

Bangladesh: Halt the Crackdown on Members of the Opposition ahead of Polls

(Bangkok/Kathmandu – 19 December 2022) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is gravely concerned about crackdowns against opposition political parties by the government of Bangladesh as the country prepares for its 2023 national elections.

The Bangladeshi government has [intensified their crackdown](#) on opposition parties, specifically the largest opposition group, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), with mass arrests and police raids on opposition members becoming a norm. In September, the leader of the ruling party Awami League's youth wing, [Jubo League](#), threatened BNP activists with raids on their houses. Since September, at least seven activists from BNP have been shot dead by the police during peaceful rallies, while at least 6000 BNP supporters have been arrested. BNP also [claims](#) that more than 180,000 legal cases have been filed against its members in the last decade and around 600 party members have been abducted, while 3000 others were victims of extrajudicial killings.

'The government in Bangladesh has repeatedly shown the tendency to misuse State apparatuses to curb dissent and intimidate anyone who speaks against the regime, be it students, human rights defenders, journalists, or the opposition. The right to protest has been under attack in the country. and is inconsistent with Bangladesh's obligations under the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which it ratified in 2000,' said FORUM-ASIA.

BNP has been organising protests as a part of the growing discontent against the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government. They are protesting against the multiple issues plaguing the country: growing inflation, human rights abuses, corruption, power outages, harassment of party workers, and arrest of its political activists. BNP is calling for installing a non-political, neutral caretaker government to ensure free and fair elections until national elections in 2023.

On [7 December](#), protests [turned violent](#) in Naya Paltan when police resorted to violence to remove party workers who had gathered outside the BNP headquarters. The police opened fire with live ammunition, pellets, rubber bullets, and tear gas, killing a BNP supporter and injuring 60 others. In the evening, the police raided the party headquarters and allegedly charged batons at BNP activists inside the building. Following the deadly police violence, BNP called for another anti-Sheikh Hasina regime rally on December 10, 2022, calling for her resignation.

Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel) party, the country's third-largest party, and several left and centrist parties have joined the BNP-led protests. A few days later, the chief of Jel [Shafiqur Rahman](#) was also arrested. This move is reminiscent of 2009 when Sheikh Hasina came to power and Jamaat's entire leadership was arrested and tried for war crimes. Rahman's arrest is a continuation of the Hasina regime's iron fist policy against political opposition.

With little to no freedom of expression, overuse of vaguely defined draconian laws such as the Digital Security Act 2018, and now skyrocketing prices of essentials, the future of democracy in Bangladesh seems to be on a razor edge. We urge the government of Bangladesh to release peaceful protestors arrested last week and to protect fundamental freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. The crackdown of the opposition must come to an immediate halt, as only then the country can conduct free and fair elections.

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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