

27 April 2016

Bangladesh – Killing of LGBT rights defenders Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Tonoy

On 25 April 2016, human rights defenders Mr **Xulhaz Mannan** and Mr **Mahbub Tonoy** were killed by a group of unidentified men in their apartment in Kalabagan area, Dhaka.

[Xulhaz Mannan](#) and [Mahbub Tonoy](#) were prominent LGBT rights defenders. Xulhaz Mannan was Senior Editor of **Roopbaan**, Bangladesh's first LGBT magazine, launched in 2014. The magazine aims to promote wider tolerance of people of diverse sexual orientations by people in Bangladesh. Xulhaz Mannan also worked for USAID at the time of incident. Previously the human rights defender had spent seven years as a Protocol Officer at the United States Embassy in Bangladesh. Mahbub Tonoy, who was involved in a theatre group, also assisted on a regular basis with the publication of the magazine. Both human rights defenders were among the organisers of the annual 'rainbow rally' in Dhaka, which since 2014 had been held on 14 April.

On the afternoon of 25 April 2016, Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Tonoy were attacked in their apartment in Kalabagan by a group of approximately six armed men. Both human rights defenders received serious knife wounds to the head and neck and died soon after. The mother of Xulhaz Mannan and one of his house helpers were also allegedly present during the incident but sustained no serious injuries. The attackers managed to enter the building, bypassing the guard, by pretending to be couriers delivering a parcel for Xulhaz Mannan. In the course of the incident the guard was also seriously wounded. He is currently undergoing medical treatment at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

On 14 April 2016, despite the cancellation of the 'rainbow rally', approximately twenty representatives of the LGBT community gathered in the centre of Dhaka to celebrate the Bengali New Year festival taking place in the city. Four of them were arrested by police and released only after relatives had been informed of their homosexual orientation.

The 'rainbow rally', which promotes the equality of members of the LGBT community, had taken place the previous two years but was banned in 2016 by the police, due to security concerns. A week before the event was due to take place, a smear campaign was started on social media against the organisers and participants of the rally. They received threats of physical attack, allegedly coming from radical Islamic groups, which claimed both the rally and the Bengali festival were anti-Islamic. It should be mentioned that homosexual relations are criminalised in Bangladesh, and in the past many LGBT rights defenders have been forced into exile.

The killing of Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Tonoy adds to a series of horrific murders of bloggers and academics in the country. Earlier this month a professor from the Rajshahi University and a blogger were killed. The perpetrators of these crimes, allegedly linked to radical Islamic groups operating in Bangladesh, have not yet been held to account.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the killing of human rights defenders Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Tonoy, which it believes is directly linked to their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence

of LGBT rights in Bangladesh. Front Line Defenders further expresses deep concern at the inability of the country's government to bring to justice the persons responsible for murders of human rights defenders, academics and bloggers in Bangladesh.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Bangladesh to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the murder of human rights defenders Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Tonoy with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Bangladesh are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.