

# **Bangladesh photographer Shahidul Alam detained, tortured after reporting Dhaka Student Protests**

Sunday 12 August 2018, by [AHMED Rahmuma](#), [The Wire \(IN\)](#) (Date first published: 6 August 2018).

**The famous photographer has been tortured and accused of falsifying reports of school and university student protest. Alam was picked up from his home by the police just hours after he went live on Facebook to describe the student protests in the city and how he was attacked by members of the ruling party while covering a demonstration.**



Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam. Credit: Facebook

## **The partner of celebrated Dhaka-based photographer Shahidul Alam writes on his arrest and torture by the Bangladeshi authorities**

Before being abducted from our apartment by men in plain clothes on the night of August 5, Shahidul Alam was doing what any self-respecting photographer and journalist should be doing: he was out on the streets investigating and live-reporting on how school and college students were being brutally attacked by police and armed goons.

Bangladesh has turned into a police state, made invisible by the mantra of ‘development’ which is spouted incessantly, and the competition between privately-owned TV channels to outdo each other in creatively putting forth government propaganda.

With the parliamentary elections approaching, the government has become suspicious and scared of its own shadow. When produced before the magistrate, Shahidul described how he had been tortured. This, and the outpouring of national and international protest has prevented further torture, and the authorities now seem to be bent on ‘proving’ that Shahidul made it up, video clips of his walking in the Detective Branch premises have been unofficially released, but a slight limp is still detectable.

Disinformation as a strategy is being actively pursued, high-ranking police officials have told the media that he has ‘apologised’ and is ‘repentant’, this was scrolled daylong on TV channels; that he had said “I will continue my propaganda until the government falls” which he never did. He had said during interrogation, “My demand is for a free and fair election”.

I was told I could take over his favourite food and see but not talk to him, only to find out when I went there that we were being secretly videotaped from a distance. Friends in the electronic media

tell me they have been instructed by the agencies to produce 'dirty stories' on Shahidul, there is even talk of constructing him as a paedophile, pathetic given his love for children known to everyone, but more worryingly, it means the trivialisation and manipulative deployment of child sexual abuse, something that we should all take seriously as it scars children for life.

There is only one thing authoritarian governments fear: courage, a human quality they cannot control or predict. Shahidul's courage and defiance has become iconic, but he, and all of us are inspired by the youth of our country, who have refused to be cowed down by state terror.

## **Bangladesh Photographer Shahidul Alam Detained After Facebook Post on Dhaka Protests**

((The Wire (India))) 6 August

**New Delhi:** Photographer Shahidul Alam, whose [photographs](#) depicting human rights violations have won him great accolades, was picked up for interrogation by the Dhaka police in Bangladesh on August 5 after posting a Facebook Live on social media on the ongoing students protests in Dhaka. A recent interview he did with *Al-Jazeera* English where he criticised the government is also believed to be one of the reason he was picked up.

The founder of the Bangladeshi multimedia organisation Drik and Pathshala Media Institute, was picked up from his home at 10.30 pm by plainclothes policemen who claimed to be from the detective branch of the Dhaka after he posted a video on Facebook about the student protest which turned violent this weekend.

"According to security guards of the apartment building and other eyewitness reports, there were roughly 30 to 35 men, in plain clothes, who claimed to be from the Detective Branch (DB)," a statement released by Drik said. "They taped up the CCTV camera, and took away the CCTV camera footage. The guards were manhandled and locked up."

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Detective Branch later [confirmed](#) to the *Dhaka Tribune* that they had picked him up for interrogation.

<https://www.facebook.com/shahidul.alam001/videos/10156666223500152/>

In the video, Alam, who spoke about how his camera was smashed by 'goons' during an attack on him allegedly by ruling party activists as he was taking a video of their demonstrations, also describes and criticises the [excessive use of force](#) used on the students by the police to break up the protest.

It is feared that he may be charged under Section 57 of Bangladesh's draconian Information Communication Technology Act, which stipulates that any post, image, or video on an electronic format that "causes to deteriorate law and order, prejudice the image of the state or person or hurt religious beliefs" are non-bailable offences.



Chhatra league goon wielding a 'da' (machete) in full view of police as they chase unarmed protesting students #politics

Thousands of students have joined demonstrations in Dhaka calling for safer roads after a boy and a girl were killed by a speeding bus on July 29. Since then, tens of thousands of students have demanded safer roads. Dozens have been injured in recent days, and hundreds of buses [set ablaze](#). The police fired tear gas shells to disperse protesters on Sunday. The *Dhaka Tribune* [reported a crackdown](#) at a university on Monday.



Bangladeshi students shouted slogan and blocked roads during a rally demanding safe roads in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on August 4, 2018. Credit: Reuters

At least five journalists were attacked at the student protests, including a photographer for The Associated Press who was briefly hospitalised, [according to the AP](#). CPJ has documented [multiple attacks](#) on journalists in recent weeks in Bangladesh.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and Amnesty International have condemned the arrest and demanded his release.

"Shahidul Alam must be immediately and unconditionally released. There is no justification whatsoever for detaining anyone for solely peacefully expressing their views. His arrest marks a dangerous escalation of a crackdown by the government that has seen the police and vigilantes unleash violence against student protestors," said Omar Waraich, Amnesty International's Deputy South Asia Director.

"The Bangladeshi government must end the crackdown on the student protestors and people speaking out against it. The students have a right to peaceful assembly and physical security. These rights should be respected and protected, and there should be an immediate and effective investigation into the use of force by police, the violent actions of pro-government vigilantes who also attacked the students, and why the police did nothing to stop them."

With Bangladesh heading to elections this year, Waraich warned, "it is crucial that the government adheres to its international obligations, including the protection of the rights to freedom of

expression, association, peaceful assembly and security of persons”.

“Such acts of arrest and violence are against the press freedom and hinders independent journalism,” IFJ said in a press release.

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### **P.S.**

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