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Bangladesh: Alleged government complicity in physical attacks against opposition activists

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about reported attacks on opposition activists by members of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on 15 August 2005. Hundreds of Awami League supporters were reportedly injured as their gatherings were raided by the ruling party activists. The attackers were reportedly led by the local leaders of the BNP.

On the day of the attack, Awami League supporters were observing the 30th anniversary of the killing of Bangladesh's founding president and leader of the Awami League, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was assassinated with most members of his family on 15 August 1975. As in previous years, Awami League activists were mourning his death by offering charity to the destitute and commemorating him. BNP members reportedly attacked this gathering, beating the activists, ransacking the meeting place and trying to prevent the programme. Among those injured were the Awami League Member of Parliament, Assaduzzamn Noor, and an Awami League local leader, Mahboobur Rahman. The injured also included journalists covering the events.

The pretext for the attacks was reportedly the plan by the BNP to hold simultaneous meetings to celebrate the birthday of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, which falls on the same day. BNP members were reportedly enraged that the Awami League members should mourn the death of their leader that day.

In this context, Amnesty International is very concerned about comments attributed to a cabinet minister at a BNP public meeting in Dohar, one of the scenes of the attacks, which may have encouraged the attackers. The Communication Minister, Najmul Huda, is reported in the Daily Star as having said: "No najat [salvation] day can be observed on the birthday of the Prime Minister," Huda said while addressing a public gathering.'

According to reports, the police, who were present during the attacks, failed to stop the attackers and Awami League members reportedly reacted angrily, getting involved in physical clashes with the attackers.

So far, no action has been taken by the government to bring the alleged BNP perpetrators of the attack to justice. On the contrary, and in an apparently discriminatory move, police have reportedly filed cases against a total of 1500 Awami League supporters, even though they have been the targets of the attacks.

Amnesty International calls on Bangladesh authorities to institute an independent, competent and impartial inquiry with power to investigate all those alleged to have been involved in these attacks; to make public the outcome of this inquiry; to bring alleged perpetrators of these attacks to justice; and to take

preventive measures on attacks against members of the opposition parties.