

# Bangladesh: Protest after atheist writer Avijit Roy was hacked to death by islamists

Sunday 1 March 2015, by [AFP](#), [HAMMADI Saad](#), [KHAN Mohammad Jamil](#), [PADS \(IN\)](#), [TRAN Mark](#) (Date first published: 1 March 2015).

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## Bangladeshis protest after atheist writer Avijit Roy hacked to death

### **Hundreds rally against fundamentalism in Dhaka as Islamists claim responsibility for murder of prominent US-Bangladeshi blogger.**

Hundreds of people have taken to the streets of Dhaka in protest at the murder of a prominent secular American blogger of Bangladeshi origin who was hacked to death with machetes after he allegedly received threats from Islamists.

Avijit Roy and his wife, Rafida Ahmed, were attacked on a crowded pavement as they were returning from a book fair at Dhaka University. Ahmed, who is also a blogger, lost a finger and remains under treatment at the Square hospital in Dhaka.

The attack took place at about 8.45pm on Thursday evening when a group of men ambushed the couple as they walked toward a roadside tea stall, with at least two of the attackers hitting them with meat cleavers. The attackers then ran off into the crowds. Two blood-stained cleavers were found after the attack, said police.

A tweet from Ansar Bangla 7, a previously unknown fundamentalist group, said: "Anti-Islamic blogger US-Bengali citizen Avijit Roy is assassinated in capital #Dhaka due to his crime against #Islam."

Roy, founder of the Mukto-Mona (Free-mind) blog, which featured articles on scientific reasoning and religion, had been receiving threats for some time. A Facebook posting this month said that he would be killed once he arrived in the capital. The couple arrived in Dhaka on 15 February.

"There have been Facebook posts stating Avijit Roy cannot be killed because he lives in America. He would be killed when he arrives in Dhaka. They must have followed his movement," Ajoy Roy, Avijit's father, told the Guardian. He criticised the police for failing to act despite being allegedly just metres away from the scene of the attack.

Police said the murder was being given high priority and had been referred to the detective branch.

"This is being treated as a highly important and sensitive case, which is why the case has been handed to the detective branch," said Shibly Noman, assistant police commissioner of the Dhaka metropolitan police.

Several hundred people - including teachers, publishers and fellow writers - joined a rally on Friday near the site of the attack carrying banners saying: "We want justice" and "Down with fundamentalism".

Imran Sarker, head of the Bangladesh bloggers' association, said the protests would not let up unless those responsible for Roy's killing were caught. "Avijit's killing once again proved that there is a culture of impunity in the country," Sarker told Agence France-Presse. "The government must arrest the killers in 24 hours or face non-stop protests."

Roy, who was 42, had been a target of extremist groups for at least five years because of his writings on secular and lesbian and gay issues in his columns and blogs, his father said. "There isn't one specific writing I can think of which caused this attack on him," he added.

Roy, a mechanical engineer, was a regular columnist of the Bangladeshi news agency bdnews24.com. He wrote about 10 books, including the best-selling Biswasha Virus (Virus of Faith), as well as his blog, which championed liberal secular writing in the Muslim-majority nation.

"His murder only highlights the point, being made consistently by many, that much more needed to be done to protect these people and the state has been failing to do its job," said Toufique Imrose Khalidi, editor of bdnews24.com.

Roy is the second blogger suspected to have been killed by fundamentalist groups in the past two years. Ahmed Rajib Haider was killed in February 2013 for posts antagonising extremist groups. After Haider's death, Bangladesh's hardline Islamist groups started to protest against other campaigning bloggers, accusing them of blasphemy and calling a series of nationwide strikes to demand their execution.

The government reacted by arresting some atheist bloggers. It also blocked about a dozen websites and blogs to stem the furore over blasphemy, as well as stepping up security for the bloggers. In 2004, Humayun Azad, a prominent writer and teacher at Dhaka University, was seriously injured in an attack when he was returning from the same book fair.

The attacks starkly underline an increasing gulf between secular bloggers and conservative Islamic groups, often covertly connected with Islamist parties. Secularists have urged authorities to ban religion-based politics, while Islamists have pressed for blasphemy laws to prevent criticism of their faith.

Islam is Bangladesh's state religion but the country is governed by secular laws based on British common law, and Sheikh Hasina, the prime minister, has repeatedly said she will not give in to religious extremism.

The latest murder comes against a backdrop of political violence since the beginning of January. More than 100 people have been killed in molotov cocktail attacks amid a political deadlock. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist party is demanding a fresh election administered by an independent interim government, which the ruling Awami League flatly rejects.

Robert Gibson, the British high commissioner, expressed his shock at Roy's murder and the recent violence in the country. Baki Billah, a friend of Roy and a blogger, told Independent TV that Roy had been threatened earlier by people upset at his writing.

"He was a free thinker. He was a Hindu but he was not only a strong voice against Islamic fanatics but also equally against other religious fanatics," Billah said.

**Saad Hammadi** in Dakha and **Mark Tran**

\* The Guardian. Friday 27 February 2015 19.35 GMT Last modified on Saturday 28 February 2015 00.31:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/27/bangladeshi-protests-over-of-atheist-writer-avijit-roy>

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## **Bangladesh Activists Protest US Blogger Avijit Roy's Murder**

DHAKA:

Hundreds of protesters gathered in Dhaka on today to denounce the murder of a prominent American blogger of Bangladeshi origin hacked to death with machetes after he allegedly received threats from Islamists.

The demonstrators - including teachers, publishers and fellow writers - met near the spot where Avijit Roy, founder of Mukto-Mona (Free-mind) blog, was attacked by unknown assailants as he returned home from a book fair with his wife on yesterday evening.

They chanted slogans including "We want justice" and "raise your voice against militants".

No one has yet claimed responsibility for the vicious attack, which also seriously wounded the 44-year-old's wife and has shocked many in a country already reeling from weeks of violent political protest.

But the atheist writer's family said he had received numerous threats from Islamists before his death, and today's rally is expected to draw hundreds of Bangladeshis concerned about the rise in Islamism in their country.

Roy, a US citizen, is the second Bangladeshi atheist blogger to have been murdered in two years and the fourth writer to have been attacked since 2004.

"The attack on Roy and his wife Rafida Ahmed is outrageous," said Imran H. Sarker, head of a Bangladeshi bloggers' association.

"We strongly protest this attack and are deeply concerned about the safety of writers."

Hardline Islamist groups have long demanded the public execution of atheist bloggers and sought new laws to combat writing critical of Islam.

Police have launched an investigation and recovered the machetes used in the attack, which they compared to that on atheist blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider in 2013.

Haider was hacked to death by members of a little-known Islamist militant group, triggering nationwide protests by tens of thousands of secular activists.

"The pattern of the killing appeared to be the same that of previous attack on a celebrated writer,"

assistant commissioner of Dhaka police Shiblee Noman told AFP.

"It seems it it was carried out by reactionary fundamentalist group."

Noman also said police were investigating a tweet by the pro-Islamist group Ansar Bangla Seven that appeared to celebrate Roy's murder.

"Target Down here in #Bangladesh," the group tweeted from the @AnsarBn7 handle.

### **'Threatening' emails**

Roy's wife, who is also a blogger, was moved to a clinic for further treatment on today.

The writer's father Ajoy Roy said he had received a number of "threatening" emails and messages on social media from hardliners unhappy with his writing.

Roy had written about 10 books, including the best-selling "Biswasher Virus" (Virus of Faith), as well as his blog, which championed liberal secular writing in the Muslim-majority nation.

The Center for Inquiry, a US-based charity promoting free thought, said it was "shocked and heartbroken" by the brutal murder of Roy.

"Dr. Roy was a true ally, a courageous and eloquent defender of reason, science, and free expression, in a country where those values have been under heavy attack," it said in a statement.

Roy's killing also triggered strong condemnation from his fellow writers and publishers, who lamented the growing religious conservatism and intolerance in Bangladesh.

Pinaki Bhattacharya, a fellow blogger and friend of Roy, said one of the country's largest online book retailers was being openly threatened for selling Roy's books.

"In Bangladesh the easiest target is an atheist. An atheist can be attacked and murdered," he wrote on Facebook.

After Haider's death, Bangladesh's hardline Islamist groups started to protest against other campaigning bloggers, accusing them of blasphemy and calling a series of nationwide strikes to demand their execution.

The secular government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reacted by arresting some atheist bloggers.

The government also blocked about a dozen websites and blogs to stem the furore over blasphemy, as well as stepping up security for the bloggers.

Bangladesh is the world's fourth-largest Muslim majority nation with Muslims making up some 90 per cent of the country's 160 million people.

A tribunal has recently handed down a series of verdicts against leading Islamists and others for crimes committed during the war of independence from Pakistan in 1971.

\* NDTV. Agence France Presse. Story First Published: February 27, 2015 16:49 IST:  
<http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/bangladesh-activists-protest-us-bloggers-murder-742969>

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## **Justice eludes victims of militant attacks**

Islamist militants were found responsible for the killing of at least 15 people including progressive teachers and bloggers committed in the last decade. But justice seems way too far.

None of the verdicts already given in three cases has been executed while the investigating agencies are still working on 11 of the cases and a court is now holding indictment hearing in another case.

Nearly 48 hours into the murder of eminent blogger and science writer Avijit Roy, who is a US citizen, and attack on his wife Rafida Ahmed Bonna, the law enforcers are yet to arrest any suspect even though the couple had long been threatened by some identified extremists.

A twitter account named “Ansar Bangla 7,” suspected to be run by militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team, also claimed responsibility for the killing within couple of hours.

Shibli Noman, assistant commissioner of police, told the Dhaka Tribune yesterday that they were investigating the incident as an act carried out by the militants.

The trial against five leaders of banned Islamist outfit Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) for the murder of noted writer Prof Dr Humayun Azad is under way. A Dhaka court has so far recorded testimonies of one-third of the prosecution witnesses.

Prof Azad was injured critically after unidentified assailants attacked him on Dhaka University campus on February 27, 2004. He succumbed to injuries in Germany on August 12 the same year.

A Dhaka court has set March 9 for further hearing on the charge framing matter against Ansarullah Bangla Team chief Jasim Uddin Rahmani and seven of his followers for the killing of architect and blogger Ahmed Rajeeb Haider. The Detective Branch of police pressed the charges on January 29 last year - nearly a year after the murder, on February 15, 2013.

The DB police are yet to submit probe report in the case of TV presenter and Islamist leader Sheikh Nurul Islam Faruqi, a presenter of religious programmes on TV, who was killed on August 27 last year.

Family members and detectives claimed that he had been killed for opposing extremist views and superstitions. A number of militant leaders have been arrested and taken on remand. Six television presenters, including a central Jamaat-e-Islami leader, were also sued for giving death threat to Faruqi.

Saiful Islam, additional deputy commissioner of DB, said: “We suspect that members of fanatic religious groups conducted the killing.”

So-called “Pir” Lutfar Rahman Faruk, his elder son and four others were slaughtered in the capital’s Wari on December 21, 2013. Four JMB members were shown arrested in the case, but none of them admitted their involvement.

Jahangir Hossain Matubbor, a DB deputy commissioner, claimed that they had identified some suspects and conducting drives to nab them.

Mystery behind the murder of Ashraful Alam, a student of Daffodil University, has still remained unknown. He was killed in his rented house in Ambagan area of Savar on September 30 last year by "Ansar Al Islam Bangladesh" which claimed the responsibility.

Rasel Shaikh, assistant commissioner of Savar circle police, said they were investigating the matter.

Arif Raihan Dwip, a third-year student of Buettow University and leader of Chhatra League, was stabbed in a dormitory of the university on April 9, 2013. He succumbed to his injuries on July 2 while undergoing treatment.

Lone arrestee Mezbah Uddin, 24, of the same university admitted to have stabbed Dwip because the latter had assaulted the Imam of MA Rashid Hall mosque for helping Hefazat-e-Islam's long march supporters. Police are yet to submit probe report in the case.

### **Killing of three RU teachers**

Rajshahi University Prof Yunus Ali of economics department was killed on December 24, 2004. A court sentenced two JMB men to death on January 29, 2010 but the verdict is yet to be implemented.

On February 3, 2006, the body of Prof Sheikh Taher Ahmed of geology and mining department was recovered from a septic tank on the campus. Six people including a Jamaat-backed teacher were awarded death penalty on May 23, 2010. The Supreme Court on April 21, 2013 upheld the death sentence of two and commuted the punishment of two others to life imprisonment. The order is yet to be executed as the full verdict has not been released.

Prof AKM Shafiul Islam of sociology was killed by some assailants on November 15 last year. Although police and RAB have arrested a number of accused and remanded, mystery behind the killing is yet to be unearthed.

### **Mohammad Jamil Khan**

\* Dhaka Tribune. Published: 02:05 March 1, 2015:

<http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2015/mar/01/justice-eludes-victims-militant-attacks#sthash.wdVXLNsG.dpuf>

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## **India: Secular Democrats Speak out Against the Murder of Avijit Roy in Dhaka - statement by PADS**

### **People's Alliance for Democracy and Secularism (PADS)**

Press Release

28 February 2015

People's Alliance for Democracy and Secularism strongly condemns the brutal murder of Mr Avijit Roy, a Bangladeshi secular blogger and author on 26<sup>th</sup> February in Dhaka. His wife Ms Rafida Anwar Banna has suffered grievous injuries in the attack. Mr Roy was a popular blogger and author who wrote a number of books against religious extremism and the threat to human dignity and

democracy from it. He had been on the hit list of Islamic fundamentalists for a number of years. He was advised caution but continued to put forth his views bravely in public. He was murdered while returning from a book fair after the release of his latest book. Islamic fundamentalists have been the bulwark of authoritarianism in Bangladesh even before the country became independent. They were hand in gloves with the Pakistani Army during the barbaric repression of Bangladeshi freedom movement, and have been in alliance with dictatorial regimes and authoritarian parties. They have also indulged in violence against Hindu and Buddhist religious minorities in the country. According to some reports up to twenty secular activists have been killed in Bangladesh in the past two years by Islamic fundamentalists. It is very encouraging to learn that secular forces in the country have not been cowed down by such violence, and spontaneous protests have erupted in the Shanbag square near Dhaka University against the murder of Avijit Roy.

It is increasingly becoming clear that authoritarian violent forces in many parts of the world are using religion to target non-believers and attack rights of minorities, women, and believers who do not share their fundamentalism. Murders of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar, and Communist Govind Panisare in Maharashtra, persecution of editor Shirin Dalvi, and increased vandalism against Churches, and rioting against minorities ever since Modi government took over are proof of this trend in India. People of Pakistan, many countries in the West Asia and Africa are suffering large scale violence by terrorist groups acting in the name of religion. Even a group of cartoonists in Paris have been killed. It is important that all democracy loving forces discuss and debate the public role of religion. This is possible only in a secular framework of polity, which gives equal public rights to non-believers and believers, and to believers of different faiths.

Released in New Delhi

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\* SIAWI, 9 février 2015:

<http://www.siawi.org/article8821.html>