

URGENT ACTION

81-YEAR-OLD JOURNALIST DETAINED WITHOUT CHARGE

Shafik Rehman, an 81-year-old Bangladeshi journalist arrested on 16 April, is still detained without charge in Dhaka Central Jail more than four months after his arrest. He now has access to his family and legal team but concerns remain that he is not being granted adequate medical care. His appeal hearing will take place on 30 August.

Shafik Rehman is a well-respected journalist who is currently the editor of the monthly *Mouchake Dhil* magazine. He is a known supporter of the main opposition party, the Bangladesh National Party, and has been targeted by the authorities for his journalistic work several times in the past.

Shafik Rehman was arrested on 16 April, suspected of being involved in a plot to kidnap and assassinate Sajib Wazed Joy, the son of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. After a period on remand, Shafik Rehman was sent to Kashimpur Central Jail on 27 April, where he was kept in solitary confinement and denied adequate medical care, despite suffering from diabetes and a heart condition. On 22 May Shafik Rehman was moved to Dhaka Central Jail and is no longer in solitary confinement.

Although it has been more than four months since his arrest, Shafik Rehman has not been charged with any crime. Under international law, authorities have a duty to inform him of the case against him, and either promptly charge or release him. He has had his bail plea rejected three times – the most recent of which was on 7 June by the High Court. Shafik Rehman was granted permission by a four-member Appellate Division bench to appeal this decision before the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court bail hearing will take place on 30 August.

Shafik Rehman is being granted some medical care in the jail hospital and on 17 July the Appellate Division bench instructed jail authorities to provide adequate medical care to him, and if need be, to have him admitted to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University. Shafik Rehman's family, however, remain deeply concerned about his deteriorating health and say that the current level of medical care available to him is not adequate.

Please write immediately in English, Bengali or your own language:

- Calling on the Bangladeshi authorities to immediately release Shafik Rehman unless he is promptly charged with an internationally recognizable criminal offence;
- Calling on the Bangladeshi authorities to ensure Shafik Rehman is provided with the appropriate medical care he needs; and if necessary that he is transferred to adequate hospital outside prison;
- Urging them to continue to allow him regular access to his lawyer and visits from his family.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 OCTOBER 2016 TO:

President
Md. Abdul Hamid
President's Office
Bangabhaban, Dhaka
Bangladesh
Fax: +880 2 9585502
Salutation: Honourable President

And copies to:
State Minister
Ministry of Home Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat, Building-8 (1st & 3rd Floor),
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax: +880 2 9573711
Email: secretary@mha.gov.bd
Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR MD. ABDUL HANNAN , 28 Queen's Gate London SW7 5JA, 020 7584 0081, Fax 020 7581 7477, info@bhclondon.org.uk, www.bhclondon.org.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 120/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA13/4113/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Police said Shafik Rehman was arrested in relation to a pending criminal case registered in August 2015 for “conspiring to abduct and assassinate” Sajib Wazed Joy, the son of Bangladesh’s Prime Minister who is living in the United States and serves as Information and Technology Adviser. This plot was allegedly concocted in the USA and relates to a US court case in March 2015 when three men were convicted of bribery offenses. Credible media reports have since, however, raised serious questions about the Bangladeshi authorities’ claims that US court documents implicate Shafik Rehman in a plot to “kidnap and kill” Sajib Wazed, or that such a plot even existed.

After his arrest on 16 April, Shafik Rehman was initially remanded, but was placed on 27 April in Kashimpur Central Jail awaiting trial, for which a date has not been set. Requests for him to be released on bail have been denied twice by separate courts in Dhaka without explanation, according to his legal team, and most recently by the High Court in June. Shafik Rehman was granted permission to appeal this decision to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court bail hearing will take place on 30 August 2016.

The conditions of Shafik Rehman’s detention violate Bangladesh’s obligation under international law to ensure that all people deprived of their liberty are treated humanely and are not subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Law enforcement officials and prison authorities are responsible for protecting the health of people in their custody, and provide health care free of charge that matches what is available to the outside community. Additionally, under international law, Bangladesh has a duty to inform Shaik Rehman of the case against him, and either promptly charge or release him. Article 9(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party, provides that “anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him”.

The arrest of Shafik Rehman comes amidst a wider backdrop of restrictions on freedom of expression in Bangladesh. The Awami League government has since 2014 intensified a clampdown on independent media. Just in 2016, at least three other high-profile editors have been charged with sedition or defamation – Mahfuz Anam of The Daily Star, Mahmudur Rahman of Amar Desh and Matiur Rahman of Prothom Alo.

Further information on UA: 120/16 Index: ASA 13/4691/2016 Issue Date: 24 August 2016