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Killing of Blogger Blow to Free Speech

(New York) – The killing of secular blogger Ananta Bijoy Das in Sylhet district on May 12, 2015, is part of an alarming trend of violent intolerance toward freedom of religion and speech in [Bangladesh](#), Human Rights Watch said today. This was the third fatal attack on bloggers in the past three months.

According to media accounts of police statements, Das was attacked by four men wielding machetes as he was on his way to work on the morning of May 12. He died instantly. Das, a banker, wrote blogs for *Mukto-Mona*, a website that had been moderated by another secular blogger, Avijit Roy, until he was killed in a similar attack in February in Dhaka. A third secular blogger, Washiqur Rahman, was hacked to death in March 2015. In February 2013, another atheist blogger, Ahmed Rajib Haider, was stabbed to death. A month later in March 2013, blogger Asif Mohiuddin who wrote blogs critical of aspects of Islam, was severely injured in a similar attack.

“This pattern of vicious attacks on secular and atheist writers not only silences the victims but also sends a chilling message to all in Bangladesh who espouse independent views on religious issues,” said [Brad Adams](#), Asia director. “The Bangladesh government needs to act swiftly to bring to justice those responsible for these brutal attacks, and to make clear public statements that attacking freedom of religion and expression will not be tolerated.”

The government says the police have identified and arrested the perpetrators in the three previous attacks, saying that they are members of extremist religious groups. Bangladeshi police have announced that they have initiated investigations into the killing of Das.

The murders of Das and others comes amid a tense political standoff between Bangladesh’s ruling party, the Awami League, and the main opposition parties, the Bangladesh National Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami. The government has clamped down on dissenting opinion in media and civil society over the last several years. In 2013 the government jailed four atheist bloggers. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has long claimed to stand for a secular democracy in Bangladesh, nevertheless pledged to continue taking action against anyone who [“hurt religious sentiment.”](#)

Several editors of opposition-friendly media and some civil society leaders have been imprisoned or face charges for reports critical of the government. Human Rights Watch has repeatedly called on the Bangladeshi government to [end curbs](#) on people’s exercising of their [free speech rights](#).

“When the authorities jail atheist or secular bloggers for nothing more than expressing their opinion about religion, it suggests that the government agrees with radicals who are butchering people on Bangladesh’s streets,” Adams said. “This sends the wrong signal to society, which should be hearing from the government that it stands with those expressing peaceful opinions.”

Human Rights Watch also called on the Bangladeshi government to extend police protection to all those who

appear on so-called atheist blogger hit-lists allegedly drawn up by militant Islamist groups. According to media reports, friends and family of Das and Roy both reportedly received threats and warnings prior to their murders, and had been told by those who threatened them that they were on these hit-lists.

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