



# Probir Sikdar

**Occupation:** A journalist from Faridpur writing for the *Daily Janakantha*.

**Human Rights Violations Suffered:** On 20 April 2001, during the time of the Awami League government, Probir Sikdar was confronted by a group of men threatening to kill him. While on his way on a motorbike to Faridpur he was stopped by few men who hurled a hand made bomb at him. These men also opened fired at him with their guns, spraying him with bullets and also attacked him with a long knife, attempting to sever his right hand. They then left the scene. He was taken to a hospital in Faridpur and from there to a hospital Dhaka. His left arm became dysfunctional from the knife attack and the doctors amputated his right leg which had been severely injured as a result of bullet wounds. He was later sent to Singapore for further treatment and, as a result, his left arm began to recover its movement. He is now using an artificial limb in place of his amputated leg.

**Why:** The attack on Probir Sikdar is believed to have been carried out by men hired by an alleged criminal whom Probir had written about outlining his links to a number of crimes during the liberation war in 1971. Probir also wrote a number of articles opposing terrorism, political crimes, fundamentalism, illegal activities of the government administration and law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh, which have reportedly fuelled further hostility towards him.

**Legal Redress:** Probir Sikdar's brother-in-law filed a complaint with the police while Probir was receiving treatment for his critical injuries. The brother-in-law was unaware of all the circumstances of the attack so the complaint did not include the names of the likely culprits. An investigation officer met Probir Sikdar several times in Dhaka. Each time, Probir gave them the names and other information he had about the attackers. However, the names of the suspects were missing from the charge sheet.

Probir Sikdar told Amnesty International: "My family felt they had to file a petition before the court to force the police to include the names of the suspects in the charge sheet but even that did not work. A second charge sheet was filed still without the names of the suspects. My family went to the court for a third time, but again the names of the suspects were missing from the third charge sheet."

While Probir Sikdar was in hospital, his fellow journalists conducted an investigation and came up with information about the identities of some of those involved in the attack. They went to the police station to submit their findings but the police refused to accept them.

Probir Sikdar told Amnesty International: "Seeing that the police were not going to investigate, I lost interest. I could see the government was not going to do anything. Even now, under a different government, nothing is being done."

At some stage in the investigation, five persons were reportedly arrested but were later released. These men were later reported to have all died in mysterious circumstances.

**Continued Harassment:** Agitation by political groups against Probir Sikdar's reports has continued. In 2002, Probir reportedly wrote a review of the work of a drama group in Faridpur praising its quality and performance. The drama group reportedly promotes secularism in its shows and peacefully defies the programs of the Islamist groups. Soon after the show, in the second quarter of 2002, an Islamist group staged a rally in the city in which they asked for the execution of Probir Sikdar because they considered his review of the play to have used "blasphemous" language. Sikdar has denied using such language, and has reported the incident to the police. No action has been taken against those chanting hate slogans against Probir Sikdar.

**AI Recommendations to Government of Bangladesh:**

- Ensure that all those found to be responsible for the attack on Probir Sikdar are brought to justice promptly and tried in accordance with international fair trial standards;
- Ensure that those subjected to attacks, their families, and their witnesses, receive full protection in their efforts to seek justice through the criminal justice system;
- Investigate promptly, fully and by a competent authority every report of death threats against human rights defenders and bring those making these threats to justice;
- Ensure that no one within the criminal justice system acts in connivance with the alleged perpetrators through bribery or negligence;
- Ensure that the police disclose evidence against perpetrators of abuses to the court;
- Ensure that all allegations of human rights abuses including those allegedly perpetrated by members of the ruling party or its allies are investigated promptly by an independent and competent authority and those found responsible are brought to justice regardless of their position in these parties or their links to the government;
- Investigate promptly, fully and by a competent authority every incident of assault on human rights defenders and bring to justice those persons carrying out these attacks, and those instigating them;
- Ensure that no human rights defender is subjected to arbitrary arrest, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- Investigate fully, promptly and through a competent authority reports of arbitrary arrest and torture of human rights defenders and bring their perpetrators to justice.