

# **Bangladesh: Call for Release of cartoonist imprisoned for “hurting religious feelings”**

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**Call on the Bangladesh authorities to release a cartoonist imprisoned for "hurting religious feelings"**

## **RELEASE CARTOONIST IMPRISONED FOR “HURTING RELIGIOUS FEELINGS”**

4 January 2008

Protestors against publication of cartoon burn copies of the newspaper in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 21 September 2007. Mohammed Arifur Rahman, a cartoonist in Bangladesh, was arrested when street demonstrations by Islamist groups followed the publication of one of his cartoons. He has been detained since 18 September 2007. The cartoon was published in *Alpin*, a supplement of the leading daily newspaper in Bangladesh, the *Prothom Alo*.

Mohammed Arifur Rahman was subsequently charged with “hurting religious feelings” and detained in jail pending trial. The charge carries a maximum sentence of two years’ imprisonment.

He is also held under the Special Powers Act, which allows for preventive detention without trial, whether or not the detainee has been charged with a criminal offence. The detention order was initially imposed for 30 days, but it is reported that it has been extended for another three months.

Mohammed Arifur Rahman is a university graduate with a keen interest in art and painting. He was awarded the first prize in a national anti-corruption cartoon competition by the Bangladeshi newspaper, the *Daily Star*. He is the sole breadwinner of his family and was supporting his mother and younger sister through the income earned from his drawings, supplemented by

part-time work as a shop assistant.

He continues to deny that his cartoon, which he described as replicating the words of a joke popular in his home village, was in any way intended to offend religious sensibilities.

Amnesty International considers Mohammed Arifur Rahman to be a prisoner of conscience, having been detained and charged solely for the legitimate and peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

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**P.S.**

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