



# MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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## **Celebrities, Minister to bat for Human Security in Bangladesh cricket match**

**DHAKA:** Film stars, politicians, and well-known cricketers will take to the pitch on Saturday afternoon in Dhaka (6 December) to rally nationwide support for human security through 'good old-fashioned teamwork'.

Development in Bangladesh is hindered by lack of law and order, as the formal justice system -- hamstrung by corruption, inefficiency, and outdated laws -- is unable to cope with spreading crime.

It will take a powerful group effort to win the match against injustice, and through Saturday's celebrity cricket match the teams are out to prove that, with finely tuned teamwork, Bangladesh's battle against rising lawlessness can be won. The Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Barrister Moudud Ahmed, is set to open the batting.

After the match, the Bangla-language version of a UNDP-sponsored report entitled '*Human Security in Bangladesh: In Search of Justice and Dignity*' will be launched. It was written by a group of leading Bangladeshi experts following their examination of the nation's legislation, law enforcement apparatus, court system and prison. The report includes no less than 131 recommendations to assist Government, law enforcement agencies, judiciary and civil society mutually implement urgently needed reforms to the criminal justice system.

One of the key findings of the Report is that in Bangladesh -- where more than 77.8 percent of the population earns less than two dollars per day -- many laws and practices of the criminal justice system disadvantage the poor. In addition, the cost of going to court, added to frequent delays and lack of access to legal aid, results in most people simply being "priced out of the justice system".

The poor were also shown at a disadvantage when dealing with police who, according to the Report, were most responsive to influential members of the community. On the whole, the effectiveness of the police was hindered by lack of training, large numbers of false cases, insufficient monitoring and evaluation, poor motivation, budgetary constraints and understaffing. In response the Report recommends improved monitoring of the police services, training that is more orientated towards the poor and disadvantaged, a focus on community policing, and better pay plus conditions for the undervalued police service.



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People prefer the non-formal courts and an estimated 60 to 70 percent of local disputes are resolved through the Shalish or traditional courts. The Report recommends numerous measures including the setting of time limits to speed up trials, improved training for judicial officials and easier access to legal aid for low-income individuals.

Such reforms would have saved fourteen-year-old Jamal Abdul two years in prison after he was picked up during a police 'crime sweep' in 2001. Three months after his arrest, a recent newspaper report informs, Jamal was found innocent of any wrongdoing but red tape, frequent delays in his hearing, and lack of finances saw him spend a further 21 months in a juvenile correction center before being released with the help of the proactive legal NGO – BLAST.

Jamal's case illustrates one of the main human security violations in Bangladesh, as an estimated 31,020 people, according to the Report, are awaiting trial in jail. Some detainees have already spent longer in jail than their likely sentence, if found guilty, would have required.

"Human insecurity is like a cancer – no single group of people or causes can be blamed for it, and it can only be tackled by all segments of society working closely together – the Government, academia, political parties, civil society, local communities and the private sector," the UNDP Resident Representative, Jorgen Lissner said.

Another key finding reveals that despite constitutional guarantees and legislative safeguards, violence against women, which includes acid throwing, murder, rape and trafficking, is a serious problem in Bangladesh. A dozen recommendations were made to ensure that the issue receives adequate attention, including the setting up of a help line, increasing the number of women officials and launching a systematic campaign to raise awareness about violence against women.

Awareness among the general population of laws and rights related to human security overall was low, according to the Report. For example, 40 percent of the people surveyed thought that police were permitted to torture detainees, and 10 percent of interviewees thought that police could hold a person in custody for as long as they wished. A national awareness campaign was recommended to dispel current myths.

Among the celebrities expected to 'bat for human security' are ex-Bangladesh cricket Captain Akram Khan, national film stars, TV personalities and supermodels. **ENDS**....

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