

7 September 2018

Bangladesh: False charges against human rights defender Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury

On 6 September 2018 **Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury** was arrested by police from his home on the basis of false extortion charges. The human rights defender is currently detained and a request for one day's remand for interrogation has been granted by a Dhaka court.

[Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury](#) is a human rights defender and Secretary-General of **Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity**, a platform which works to ensure passengers' rights by documenting road accidents and denouncing irregularities and poor administration of the transport sector in Bangladesh.

On 6 September 2018, at approximately 3:00 a.m., Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury was arrested by police from his house in Sanarpar, Narayanganj, on the basis of false extortion charges which had been made against him. The charges relate to a complaint lodged on 4 September 2018 by Mohammed Dulal, who claimed to be the Secretary of Mirpur Road Workers' Committee. Mohammed Dulal complained that the defender had attempted to extort him into paying Tk 200,000 (approximately €2,000), under threat of the publication of misleading reports against the complainant and his organisation.

The report filed against the human rights defender states that the complainant handed the defender TK 10,000 (approximately €100) towards the amount allegedly requested, in front of Sony Cinema Hall in Mirpur on 3 September 2018. The Officer-in-Charge of Mirpur Police Station stated that police carried out a preliminary investigation and took three witness statements claiming that this incident took place. However, there is dispute over the identity of the complainant, as attempts to call the phone number included in the complaint have been unsuccessful, and, upon visiting the address provided, local reporters were informed that no person named Mohammed Dulal lived there. Transport workers in the area have also stated that they are not aware of a person called Mohammed Dulal, or the organisation that he claimed to represent.

The same day that Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury was arrested, a Dhaka court placed the human rights defender under one day's remand for interrogation, rejecting his petition for bail. The investigating officer in the case had initially petitioned the Court for seven days' remand. If the defender does not receive bail, he will remain in detention.

Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury's family members and members of his organisation believe that the charges against the defender have been fabricated in order to silence his critical voice. The defender's arrest comes just days before the proposed Road Transport Act 2018 is due to be introduced to parliament. Critics of the Act say that, rather than serving the public interest, it is designed to benefit transport owners and the government.

Front Line Defenders is concerned over the false charges and judicial harassment against Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury as it believes that they are a result of his peaceful and legitimate work in the defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the Authorities in Bangladesh to:

1. Immediately release and drop all charges against human rights defender Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury as it believes that his detention and charges against him are a direct result of his work

in the protection of passengers' rights and the diffusion of information related to human rights violations occasioned by the activities of the transport sector.

2. Ensure that the treatment of Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the "*Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*", adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Bangladesh are able to carry out their peaceful and legitimate work in a safe environment, free from all threats, acts of reprisal and harassment, including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 6 (b): "*Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms*", and to Article 12 (2): "*(2) The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.*"

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director

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