

*Start date: 09/12/05 [will launch in English on this date]*

## **Human rights defenders in Bangladesh under attack**

Journalists and activists in Bangladesh who expose human rights abuses, violations and corruption are frequently targets of attacks, intimidation and harassment. Take action to ensure they get justice now and protection in the future.

Hundreds of human rights defenders in Bangladesh have received death threats and been physically attacked. Many have been seriously injured and continue to be in need of medical attention: several journalists engaged in defending human rights have had their fingers or hands deliberately damaged so they can no longer hold a pen.

At least eight human rights defenders have been assassinated since 2000 by assailants believed to be linked to armed criminal gangs or armed factions of political parties. Many human rights defenders have had to leave their homes and localities in the face of continued threats.

Abuses and violations against human rights defenders in Bangladesh have occurred under successive governments. These governments have consistently failed to protect individuals at risk, investigate the abuses committed against them and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Lack of credible and effective investigation of attacks against human rights defenders has been the main reason for the continued vulnerability of human rights defenders in Bangladesh.

Watch a video interview of human rights defenders in Bangladesh (in Bengali & English)

Read individual cases of Bangladesh human rights defenders

Please write to the Foreign Minister of your government urging them to encourage the government of Bangladesh to ensure the safety and security of human rights defenders in their country.

Dear (insert name of Foreign Minister)

I am writing to express my concern about the increased level of violence against human rights defenders in Bangladesh. Hundreds have been attacked and received death threats; many have been seriously injured and continue to be in need of

medical attention. At least eight have been assassinated by assailants believed to be linked to armed criminal gangs or armed factions of political parties.

I therefore urge you to raise the following concerns with the Government of Bangladesh for them to take action to put an end to human rights abuses and violations being committed against human rights defenders:

- the increase in attacks and violence against journalists and activists who expose human rights abuses, violations and corruption, and the lack of public condemnation of these attacks;
- the failure to ensure that thorough and impartial investigations are carried out and those responsible are brought to justice, due to a poorly trained and apparently corrupt police force and a severely overloaded judicial system;
- the importance for the Government of Bangladesh to demonstrate their commitment to upholding the rights of human rights defenders as specified in the *UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*, and establish the long awaited National Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Ombudsman.

Foreign Minister



Tipu Sultan shows wounds sustained during an attack on him in 2001. © AI

## **Human rights defenders in Bangladesh under attack: Individual cases**

### **Tipu Sultan**

In January 2001, Tipu Sultan, a journalist with United News of Bangladesh, was attacked by a mob in his home-town of Feni after he published an article criticising a local politician.

In the attack, Tipu Sultan's legs and hands were broken which resulted in him having to undergo numerous operations in order to regain the use of his limbs.

Four and half years later, Tipu is still waiting for justice. In September 2001 police filed a case against 13 people accused of the attack. Two of the accused are in detention, three have been released on bail, and the rest are absconding. So far, the case has not gone before a court hearing. The lack of a rigorous investigation has effectively stopped proceedings in the case.

Members of Tipu Sultan's family have frequently received threats that they will be killed if the case against those who carried out the attack is not withdrawn.

### **Nazmul Imam**

Nazmul Imam is a staff reporter with the national daily newspaper *Manavzamin* in Kushtia district. During 2001 he wrote several articles alleging member of parliament (MP) involvement in unlawful activities, including murder, robbery, collection of protection money, kidnapping for ransom and threatening behaviour by political groups to elicit votes during elections.

On 27 May 2002 Nazmul Imam was attacked by at least six men. He received five stab wounds and other wounds from the beating including one on his left eye. Nazmul said, "They cut off a slice of flesh from my thumb and told me this was to stop me from writing."

Police in Kushtia initially refused to file his complaint. The investigation currently underway shows signs of interference to slow down the course of justice: at least three investigation officers have been replaced; reports indicate that each time an officer is replaced the entire investigation starts anew.

### **Sumi Khan**

Sumi Khan, correspondent for the weekly magazine *Shaptahik 2000*, was stabbed and critically wounded in the Nandan Kanon area of Chittagong on 27 April 2004. She had written 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.

Before the attack, she received several threatening telephone calls warning her not to "defame" people in her reports. People who came to her rescue during the attack heard the assailants yelling she would be killed if she did not stop writing. So far no-one has been arrested.

Sumi Khan still has problems opening her left eye and the fingers in her right hand are not fully recovered: she gets severe pain in the finger joints when she holds a pen in her hand.

**Hiramon Mondol**

In August 2003 Hiramon Mondol, a journalist working on the daily *Prabartan*, wrote an article about the plight of fishermen having their fish stolen from them, and being beaten by army soldiers. He was abducted by the army soldiers and severely beaten,

“The beating lasted for hours non-stop. I saw blood oozing from my legs but they kept beating me. I think I became unconscious again.”

Afraid that the army and the police would retaliate against him, he did not file a criminal case against the torturers. The government took no action against them either, despite continued reports of his torture in the local press.

In March 2003, he filed a civil suit before the Khulna Sessions Court demanding compensation. However, two key witnesses who saw him being tortured while in army custody were threatened not to provide testimony to the court.

Hiramon Mondol has not yet fully recovered from the attack and needs further medical treatment.

Read the full report (in English):

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engASA130042005>

Visit our Asia-Pacific site to take action on individual cases