

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 13/001/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 022
28 January 2005

Bangladesh: Grenade attack on opposition party

The latest grenade blast at an opposition party rally is part of a pattern of violent attacks against the party leadership, and the government's failure fully to investigate previous attacks is deeply concerning, said Amnesty International.

Five people including the former Finance Minister and senior Awami League leader, Shah AMS Kibria, were killed in the grenade attack on a rally in Habiganj district, northeast of the capital Dhaka, yesterday evening. Scores of people were injured.

Another grenade attack on an Awami League rally in Dhaka left 22 people dead and hundreds injured on 21 August last year.

Amnesty International is urging the Bangladesh government to fully investigate the attacks and bring the perpetrators to justice. It should establish an investigating body independent of the government, with a mandate to investigate not only the recent attack but any possible links to the previous attacks. It is of crucial importance that inquiry into these attacks is conducted by people known for their independence and impartiality, and trusted by the human rights community as well as the opposition.

At the same time, the government must ensure that all evidence relating to the attack is kept intact. Any state institutions or employees whose negligence may have facilitated the attacks should be removed from any position where they could influence the inquiries.

"The government has failed to investigate previous attacks with the rigour and determination they deserve," said Catherine Baber. "Unless such inquiries are conducted thoroughly and impartially, they will lack credibility and the culprits will be sheltered from justice."

Following the 21 August grenade attack, the government instituted a judicial inquiry, but its impartiality was brought into doubt when Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was reported to have announced before its conclusion that the opposition might have carried out the attack themselves in order to tarnish the government's image.

Although the inquiry judge submitted his report on the August grenade attack to the authorities on 2 October, the government has failed to make public the content of that report, or to announce what steps it is taking to address the attack. The Awami League, as the aggrieved party, has not been informed of any steps the government has taken. The inquiry judge at the time told journalists that he had identified the perpetrators and a link to "foreign enemies" but gave no details.

The present attack is a stark reminder of the growing vulnerability of opposition politicians and an apparent lack of determination on the part of the government to ensure their safety and security. Amnesty International is urging the highest authorities in Bangladesh to condemn the attacks and to ensure that no political pressure influences the outcome of the inquiry.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>