

Thousands arrested in Bangladesh

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Police in Bangladesh say they have arrested more than 10,000 people since launching a crackdown on crime in the country over the weekend

Police chief Nur Mohammed says security needs to be improved before elections are held at the end of the year. Leaders of political parties opposed to the army-backed caretaker government say that many of their district level officials have been picked up.

Many top politicians are already under arrest in the anti-corruption drive.

Mohammed said the latest initiative was a month-long drive against crime.

The police, he said, were arresting those against whom there were specific allegations, cases or warrants, including smugglers and the owners of illegal arms.

Earlier he said that the force was targeting what he described as terrorists and extortionists.

He denied that the arrests were in any way political, except that they were aimed at making Bangladesh more secure in the run-up to elections in December.

That is when the army-backed government has promised to restore democracy.

But leaders of the main political parties say that hundreds of their officials have been detained under emergency laws.

Khandaker Delwar Hossein, of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, said that many innocent activists had been held and that others were now in hiding.

Since January 2007 the government has arrested dozens of prominent politicians as part of its stated drive to clean up Bangladesh, which is often described as one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

Two former Prime Ministers, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, are under arrest and facing multiple corruption charges.

Last week the government opened talks with a range of political parties on the restoration of democracy.

But Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia's parties boycotted the talks, saying that free elections could not take place without the country's most popular politicians.

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