

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina  
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Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,

I am writing about the egregious situation of Khadijatul Kubra, a second-year student at Jagannath University in Dhaka, who has been in custody for a year without charges. Two cases were filed against her in 2020, under the Digital Security Act (DSA), over a webinar she hosted where a Canada-based panellist made some critical comments about the government. Though 17 years old at the time, she was prosecuted as an adult, under Section 25(2), 29(2), 31(2) and 35(2) of the DSA. She was arrested on 27 August 2022.

I am further troubled by reports that earlier this year, while in jail, she was put in a cell with death row convicts for almost a week. She has also been suffering from kidney issues and other medical problems.

Her bail applications were rejected by Dhaka courts several times. On 16 Feb 2023, the High Court granted bail for Khadija, but the bail was stayed due to an appeal by the state. On 10 July, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court adjourned her bail hearing for four months, stating she should be able to take responsibility for the views expressed on her talk show.

Khadija simply exercised her right to freedom of speech. She should be in university, studying for her degree, not in jail waiting for her fate to be decided under a draconian law.

Despite your government's decision to repeal the draconian Digital Security Act, cases filed under it, such as Khadija's, continue to violate human rights.

I therefore urge your government to:

- Drop the case against Khadijatul Kubra and immediately and unconditionally release her;
- Release all those charged and detained under the DSA solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- Ensure that Khadija receives compensation for the harm caused to her by the arbitrary deprivation of her liberty for one year;
- Pending her release, ensure that she has regular access to adequate healthcare and is held in conditions that meet international standards;

Yours sincerely,