

Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina
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Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,

I am gravely concerned about the allegations of torture of cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore and writer Mushtaq Ahmed who had been held in pretrial detention for nine months since May 2020 for posting satirical cartoons and comments critical of your government on social media.

Mushtaq Ahmed died in prison on 25 February 2021. A week later, on 4 March, Ahmed Kabir Kishore was released on bail for six months only. The cartoonist told Amnesty International that they both were tortured while in custody of one or more state security agencies before their arrest was officially recorded on 5 May 2021.

In addition to no longer being able to hear on his right ear, Ahmed Kabir Kishore also has difficulty walking due to pain in his left knee and ankle which shows the urgent need of proper medical attention to him.

Charged under Bangladesh's draconian Digital Security Act, Ahmed Kabir Kishore and nine others in the same case could face up to 10 years in prison solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, if convicted.

Drawing cartoons and posting criticisms online aren't crime. Under international human rights law including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party, "the value placed upon uninhibited expression is particularly high". No one should have to die solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

I urge your government to:

- Immediately and unconditionally drop all charges against Ahmed Kabir Kishore and all those accused or detained solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- Promptly, thoroughly, impartially, independently and transparently investigate the death in prison of Mushtaq Ahmed, allegation of torture of Ahmed Kabir Kishore and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- Repeal the Digital Security Act unless it can be amended in line with international human rights law including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party.

Yours sincerely,