

PUBLIC

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Prisoner of Conscience/Fear of torture

11 December 2001

BANGLADESH

Shahriar Kabir (m), journalist

Prisoner of conscience and journalist, Shahriar Kabir was removed from the Central jail in the capital Dhaka, on 10 December by plainclothes policemen. He is reportedly being interrogated at an undisclosed detention centre and is at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

Shahriar Kabir was arrested on 22 November by members of the Special Branch Police Force, upon his return from Kolkata, India, where he had been interviewing Hindus who had recently fled persecution in Bangladesh. The police seized his passport, five video cassettes, 13 audio cassettes, three CDs, several unprocessed films and his camera. In a press release of 24 November, the government claim he was detained because "*...it was later found that the videos contain objectionable and misleading statements that are detrimental to communal harmony and subversive of the state*", and also because Shahriar Kabir "*...was involved in tarnishing the image of Bangladesh and of the government in the outside world*".

The next day, the police asked the court to remand Shahriar Kabir into police custody for further interrogation. This was granted, but the court stayed the remand order for two weeks. Shahriar Kabir was subsequently sent to Dhaka Central Jail under the Special Powers Act, which allows an individual to be detained on unspecified charges.

On 1 December, the Bangladesh High Court asked the government to explain within one week why Shahriar Kabir's detention was not illegal. The ruling followed a writ petition by his lawyers challenging his detention. On 9 December, the government reportedly directed the police to file a complaint against him under section 123A (condemnation of the creation of state and advocacy of the abolition of its sovereignty), section 124A (sedition) and section 505A (prejudicial act by words or other means) of the Bangladesh Penal Code. The next day, Shahriar Kabir was taken to an undisclosed detention centre for interrogation. He has not yet however, been formally charged.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that Shahriar Kabir has been taken to an undisclosed detention centre with no access to lawyers or family visits;
- expressing concern that he may be subjected to torture;
- urging the government to make his whereabouts public and allow his lawyers and family to visit him;
- urging the government to release him immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoners of conscience detained for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia
Office of the Prime Minister
Gona Bhaban
Sher-e Bangla Nagar
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Telegrams: Prime Minister Zia, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Fax: +880 2 811 3243

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mr Nurul Huda
Inspector General of Police
Police Headquarters
Fulbaria
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Telegrams: Inspector General Huda, Fulbaria, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: +880 2 956 3362

Salutation: Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

Diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 January 2002.