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Bangladesh: Transparency needed over hasty executions and safety of family members must be ensured

Amnesty International condemns last week's execution in Bangladesh of five men found guilty of killing the country's founding leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Six other men sentenced to death in their absence in the same case are living outside Bangladesh, and the government is seeking their extradition. The execution of these five men will make their extradition highly unlikely. There is a high risk that they, too, might be executed.

Family members of the convicts also live in fear of being attacked by political activists of the ruling Awami League party. According to a United News of Bangladesh (UNB) report, Awami League activists led by a local Awami League leader attacked the house of Aziz Pasha, one of 12 men sentenced to death for killing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in Tetra village in Harirampur *Upazila* in Manikganj on 31 January. Witnesses have told UNB reporters that the attackers looted the valuables and set the house on fire. Aziz Pasha who was sentenced in his absence reportedly died outside Bangladesh but his brother lives in his house. Amnesty International calls on the Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to establish an impartial and independent investigation into this attack. The government should publicly condemn any such attacks and bring anyone involved to justice,

The five who were executed on 28 January were found guilty of the murder by the Supreme Court on 27 January and according to media reports in Bangladesh they were executed shortly after midnight on 28 January 2010, less than twenty four hours after their conviction.

Amnesty International opposes the execution of these five men, which should never have taken place. The haste in which they were carried out raises serious questions about the timing and procedures for these executions. Amnesty International calls on the government of Bangladesh to ensure transparency about its handling of this case.

In Bangladesh it is standard practice for mercy petitions calling for the commutation of death sentences to be considered by the President after all judicial remedies have been exhausted.

However, the President dismissed the mercy petitions of three of the men, before the Supreme Court's final review of their sentences.

The mercy petition of one of the condemned men was considered after the Supreme Court's final decision was announced on 27 January, but it was dismissed within hours of it being sent to the President. Lawyers for the man say the speed with which a decision was given for a mercy petition is unprecedented in a death penalty case in the history of Bangladesh.

The fifth man did not submit a mercy petition to the President.

The Supreme Court upheld the death sentences against the five men on 27 January. No other judicial remedy was available to the five former army officers convicted of carrying out the

killing. Their lawyers say the men's execution so close to the final judicial review of their sentences is unprecedented in Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family members were killed when a group of military officers entered his house and opened fire on them in an attempted coup on August 15th 1975.

Acting President Kondaker Mushtaq Ahmed, who took office following the death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as well as his successor, President Ziaur Rahman, had granted the accused officers immunity from prosecution. The immunity was lifted by Sheikh Hasina when she became Prime Minister in 1996.

The killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members were grave human rights abuses, and those who committed them should be brought to justice. However, bringing people to justice must not in itself violate the human rights of the accused.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender, or the method used by the state to kill the prisoner. The death penalty violates the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

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