

URGENT ACTION

28 MEN ARRESTED, SUSPECTED OF BEING GAY

Bangladesh's elite security forces arrested 28 young men on 19 May 2017 at a social event where more than 150 people were gathered and which is known to be frequented by members of the LGBTI community. They have been charged with drug possession and are all currently in detention where they remain at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

On Thursday, 18 May 2017, some 150-200 men had gathered for a regular social event, known to be frequented by members of the LGBTI community, in Keraniganj, a town south of the capital Dhaka. At around 2 am, members of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), an elite anti-crime and anti-terrorism unit of the Bangladesh Police, raided the community centre where the event was hosted. The RAB has been accused by human rights organisations of committing a range of human rights violations including extrajudicial executions, torture and enforced disappearances.

Multiple sources told Amnesty International that RAB officers physically and verbally assaulted many of those present, and forced all of them to stand in a line. Officers then proceeded to "inspect" them and arrested those they suspected of being gay men, based on their clothing and mannerisms. At least 28 people were arrested, including the owner of the community centre, while the others were allowed to leave.

According to media reports, RAB Commander Jahangir Hossain Matuboor said that RAB raided the community centre after locals had filed complaints. He stated that condoms and drugs were found on the premises, and that after being arrested, the men all admitted to "homosexual activities".

The men were then taken to Keraniganj Police Station where they were charged with drug possession under the Narcotics Control Act 1990, which can carry a penalty of life imprisonment or a death sentence. A court in Dhaka on Friday denied bail to all 28 arrested, and placed four of the men on remand in custody. Torture and other ill-treatment is rife in detention in Bangladesh and Amnesty International is extremely concerned about the well-being of those arrested.

Please write immediately in Bengali, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to ensure that all those arrested are not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment and have immediate access to lawyers, their families and to medical care they may require;
- Calling on the police to immediately end all harassment of members of the LGBTI community and to seriously investigate threats made against them; and
- Urging the authorities to repeal all laws which criminalise same-sex sexual conduct, including Section 377 of the Penal Code.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 JULY 2017 TO:

Inspector General of Police

AKM Shahidul Hoque

Police Headquarters

6 Phoenix Road

Fulbaria 1000 Dhaka

Fax: +880 2 9563 362

Email: ig@police.gov.bd

Salutation: Dear Inspector General

And copies to:

Ministry of Home Affairs

Asaduzzaman Khan

Bangladesh Secretariat, Building-8

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: +880 957 3711

Email: stateminister@mha.gov.bd

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below: Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

“Homosexuality” is a criminal offence in Bangladesh, and “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” (Section 377 of the Penal Code) carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Criminalising private, consensual same-sex sexual conduct violates the rights to privacy and to non-discrimination and is a breach of Bangladesh’s international human rights obligations, including those under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Harassment of LGBTI people by security forces is common in Bangladesh, and many LGBTI people have told Amnesty International that they are extremely hesitant to approach the police. Far from being offered protection, those who have reported abuses say that they are often harassed by police, told to be “less provocative” and even threatened with arrests and criminal charges for “unnatural offences” under Section 377 of the Penal Code.

The situation for members of the LGBTI community in Bangladesh has deteriorated significantly since April 2016 when two prominent LGBTI activists, Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Tonoy, were attacked and killed with machetes by the armed group Ansar al-Islam. Xulhaz Mannan was the chairman of Roopban, an LGBTI activist organisation, which also published the only LGBTI magazine in the country. Following these murders, the threats against the LGBTI community have escalated, forcing many into hiding or to leave Bangladesh to ensure their own safety. Self-censorship is now the norm and even the limited community activities organised by groups like Roopban have almost all ceased.

Government officials have not only failed to condemn the murders, but made statements similar to those of Home Minister Asaduzzaman Kamal who in April 2016 said that any movement promoting “unnatural sex” is not allowed in Bangladeshi society. These statements have put LGBTI persons at even higher risk and signal that they will not be protected by the state. For more information, see Amnesty International’s recent report *Caught between fear and repression: Attacks on freedom of expression in Bangladesh* (2 May 2017), available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/05/bangladesh-dissenting-voices-trapped-between-fear-and-repression/>

Name: Group
Gender m/f: m

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