

Human rights in Bangladesh: a Journalist has Died in Custody after Criticising the Government on Facebook

What is the issue?

- **Mushtaq Ahmed**, a Bangladeshi writer and journalist, died in custody on **Thursday 25th February 2021** after being held in pre-trial detention for nearly ten months. He was just 53 years old.
- The cause of his death is not immediately clear, but there are allegations of torture.
- Ahmed was charged with the ‘crime’ of criticising the government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic on Facebook. He was refused bail six times.
- The charge was brought under the infamous **Digital Security Act (DSA)**, which has been described by **Reporters Without Borders** as a [“custom-made judicial weapon for silencing journalists”](#).
- His co-defendant, political cartoonist **Ahmed Kabir Kishore**, remains in jail. Both were arrested in May 2020 and refused bail. Kishore is in poor health, having suffered an ear infection and heel pain.
- The cases are similar to that of **Shafiqul Islam Kajol** who was arrested last year. Kajol was also charged with ‘criminal defamation’ under the DSA for posts on Facebook. Thankfully, due to a high-profile campaign by Kajol’s 20-year-old son, he was granted bail in December. Ahmed has not been so lucky. But his death should not go unnoticed; he deserves justice.
- There have been protests in support of Ahmed and against the DSA in Dhaka over the last few days. These have been met with [a very heavy-handed police response](#). We have been provided with photos at **Appendix 1** which show that **protestors have been attacked**. Further photos posted on Facebook by Shahidul Alam, the photojournalist and TIME person of the year, appear at **Appendix 2**.
- Bangladesh’s record on press freedom is already poor with it ranking **151 out of 180 countries** in Reporters Without Borders’ [Press Freedom Index](#). Cases like this continue to illustrate why this is.
- In these uncertain times, it is vitally important that the UK takes strong action to defend journalists - and press freedom - all around the world.

What should the UK Government be doing about it?

- We are pleased to see the UK High Commissioner, Mr Robert Chatterton Dickson, [sign a joint statement](#) with twelve other OECD ambassadors raising ‘grave concern’ about Ahmed’s death.

Contact us: [@LabourCHR](#) | www.lchr.org.uk

Author: matthew.turner@lchr.org.uk

- However, the UK government needs to do more and the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, or the Minister of State for Asia, Nigel Adams, should raise this case directly with their counterparts in Bangladesh.
- Action by the UK Government could make a big difference. In October, Stephen Kinnock [published a letter to Nigel Adams raising Kajol's case](#). In December, Kajol was granted bail.
- **The UK Government must call for the Bangladesh authorities to: (1) conduct a transparent and independent investigation into the circumstances of Mushtaq Ahmed's death; and (2) release his co-defendant, Kishore.**

How you can support:

- Write to Dominic Raab and / or Nigel Adams asking them to raise this case with their counterparts in Bangladesh.
- Write to the Bangladesh High Commissioner, H. E. Ms. Saida Muna Tasneem, to raise your concerns about this case. Her contact details can be found [here](#).
- Share your support for the calls by the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) for an independent and transparent investigation.
- Share your support on social media using the hashtag [#JusticeforMushtaq](#) - e.g. *Bangladeshi writer and journalist, Mushtaq Ahmed, has died in custody after criticising the government on Facebook. The Foreign Secretary @DominicRaab should raise this urgently with his counterpart in Bangladesh. #JusticeForMushtaq*

Further reading:

- [Human Rights Watch](#): Bangladesh: Writer Dies After 9 Months in Custody.
- [Committee to Protect Journalists](#): Bangladeshi writer Mushtaq Ahmed dies in jail; cartoonist Kabir Kishore allegedly abused in custody
- [Al Jazeera](#): Anger in Bangladesh over dissident writer's death in prison
- [Labour Campaign for Human Rights](#): Britain and Bangladesh Recommendations
- [Labour Campaign for Human Rights](#): Britain and Bangladesh Full Briefing

Contact us: [@LabourCHR](https://twitter.com/LabourCHR) | www.lchr.org.uk
Author: matthew.turner@lchr.org.uk

Appendix 1 – Photos from protests by Md Ibrahim:



Contact us: [@LabourCHR](https://twitter.com/LabourCHR) | www.lchr.org.uk
Author: matthew.turner@lchr.org.uk



Contact us: @LabourCHR | www.lchr.org.uk

Author: matthew.turner@lchr.org.uk

Appendix 2 – Facebook post from Shahidul Alam:



Shahidul Alam

Yesterday at 16:15

Police attack peaceful march protesting death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in jail. 7 arrested, many injured. Repression in Bangladesh reaches new heights.



Jannatul Mawa

Yesterday at 14:38

লেখক মুশতাক হত্যার প্রতিবাদে ঢাকায় ছাত্র জনতার মশাল মিছিলে পুলিশের হামলা, টিয়ারসেল নিক্ষেপ। ছাত্র কাউন্সিলের কেন্দ্রীয় অর্থ সম্পাদক এনী চৌধুরী ও প্রকাশনা সম্পাদ... See more

Police attacked the torch procession of students in Dhaka protesting the murder of writer Mushtaq, tearcell thrown. Many including the central finance secretary of the Student Council Ani Chowdhury and publication secretary Rajeshwar Das Gupta, Chhatra Front, Sajib Chauhan, Nitu, Fahad of the Student Union are injured.

Many have been arrested by police

-Saiedul Hoq Nissan

Hide Translation · Rate this translation