

URGENT ACTION

SECOND CASE FILED AGAINST DISAPPEARED EDITOR

A new case filed under the draconian Digital Security Act against Bangladeshi newspaper editor Shafiqul Islam Kajol, three hours after a CCTV footage shows his last known whereabouts raises further fears of an enforced disappearance. Bangladesh authorities must launch an urgent investigation to determine his fate and whereabouts, release him if he is in their custody and drop all cases against him.

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

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Honourable Minister Khan,

I remain concerned about the fate and whereabouts of **Shafiqul Islam Kajol**, a Bangladeshi newspaper editor and photographer who was last seen in a CCTV footage leaving the premise of his newspaper office on Meher Tower at Hatirpool in Dhaka at 6:51PM on 10 March 2020.

Amnesty International has obtained the copy of a second case that police have registered against Shafiqul Islam Kajol under the draconian Digital Security Act 2018. It is concerning to note that it was issued only three hours after he was last seen on CCTV cameras, and less than 24 hours after the first case was brought against him at 11:55PM on 9 March.

Given the irregular circumstances surrounding his disappearance, Shafiqul Islam Kajol's wife informed the local police in Dhaka the day after he went missing that he did not come back home and urged them to investigate his whereabouts.

I am alarmed to learn that the police refused to register the case, and that it was only after an order by the High Court on 18 March that they accepted the case for investigation. It appears that no headway has been made into the investigation since then.

During the UN Committee Against Torture in July 2019, Bangladesh said that "enforced disappearances were not a frequent occurrence" in the country. It is however important to note that, irrespective of the frequency, an enforced disappearance is a crime under international law.

I therefore call on you, to urge the Bangladesh government to:

- 1. Immediately launch an independent and impartial investigation to determine the fate and whereabouts of Shafiqul Islam Kajol and keep his family fully informed at all times;**
- 2. If Shafiqul Islam Kajol is in custody of any of the State agencies, ensure that he is immediately and unconditionally released and all cases against him are dropped;**
- 3. Promptly ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Shafiqul Islam Kajol, 50, is a photographer and editor of a Bangla daily *Dainik Pokkhokal*, whose fate and whereabouts remain unknown since 10 March 2020, a day after police registered a case against him and 31 others under the draconian Digital Security Act (DSA) 2018.

The day before he went missing, at 11:55PM on 9 March 2020, the ruling Awami League party lawmaker Saifuzzaman Shikhor filed a case under the DSA at the Sher-e-Bangla police station against Shafiqul Islam Kajol and 31 others.

The next day, on 10 March, Shafiqul Islam Kajol arrived on his motorbike at his newspaper office on Meher Tower at Hatirpool, Dhaka at 4:14PM. He parked his motorbike and went into the newspaper building. CCTV footage obtained by Amnesty International shows several unidentified men suspiciously moving around his bike and keeping an eye on it. In six minutes between 5:59PM and 6:05PM, three men appear to tamper with his motorbike. Finally, the journalist is seen leaving the place on his motorbike alone at 6:51PM. That is the last time anyone has seen or heard from him.

Roughly three hours later, at 10:10PM on 10 March, police registered a new case against Shafiqul Islam Kajol filed by Usmin Ara Bailey, a member of the Awami League party, who accused him of committing “extortion” by “obtaining information illegally” and publishing “false, intimidating and defamatory” information on Facebook and Messenger under sections 25, 26 and 29 of the DSA. Usmin Ara Bailey has said in her statement that she filed the case at the Hazaribag police station after consultation with the central leadership of the ruling Awami League party.

Police has denied having him in custody, but his family fears he could be a victim of enforced disappearance. Bangladesh authorities have an obligation under the Constitution that “no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty save in accordance with the law.”

“When everyone else is worried about Covid-19, my family is worried about where my father is, and we cannot think about anything else. I hope no one has to live through this uncertainty,” Monorom Polok, son of Shafiqul Islam Kajol told Amnesty International.

Human rights organisation Odhikar documented 34 incidents of alleged enforced disappearance in 2019. Eight of them were later found dead, 17 were shown arrested while the fate and whereabouts of the other nine remain unknown.

The UN Committee Against Torture has urged Bangladesh to ensure that, “no one is held in secret or incommunicado detention anywhere” and that “law enforcement authorities must immediately cease engaging in the practice of unacknowledged detention”.

When reviewing Bangladesh’s initial report on its implementation of the Convention Against Torture, the UN Committee Against Torture regretted that Bangladesh did not provide any information about the status of investigations into allegations of enforced disappearances.

The Committee called on Bangladesh to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 13 May 2020

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Shafiqul Islam Kajol (he/him/his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/1980/2020/en/>