

URGENT ACTION

STUDENT ACTIVIST ARRESTED FOR FACEBOOK POSTS

Dilip Roy, a 22-year-old student activist, has been arrested in Rajshahi in Bangladesh after making two Facebook posts criticising Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. He has been denied bail and could face up to 14 years in prison.

Dilip Roy is studying at Rajshahi University in western Bangladesh, where he is the General Secretary of student organisation Biplobi Chhatra Maitri. He was arrested by police on 28 August after criticising Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in two Facebook posts. The posts focused on Sheikh Hasina's support for a proposed coal-fired power plant in Rampal in southern Bangladesh, which many environmental activists oppose as it could have a damaging effect on Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest.

After Dilip Roy was arrested, a member of the local chapter of the Chhatra League – the student wing of the ruling party Awami League – filed a case against him under Section 57 of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Act for making “derogatory remarks” about Bangladesh's Prime Minister and the Awami League. Under this draconian law, an individual can face up to 14 years in jail for “publishing fake, obscene or defaming information in electronic form” or information which “prejudices the image of the State or person.” The ICT Act is often used by the Bangladeshi authorities to target, harass and imprison critics.

Dilip Roy is currently in police detention in Rajshahi, where he has access to his lawyer and family, and has not been subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment according to his lawyer. His request for bail was rejected by the Rajshahi Magistrate Court on 31 August, with a second bail hearing scheduled for 4 September. He could be moved to the capital, Dhaka, to stand trial in a special court which handles cases under the ICT Act.

Please write immediately in Bengali or English:

- Calling on the Bangladeshi authorities to immediately drop the charges against Dilip Roy and unconditionally release him;
- Urging them to stop harassing, charging and imprisoning activists who have done nothing but peacefully exercise their right to freedom of expression; and
- Urging them to repeal Section 57 of the ICT Act and other laws that are not compatible with Bangladesh's international human rights obligations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 OCTOBER 2016 TO:

Minister of Law, Justice and
Parliamentary Affairs

Anisul Huq

Law and Justice Division

Building 4

Bangladesh Secretariat Dhaka - 1000

Bangladesh

Email: secretary@lawjusticediv.gov.bd

Salutation: Honourable Minister

Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister's Office

Old Sangshad Bhaban, Tejgaon, Dhaka

1215, Bangladesh

Fax: +880 2 9133722

Email: info@pmo.gov.bd

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Home Affairs

Asaduzzaman Khan

Bangladesh Secretariat, Building-8 (1st
& 3rd Floor),

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: +880 2 9573711

Email: secretary@mha.gov.bd

Salutation: Honourable 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.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Dilip Roy is the General Secretary of the non-violent student movement Biplobi Chhatra Maitri at Rajshahi University, one of the biggest universities in Bangladesh. The movement advocates for a range of left-wing causes, which sometimes has led to friction with the Chhatra League, the student wing of the ruling Awami League. In the two Facebook posts which led to his arrests, Dilip Roy criticised Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for remarks she had made at a recent press conference on the proposed Rampal power plant. Environmental activists have argued that the power plant will have a damaging effect on Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest. One of the posts reads: "Prime Minister Hasina, maybe you want to see another Phulbari - I congratulate you for that! [As far as] I know, [the people of the country] will happily help you to gain this experience." (Phulbari Coal Project is another proposed coal mine which has been put on hold after strong resistance from environmental activists and residents in the area).

The ICT Act – first passed in 2006 and amended in 2013 – has for years been used by the authorities in Bangladesh to curtail the right to freedom of expression. Section 57 of the ICT Act is of particular concern, as it is vaguely formulated and imposes restrictions on freedom of expression beyond those allowed under international law. Anyone found guilty of violating Section 57 faces a prison sentence of minimum seven years and maximum 14 years. Amnesty International has for years urged the Bangladeshi authorities to repeal Section 57, see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/005/2014/en/>

According to the human rights organisation Odhikar, at least 59 people have been arrested under the ICT Act between January 2014 and July 2016. Those targeted often include those who, like Dilip Roy, are perceived to have criticised the Prime Minister, her family or the ruling party online. A recent example is the arrest of three journalists of the online news portal banglamail24.com on 9 August 2016. They had a case filed against them under the ICT Act simply for publishing a news story refuting a rumour that Sheikh Hasina's son Joy Wazeb had died in a plane crash.

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