

PUBLIC

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Fear of imminent execution

BANGLADESH

**Abdur Rahman (m)
Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai (m)
Ataur Rahman Sunny (m)
Abdul Awal (m)
Khaled Saifullah (m)
Iftekhar Mamun (m)**

The six men named above, who are members of the Islamist group Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), are facing imminent execution, convicted of involvement in a November 2005 suicide bomb attack which killed two judges in the southern city of Jhalakathi.

They were sentenced to death on 29 May 2006. Their appeal was rejected by the High Court on 31 August. The prisoners have 30 days to appeal to the Supreme Court against the High Court ruling, but so far only one of them, Iftekhar Mamun, is reported to have done so.

The attack followed a series of bomb blasts on 17 August 2005, aimed at government offices and court buildings in almost every major city in the country. The prisoners have reportedly admitted that JMB was involved in these attacks.

Usually, it is four to five years before a condemned prisoner is executed, but in this case the government appears keen to hasten the executions. The Law Minister has told journalists that the government wishes to carry out the death sentences before it hands over power to a caretaker government, due to take power on 28 October and retain it until elections in 2007.

The government claim that the reason for this haste is to show to the world that they are serious about dealing with terrorism. However, civil society groups say the government's real motive might be to suppress evidence that in the past they gave support for the activities of these groups. The prisoners have reportedly said they have information about a government link with their group, and are keen to speak to journalists about it. So far, the authorities have prevented them having any contact with journalists, heightening the suspicion that they want to prevent the men from revealing any government connection to the JMB or similar groups.

Another man was sentenced to death in absentia and has so far evaded arrest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Prisoners sentenced to death in Bangladesh have an automatic appeal hearing before the High Court. They can also lodge additional appeals with the High Court. They can then appeal to the Supreme Court, and after that they have the right to appeal to the President for mercy. Executions are carried out after all these appeals have been exhausted.

The number of prisoners sentenced to death has increased in recent years. In 2005, at least 217 men and one woman were sentenced to death, and at least three men were executed by hanging.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- saying that Amnesty International recognizes the gravity of the offences of which the six men (naming them) have been convicted, but opposes the death penalty in all cases, as it violates the most fundamental right of every human being, the right to life;
- urging the authorities to commute the men's death sentences;
- urging the authorities to ensure that the prisoners are provided with all the necessary facilities to enable them to appeal against their sentences;
- urging that the prisoners are allowed to speak openly to journalists.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia
Office of the Prime Minister
Gona Bhaban
Old Sangsad Bhaban, Tejgaon,
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 8113244
+ 880 2 8113243
+ 880 2 8111015
+ 880 2 8151490
+ 880 2 8151157

Email: pm@pmobd.org
psecretary@pmobd.org
presssecy@pmobd.org
pmo@pmobd.org

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Md. Lutfuzzaman Babar
State Minister for Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Building 4
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Salutation: Dear Minister of State

Barrister Moudud Ahmed
Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.