

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Legal Concern

28 November 1990

BANGLADESH: Arrest of opposition leaders:

Sheikh HASINA (f)
Dr Kamal HOSSAIN
Mostafa Mohiuddin MONTA
Mirza ABBAS

At least four opposition leaders are reported to have been arrested following the imposition of a state of emergency by President Ershad on 27 November 1990.

Police reportedly detained Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the Awami League on her way to address a party rally and put her under house arrest. Another Awami League leader Dr Kamal Hossain, was also reportedly taken by the police, while an attempt by the police to detain Begum Khaleda Zia, Head of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, failed as she managed to escape. Police also reportedly attempted to arrest Mostafa Mohiuddin Monto, chief of the Awami League youth wing. Mirza Abbas, chief of the Bangladesh National Party youth front, was reportedly arrested on 24 November. Amnesty International has been unable to confirm some of these arrests because of the government restrictions on news transmitted abroad.

Amnesty International is concerned about the use of the state of emergency by the government to detain leaders of the opposition political parties and urges the Bangladesh authorities that those detained for their non-violent political activities be released immediately and unconditionally.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Opposition to President Hossain Mohammad Ershad has continued ever since his coming to power in a bloodless coup in 1982. Following prolonged and violent anti-government demonstrations in 1987, President Ershad declared a state of emergency in November that year, and dissolved parliament soon afterwards. A large number of people were reportedly arrested for their non-violent political activities during the 1988 state of emergency. The opposition political parties boycotted the parliamentary elections in March 1988, and announced that they would continue their campaign for the resignation President Ershad.

On 10 October 1990 the opposition parties launched a new campaign against the government of President Ershad. At least 10 people have reportedly been killed and 1,000 injured during these demonstrations. Three people were killed on 10 October after police reportedly opened fire without warning on demonstrators trying to disperse at Captan Bazar, near Gulistan, Khaka.

Under the current state of emergency a moratorium has been placed on all political activities and all political meetings, processions and strikes have been banned for an indefinite period. No newspapers are permitted to print any news of political nature without clearance from a senior officer of the Home (Interior) Ministry. The Minister is also supposed to regulate all political news transmitted abroad by telephone, fax, telex or any other means.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/express and airmail letters:

(Please note that restrictions are likely to have been imposed on letters sent to the country, so you may wish to check with your post office before sending letters)

- expressing concern at the suspension of all fundamental rights, stating that this is in violation of Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

- expressing concern that the above-named opposition leaders reportedly arrested under the state of emergency are likely to be prisoners of conscience detained for their non-violent political activities;

- urging the authorities that all those detained for their non-violent political activities be released.

APPEALS TO:

President Hossain Mohammad Ershad
Office of the President
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Telegrams: President Ershad, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Telexes: 642200 PAMA BJ; 642222 PAMA BJ

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 January 1991.