



a joint programme



The Observatory
for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders



ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

BANGLADESH: Immediately release Mahmudur Rahman, arbitrarily imprisoned since 2013

Geneva-Paris-Hong Kong, February 3, 2016. *The authorities of Bangladesh should immediately release journalist Mahmudur Rahman, who completed 1,000 days in custody without trial on January 6, 2016 as part of the Government's efforts to stifle critical voices in the country, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (a OMCT-FIDH joint programme) and the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) said today.*

Mr. **Mahmudur Rahman**, Acting Editor of the *Amar Desh* newspaper, has been detained since April 11, 2013, after he was charged with sedition and unlawful publication of a Skype conversation between International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) Judge Md Nizamul Huq and an external consultant in December 2012. At the time of his arrest, the *Amar Desh* office and its press were raided by the police, journalists and press-operators were beaten and driven out, and the press building was sealed. It has remained closed since. From April 11 to 24, 2013, Mr. Rahman was subjected to torture while in police custody.

On August 13, 2015, Mr. Mahmudur Rahman was sentenced to three years in prison by a Dhaka Court for charges brought against him in 2010 by the Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), which accused him of failing to submit his wealth statement.

Prior to his arrest in 2013, Mr. Rahman had already been the target of judicial harassment in relation to defamation and sedition cases brought against him by the Bangladeshi authorities, notably for publishing a report on alleged corruption practices of the Prime Minister and her relatives. He was subjected to torture and ill-treatment while he was arbitrarily detained in relation to these charges from June 2010 to March 2011.

The Government has now mounted approximately 70 fabricated and politically motivated cases against Mr. Rahman. He has to travel three to four times a week from Kashimpur Jail 2 to the court of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka, for hearings on these cases. Each journey, covering a total distance of almost 100 kilometres a day, takes more than four hours each way in a hot and humid prison van with very little ventilation. This type of ill-treatment is especially concerning due to 63 year-old Mahmudur Rahman's health, as he suffers from various ailments aggravated by the torture he suffered while in police custody and nearly four years of confinement at Kashimpur Jail 2. In addition, his family members - including his wife and his mother - have also been threatened and harassed by the Government.

Mr. Rahman's current prolonged detention is illegal according to both the Criminal Procedure Code and the Constitution of Bangladesh. The Criminal Procedure Code clearly states that if a trial cannot be completed within a specific time (in this case, 180 days) the accused person should be released on bail.

Our organisations reiterate their call to the authorities of Bangladesh to immediately and unconditionally release and to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Mahmudur Rahman, whose detention is emblematic of the increasing repression of dissenting voices in the country.

Our organisations more generally urge the Bangladeshi Government to uphold its obligation under international law to ensure that its people can exercise and defend the right to freedom of expression as well as all other human rights.

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*The **Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders** was created in 1997 by the **World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)** and **FIDH**. The overall objective of this programme is to strengthen the action of human rights defenders in defence of victims and to reduce their isolation and vulnerability. It is also based on the absolute necessity to establish a systematic response to the repression they face.*

*The **Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)** works towards the radical rethinking and fundamental redesigning of justice institutions in order to protect and promote human rights in Asia. Established in 1984, the Hong Kong based organisation is a Laureate of the Right Livelihood Award, 2014.*