

PUBLIC

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UA 164/04 Fear of safety/human rights defender at risk

BANGLADESH Sumi Khan (f), journalist

Sumi Khan, Chittagong correspondent of the magazine *Weekly 2000* was stabbed and critically wounded in the Nandan Kanon area of the city on 27 April. The attack took place at about 10.30pm as she was travelling to a courier delivery service to send a report to her editor.

Three men in an auto-rickshaw attempted to drag her into their vehicle, but she resisted. They then stabbed her several times. As people in the vicinity came to her aid, the assailants grabbed her handbag and drove away. Sumi Khan lost consciousness and was taken to hospital for treatment.

Sumi Khan has written a number of investigative articles about the alleged involvement of local politicians and religious groups in attacks on members of minority communities, kidnapping and land grabbing by some landlords. In recent weeks she had received several anonymous threatening telephone calls, warning her not to "defame" people in her reports. The threatening phone calls, death threats and the recent attack are believed to be linked to her articles. She has filed a complaint with the police about the attack, but so far no-one has been arrested.

People who came to rescue her heard the assailants yelling at her about her reports in the paper, saying she would be killed if she did not stop writing.

Sumi Khan has received more threatening phone calls as she recuperates at her home.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights defenders, including journalists seeking to highlight human rights violations and their causes, are at risk of attack or harassment in Bangladesh. Many have received death threats which have at times been followed by physical attacks. Some have been murdered. The attackers are believed to be mercenaries hired by people identified in the journalists' reports as being involved in human rights abuses. Victims of threats and attacks are left with no protection. The culprits are rarely brought to justice, as they reportedly bribe the police not to implicate them in the attacks. In some cases they are reportedly able to rely on support from influential politicians, who are successful in discouraging the police from arresting the culprits. At the same time, the government shows little determination to bring the attackers to justice. This cycle of impunity is a major cause of continued human rights violations in Bangladesh, including attacks on human rights defenders.

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

- expressing concern about the attack on Sumi Khan and urging the authorities to bring the perpetrators and their patrons to justice regardless of their political position or party affiliation;
- expressing concern for the safety of Sumi Khan, and urging the authorities to provide her with effective and adequate protection;
- urging the authorities to provide Sumi Khan with the medical attention she requires.
- urging the authorities to publicly condemn the attack;

APPEALS TO:

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

Fax: + 880 2 8113244/8113243/9133722/8111015/8151490/8151157

Telex: 672802 PSEC BJ / 632220 RAPA BJ / 672803 PM SEC BJ

Email: pm@pmobd.org
psecretary@pmobd.org
pressesecy@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

Fax: + 880 2 8619667

Salutation: Dear Minister of State

COPIES 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 15 June 2004.