



Govt must tell what happens to people who disappear

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ENFORCED disappearances coming to be a dominant feature is gravely concerning. At least six people disappeared from Gulshan, Khilgaon and Agargaon in the capital city in November 5–8. Rights group Odhikar, as New Age reported on Monday, comes up with a figure of 402 people going missing between January 2009 and October 2017. There were two cases of enforced disappearances reported in 2009, 18 in 2010, 31 in 2011, 26 in 2012, 54 in 2013, 39 in 2014, 66 in 2015, 91 in 2016 and 74 in the first 10 months of 2017, as the rights group puts its statistics based on such incidents reported in national newspapers. Fifty-two of them were later found dead, 198 could be traced or were shown arrested and 152 still remain untraced. And 36 of such people went missing only in 2017. Another rights group, Ain O Salish Kendra, comes up with a figure of 202 for enforced disappearances between January 2015 and September 2017. But people cannot simply disappear. Someone somewhere should know what has happened to them. Odhikar says that the Rapid Action Battalion and the police picked up 80 per cent of the 402 people who disappeared; in the remaining cases, as the rights group puts it, there are ‘law enforcement agencies’ and ‘people from the government’ involved.

In recent times, not only political activists but also journalists, students and businesspeople have come to disappear. While people continue to disappear, the government keeps trying to wash its hands of the matter, routinely passing the blames for such incidents, often termed ‘abduction’, onto unnamed ‘miscreants.’ While the Awami League-led government claims that it does not believe in the practice of enforced disappearances — the ruling party came to power in 2009, professing in its manifesto that the rule of law will be established and human rights will be strictly enforced — but it is unwilling to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances and remains silent about ratifying the convention, which might place an obligation on the state to adopt and enforce safeguards against disappearances and also require it to provide judicial remedy and redress for the victims and their family. The National Human Rights Commission chair, rightly, earlier said that all that was good that the government had done were being overshadowed by an alarming trend of human rights abuse. He also sounded a warning that the impunity that law enforcers enjoy would ‘definitely’ affect the ruling political leadership in the long run. Such a failure of the state not to know what happens to people who go missing could pave the way for an increase in the number of enforced disappearance.

The issue of enforced disappearances, and also the use of illegal detention, is moral and political in nature while such a menace cannot continue without the state’s complicity. The government, as the manager of the state, must ensure that all past and current allegations of enforced disappearances are early, thoroughly, independently and impartially investigated. Socially conscious people should also rise up against this and force the government to end enforced disappearance, which often ends up in extrajudicial killing.

<http://www.newagebd.net/article/28292/govt-must-tell-what-happens-to-people-who-disappear>