

Personal sufferings for criticism over WHO Regional Director Nominee

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Dear Editor-in-Chief:

Sheikh Hasina, former Prime Minister of Bangladesh from 2009 to August 2024, has faced criticism regarding electoral manipulation, sheer corruption, embezzlement, torture of political opposition, and human rights violations such as extrajudicial killings (a report indicated 2597 persons were killed in 13 years of Hasina regime), enforced disappearances in “Aynagar” (House of Mirrors) (Ahasan, 2023). She has been accused of restricting freedom of speech, censoring the press, and manipulating the judiciary for political gain (United Nations, 2025).

The “July Mass Uprising (Monsoon Revolution)” led to the ousting of Sheikh Hasina after 15 years in power. The protests began in July 2024 with students demonstrating against a quota system for civil service jobs (Human Rights Watch, 2025; United Nations, 2024). The government’s violent crackdown on protesters resulted in at least 1400 deaths, thousands of injuries, and more than 11,700 arrests (United Nations, 2025; TBS Report, 2024; The Guardian, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2025).

As an active mental health researcher living in Dhaka, Bangladesh, I used to share important recent research papers and significant social issues affecting the community’s mental health in my social media profiles. On September 23, 2023, I shared a status on my Facebook profile (Fig. 1) mentioning a paper published in The Lancet criticising Saima Wazed’s nomination for World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for South-East Asia. As the daughter of Sheikh Hasina, her nomination raised concerns about nepotism and political influence in the selection process. Critics questioned her qualifications, noting her background in autism advocacy rather than extensive public health experience (Burki, 2023). This situation led to questions about the transparency and fairness of the selection process (Buse et al., 2024).

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On September 27, while I was in the morning ward round, I was called to attend my college office (Enam Medical College, Savar, Dhaka). My principal and vice principal informed me that my status was noticed by Sheikh Hasina, who ordered the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) to take action by that day and send proof of action via WhatsApp. My Principal suggested I resign from the job. I declined to do so. After about an hour, my institute sent me a termination letter without mentioning the reason for termination.

This turned my world upside down. It created sudden uncertainty in every aspect of my life. It took away my sleep, my peace, my academic writing, and my clinical practice due to the perceived and real threat of enforced disappearance, even extra-judicial killing (United Nations, 2025; Ahasan, 2023). My colleagues informed me to send my family to my village swiftly, change my mobile phone, and hide in a safer place with concerns of enforced disappearance, as there were such incidents. My colleagues were afraid of being connected with me to avoid harassment due to my incidents, and none of them protested it.

Benar News investigated the issue and inquired of the principal, vice-principal, and Chairman. After the investigation, the institute reinstated my job on September 30, 2023. Then, I expressed my safety concerns to the principal, and later, I finally resigned due to my perceived intimidation and fear of enforced disappearance.

Figure 1. Screenshot of a Facebook status.



The event raises fundamental concerns about human rights, such as freedom of speech and workplace safety. Furthermore, it resulted in an acute stress reaction to a psychiatrist working in a medical college setting in Bangladesh with immense fear of forced disappearance. The event set an example of an extreme lack of freedom of speech, even sharing a scientific paper, when it goes against the family members of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. It has created fear among other community members and has fostered a culture of fear so that people dare not protest. Secondly, it revealed extreme job insecurity. They sacked me within an hour without considering any aspects of labour law. Thirdly, although it did not happen, some of my colleagues raised concerns related to my enforced disappearance based on their collective memory during the Hasina regime in Bangladesh.

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