

## India: Ensure justice for journalist Shantanu Bhowmik and safeguard freedom of the press

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 27 September 2017) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) strongly condemns the killing of 28-year-old journalist Shantanu Bhowmik on 21 September 2017. At the time of his murder, he was working for Din Raat, a local television channel in Tripura. He was covering a protest and roadblock by the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) in Mandai village near Agartala in West Tripura. The IPFT is a tribal political party<sup>1</sup> which demands the establishment of a separate tribal state to be named Tipraland.<sup>2</sup>

On 21 September, IPFT supporters gathered in several places in Mandai village and other nearby areas of Jirania to protest against the alleged misdeeds of its arch-rival Gana Mukti Parishad (GMP), the tribal wing of the ruling Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI-M). Clashes between IPFT and GMP had already resulted in several people getting injured, houses being burned and other forms of violence. Shantanu had covered several of these clashes.

Around noon, the two groups violently clashed with each other once again. The police tried to disperse them and force them to vacate the place. They imposed Section 144 of Criminal Procedure Code, which prohibits large gatherings. Shantanu was, along with a local help, filming the violence with his cell phone. Shantanu was reportedly injured due to stone pelting by the mob. About 15 IPFT cadres reportedly got hold of him as he was unable to move due to his injuries. He was then abducted by IPFT supporters<sup>3</sup> and taken to an isolated place nearby where he was beaten and stabbed.<sup>4</sup>

When found at around 3 pm, he was in a critical state and brought to the Agartala Medical College and Hospital, where he was pronounced dead. According to Abhijit Saptarshi, Superintendent of Police (SP) of Tripura West district, Shantanu was targeted for having videos of IPFT members attacking the police and damaging vehicles.<sup>5</sup>

Shantanu was one of the only reporters covering the recent controversies related to the IPFT, including their earlier blockades in July that had led to a serious food shortage in the area.<sup>6</sup> Samir Dhar, the bureau chief of Din Raat said that 'he had sent a comprehensive dispatch on the agitation to office before his

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous\\_People%27s\\_Front\\_of\\_Tripura](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_People%27s_Front_of_Tripura)

2 <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/journalist-santanu-bhowmik-killed-while-covering-ipft-agitation/article19722844.ece>

3 <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/this-is-what-happened-before-tripura-journalists-murder-police-sources-1754249>

4 <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/journalist-taped-violence-cpm-says-he-was-our-own-ipft-tripura-shantanu-bhowmik-4855385/>

5 <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/journalist-taped-violence-cpm-says-he-was-our-own-ipft-tripura-shantanu-bhowmik-4855385/>

6 <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/lynched-tripura-journalist-santanu-bhowmiks-last-words-to-his-channel-reaching-o/302040>

death and claimed that he was perhaps the only reporter who went ahead to report despite IPFT cadre threatening journalists not to.’<sup>7</sup>

Several people have been arrested for their involvement in the killing. However, so far no charges have been made.

The killing of Shantanu, a journalist on-duty exemplifies the precarious condition in which journalists operate in India.<sup>8</sup> Justice in Shantanu’s case is imperative, not just for him and his family, but also to ensure freedom of the press in the country. FORUM-ASIA urges the Government of India to ensure a thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Shantanu Bhowmik. Those responsible should be brought to justice. FORUM ASIA also urges the State Government of Tripura to conduct an inquiry into whether the police failed to protect him despite being present at the scene of the incident, and take all measures necessary to ensure an environment for journalists in which they can do their work unhindered and without risk to life and liberty.

#### **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 democratization.*

#### **For further information, please contact:**

- South Asia Programme, [sasia@forum-asia.org](mailto:sasia@forum-asia.org)

<sup>7</sup> <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/in-agartala-santanu-bhowmicks-last-despatch-plays-on-loop-4855049/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/news/india/another-journalist-found-dead-from-gauri-lankesh-to-shantanu-bhowmick-at-least-five-journalists-have-been-killed-in-over-two-years-in-india/articleshow/60807581.cms>

Regional Office: S.P.D Building 3rd Floor, 79/2 Krungthonburi Road, Khlongtongsai, Khlongsan, Bangkok 10600, Thailand

International Office: Rue de Varembé 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0)22 740 2947 Fax: +41 (0)22 740 2948

Jakarta Office: c/o KontraS - Jalan Kramat 2 no.7, Senen, Jakarta Pusat  
10420 Indonesia +62(0)213919006

Kathmandu Office: c/o INSEC – Syuchatar, Kalanki, Kathmandu, Nepal, +9779(0)14278770