

19 May 2021

Bangladesh: Journalist and woman human rights defender Rozina Islam arrested

On 17 May 2021, after being arbitrarily detained for several hours by officials of the Ministry of Health in Dhaka, woman human rights defender and investigative journalist **Rozina Islam** was handed over to Shahbagh police. Rozina Islam was arrested under sections 379 and 411 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and sections 3 and 5 of the Official Secrets Act for allegedly collecting sensitive government documents and taking photos of them. On 18 May 2021, the woman human rights defender was brought before the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, following which she was sent to Kashimpur Central Jail, where she is currently being detained.

[Rozina Islam](#) is a woman human rights defender and a senior journalist with the Bengali Newspaper Prothom Alo. She has extensively reported on human rights issues in Bangladesh and most recently published a series of investigative reports on the government's weak management of the COVID-19 pandemic, including on corruption and mismanagement of the health sector. She has also received several international and national awards for her investigative reports revealing governmental corruption.

On 17 May 2021, Rozina Islam was arrested at the Secretariat of the Ministry of Health in Dhaka, in connection with a case filed by the Health Ministry under sections 379 and 411 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which relate to theft and possession of items of theft, and sections 3 and 5 of the Official Secrets Act of 1923, which relate to 'disclosing information, documents or other articles relating to international relations' and 'disclosure of information, documents or other articles protected from disclosure', respectively. If charged and convicted, Rozina Islam faces up to fourteen years in prison and the death penalty.

Prior to Rozina Islam being handed over to the Shahbagh police, the woman human rights defender was detained for five hours at the Secretariat of the Health Ministry and was accused of taking photos of important official documents at the office of the personal secretary to the Secretary of Health Services Division. Rozina Islam has denied all the accusations made against her. Furthermore, while being held at the Secretariat of the Health Ministry, Rozina Islam was reportedly aggressively frisked by officials and her mobile phone was confiscated.

The following day, on 18 May 2021, Rozina Islam was presented before the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, where police requested for her to be remanded in custody for five days. However, this request was denied by the Court and the woman human rights defender was sent to Kashimpur Central Jail, where she is still in custody. She has had access to her lawyer since her arrest.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, several human rights defenders who have expressed their concerns over the government's handling of the pandemic have been the target of arbitrary [arrests](#) and judicial harassment. Rozina Islam's arrest adds to the growing list of those who have been targeted in this manner for their critiquing of the government.

Front Line Defenders condemns the arrest of journalist and woman human rights defender Rozina Islam and believes that the woman human rights defender is being targeted solely as a result of her peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Bangladesh to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release woman human rights defenders Rozina Islam and

drop all charges against her, as Front Line Defenders believes that she is being targeted solely as a result of her legitimate human rights works;

2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Rozina Islam, while she is in custody;
3. Repeal the colonial era Official Secrets Act and bring necessary amendment to the Penal Code to bring it in accordance with the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a party;
4. 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, including judicial harassment.

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