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Bangladesh: MP tortured by security forces

Amnesty International is calling on the Bangladeshi government to immediately investigate allegations that a MP for the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has been tortured while in police custody.

Bangladeshi security forces have tortured Salauddin Quader Chowdhury during interrogations, Amnesty International has learned. This has included applying electrodes to his genitals, beating him, slitting his stomach with razors and twisting his toenails and fingernails with pliers. There are fears that he may face further torture or other ill-treatment.

“The Bangladeshi government must ensure that Salauddin Quader Chowdhury is protected and treated properly and that these very serious allegations of torture are investigated,” said Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International’s Bangladesh researcher. “In particular, the authorities must ensure that he has access to the necessary specialist medical attention, including by independent doctors.”

Chowdhury was arrested on 16 December in connection with a case in which a private car was set alight in Dhaka on 26 June, killing a passenger. On 19 December, the International Crimes Tribunal, a Bangladeshi court, issued an arrest warrant against him for alleged crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

According to reports received by Amnesty International, a combined force of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Detective Branch (DB) police, and the Directorate-General Foreign Intelligence (DGFI) arrested Chowdhury in the early hours of 16 December at an apartment in the Banani neighbourhood in Dhaka.

Family members who were allowed to see him earlier today, told Amnesty International that Chowdhury reported that security forces came prepared with torture equipment as well as with a physician, and proceeded to torture him for several hours.

He told his family that he lost consciousness three times during the ordeal, and the doctor present revived him. However, when his condition deteriorated under interrogation, he was taken to the Bangabandhu Medical Hospital for treatment.

Video footage from the hospital grounds show Chowdhury weak, in pain, unable to walk on his own and with an apparent blood stain on his shirt.

After an hour in the hospital, Chowdhury was reportedly taken to headquarters of the Detective Branch of the Police (DBHQ), where he was subjected to further torture, including with electric shocks.

Family members who saw Chowdhury earlier today told Amnesty International that his genitals and nose were still bleeding, there were cut marks on his stomach and bruises all over his body. They said that he was very frightened for his life.

The police have said that he was taken to hospital to be treated for an asthma condition. The Inspector

General of Police has denied that Salauddin Quader Chowdhury has been tortured.

Torture is widespread in Bangladesh, particularly during police interrogations.

“Given the detailed information provided by the family and the media, the possibility that Salauddin Quader Chowdhury was tortured must be taken seriously and the possibility that he may face further torture or other ill-treatment cannot be ruled out,” said Abbas Faiz.

Today the Court has ordered him to be placed in Dhaka Central Prison pending proceedings in his trial. According to Salauddin Quader Chowdhury’s family, he has not been allowed to meet his lawyers since his arrest, and was not present at the Court during today’s hearing. Instead, he was kept in the holding cell downstairs, where six members of his family were allowed to see him, under Court orders.

Chowdhury is 63 years old. He has suffered three heart attacks and has several cardiac stents.

“Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the allegations, and considers the reported torture of Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, as of any other human being, wholly unacceptable,” said Abbas Faiz. “The government of Bangladesh is obligated under international human rights law, to protect all persons under its jurisdiction from torture and other ill-treatment at all times.”