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Bangladesh: Authorities must account for deaths amid spate of disappearances

Fatalities during protests about the disappearance of a key opposition figure seven days ago in Bangladesh must be thoroughly investigated by the authorities, Amnesty International said.

Ilias Ali, secretary of the Sylhet Division of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) disappeared together with his driver Ansar Ali on 17 April.

His is the latest in a spate of disappearances in which security forces, including the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), have been implicated, though they deny detaining those missing.

During clashes over the disappearances between the BNP protesters and the police, two men were killed – both on 23 April.

Monawar Hossain was found dead in the Biswanath area of Sylhet with gun shot wounds, and a second man died in a Sylhet hospital of bullet wounds. According to witnesses, police had opened fire on demonstrators after being attacked with stones.

"The Bangladesh authorities must establish an independent investigation to determine how these men died and who fired the bullets, and bring to justice those responsible for these deaths," said Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International's Bangladesh Researcher.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called on police to investigate the disappearance of Ilias Ali and his driver. Paradoxically she also stated the two men chose to go into hiding to 'create an issue'.

"Why did the prime minister order an inquiry, but then claim she knows what has happened? Any inquiry will be credible only if it is independent and free from police and political involvement – otherwise it risks simply towing the police line," said Faiz.

"There appears to be a pattern of enforced disappearances - a concerted effort to eliminate people deemed undesirable."

One trade unionist has been killed, and more than 20 people have 'disappeared' this year.

On 4 April, Aminul Islam, a trade union leader went missing. He was found dead a day later in Ghatail, north of Dhaka.

His family saw evidence of torture on his body and suspect he was abducted by security forces. He had been previously subject to arrest and beaten by members of the National Security Intelligence for his trade union activities.

“Aminul Islam was an outspoken leader known for his ability to mobilise workers for better conditions, which made him a target,” said Faiz.

Two other BNP members, Iftekhar Ahmed Dinar and Junaid Ahmed, went missing on 2 April. Iftekhar Ahmed’s family say they were taken from their homes by plain clothes officers. Their whereabouts remain unknown.

Al Mukaddas and Mohammad Waliullah, members of the student organisation Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir, went missing on 4 February. They have not been heard from since.

Amnesty International has spoken to family members of many of the victims, who say abductions are usually carried out by plain clothes security officers who are easily identified because they wear similar clothing, including heavy duty shoes unusual for the hot Bangladesh climate. They also have short hair.

Amnesty International has documented abductions and killings by Bangladesh security forces, especially the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), for years.

“These disappearances cannot be simply brushed off - it is the government’s responsibility to bring the perpetrators to account, and ensure justice for the victims,” said Faiz.

Background

RAB is a special police force, created to combat criminal gang activity throughout Bangladesh. Since its inception in 2004, RAB has been implicated in the unlawful killing of at least 700 people. More 200 of these killings have occurred during the tenure of the current Awami League government, despite the Prime Minister’s pledge to end extra-judicial executions.

For further information, see Amnesty International’s 2011 report ‘Crimes Unseen: Extrajudicial Executions in Bangladesh’.

Click here for the report: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA13/005/2011/en>

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Notes to Editors

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