

**Bangladesh: Immediately release journalist Mahmudur Rahman, arbitrarily detained since 2013**

(Bangkok, 9 February 2016) – Bangladesh authorities should immediately and unconditionally release journalist Mahmudur Rahman, who has been in arbitrary detention for over 1000 days in complete disregard of all human rights norms, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) said today.

Mahmudur Rahman, acting Editor of a local daily, *Amar Desh*, has been under detention without trial since April 2013. Prior to the ongoing detention, authorities also arbitrarily detained him between 2 June 2010 and 17 March 2011. He bought *Amar Desh* in 2009, and has been its acting Editor since then. A series of defamation cases had been filed against *Amar Desh* and Mahmudur Rahman since 2009 as a clear sign of reprisals after his paper reported on several corruption scandals including related to members of the present government. He had been detained and subsequently acquitted by the courts in earlier cases. Journalists working with *Amar Desh* have also faced arbitrary detention, and their printing unit was closed down.

Mahmudur Rahman's current detention started on 11 April 2013 on charges of sedition under the Bangladesh Penal Code, and for "publishing fake, obscene or defaming information in electronic form", under article 57 and 58 of the Cyber Crime and Information and Communication Act 2006 (Amended in 2013). He is being accused of illegally publishing a Skype conversation between the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) Judge, Md Nizamul Huq, and an external consultant in Brussels in December 2012. Judge Md Huq resigned from the position of Chairman of the ICT after the publication, although he still serves as Judge of the High Court Division of Bangladesh.

It is alleged that at the time of Mahmudur Rahman's arrest, the *Amar Desh* office and its press were raided by the police. Journalists and press-operators were allegedly beaten and driven out. The press building was sealed. It has remained closed ever since.

Mahmudur Rahman was allegedly tortured in police custody. On 13 August 2015, he was sentenced to three years in prison by a Dhaka court for charges brought against him in 2010 by the Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), which accused him of failing to submit his wealth statement. The ACC initiated this process ostensibly after *Amar Desh* newspaper published news about corruption involving high profile political actors. Bangladesh authorities have reportedly framed 70 fabricated and politically motivated cases against Mahmudur Rahman and as a result he has to spend a majority of his time attending trials in different parts of the country. This has taken a toll on the 63 year-old journalist's health. He is suffering from various ailments, aggravated due to torture in custody. His family has also been targeted and subjected to repeated harassment.

*“Prolonged arbitrary detention and delays in trials are a serious violation of the right to life. The Bangladesh’s Criminal Procedure Code prescribes release on bail after completion of 180 days of detention,”* said Evelyn Balais-Serrano, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA. *“He should be released immediately to protect his fundamental right to life and liberty. His persecution has become a symbol of reprisal against journalists and human rights defenders who exercise their freedom of expression.”*

FORUM-ASIA urges the Government of Bangladesh to respect its obligations under national and international law and immediately and unconditionally release Mahmudur Rahman. FORUM-ASIA also calls on Bangladeshi authorities to ensure protection of freedom of expression and tolerance towards dissenting voices in line with its human rights responsibilities.

**About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*

**For further inquiries, please contact:**

- South Asia Programme, FORUM-ASIA, [sasia@forum-asia.org](mailto:sasia@forum-asia.org)
- Human Rights Defenders Programme, FORUM-ASIA, [hrd@forum-asia.org](mailto:hrd@forum-asia.org)