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Refrain from using force on student’s protest; protect people’s right to peaceful assembly and association: Forum-Asia urges Bangladesh Government

(Bangkok, 29 August 2012) The Government of Bangladesh should initiate dialogue with the protesting students, rather using force to meet their grievance, said the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), a regional human rights organization representing 49 Non Government Organizations across Asia.

In Bangladesh, medical and dental college admission seekers are having peaceful demonstration for a few days protesting the government’s sudden announcement on August 12, 2012 saying that there would be no admission tests for public and private medical colleges this year. In protest to this decision the students tried to gather for a protest rally on 27 August at the capital Dhaka when the police chased them, charged at them with truncheons leaving at least six students injured. The police did also arrest eight of them, though released shortly.

The police have also foiled the peaceful demonstration of the students in Chittagong in similar manner. Photographs published in the newspapers show that the police was extremely brutal to the students who were completely peaceful and there was no point at all to be so much heavy handed.

“We strongly condemn this heavy-handedness showed by the police as this was completely unnecessary. The constitution of Bangladesh also does not allow the law enforcement agencies to make any interference as long as a rally remains peaceful”, said Yap Swee Seng, the Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

“In fact, such heavy-handedness have been witnessed in several occasions in recent time in Bangladesh which show the high level of intolerance to any sort of opposition to the government seeking to give vent to their discontent and displeasure with its poor performance or the flawed policies pursued by it,” added Yap.

“The police and other law enforcers have on several occasions foiled programmes, including human chains, organised by opposition parties. Even people tied to different citizens’ platforms such as the national committee to protect oil, gas, mineral resources, power and ports have on more occasions than one fallen victim to police beating. Like the present one, other forms of peaceful protests by the teachers, nurses, and garment workers were also badly handled by the law enforcing agencies”, concluded Yap.

Meanwhile, the High Court on 27 August 2012 issued a split verdict on a petition filed seeking its directives on the government to immediately start the admission process at medical and dental colleges by holding a test, which needs to be further heard by another bench of the High Court.

Forum-Asia reminds Bangladesh government the remarks made by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in his latest report to the UN Human Rights Council in May 2012 referring to the general comment No. 31 (2004) of the Human Rights Committee that “where restrictions are made, States must demonstrate their necessity and only take such measures as are proportionate to the pursuance of legitimate aims in order to ensure continuous and effective protection of Covenant rights”.

Noting that Bangladesh is a sitting member of the UN Human Rights Council, the regional human rights organization urges Bangladesh government to respect and protect everyone’s right to peaceful assembly and association in any situation.
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