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Bangladesh: The government must stop killing protestors and silencing dissent



The BNP was the main target of the security forces, with at least 11 people killed on the day of the demonstration on 28 October in Dhaka and other cities across the country © Shutterstock

6 November 2023 - Bangladesh authorities must immediately stop resorting to violence and excessive use of force to suppress protests. The undersigned organisations wish to express their deep concern over the alarming and distressing developments in the country, in the context of the demonstrations co-organised by the opposition parties and led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Last week, the BNP organized a [massive rally](#) to take place in Dhaka on 28 October to demand Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government resign and the facilitation of free and fair elections by a non-partisan independent administration. As the set date approached, [reportedly over 1,200 political activists and leaders were arrested](#) in different parts of the city, including their homes. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) ordered an [internet shutdown](#) from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 pm on the day of the protest.

Recent reports indicate that during the rally, Bangladeshi authorities used excessive force, and [at least three people were killed](#) (a policeman, a [BNP activist](#) and journalist Rafiq Bhuiyan). As of the morning of 31 October, [at least 11 people had died](#), and [hundreds had been injured](#) in connection with the protests in different cities. While there are also reports of violent reactions from protesters, this is an example of the extreme measures taken by law enforcement agencies to quash dissent. We are profoundly shocked by these killings and the escalation of violence during these protests.

After the demonstrations, the police visited the residences of BNP officials and [arrested BNP Secretary General](#) Mirza Fakhrul Islam [Alamgir](#). The reports of [arbitrary arrests of over 500 BNP members and supporters](#) are deeply troubling. These actions severely suppress political expression and raise serious concerns about the safety and well-being of those detained. We particularly fear

that detainees may be subjected to physical and psychological torture and ill-treatment, which has been a [longstanding and widespread practice](#) in Bangladesh. Allegations of torture and ill-treatment by the security forces and law enforcement officers have further [multiplied](#) in the past weeks.

The Bangladeshi government has persistently used [excessive force](#), including less lethal weapons, to [suppress dissent and punish political opponents](#). This highlights the concern of a repeated cycle of deaths, arrests, and brutal repression of protests, further undermining the principles of democracy and the respect for the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly. Further, a [recent report](#) reveals the government's increased campaign of repression against the opposition, further escalating the situation and exacerbating the human rights crisis in Bangladesh. This intensified crackdown on political opponents is unacceptable and raises concerns about the state of human rights, democracy, and fundamental freedoms in Bangladesh.

The troubling situation in Bangladesh goes beyond targeting political opposition and extends to the [excessive use of force](#) against striking Ready-Made Garment (RMG) workers, who have been grappling with the impacts of soaring inflation and price hikes for basic commodities in the country. As a result, [at least two labor leaders have lost their lives](#) due to police gunfire, and scores have sustained injuries during protests.

We call on the government of Bangladesh to immediately stop the use of violence and excessive force against protesters and to ensure that the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, liberty, and personal integrity are respected and protected. It is essential that the relevant international supervision mechanisms urge Bangladesh to conduct a prompt and independent investigation into the recent events of violence and excessive use of force and that those responsible for human rights violations are held accountable.

We urge the international community to monitor the situation in Bangladesh closely and to engage with the government to ensure that these human rights violations are brought to an end. It is crucial that the global community upholds its commitment to defending and promoting human rights and that the people of Bangladesh are guaranteed their basic rights and freedoms. In particular, the United Nations member states must raise these concerns during the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Bangladesh, taking place on 13 November, since the current human rights abuses result from a pattern of violence and repression of dissidents in the country, as noted in the [alternative reports](#) submitted by human rights groups leading up to the UPR.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Bangladesh in their pursuit of a just, democratic, and peaceful society and call for an immediate end to the cycle of violence, repression, and intimidation against political opponents, as well as the immediate release of all the individuals who have been arbitrarily detained.

Signed:

1. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
2. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
3. Capital Punishment Justice Project (CPJP)
4. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
5. Omega Research Foundation (Omega)
6. REDRESS
7. Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN)