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21 January 2026

Bangladesh: Woman human rights defender Layeqa Bashir faces arbitrary dismissal

On 18 January 2026, woman human rights defender and academic, **Layeqa Bashir**, learned of a letter terminating her contract employment at the University of Asia Pacific, which was circulated on social media and signed by the University's registrar. To date, the woman human rights defender has not received an official letter terminating her contract of employment. This recent incident is part of a wider smear campaign, acts of intimidation and threats orchestrated against Layeqa Bashir.

[Layeqa Bashir](#) is a woman human rights defender and an Assistant Professor of Sociology in the Department of Basic Sciences and Humanities at the University of Asia Pacific, a private university in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She serves as a convenor for the University Complaints Committee which advances accountability for gender-based violence. She is also a member of the University Teachers Network, a platform of university teachers who actively defend academic freedom, freedom of expression and the right to education. During the July 2024 Student Movement, she played a frontline role in peacefully protesting and supporting the movement's call for democratic reform in Bangladesh.

On the evening of 18 January 2026, Layeqa Bashir was alerted to the circulation of a letter stating the termination of her employment contract as Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Asia Pacific. The letter was circulated on Facebook and had been signed by the University's registrar. Earlier in the day, hundreds of students gathered on the University campus and conducted a press conference demanding the resignation of Layeqa Bashir. Throughout the day, the assembled group of students exerted sustained pressure on University officials. To date, the woman human rights defender has not received an official letter from the University, terminating her contract of employment.

On 12 January 2026, Layeqa Bashir was informed by the Head of Department for Basic Sciences and Humanities, via telephone, that the University had decided to suspend her temporarily. She was offered certain benefits, if she followed this pressure and resigned.

These actions occur just months after she had acted in her capacity as Convener of the University's 'Complaints Committee', investigating a case of sexual harassment in which she proposed disciplinary action against a senior University staff member. This recommendation led to dissatisfaction among certain senior officials and the accused perpetrator themselves. The woman human rights defender has also been subjected to an online smear campaign stemming from events that took place in mid-December 2025.

On 10 December 2025, Layeqa Bashir uploaded a post on her personal Facebook page referring to a high profile double murder case that took place in Mohammadpur, allegedly committed by a veiled domestic worker. The post, which was set to "Friends Only" and not publicly visible, stated that covering faces with veils makes it difficult to identify suspects of crime. It also suggested that the growing practice of face-covering may contribute to increasing crime. In response to the private Facebook post, some former students of the University of Asia Pacific began issuing threats and spreading defamatory narratives about Layeqa Bashir online.

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On 14 December 2025, the University's Vice Chancellor verbally instructed her to submit her resignation immediately. On 15 December 2025, Layeqa Bashir met with some University officials including the Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor, and the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees as well as other senior officials, where she verbally requested a proper investigation. After this, University officials called for fresh complaints from students and formed an investigation committee. Cyberbullying against Layeqa Bashir continued from several student-run Facebook pages and groups, where she was labeled as "Islamophobic."

On 22 December 2025, concerned for her physical safety amid escalating online threats, Layeqa Bashir filed a complaint at Tejgaon police station over the harassment she was facing. In the weeks prior to the letter of termination, right-wing online groups continued to harass Layeqa Bashir and issued various threats against her, including threats to her physical and psychological integrity.

The smear campaign, threats and disciplinary actions taken against woman human rights defender, Layeqa Bashir, demonstrate part of a larger trend where those in positions of authority have repeatedly sought to suppress freedom of expression and academic freedom, through coercion and pressure, which increasingly targets progressive and secular groups in Bangladesh.

Front Line Defenders believes that Layeqa Bashir is being targeted for her human rights work and active role in promoting democracy, academic freedom, and calling for accountability against gender-based violence.

Front Line Defenders call on the relevant authorities in Bangladesh to:

1. Immediately restore Layeqa Bashir's employment contract and establish an independent investigation into the online smear campaign and threats made against her;
2. Guarantee Layeqa Bashir's right to due process, including access to all complaints filed against her, and protection from arbitrary dismissal without proper hearing;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Layeqa Bashir;
4. Ensure that all human rights defenders in Bangladesh can carry out their human rights activities without the fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions.

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