

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina  
Prime Minister's Office  
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Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,

I write to you with grave concern about Shahnewaz Chowdhury, an engineer and activist, who was arrested at midnight from his Gandamara residence in Banshkhali on 28 May 2021, solely for sharing his opinion on Facebook.

In the Facebook post, Shahnewaz Chowdhury expressed his opinion that a coal-fired power plant in Banshkhali was environmentally destructive and criticised the incidents that allegedly led to the killing of 12 people during protests in the plant. Believing that the power plant has not contributed to the development that people expected, he encouraged the youth to resist injustice and support development through fearless writing.

For this, he has been accused of posting “false and offensive information”, “tarnishing the reputation of the power plant” and “creating animosity, instability and chaos” under sections 25, 29 and 31 of the draconian Digital Security Act (DSA). He could face up to 10 years in prison, if convicted.

The DSA is being used by the authorities to target critical voices and silence dissent. Shahnewaz Chowdhury is being punished simply for sharing his personal opinion online. Expressing an opinion is not a crime. His arrest is a clear violation of the right to freedom of expression under international human rights law including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party.

I urge your government to:

- Drop the case against Shahnewaz Chowdhury and immediately and unconditionally release him and all those accused solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- Repeal the Digital Security Act unless it can be amended in line with international human rights law including the ICCPR, to which Bangladesh is a state party

Yours sincerely,