka Division alone, primarily carried out by the police, but also by the RAB, BGB, and ruling party affiliates like the BCL and Jubo League. These killings, which targeted students, bystanders, and children such as 6-year-old Riya Gope, were not random but strategic and coordinated, designed to kill and terrorize. Statistical data, published by the UN OHCHR, estimate that over 1,400 civilians were killed, with 78% of deaths caused by military-grade rifles and 12% by pellet guns. Meanwhile, Sapran’s own research into the pattern of headshot killings is ongoing, with 54 cases verified so far which is likely only a fraction of the true scale. Testimonies and digital forensics indicate that former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan issued verbal “shoot-at-sight” and “maximum force” directives, with police instructed to treat protesters as combatants. Senior officers reportedly monitored live CCTV footage to direct real-time attacks. This violence reflects not isolated misconduct, but a systematic state policy, rooted in a culture of impunity shaped by colonial-era policing models and politicized recruitment, being an expression of necropolitics, where the state exercises control over life and death without accountability.

### **Our Initial policy recommendations include:**

- » **Independent Oversight:** Establish a National Civilian Oversight Body to investigate law enforcement violence, modeled after Kenya’s IPOA.
- » **Community Monitoring:** Create youth-led Civic Policing Observatories to document abuses in real time.
- » **Coalition Building:** Form a Police Reform Coalition uniting activists, lawyers, and civil society to advocate for accountability.

- » **Depoliticize Law Enforcement:** End partisan recruitment and promotions; restructure police to serve the public, not the regime.
- » **Demilitarize Policing:** Ban military-grade weapons for crowd control; disband the RAB.
- » **Whistleblower Protections:** Legally shield officers who refuse unlawful orders, akin to Germany's labor laws.
- » **Transparency Laws:** Enact a Police Accountability Act mandating public access to recruitment and misconduct records.
- » **Training Reforms:** Implement rights-based policing programs (6+ months) focusing on de-escalation and human rights.
- » **Public Memory Projects:** Launch a People's Tribunal or Public Archive of Police Brutality to document crimes (e.g., South Africa's TRC).
- » **Cultural Advocacy:** Produce documentaries, murals, and educational materials (e.g., Argentina's Nunca Más) to preserve victims' stories.
- » **Constitutional Safeguards:** Embed protections against state violence in a new constitution, ensuring judicial independence and civilian oversight.

According to the presentation, the findings have serious implications across legal, political, and social domains. Legally, the documented evidence fulfills the threshold for crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute, demanding international scrutiny and accountability. Politically, the crisis exposes the urgent need to reform Bangladesh's policing institutions by dismantling the colonial-era foundations and breaking the entrenched **“patronage pipeline”** that enables the weaponization of law enforcement. Socially, memorializing the victims through archives, testimonies, and public acknowledgment is essential to prevent historical erasure and support collective healing. The paper stresses that without comprehensive structural reforms such as depoliticizing institutions, prosecuting those responsible, and elevating victims' voices Bangladesh remains at risk of repeating such cycles of state-sanctioned violence.

The following panel discussion brought together a diverse range of perspectives through the reflections from the family members of victims and discussions by Sadman Rizwan Apurbo (Lecturer, School of Law, BRAC University), Zina Tasreen (Journalist, The Daily Star), Rezwana Karim Snigdha, Ph.D (Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University) and lastly, Bokhtiar Ahmed, Ph.D. (Professor, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Independent University Bangladesh).



Experts are discussing the systematic use of targeted headshots

**Md. Solaiman Topu**, brother of martyr **Md. Atikur Rahman**, spoke with deep emotion as he recounted the police brutality in the Kajla area of Jatrabari. He described how people from all walks of life—from 5-year-old children to 55-year-old elders joined the July movement with a spirit of resistance. His testimony offered a powerful reminder that the violence was indiscriminate. He demanded the establishment of a strict and transparent system of justice to hold perpetrators accountable and prevent such brutality from recurring. Following Topu, **Sirajul Islam commemorated his brother, martyr Md. Sajidur Rahman Omar**, offering a personal account of enduring grief. He shared how the loss of his brother continues to haunt their family, especially their mother. His reflections served as a painful reminder of the human cost of state violence, echoing the collective trauma experienced by many affected families across the country.

Professor **Dr. Bakhtiar Ahmed** provided a sobering political analysis of the massacre, noting that it was not an isolated incident but a culmination of 15 years of systematic preparation. He referenced a day during which more than 50 people were killed by state forces, illustrating the government's readiness to deploy lethal violence. He read from a piece he authored in 2018 titled *Bonduk*, in which he described the gun as both a literal and symbolic source of power for authoritarian regimes.

*“The barrel of the gun is the source of power; the gun is, in fact, an intoxicant for the ruler. Even when it sleeps, the gun kills. And that is precisely why, even after a government openly declared itself a killer before our very eyes, we were unable to do anything.”*

-Dr. Bakhtiar Ahmed, Professor, Department of Social Science and Humanities, School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Independent University, Bangladesh

Criticizing the enduring presence of colonial-era laws in Bangladesh's constitution, he argued that the legal system continues to serve state violence rather than restrict it. He further presented a historical overview of extrajudicial killings by successive governments and expressed frustration over the public's inability to stop a government that had, in his words, openly declared its murderous intent.

**Dr. Rezwana Karim Snigdha** focused her remarks on the ideological underpinnings of state violence. She argued that targeting the head was not only a method of execution but a symbolic attempt to extinguish dissenting ideas and aspirations. She explored the concept of necropolitics and highlighted how class dynamics played a role in determining whose lives were deemed expendable.

*“By aiming at the heads of protesters, the state did not merely ensure the death of individuals, it attempted to kill the thoughts and consciousness formed in their minds.”*

-Dr. Rizwana Karim Snigdha, Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Jahangirnagar University

According to her, the government legitimized the killing of unarmed civilians by labeling them with politically loaded terms such as “rajakar” or “anti-liberation,” thereby stripping them of public sympathy. She questioned the selective framing of martyrdom and called for a shift away from a culture of violence and ideological weaponization.

**Zina Tasreen** addressed an often-overlooked issue, the opacity surrounding state procurement of weapons. She raised important questions about how arms are acquired, under what oversight mechanisms, and whether those mechanisms align with international human rights standards. Her remarks underscored the need for greater accountability not just in the use of force, but in the infrastructure that enables it.

**Sadman Rizwan Apurbo** provided a legal perspective on the state's actions during the July uprising. He emphasized that the Awami League government failed to adhere to both constitutional obligations and international human rights laws while dispersing peaceful assemblies. He stated unequivocally that the killings constituted a breach of legal and moral standards, describing the actions of the police as more akin to partisan enforcers than state employees. Apurbo concluded his remarks with a strong call for justice, urging that those responsible—regardless of rank or affiliation must be held accountable under both domestic and international law.

In his concluding address, **Md. Zarif Rahman**, Research Director at Sapan, emphasized that the organization's mission extends beyond documenting human rights violations. He highlighted Sapan's commitment to critically examining and dismantling the narratives used by the state to legitimize violence in the

public consciousness. By exposing how these justifications are constructed and disseminated, he reaffirmed Sapran's role in not only seeking justice for victims but also challenging the ideological foundations that enable systemic repression. His remarks highlighted the importance of narrative accountability as a crucial step toward truth, justice, and long-term structural change. The event



Participants, guest speakers, victim family members and the Sapran team after the event

highlighted the systematic use of lethal force, particularly targeted headshots by law enforcement and state-backed groups during the July–August 2024 mass uprising in Bangladesh. It exposed how security forces operated with impunity, using military-grade weapons against unarmed civilians, and examined how state ideology and colonial-era laws enable and justify such brutality. The discussion also emphasized the need for justice, structural reform, and the memorialization of victims to prevent future state-sponsored violence.



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## Focus Group Discussion

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# “When Less-Lethal Becomes Lethal”: Sapran Urges State Transparency and Victim Documentation at UN Rapporteur Discussion

Report from Focus Group Discussion with UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions, 29 July 2025:

On 29 July 2025, Md. Zarif Rahman, Research Director of Sapran (Safeguarding All Lives), joined a Focus Group Discussion with Dr. Morris Tidball-Binz, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, held at Bishwo Shahitto Kendro, Dhaka. The session brought together a wide range of voices from Bangladesh’s human rights community, including Odhikar, ASK, HRSS, legal professionals, youth activists, and UNDP representatives, to engage in a critical conversation on state violence, forensic accountability, and the applicability of the UN Minnesota Protocol in the country’s context.

### **Challenging the Myth of “Less-Lethal” Weapons:**

Representing Sapran, Mr. Rahman made a strong intervention on the use and abuse of “less-lethal” weapons, such as pellet guns, rubber bullets, and tear gas canisters, particularly in the aftermath of the July 2024 Uprising. He noted

that despite being labeled “less-lethal,” such weapons have in practice inflicted life-altering harm, including permanent blindness, brain injury, and fatalities. “The state continues to hide behind the label ‘less-lethal’ while deploying these weapons with deadly precision,” Mr. Rahman said,

*“We saw this clearly during the July Uprising when pellet guns, aimed at protesters’ upper bodies and faces, permanently disabled dozens. The term less-lethal has become a smokescreen for unaccountable violence.”*

-Md. Zarif Rahman, Research Director, Sapran



Sapran’s Research Director Md. Zarif Rahman participated in a Focus Group Discussion with Dr. Morris Tidball-Binz on 29 July 2025

He called for immediate public disclosure of procurement and deployment protocols related to such weapons. The lack of transparency surrounding what tools are bought, from whom, under what conditions, and how they are authorized for use against civilians, Mr. Rahman argued, enables impunity and erodes public trust in law enforcement institutions.

### **A Database for the Forgotten:**

Mr. Rahman further proposed the creation of a centralized national database of victims of “less-lethal” weapons, especially pellet gun injuries. He emphasized the dual importance of such documentation, as a tool for truth-seeking and justice, and as a foundation for support networks providing medical, legal, and psychological assistance to victims. “Many of those injured by state force are young, poor, and voiceless; and they disappear from the public narrative once the crackdown ends,” he said. “Without documentation, they remain invisible. And without visibility, there is no justice.”

Sapran is committed to working with other human rights groups, forensic experts, and survivors’ families to develop and maintain such a database, which could also

serve as a policy advocacy tool to push for legislative reform and international pressure.

## Forensic Gaps and the Promise of the Minnesota Protocol

The Focus Group centered on the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016), a UN-established framework that outlines international standards for investigating deaths involving state actors. Dr. Tidball-Binz, a pioneer in forensic medicine and human rights investigations, stressed the urgency of adopting such protocols in Bangladesh to ensure independent, prompt, and scientifically grounded investigations into suspicious deaths. Participants echoed these concerns, noting Bangladesh's critical lack of forensic capacity, including:

- » Shortage of trained forensic anthropologists and pathologists.
- » Inadequate digital forensic infrastructure.
- » Lack of access to independent autopsies in politically sensitive cases.
- » Absence of chain-of-custody standards for evidence handling.
- » No centralized, publicly accessible victim database for lethal and less-lethal state violence.

Sapran highlighted the potential of Forensic Architecture: the use of spatial analysis, satellite imagery, and open-source investigations, as a valuable methodology for documenting state violence when physical access to victims or sites is obstructed.



On behalf of Sapran, Mr. Rahman called for immediate and total transparency of the procurement and deployment protocol for the “less-lethal” weapons

## Call for Cross-Border Collaboration and Local Capacity Building

The discussion concluded with a shared commitment to collaborative work across borders, disciplines, and institutions. Dr. Tidball-Binz emphasized the value of South-South cooperation, capacity-sharing with global forensic networks, and the importance of strengthening local institutions to investigate unlawful deaths with full independence. “Truth must be technical, but also political,” Mr. Rahman noted. “We must equip our institutions with scientific capacity, but we must also fight to ensure that such capacity serves the people, not power.”

### Sapran’s Commitment

As an organization deeply committed to safeguarding all lives, Sapran reiterates its call for:

- » Full transparency in the procurement and deployment of all state weapons.
- » Creation of a publicly accessible victim database, especially for those harmed by pellet guns and other less-lethal weapons.
- » Implementation of the Minnesota Protocol in domestic legal and investigative processes.
- » Capacity-building for forensic and human rights documentation, especially among youth and grassroots organizations.

Bangladesh stands at a crossroad between impunity and accountability, between silence and justice. Sapran will continue to stand with survivors, fight for transparency, and work toward a future where no life is discarded under the guise of law and order.



## UN Panel Discussion

### **From Power to Service: Sapran's Call for Security Sector Reform at the UN Human Rights Mission**

On 29 July 2025, Sapran's research team participated in a high-level event hosted by the Human Rights Team (HRT) of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) in Bangladesh, titled "Commemorating July: The Implementation of the OHCHR's Fact-Finding Report's Recommendations", held at the Intercontinental Hotel, Dhaka. The programme featured a High-Level Panel Discussion on the OHCHR's recommendations following the 2024 Mass Uprising. Among the distinguished panelists was Sapran's Research Director, Md. Zarif Rahman, who joined Barrister Sara Hossain (BLAST), Dr. Fahmida Khatun (Centre for Policy Dialogue – CPD), and Nasreen Sultana Mili (AB Party) in a critical discussion on justice, reform, and democratic transition.

#### **Key Recommendations of Security Sector Reform:**

- » **Depoliticizing the police** and reducing dependence on local political actors.
- » Making the police **accountable to the people** they serve, not to entrenched power structures.
- » Establishing **independent citizen oversight bodies** at the local level to monitor policing.

- » Enhancing **civic awareness** so citizens understand their rights and are less vulnerable to abuse.
- » **Collaborating with local schools** to educate students on their basic rights and the role of the police.



Sapran's Research Director, **Md. Zarif Rahman** was among the distinguished panelists, stressing on the urgent need for grassroots reforms and citizen-centric accountability

During the panel discussion, Mr. Rahman addressed the topic **“How to Change Security Forces from Being Forces of Power to Forces of Service.”** Drawing on his experience as a member of the Police Reform Commission formed by the Interim Government, he underscored the urgent need for grassroots-level reforms and a shift towards citizen-centric accountability. He emphasized that transforming the security forces requires not only structural changes but also a fundamental reorientation of their mandate—from serving political interests to upholding the rights and trust of the people.

*“We must critically revisit the actions of law enforcement to understand how they have, at times, turned against civilians and become instruments of oppression in the hands of those in power.”*

-Md. Zarif Rahman, Research Director, Sapran

Drawing on his reform experience, Mr. Rahman emphasized that police reform must be seen not merely as an administrative measure, but as an integral part of Bangladesh's democratic transition. He noted how deep-rooted political influence has often led police officers to act against citizens' interests, damaging public trust - especially in the aftermath of the July events.

In his speech, Mr. Rahman stressed that meaningful police reform must begin with depoliticizing the force and dismantling its dependence on local political actors, ensuring that officers serve the public interest rather than partisan agendas. He argued that true accountability can only be achieved when the police are answerable directly to the citizens they protect, rather than to entrenched power structures. To support this, he proposed the creation of independent citizen oversight bodies at the local level to monitor policing practices and uphold transparency. Mr. Rahman also highlighted the importance of enhancing civic awareness, empowering citizens to understand their rights and thus reducing their vulnerability to abuse. Finally, he suggested fostering partnerships between police and local schools to educate students about their basic rights and the role of law enforcement - an initiative that could build trust from an early age and help reshape the relationship between communities and the police.

Mr. Rahman warned that even within consensus-driven reform platforms, the issue of police reform risks being sidelined. He called for sustained **public discourse and political consensus** to ensure meaningful change - where no politician, regardless of power, can misuse the police for personal or party interest without being held accountable by their own party and by law.

*“We must critically revisit the actions of law enforcement to understand how they have, at times, turned against civilians and become instruments of oppression in the hands of those in power.”*



Sapran's research team: Zeba Sajida Saraf (Left), Nusrat Jahan Nisu (Center) and Md. Zarif Rahman (Right) were invited to the event

The event's second session, chaired by the Chief Adviser, featured representatives of martyr families as well as political leaders including BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, and NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossain. All reaffirmed their commitment to justice, structural reforms, and democratic transition.

