

URGENT ACTION

PROFESSOR SACKED, THREATENED

Professor Md. Morshed Hasan Khan faces trumped-up sedition charges and has had his professorial position at Dhaka University terminated for publishing an opinion editorial in a national newspaper. Professor Morshed has received multiple death threats from unidentified people, and is being denied access to his campus residence, where his wife – who is a cancer patient - resides. In 2019 alone, at least 1,325 people were detained in 732 cases filed under the Digital Security Act (DSA). If found guilty, Professor Morshed could face life imprisonment.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Mr. Abdul Hamid
President
People's Republic of Bangladesh
President's Office
Bangabhaban, Dhaka-1000
Bangladesh
Fax: +88-02-9585502
Email: secretary@bangabhaban.gov.bd
js@bangabhaban.gov.bd

His Excellency,

*I am concerned about the harassment, intimidation and targeting of **Dr Md. Morshed Hasan Khan**, professor of the Department of Marketing, at the Dhaka University Syndicate, simply for publishing his opinion in a newspaper. He has been dismissed from his position at the Dhaka University, charged with sedition and threatened with death. It is alarming that an academic is facing life imprisonment merely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.*

Accused of “distorting” the history of war of independence and the post-war political situation in Bangladesh, Professor Morshed has been dismissed on the grounds of “moral turpitude” or “inefficiency” under Rule56(3) of Dhaka University Order 1973, despite procedural flaws in the conducts of the Enquiry Committee.

In addition, Professor Morshed is also being charged with sedition under section 124A of Bangladesh Penal Code 1860 for merely sharing his opinion. A charge such as this is inconsistent with international human rights law and constitutes a violation of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Bangladesh is a state party.

Furthermore, I find it deeply disturbing to learn that Professor Morshed has reportedly been threatened with death by unidentified persons over phone and on social media. He is being forced to stay out of his campus residence, where his wife – a cancer patient - still resides.

In order to protect the safety and security of Professor Morshed, uphold his right to freedom of expression, and to remedy the procedural flaws in his dismissal, I call on you to:

- 1. Ensure Professor Morshed Hasan Khan and his family's safety and security;**
- 2. Immediately reverse Professor Morshed Hasan Khan's dismissal and reinstate him to his position;**
- 3. Immediately drop all charges brought against Professor Morshed Hasan Khan under Section 124A, Bangladesh Penal Code**
- 4. Respect, protect, and fulfil the right to freedom of expression and academic freedom;**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Professor Morshed Hasan Khan wrote an opinion piece on the role played by the late Bangladeshi president Ziaur Rahman during the war of independence and in post-war Bangladesh, in the Daily Naya Diganta newspaper on 26 March 2018. The political history of Bangladesh has been bitterly contested by major political parties and different governments attempted to highlight their versions of the history.

On 2 April 2018, the Dhaka University Registrar's office, in an official letter, discharged Professor Morshed from all academic and administrative duties, accusing him of "distorting the liberation war history" and "disrespecting the father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman". On 28 May 2018, Dhaka University Syndicate formed a five-member inquiry committee led by Pro-Vice Chancellor of the university to investigate these allegations.

For nearly two years, the case was shelved for unknown reasons. On 12 February 2020, the university authority informed Professor Morshed, in a written letter, that a tribunal had been formed to try the allegations brought against him in 2018. The tribunal gave him seven days to respond to the accusations, which he did. Professor Morshed was dismissed on 9 September 2020.

Procedural flaws during the hearing impeded Professor Morshed's right to defend himself against the accusations. According to Rule 56(3) of Dhaka University Order 1973, a teacher can only be dismissed on the grounds of "moral turpitude" or "inefficiency." The same rule says that "no such teacher or officer shall be dismissed unless an inquiry into the charges of moral turpitude or inefficiency is held by an Enquiry Committee on which the teacher or the officer may be represented by a person nominated by him". A member of the Enquiry Committee, who has given a note of dissent to the Committee's decision citing these grounds, told Amnesty International that "there is a serious procedural flaw observed in this trial as none of the two grounds provided by the Rule 56(3) to dismiss a teacher are relevant to the accusations brought against Professor Morshed." Professor Morshed told Amnesty International that Rule 56(3) of the 1973 Order also provides him to have a representative in the Enquiry Committee, which was denied in this case.

On the day of his dismissal, a Dhaka University student affiliated with the student wing of the ruling party Awami League filed a case of sedition with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Dhaka against Professor Morshed. The vaguely worded section 124A of the Bangladesh Penal Code is punishable with life imprisonment.

The vagueness of this section is that anyone can be charged merely for critiquing the government. The legal provisions like this are inconsistent with international human rights law and constitute a violation of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that guarantees the right to freedom of expression and to which Bangladesh is a state party.

In March 2018, some unidentified persons called Professor Morshed and threatened him with death for his opinion in the article. Since then, he received multiple threats of death over phone and social media. Following the first threat in March 2018, he immediately called the University Proctor and sought protection.

In recent years, hundreds of people have been charged and detained under the draconian Digital Security Act 2018. Different provisions of the Act (sections 25, 26, 29 and 31, for example) provide broad and vague definitions of law and can be abused to frame people for merely expressing their opinion. In November 2018, Amnesty International released a report titled "Muzzling Dissent Online", which outlined sections within the DSA which are inconsistent with international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and called on the Bangladesh government to promptly amend the law, and bring it into conformity with international standards.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 11 November 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Md. Morshed Hasan Khan (he/him)