

URGENT ACTION

THOUSANDS OF PROTESTERS ARRESTED ARBITRARILY

Arif Sohel, Rony Sheikh and Sabir Rahman are three of the more than 10,000 protesters (students, members of the opposition as well as bystanders) who were arrested in July 2024, as part of the government's intense crackdown against protesters. Families of the three detained students claim that neither they nor their lawyers have been given access to them, and they fear that they will be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in custody. The government's harsh response has killed more than 200 people, including journalists and bystanders. The Bangladeshi authorities must immediately end the mass arrests, release all protesters detained solely for exercising their human rights and ensure the right to fair trial for all detainees.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister's Office
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Bangladesh
Email: ps1topm@pmo.gov.bd

Dear Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,

I am writing to express deep concern over the recent crackdown on protesters in Bangladesh. In addition to over 200 protesters being killed and thousands of others injured, more than 10,000 protesters have reportedly been arrested or arbitrarily detained in the last few weeks.

Among those who were arrested are Arif Sohel, a university student leader who was arrested on 27 July; 18-year-old Rony Sheikh who was arrested on 22 July while preparing for his exams and Sabir Rahman, another university student who was arrested on 18 July during the protests, whose family claims that he was beaten in custody. The main demand for these protests was fair government job recruitment by removing the 30% quota allocated for descendants of war veterans.

While Sabir's mother briefly saw him for a few minutes when he was brought to court, Arif and Rony are yet to meet with their family members or lawyers since their arrests. The "shoot on sight" curfew at that time prevented the families from even attempting to go to the police to check whether there was a possibility to visit their family member. Arif was allegedly not given any proper food for nearly 40 hours since his arrest and his whereabouts were also unknown to his family for nearly 36 hours.

Arif and Sabir have been charged for causing public fear and endangering lives through illegal acts. Rony has been listed in a group complaint and charged with unlawful assembly, assault with intent to kill and causing bodily harm. According to the families, the lawyers are finding it difficult to access the students they are representing as well. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is a human right, and these mass arrests and arbitrary detentions of protesters is an alarming violation of this right. I therefore urge the Bangladeshi government to:

- **Immediately release Arif Sohel, Rony Sheikh, Sabir Rahman and all other protesters who have been unlawfully detained solely for exercising their human rights.**
- **Ensure that all protesters arrested for a recognizable offence receive a prompt and fair trial.**
- **Immediately grant access to the families and the lawyers of those who have been detained, and ensure that the whereabouts of each person in detention is urgently communicated to their families.**
- **End custodial torture and other forms of ill-treatment.**
- **Conduct a prompt, thorough, effective, independent, and impartial investigation into the deaths and injuries during the crackdown. Those found responsible for the unlawful use of force must be held accountable.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since 1 July 2024, Bangladesh has been engulfed in widespread protests following the reinstatement of a controversial 30 percent quota in government jobs for the descendants of independence war veterans. This quota, previously abolished in 2018 due to similar protests, is seen by many, especially university students, as disproportionately favouring supporters of the ruling party. The protests, largely peaceful initially, turned violent after demonstrators were attacked, reportedly by members of the Bangladesh Chatra League (BCL) affiliated with the ruling party, on 15 July at Dhaka University and other institutions. These attacks included the use of rods, sticks, bricks, and firearms, leading to numerous injuries and escalating tensions across the country. Authorities have since arrested thousands of protesters.

Arif Sohel is a student at the Jahangirnagar University in Dhaka, who was taken by a group in plain clothes on 27 July. His whereabouts were not known for nearly 36 hours and his family has not yet been allowed to meet him. His friends claim that he was nowhere near the location of the incident police say he was involved in the charge sheet, and the charges against him are false, and that he has been targeted for being an organiser of the protests.

18-year-old Rony was in the middle of his Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC – A/L equivalent) when he was arrested. According to his family members, the authorities came to his residence where he has rented a room, checked his mobile phone and arrested as he had videos of the protests in his mobile. He has not had access to his lawyer or family yet.

Sabir is a fourth-year student at the Jahangirnagar University, studying urban planning. He was arrested during the day time, close to noon, during the protests. There were others with him protesting outside their university. His mother was allowed to see him for 10 minutes once since his arrest on 18 July – and she saw signs of beating on his body.

The situation deteriorated further on 19 July, when the deadliest crackdown happened with 75 deaths reported in one day. The government responded by deploying the military and paramilitary forces such as the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB), and imposing a "shoot-on-sight" curfew along with a nationwide internet blackout. Amnesty International has verified multiple instances of unlawful force, including the death of [Abu Sayed](#), a 25-year-old student, who was shot by police officers from a distance of 15 meters while posing no threat. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) further escalated the situation by banning all rallies and processions in the capital, leading to [more aggressive tactics by security forces](#), including the unlawful use of tear gas, rubber bullets, and sound grenades and assault rifles.

As of 31 July 2024, more than 200 have been killed (the government statistics say 145), thousands injured and over 10,000 arrested. Most of them are charged in unnamed mass First Incident Reports. According to media reports, the mass arrests have been carried out by various security forces who shut down the internet connection in the neighbourhoods they raided and went to houses to arrest the students. Three students who were being treated in hospital were discharged under coercion and taken into custody, though the Minister of Law made a statement claiming that these students were taken in custody for their own safety.

International law is clear on how law enforcement authorities should respond when certain protesters become violent. According to the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37 on the Right of Peaceful Assembly, participants in an assembly cannot be held responsible for isolated acts of violence by only a few protesters. Furthermore, even where an individual engages in violent conduct (placing them outside the protective scope of the right of peaceful assembly), their other rights must still be protected. It is paramount that the unlawful use of violence by the security forces is investigated and perpetrators are held to account.

This crisis underscores a broader pattern of repression in Bangladesh, where laws like the Digital Security Act 2018 and its successor, the Cyber Security Act 2023, are used to stifle dissent and free speech. The international community's intervention is crucial to pressuring the Bangladeshi government to uphold its human rights obligations and restore public trust in the rule of law.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English/Bangla

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 30 November 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Arif (he/him), Rony (he/him), Sabir (he/him) and other protesters

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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