

PUBLIC

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Fear of torture

BANGLADESH

**Dr Qazi Faruque Ahmed (m)
David William Biswas (m)**

Dr Qazi Faruque Ahmed and David William Biswas, leading members of a non-governmental organization (NGO) that promotes sustainable development were arrested on 22 May. They are held incommunicado and are at grave risk of torture.

The men are president and vice-president respectively of one of the largest development NGOs in Bangladesh, PROSHIKA ("A Centre for Human Development"), which has been the target of what appears to be politically motivated harassment for its alleged involvement in political activity. Dr Faruque was arrested at the Supreme Court, in the capital, Dhaka, where he had gone to seek judicial safeguards against arrest of PROSHIKA officials and police raids on PROSHIKA offices. David Biswas was arrested elsewhere in the city.

The police produced them in court the following day. Dr Faruque was remanded in police custody for a further three days. David William Biswas was remanded to jail custody. Both prisoners are reportedly held incommunicado. Amnesty International has extensively documented frequent use of torture by the police to extract confession from detainees.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following the general elections of October 2001, the authorities reportedly blocked donor funds to PROSHIKA and placed the organization under investigation for alleged financial irregularities. There were serious concerns about the investigations' lack of transparency. The donors expressed concern to the government that they saw no grounds for blocking the NGO's entire programme while this investigation was carried out, as this would cut off thousands of people from assistance funded by donors, but the NGO's funds were not unblocked. In recent weeks, the authorities have reportedly accused PROSHIKA of taking an anti-government political line during an opposition campaign of general strikes to unseat the government. PROSHIKA denied involvement in political activity, but the police raided its offices in Dhaka. One of its managers, Abdur Rob, was arrested on 20 April. The police brought him before a court three days later, claiming that he had "confessed" that PROSHIKA was involved in political activities. In court, he retracted the confession, saying the police had tortured him severely to make him sign it. He was nonetheless charged with treason. Amnesty International is monitoring his case.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing serious concern about the arrest and incommunicado detention of PROSHIKA leaders Dr Qazi Faruque Ahmed and David William Biswas;
- urging the authorities to ensure that under no circumstances are they tortured or subjected to other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- urging the authorities to ensure that the prisoners have access to their lawyers, family, and any medical attention they require;
- urging the authorities to ensure that legal safeguards against arbitrary detention in Bangladeshi law and international human rights standards, including the right to obtain release on bail as appropriate, are provided to the prisoners without delay.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia
Office of the Prime Minister
Gona Bhaban
Old Sangsad Bhaban, Tejgaon,
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Telegram: Prime Minister, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax: + 880 2 8113244/8113243/9133722/8111015
Telex: 672802 PSEC BJ / 632220 RAPA BJ / 672803 PM SEC BJ
Email: pm@pmobd.org / psecretary@pmobd.org / pressecec@pmobd.org / pmo@pmobd.org
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Md. Lutfuzzaman Babar
State Minister for Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Building 4
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Telegrams: Minister of Home Affairs, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax: + 880 2 8619667
Salutation: Dear Minister of State

and to diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 July 2004.