

Public Statement

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“The mass arrest and arbitrary detention of student protesters is a witch hunt by the authorities to silence anyone who dares to challenge the government and is a tool to further perpetuate a climate of fear.”

Smriti Singh, Regional Director for South Asia at Amnesty International

“End punitive mass arrests and arbitrary detention of student leaders and protesters”

Bangladesh

Responding to reports of the arrest and detention of student leaders, protest participants and members of opposition parties following the quota-reform protests, with over 9000 arrests over the weekend in Bangladesh, Smriti Singh, Regional Director for South Asia at Amnesty International, said:

“The mass arrest and arbitrary detention of student protesters is a witch hunt by the authorities to silence anyone who dares to challenge the government and is a tool to further perpetuate a climate of fear. Reports suggest that these arrests are entirely politically motivated, in retaliation for the exercise of human rights. It is essential that the Bangladeshi authorities respect people’s rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.”

“The authorities must ensure that any arrests comply with due process safeguards and are fully in accordance with international human rights law and standards, including but not limited to the right to a free and fair trial, the right to be informed of the reasons for arrest and the place of detention, and the right to be brought promptly before a judge, and to have access both to legal counsel and to their family.”

“The authorities should ensure that peaceful activists are not prosecuted on trumped-up charges as punishment for participating in protests. Peaceful protest is not a crime, and this witch-hunt must end.”

Background

On Friday afternoon, 26 July 2024, key protest coordinators Nahid Islam, Asif Mahmud and Abu Bakar Majumder, were **taken into custody** by plain-clothed police personnel from Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital in Dhaka, regardless of the advice of the medical officers not to take patients who are under treatment. Their mobile phones were seized. Three more coordinators, Sarjis Alam, Hasnat Abdullah and Nusrat Tabassum, were detained in the next two days.

The Bangladesh Home Minister, Asaduzzaman Khan, **later stated** that the coordinators had been taken into ‘custody for their safety’. On Sunday, 28 July, while in police custody, the protest coordinators **declared an end to the protests**, while condemning the deaths, violence and arson through a short video message.

Another student leader, Arif Sohail was also picked up on 27 July, and his whereabouts remained unknown for nearly 36 hours till the Detective Branch of Bangladesh Police confirmed his custody. Arif has been **remanded for 6 days** in connection with an attack and arson on Setu Bhavan on 18 July. Meanwhile, student groups state that Arif was with them in Jahangirnagar on that day – a one-hour drive away.

As per **media reports**, over 2.13 lakh people, most of them unnamed, are accused in around 200 cases filed with police stations in the capital over the recent protest related violence. Reports have highlighted that a large number of leaders and activists of opposition parties have also been arrested. The tactic of leaving unnamed accused in pending cases leaves room for law enforcers to arrest anyone they want, as has been previously **documented** by Amnesty International.

Link: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/bangladesh-end-punitive-mass-arrests-and-arbitrary-detention-of-student-leaders-and-protesters/>