

Joint Statement: Drop the ICT Investigation into Journalists Farzana Rupa and Mozammel Babu

As Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) deepens its investigation against detained journalists Farzana Rupa and Mozammel Babu in relation to allegations arising from their broadcast coverage of the May 2013 Shapla Chattar massacre, we — the undersigned international press freedom and human rights organisations — call on the Government of Bangladesh to ensure that journalists do not face criminal charges, particularly for crimes against humanity, for their reporting.

Prosecutors have indicated that the investigation concerns coverage of the May 5–6, 2013 security operation against a protest in Dhaka by the Islamist group Hefazat-e-Islam at Shapla Chattar, where the death toll has been contested. On 14 May 2026, the [ICT showed Rupa and Babu arrested in the case](#). As of the time of this statement, lawyers representing Rupa and Babu had not received evidence or a charge sheet. The prosecution has suggested that the allegations concern their broadcast coverage of the 2013 events, including a current affairs programme presented by Rupa that allegedly “spread misleading information” about casualty figures and contributed to crimes against humanity.

A fundamental aspect of the right to freedom of expression is the protection of journalistic work, including reporting and editorial decisions on matters of significant public interest, especially where events are politically contested or disputed. Decisions about how to cover a contested political incident should not be criminalized, let alone prosecuted as crimes against humanity. The suggestion that such conduct could amount to an international crime is wrong as a matter of law. The decision to initiate proceedings without a legal foundation creates a chilling effect on journalists and media outlets in Bangladesh.

Rupa and Babu, alongside Rupa's husband and fellow Ekattor TV journalist Shakil Ahmed, and Shyamal Dutta, editor of the newspaper *Bhorer Kagoj*, have been held in pre-trial detention since [August and September 2024](#) in connection with numerous murder cases arising from deaths during the July–August 2024 uprising that toppled Sheikh Hasina's former Awami League government. No charge sheet has been served in any of those cases and there has been no explanation as to how journalists' reporting on the uprising could be characterised as the crime of murder. These are among thousands of murder cases filed against perceived supporters of the former government, many of which are based on no known evidence. On 11 May 2026, Bangladesh's [High Court granted Rupa and Ahmed bail in the majority of cases against them](#), but the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court has since stayed that order. The ICT track now creates a separate route, in a court system where bail is rarely granted, that locks Rupa and Babu into continued detention regardless of any bail decision on the murder cases.

We believe that action at the ICT against Rupa and Babu goes against Bangladesh's obligations under Articles 15 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party.

We therefore urge the Government of Bangladesh to:

- Ensure that the prosecution's investigation, however it proceeds, does not name Farzana Rupa and Mozammel Babu as formal accused based solely on their journalism, and support the establishment of an independent and impartial review mechanism to examine International Crimes Tribunal cases involving journalists and assess whether any prosecutions are based solely on the exercise of legitimate journalistic activities.
- Immediately release journalists Farzana Rupa, Shakil Ahmed, Mozammel Babu, and Shyamal Dutta from cases where they are detained solely for the peaceful exercising of their human rights and reporting, drop politically motivated charges brought against them for their journalistic work, and end the practice of case-stacking and mass First Information Reports against journalists and other people across Bangladesh.
- Ensure and uphold the human rights of everyone in the country, including the right to freedom of expression and media freedom.

Taking these steps would be consistent with Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's manifesto commitment to end the persecution of journalists. We call on the Government of Bangladesh to translate that commitment into concrete action, beginning with the cases described above.

Signatories

Amnesty International

ARTICLE 19

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Committee to Protect Journalists

Human Rights Watch