

PUBLIC

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UA 122/09 Fear for safety/Death Threats

BANGLADESH **Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob (m), Journalist**

Journalist Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob was attacked on 11 April by men identifying themselves as supporters of a local Member of Parliament (MP). This followed the publication of several articles he had written criticising the actions of the MP in the Bangla newspaper *Samakal*.

According to testimony from Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob, at 1.30pm on 11 April, he was approached by the local Awami League MP in the village of Maisebary Chowrasta near the town of Gafargaon. The MP told him that he had been elected for a five year term, and that during this period he would not tolerate anyone writing against him. He threatened to give Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob "a lesson" if he wrote another sentence criticising him.

At about 7.30pm later that day, Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob went to a computer shop in Gafargaon in order to send an article to his newspaper. Before he could send the story, two men entered the shop and approached him. They then revealed chopping knives which they had hidden under their shirts. Several other men armed with knives and iron pipes also joined them. One of the men told Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob that the local MP had told them to cut off his head for writing stories against him. The man then attempted to strike Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob's head with a chopping knife. Fortunately Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob managed to move in time, but received several cuts to his hand. The man then attempted to stab him in the stomach. Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob once again managed to deflect the blow, but did receive more cuts to his hand. Another attempt was made to strike him on the head, which he guarded using his left arm. As a result, he received a deep cut at the elbow.

Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob managed to escape the computer shop and once outside, saw that fellow journalists had come to see what was going on. They could not help him however, as they were afraid to pass a large group of men who had joined those who were attacking him. He also saw four police men who did nothing to stop those threatening his life, until he explicitly asked them for help. Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob was then taken by rickshaw to Gafargaon hospital. He was seen by a doctor who treated his injuries which included a deep cut to his left elbow. On the doctor's advice, he was taken to Mymensingh Medical College hospital where an emergency operation was performed. In total Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob spent 17 days in hospital.

On 12 April, a friend reported the attack at the local police station on Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob's behalf. Six people involved in the attack were named and up to ten other unknown men who helped them, were also mentioned. Even though the police registered the complaint, they failed to question any of the accused. When challenged, they also failed to provide an explanation for not investigating the case. Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob and his fellow journalists suspect that the local MP may have used his political influence to prevent the investigation from taking place. However, the MP denies any association with the assailants.

Six of the accused, subsequently obtained anticipatory bail (bail before arrest). Three did so at Mymensingh court and the three others at the High Court. On 30 April, three of the accused, sent Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob a text message on his mobile phone which said:

"Biplob, we will kill you, son of a bitch. Today we have got bail from High Court. If you want to live, withdraw the allegation. [signed] F Fakhrul, Sayot, Biplob [another person], Shafique"

Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob informed the police about the death threat. Police responded by simply recording it, which has left him fearing that he could be attacked again at any time. The attack against Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob is the first of its kind under the present Awami League government. Other journalists in Gafargaon fear that unless the government acts to ensure Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob's safety and bring the attackers to justice, they too will be at risk.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Individuals linked to armed gangs allegedly working for local politicians have frequently attacked journalists for writing articles which criticise politicians in Bangladesh. Attacks were reportedly increased between 2000 and 2005 because of the failure of then Awami League (1996-2001) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) (2001-2006) governments to stop them. At least eight journalists were assassinated during this period. In the face of mounting national and international criticism, the situation improved from late 2005 onwards, but no one has been brought to justice for the attacks or assassinations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language: calling on the authorities in Bangladesh

- to ensure that the attack on Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob and the death threats he has received are promptly and thoroughly investigated and those responsible are brought to justice;
- to ensure that Abdullah Al-Amin Biplob, his family and any witnesses receive the full protection of the law in their efforts to seek justice through the criminal justice system;
- to ensure that all allegations of human rights abuses by members of the ruling party, or its allied parties, 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.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister's Office
Old Sangsad Bhaban
Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215
Bangladesh

Fax: + 88028113244

E-mail: info@pmo.gov.bd

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Advocate Sahara Khatun

Minister of Home Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Dhaka-1000
Bangladesh

Fax: + 88027164788

Email: sobhansikder@yahoo.com

Salutation: Dear Home Minister

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 19 June 2009.