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## **Bangladesh: Attempt to frame human rights defender Sheikh Saifullah on trumped up charges**

On 30 January 2021, an audio clip of a telephone conversation was leaked through social media, believed to be between a local lawmaker and a police official, where the latter was directed to orchestrate a bomb explosion and subsequently arrest environmental rights defender Sheikh Saifullah for the crime.

[Sheikh Saifullah](#) is an environmental rights defender and a member of the Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA). He has been an active community leader working of issues of the environment, especially on matters of illegal land occupation.

On 30 January 2021, a telephone conversation believed to be between a lawmaker from Keshabpur Upazila and the officer-in-charge of Keshabpur police station was leaked, during which the lawmaker instructed the police official to stage a bomb explosion and to press charges for the crime on environmental rights defender, Sheikh Saifullah. An individual, identifying himself as a member of parliament, gave a detailed description of the setup and asked the officer to send plain clothed officials to orchestrate the explosion at a brick field and then lodge a case of attempted robbery. The individual insisted that the case must be filed against the environmental rights defender Sheikh Saifullah.

Sheikh Saifullah has previously faced threats for his work against a brick construction site which has been illegally set up on agricultural land. Due to the illegal manner in which the construction site was set up and its negative impact on the environment, the defender mobilised the local community to campaign against the setting up on the factory. With the help of villagers, BELA filed a public interest litigation in the High Court asking it to declare the brick construction site illegal. The Court passed a judgement in favour of the applicants, and the Appeals court sustained that order, following which a part of the brick construction site was demolished on 20 December 2020. This was not received well by those who profited from the operating of the factory and has led to them targeting the human rights defender.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the contents of the leaked telephone conversation and the attempt to frame environment rights defender Sheikh Saifullah, as it believes he is being targeted solely for his legitimate and peaceful work in the protection of human rights.

### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Bangladesh to:**

1. Immediately open an investigation into the incident and hold the perpetrators accountable;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the human rights defender, in consultation with him;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in the Bangladesh and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.