



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)  
LEGAL AID BOARD

## **Bangladesh - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Friday 10 January 2014**

### **Information on a demonstration in Dhaka on 5 May 2013 including numbers attending, injuries, deaths.**

*BBC News* in May 2013 states:

“Clashes between police and Islamist protesters in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka have left at least three people dead and 60 injured. Up to half a million Hefazat-e-Islam supporters gathered in the city, where rioters set fire to shops and vehicles” (*BBC News* (5 May 2013) *Riot police battle Islamists in Dhaka Bangladesh*).

This document also states:

“Three people were killed, the BBC Bengali service reported, with at least one dying of gunshot wounds. Other agencies reported the death toll had risen to at least 10, with several casualties sustaining gunshot wounds to the head. Reports spoke of some 60 people being injured, including two local TV journalists” (*ibid*).

A report issued in May 2013 by *Amnesty International* notes:

“The Bangladeshi authorities must immediately set up an independent and impartial investigation into police use of force after at least 44 people died in violent clashes between protesters and the police, Amnesty International said. Tens of thousands of supporters of the Islamist group Hefazat-e-Islam took to the streets in the capital Dhaka and elsewhere in Bangladesh on 5 May and the early hours of 6 May” (*Amnesty International* (7 May 2013) *Bangladesh: Investigate deaths in protest clashes to prevent more bloodshed*).

This document also states:

“The circumstances of the protests are disputed, with police claiming the violence erupted on 5 May when protesters tried to storm a police barricade, and then pelted police officers with stones and bricks. A police operation in the early hours of 6 May led to a new round of clashes. Police have confirmed four deaths from 5 May but have remained silent about the deaths on 6 May. Media reports estimate a total of 22 deaths in Dhaka over both days. Unofficial figures from hospitals that Amnesty International has obtained also confirm 22 deaths” (*ibid*).

In May 2013 *Odhikar* notes that:

“...clashes also occurred between the activists of Hefazate Islam and lawenforcing agents on May 5, when Hefazate Islam activists were heading peacefully towards Motijheel to join the meeting from different areas (after completing the Dhaka blockade programme). During this time, activists of the ruling party, along with police and RAB attacked the Hefazate Islam activists – most of whom were from rural areas. According to various hospital sources, at least 16 persons were reported killed and 200 others were injured during this clash” (*Odhikar* (7 May 2013) *Odhikar*

*condemns the indiscriminate killing of hundreds of unarmed Hefazate Islam activists and curtailing media freedom,p.2).*

In May 2013 a publication released by *Human Rights Watch* notes:

“The exact number of deaths during the May 5-6 protest remains unclear, with figures ranging from the official government figure of 11 deaths to Hefazat’s estimate of thousands. Independent news sources put the figure at approximately 50 dead, with others succumbing to injuries later. The dead include several security personnel” (Human Rights Watch (10 May 2013) *Bangladesh: Independent Body Should Investigate Protest Deaths*).

A document issued in July 2013 by *Human Rights Watch* states:

“On May 5, an estimated 200,000 Hefazat supporters held a rally in Dhaka to push for their demands. The security forces broke up the demonstration early the next morning. Precisely what happened on May 5 and 6 has become hugely controversial in Bangladesh. The opposition BNP has accused the police of killing hundreds of protesters, describing their actions as a “genocide.” It alleged that the government turned off the electricity in the area where the demonstration was taking place so that the police could kill protesters in the dark. It also claimed that two opposition-funded news channels that had shown footage of corpses were raided and ordered to stop broadcasting as a way of hiding the violence from the public” (Human Rights Watch (31 July 2013) *Blood on the Streets, The Use of Excessive Force During Bangladesh Protests*, p.21).

This document also states:

“While the claims of the BNP lack credibility and those of Hefazat appear overstated, the government’s account also appears inaccurate. The evidence obtained by Human Rights Watch suggests that serious human rights abuses were committed by the security forces and that some people were killed during the early hours of May 6. In total, based on hospital logs, eyewitness accounts, and well-sourced media reports, Human Rights Watch believes that at least 58 people died on May 5 and 6, seven of whom were members of the security forces. The death toll may be higher” (ibid, p.23).

It is also pointed out in this report that:

“On May 5, 2013, some 200,000 madrasa teachers and students, including many boys under the age of 18, converged on Dhaka from different parts of the country, to support Hefazat’s demands. Violence broke out from about noon onwards at various locations in the city center. The government blamed it on demonstrators who committed “widespread vandalism, arson and destruction of public and private properties.” Footage filmed by the Associated Press shows police officers opening fire with shotguns and spraying tear gas while trying to prevent a huge crowd of stick-wielding young men from moving away from the center.<sup>51</sup> But the AP only had cameras in one location, and it is not clear what sparked the violence, which soon degenerated into a full-scale clash with protesters hurling rocks at the police and setting up barricades in front of Dhaka’s main mosque, the Baitul Mokaram” (ibid, p.24).

## References

Amnesty International (7 May 2013) *Bangladesh: Investigate deaths in protest clashes to prevent more bloodshed*

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<http://odhikar.org/odhikar-condemns-the-indiscriminate-killing-of-hundreds-of-unarmed-hefazate-islam-activists-and-curtailing-media-freedom/>

Accessed Friday 10 January 2014

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

#### Sources Consulted

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