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## **AUTHORITIES MUST RESPECT RIGHT TO PEACEFUL PROTEST FOLLOWING BLOODY CRACKDOWNS**

### **Bangladesh**

The Bangladeshi authorities must respect the right to freedom of assembly and protect peaceful protestors, said Amnesty International, after police opened fire on protestors at a rally in Chattogram today, killing at least four people and injuring dozens of others, according to local media sources.

On a day of nationwide protests against the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at least 60 people were injured at a separate protest in Dhaka according to local media, many with gunshot wounds. The crackdowns are the latest in a series of violent responses to protests in Bangladesh in recent weeks.

“The scenes of violence we witnessed in Chattogram and Dhaka follow a worryingly familiar pattern of behaviour by the Bangladeshi authorities. The right to peaceful protest has come under concerted attack, particularly during the coronavirus pandemic, culminating in this type of bloody repression,” said Sultan Mohammed Zakaria, Amnesty International’s South Asia Researcher.

“Bangladesh’s commitments under international law and its own constitution enshrine the right to peaceful assembly. The authorities must respect these commitments, protect peaceful protestors and halt the use of unlawful and excessive force.”

Today's events follow a spate of violent crackdowns on rallies over the past fortnight that has left more than 100 injured.

On 25 March, more than 40 people were hurt after police fired rubber bullets and released teargas into a crowd in Dhaka protesting a visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. On the same day, local media reported that ruling party-affiliated student body Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) members attacked protestors in Dhaka University campus, injuring 20 students.

On 24 March, 25 protestors were injured after police baton charged a peaceful rally in the north-eastern district of Sylhet organized by the Left Democratic Alliance (LDA).

On the same day, police baton-charged and dispersed a peaceful rally organized by several opposition parties in the northern district Rajshahi, arresting at least 10 people including the

former Vice President of Rajshahi University Student Union Ragib Ahsan Munna. Local sources told Amnesty International that police severely beat Ragib Ahsan Munna before detaining him.

On 23 March, local media reported that members of the BCL physically beat protesters joining a rally organized by Dhaka University's Progressive Students Alliance, injuring at least 25 student activists.

Video footage of various protests seen by Amnesty International show that unidentified people joined in attacks on protesters, with local media identifying them as being members of the BCL and the ruling Awami League party.

## **Background**

On 2 December 2020, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) imposed official restrictions on holding peaceful rallies without permission.

Between January and February 2021, the authorities blocked at least two public gatherings applying Section 144 – a legal provision under the Penal Code of 1860 that permits the authorities to prohibit gatherings of five or more people and the holding of public meetings on grounds of public safety. In 2020, at least 17 such gatherings have been blocked by the authorities. The authorities also blocked or used violent force to disperse a number of assemblies and rallies organized by different opposition political parties over the same period.