

BANGLADESH

Explosive devices were used to target schools in Bangladesh during the elections in January 2014, when many educational institutions were used as polling stations. Attacks on higher education, often involving improvised explosive devices detonated by unknown assailants, occurred on dozens of university campuses and were the most frequent type of attack on education.

Context

Bangladesh has a history of political violence, mainly involving two political parties. The ruling Awami League (AL) was the predominant political presence from the country's independence through the reporting period. The AL won the national elections in 2014 amid violent protests in which hundreds were killed and injured. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) boycotted the elections. Both political parties had an active student wing (Bangladesh Chhatra League for the AL and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal for the BNP).³⁷³

In their reporting, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International highlighted the Bangladeshi authorities' crackdown on the opposition, including the illegal detention and possible killing of activists and bloggers, and the failure to provide protection for activists who received threats and in some cases had to leave the country for their safety.³⁷⁴ Some analysts noted that the AL afforded impunity to government security forces.³⁷⁵ Meanwhile the BNP and its allied Jamaat-e-Islami organization worked to disrupt state operations, elections, and other political activity, especially around the January 2014 elections.³⁷⁶ Numerous violent extremist groups were also active.³⁷⁷

Political and extremist violence affected education in Bangladesh, resulting in attacks on schools, universities, teachers, and students, especially during the 2014 elections, when schools were frequently used as polling centers. While reports of attacks at the primary and secondary school level peaked in 2014, reports of attacks on higher education peaked in 2015. In addition, although there was gender parity in education, sexual harassment and other factors like child marriage, pregnancy, and poverty continued to affect girls' enrollment in secondary school.³⁷⁸

Bangladesh did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the 2014 issue of *Education under Attack*, so no comparisons or identification of trends was possible.

Attacks on schools

IEDs were the most commonly used method of attacking schools during the reporting period. Dozens were attacked, particularly during the January 2014 elections, when many schools were used as polling stations. Reports gathered by GCPEA indicated that election-related violence damaged dozens or possibly hundreds of educational institutions throughout the country. Attacks occurred sporadically for the remainder of the reporting period, the majority of them carried out by unknown assailants.

In 2013, GCPEA collected reports of two IED attacks by unidentified perpetrators:

- Local media reported that on April 15, 2013, unknown perpetrators torched a madrassa in Laxmipur, Chittagong area, causing damage to two rooms.³⁷⁹
- According to media sources, on October 7, 2013, a device planted by an unknown assailant exploded near a madrassa in the Lalkhan Bazaar area of Chittagong, killing three people. It is unclear whether the school was the intended target of the attack.³⁸⁰

Media sources compiled by GCPEA suggested that, in 2014, assailants bombed or set fire to at least 46 schools being used as polling centers for the general elections that took place on January 5. No injuries were reported for most of these attacks.³⁸¹ Local media sources reported 15 such attacks on January 3, 30 on January 4, and 2 on January 5, 2014.³⁸² The *Guardian* reported that at least 60 schools planned to be used as polling stations were set on fire between January 2 and January 4; it was unclear how many of these incidents were the same as those in the local media reports that GCPEA collected.³⁸³ According to Human Rights Watch, government officials claimed that a total of 553 educational institutions throughout the country were damaged by election-related violence in January 2014.³⁸⁴ Examples of these attacks included the following:

- Media sources reported that on January 3, 2014, unidentified assailants threw petrol bombs at a polling center at the Gazaria Ideal Kindergarten in Feni, Chittagong.³⁸⁵
- In an incident documented by Human Rights Watch, between 100 and 150 BNP-Jamaat supporters attacked Molani Cheprikura Government Primary School on January 4, 2014, the night before it was to be used as a polling station. They killed the “assistant presiding officer” and injured three others.³⁸⁶

Sporadic attacks on schools were documented beginning in January 2015. News sources recorded 12 attacks or threats of attacks in 2015, all of which involved explosive devices detonated in or near schools.³⁸⁷ The motivation for these attacks was unclear. Ten incidents occurred in Dhaka city and two happened elsewhere. For example:

- On January 12, 2015, unidentified assailants attacked two schools in Dhaka city: Suritola school in the Suritola neighborhood and Viqarunnia Noon school in the Azimpur area.³⁸⁸
- On March 1, 2015, police reportedly found approximately 10 explosive devices at Monipur High School and College and Mirpur Bangla High School and College in the Mirpur area of Dhaka city.³⁸⁹
- On March 8, 2015, government security forces safely removed four explosive devices planted by unknown perpetrators at a kindergarten in Gaibandha, near Rangpur city in northern Bangladesh.³⁹⁰
- Unidentified perpetrators detonated multiple devices on March 11, 2015, at a school in the Azimpur area of Dhaka city, wounding two police officers.³⁹¹
- On December 26, 2015, two IEDs exploded outside the Charnoabad Government Primary School in Bhola district, Barisal province, as a mayoral candidate’s procession passed by the school.³⁹²

Attacks on schools appeared to decrease in 2016, with only sporadic cases reported. According to local media, there were two attacks on schools that year, both carried out by unspecified assailants:

- In the first, on March 31, 2016, unidentified perpetrators threw IEDs at a school that was being used as a polling station in Jessore district in southwestern Bangladesh, killing one person.³⁹³
- On May 5, 2016, unknown assailants set fire to Boikanthapur Baldia Primary School in Thakurgaon district, Rangpur province, causing no casualties.³⁹⁴

GCPEA did not identify any reports of attacks on schools in 2017.

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

While attacks targeting students and educators took place, they were infrequent, occurring at a rate of one or two attacks per year throughout the 2013-2017 period. Approximately half of the attacks were carried out by unidentified perpetrators, while two appeared to be politically motivated and one appeared to be related to religious and ethnic violence. Additionally, the CRC reported that harassment and violence on the way to and from school contributed to dropout rates during the reporting period;³⁹⁵ the US State Department found that these violations disproportionately affected girls and prevented them from attending school.³⁹⁶ It was not clear who was responsible for this harassment or what their motivations were.

During 2013, unknown perpetrators used explosives against students and teachers in two incidents, and Human Rights Watch documented several cases in which police used force against student activists or those accused of being affiliated with Jamaat-e-Islami’s student wing.³⁹⁷ For example:

- Media sources reported an incident on June 1, 2013, in which unidentified assailants threw an explosive device at a teacher and an army corporal as they walked home together from prayers in Khulna. The intended target of the attack was unclear, but both individuals were injured in the blast.³⁹⁸
- In September 2013, police allegedly entered a private student dorm, according to Human Rights Watch. They questioned the one student there about activists affiliated with Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, accusing them of living in the dorm. When the student said that he had no information, they searched his room, confiscating his books and papers, and then shot the student in his right leg. The student was taken to a government hospital and then transferred to a jail after 10 days. He was jailed for eight months, while the con-

dition of his leg worsened. This was one of several cases in which police allegedly shot student activists in leg during 2013.³⁹⁹

- A witness reported to Human Rights Watch that, in December 2013, someone on a rickshaw threw a bag in front of her son as he was walking home from school in Dhaka. The bag exploded and severely injured him.⁴⁰⁰

Violence against students continued in 2015, with two reported incidents targeting secondary school students. Both attacks were likely politically motivated, as they were carried out by identified opposition and government supporters:

- Media sources documented an incident on January 22, 2015, in which suspected opposition supporters threw an explosive device at a secondary school truck that was being escorted by police vehicles in Srimangal city, Sylhet province. The blast injured one of the truck personnel.⁴⁰¹
- The US Department of State reported that on an unspecified day in August 2015 in Chandpur district, government supporters attacked secondary school students who were protesting the assault of their teacher by government security forces, resulting in the hospitalization of at least 20 students.⁴⁰²

No attacks on students or education personnel were identified in 2016 or 2017.

Attacks on higher education

Attacks on higher education targeted both individuals and institutions throughout the reporting period. IED attacks on university infrastructure were particularly common, with more than 45 occurring during the reporting period. These incidents most frequently affected Dhaka University, which suffered 27 IED attacks in 2015 alone. Attacks on university infrastructure peaked in 2015 with 33 incidents, and were at their lowest rates in 2014, 2016, and 2017, with only one or two incidents in each of those years. GCPEA collected data on 10 incidents in which university personnel and students were the victims of homicide and the targets of other physical violence and threats, mostly by unidentified assailants and for unknown reasons. Attacks on students and personnel were most common in 2014 and 2015, with three attacks each year, and least common in 2013, when just one such incident occurred.

Anti-government protesters, including the BNP and unknown perpetrators, used explosive devices to target universities in at least 10 attacks throughout 2013, according to local media reports. For example:

- Seven incidents involving the detonation of IEDs occurred on the Dhaka University campus between January 5 and January 6, 2013.⁴⁰³
- Unknown perpetrators detonated at least 9 IEDs around Dhaka University throughout the morning of January 28, 2013.⁴⁰⁴
- On January 29, 2013, assailants on motorcycles, reportedly affiliated with the BNP, set off explosive devices at various points around the Dhaka University campus.⁴⁰⁵
- Less than one month later, on February 25, 2013, unknown perpetrators detonated an explosive device at the Women's College in Brahmanbaria district, Chittagong province.⁴⁰⁶

One attack on university students was also reported in 2013. On July 7, 2013, unidentified attackers beat two student activists while they were driving a motorbike on the campus of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Kulgargaon city, Sylhet province.⁴⁰⁷

Media sources and Scholars at Risk together reported at least five IED attacks on universities, infrastructure, and personnel by unidentified assailants in 2014, a decrease from the 11 attacks reported in 2013:

- The first attack was outside the main gates of Rajshahi University, Rajshahi district, on January 23, 2014, where assailants detonated explosive devices.⁴⁰⁸
- Attackers threw bricks and IEDs at a teachers' bus on its way to Chittagong University, Chittagong district, on September 13, 2014, injuring 10 teachers.⁴⁰⁹
- On September 27, 2014, unidentified aggressors threw two IEDs at the car of the director of a medical university in Dhaka. He was not injured, but his car was damaged in the attack.⁴¹⁰

- Two violent extremist groups, Ansar al-Islam Bangladesh-2 and al Qaeda, both claimed responsibility for the killing of a professor of sociology at Rajshahi University, who was hacked to death by assailants wielding blunt objects while walking home from the campus on November 15, 2014.⁴¹¹
- Violence returned to Dhaka University on December 28, 2014, according to media sources, when unknown assailants threw Molotov cocktails at three different buildings across campus, injuring three civilians.⁴¹²

During 2015, unknown perpetrators continued to bomb higher education institutions and violent extremists threatened university teachers. At the beginning of the year, bombings continued to impact Dhaka University at significantly increased rates from January to March, during which time local media reported at least 27 incidents of IEDs exploding on campus, some involving multiple detonations at once.⁴¹³ For example, on January 13, 2015, six devices placed by unknown perpetrators exploded at various points around the Dhaka University campus.⁴¹⁴ According to news sources, IEDs were used in at least six other anonymous attacks on universities throughout the year, including three IED attacks at Rajshahi University, one each on February 11, October 29, and December 5, 2015.⁴¹⁵ Violence that targeted university professors and students in 2015 continued to include homicide, but also reportedly involved death threats sent to dozens of professors throughout the year:

- Media reports indicated that dozens of teachers at Rajshahi University received death threats in 2015 and 2016.⁴¹⁶
- Such messages were also reportedly sent to at least one professor at Dhaka University, who received an anonymous threat by text message on November 10, according to Scholars at Risk.⁴¹⁷
- According to Human Rights Watch, a 22-year-old university student was reportedly found dead after being arrested by the police. The government claimed that the student was killed in the crossfire between government security forces and Jamaat-e-Islami, which the student supported.⁴¹⁸

In 2016, attacks against higher education were reported less frequently, but there were at least five cases in which university personnel and infrastructure were targeted:

- Local media recorded an incident on February 18, 2016, in which unknown assailants threw an IED at a university bus in Chittagong city. There were no casualties in the attack.⁴¹⁹
- Scholars at Risk and local media reported that, on April 23, 2016, two assailants on a motorbike drove up to an English professor who worked at Rajshahi University and hacked him to death while he was on his way to the university. 'IS' claimed responsibility for this incident.⁴²⁰
- Media sources reported that on June 15, 2016, three armed men arrived at the Madaripur home of a Hindu lecturer and attacked him with a machete when he opened the front door. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but authorities considered it to be part of a recent spate of similar attacks against ethnic minorities by violent extremist groups.⁴²¹
- According to local news sources, on October 28, 2016, members of Islami Chhatra Shibir, part of Jamaat-e-Islami, detonated IEDs at Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur.⁴²²
- On November 27, 2016, local media reported that students and teachers at the Phulbaria Degree College in Mymensingh city were protesting to demand the nationalization of the institution when police tried to disperse them using batons and possibly guns. The police killed two people in the ensuing clash, including one college teacher, and injured at least 20 more.⁴²³

GCPEA identified one report of an attack on higher education in 2017. On November 7, Mubashar Hasan, an assistant professor of political science at North South University in Dhaka, reportedly disappeared shortly after leaving campus. The professor was known for his research on violent extremism in Bangladesh. His disappearance took place in a context in which a growing number of public figures had gone missing. The professor had previously reported that unidentified men had come looking for him at his home.⁴²⁴ Hasan was released in late December, but the perpetrators and the reason for the abduction remained unknown.⁴²⁵

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