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Bangladesh: Environmental lawyer and woman human rights defender Syeda Rizwana Hasan and team attacked and harassed

On 26 January 2023, woman environmental human rights defender **Syeda Rizwana Hasan** and her team were attacked when their vehicles were pelted with stones. The events took place on their visit to the Lake City residential area of Chattogram, a site where the hills have been razed for a housing project, impacting the local environment.

[Syeda Rizwana Hasan](#) is a lawyer of the Bangladesh Supreme Court and the chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA). She is a member of the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide, and the Environmental Law Commission of International Unions for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Additionally, she is a member of the board of the South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE). Over the past 20 years, Syeda Rizwana Hasan has been advocating for environment protection on issues such as deforestation, pollution, unregulated ship breaking, illegal appropriation of wetlands, cutting of hills, unregulated mining, unplanned urbanization, commercial shrimp cultivation, and illegal land development in Bangladesh. In 2022, she was awarded the International Women of Courage Award by the US Department of State.

On 26 January 2023 at around 12.30pm, members of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyer's Association (BELA), along with several journalists, visited the aforementioned housing project in the Lake City residential area. Following this, they visited Kalirichara Khal, a body of water which has been filled in as part of the construction. This development has been headed by Jahurul Alam Jashim. Jashim is a local leader of the national ruling party, as well as a local Councillor of Chottogram City Corporation. While the woman environmental human rights defender was conducting this visit, a group of people started to follow the team and made attempts to intimidate them by questioning them about their reasons for being there. As Syeda Rizwana Hasan and her team proceeded towards the site, Jahurul Alam Jashim and his men appeared, brandishing sharp weapons, and obstructed them from entering the site. The woman environmental human rights defender escaped to the nearby bypass road and called the police to come to the scene. By the time they arrived, she had reached her car. However, when she subsequently made an attempt to leave the vicinity, Jahurul Alam Jashim and his men pelted the car with stones, also aiming for Syeda Rizwana Hasan herself.

The woman human rights defender has filed a complaint against Jahurul Alam Jashim, along with other individuals, at the Akbar Shah police station. However, as of yet, no action has been taken against the main accused, Jahurul Alam Jashim.

This is not the first time that the woman human rights defender has been targeted for her human rights work. Those close to her have also been the subject of harassment as a result of her activism. Her husband, Abu Bakar Siddique, was abducted by unidentified men on 16 April 2014. After being held hostage for more than 20 hours, he was left blindfolded on the road miles from where he had originally been abducted.

Front Line Defenders believes that the incident on 26 January 2023 is directly related to Syeda Rizwana Hasan's work in defence of human rights, particularly in regard to environment and climate related issues in Bangladesh.

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Front Line urges the authorities in Bangladesh to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack, threats and harassment against Syeda Rizwana Hasan and her team, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Syeda Rizwana Hasan and her team;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Bangladesh are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisal and free of all restrictions.