Press Note

Over 300 Global Scholars Urge SAARC Secretary-General to Intervene in the Unjust Dismissal of Dr. Snehashish Bhattacharya from South Asian University, New Delhi

More than 300 scholars from leading universities and research institutions across the world have appealed to the Secretary-General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to urgently intervene in the "unjust and punitive dismissal" of Dr. Snehashish Bhattacharya, Associate Professor of Economics at the South Asian University (SAU), New Delhi.

In a letter addressed to SAARC Secretary-General Ambassador Md. Golam Sarwar, the signatories — including many renowned global academics and intellectuals — have expressed deep concern over the violation of academic freedom and due process at the University, which was established under the aegis of SAARC to promote regional cooperation through higher learning. The scholars have urged the Secretary-General to call upon SAU to immediately rescind Dr. Bhattacharya's termination, to protect academic freedom within the institution, and to uphold the founding ideals of collegiality, dialogue, and intellectual independence that underpin the University's mandate.

Dr. Bhattacharya was terminated on September 11, 2025, with retrospective effect from June 2023 — penalizing him for having raised "principled concerns" over the administration's handling of peaceful student protests in 2022. The students had demanded representation in gender sensitisation and anti-harassment bodies, as well as a rollback of stipend cuts. Rather than engage in constructive dialogue, as urged by faculty members, the University administration resorted to expulsions, suspensions, and police action. Later, in June 2023, four faculty members were suspended, with their pay slashed to 25 per cent without clear statutory authority. Dr. Bhattacharya's consistent denial of all charges levelled against him, and his conscientious refusal to submit a letter of regret, was followed by his termination, which the administration justified as a response to "incitement against the University". The signatories reject this as a distortion of his record and commitment to academic integrity.

The scholars also argue SAU's claim that it lies outside the jurisdiction of Indian courts, even though the University was created by The South Asian University Act enacted by the Indian Parliament in 2008, undermines the rule of law and accountability. Dr. Bhattacharya has challenged this claim in Delhi High Court. [The next hearing in the Chief Justice's Division Bench is scheduled for November 18, 2025.]

Reaffirming SAU's original vision of fostering liberal, humane education and South Asian cooperation, the appeal warns that the recent developments have led to a climate of fear among students and staff. "Dr. Bhattacharya's commitment to fairness and dialogue embodies the values SAU was meant to uphold," the letter notes, adding that his dismissal threatens the very credibility of the institution as a regional centre of excellence. "This is not merely a case of one individual," the letter concludes, "but a test of whether the South Asian University can still stand by the principles of openness, dialogue, and mutual respect on which it was founded."

The letter, along with the list of signatories, is attached below.

H.E. Ambassador Mr. Md. Golam Sarwar Secretary General South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) SAARC Secretariat Kathmandu, Nepal

Subject: Appeal for urgent intervention to retract the termination of service and revoke the prior suspension of Dr. Snehashish Bhattacharya at South Asian University, New Delhi

Dear Hon'ble Ambassador Sarwar,

We, the undersigned scholars, are deeply concerned at the unjust <u>dismissal</u> of Dr Snehashish Bhattacharya, Associate Professor of Economics, from service at South Asian University (SAU), New Delhi. On September 11, 2025, he was terminated with retrospective effect from June 2023, effectively punishing him for raising principled concerns about the administration's response to the 2022 student protests. As SAU functions under the aegis of SAARC, we appeal to your office, Your Excellency, for urgent intervention.

In 2022, SAU students peacefully protested for representation in the University bodies for gender sensitisation and against sexual harassment, and a rollback of reduction in their stipends. The administration responded with student expulsions, suspensions, and police action. Faculty, including Dr Bhattacharya, urged dialogue and constructive engagement. Instead, the administration singled out Dr Bhattacharya and three colleagues, suspended them in June 2023, and cut their pay to 25 percent without statutory basis. Dr Bhattacharya, standing by professional <u>principles</u>, has consistently denied all charges, and refused to submit letters of regret demanded by the university. The university has responded with his dismissal and has justified Dr Bhattacharya's dismissal as a response to "incitement against the University". This misrepresents his good-faith commitment to teaching and student welfare.

The University has acted without transparency, fairness, or credible evidence. It has also advanced the untenable claim that, as an international institution, it lies outside Indian court jurisdiction—even though SAU was created through the The South Asian University Act. 2008 of the Indian Parliament. Dr Bhattacharya is challenging this in court, but the University's stance undermines both legality and accountability. As Dr Bhattacharya fights this, we extend our solidarity to him.

SAU was established with a vision of a world class institution emerging out of a collaborative effort in South Asia, with one of the objectives being:

"to impart liberal and humane education towards capacity building of the South Asian nations in the domain of science, technology and other areas of higher learning vital for improving their quality of life and to give students the analytical tools needed for the pursuit of profession and inculcate in them the quality of leadership."

Instead, it has seen an exodus of international faculty and repeated attempts to censor students and staff. Dr Bhattacharya's consistent good-faith actions embody the values SAU was meant to uphold. His dismissal threatens not only an individual's career but also broader principles of academic freedom, collegiality, and the University's role in nurturing future scholars and engaged citizens through openness, dialogue, and mutual respect. The gravity of the decision is reflected in the recent <u>letter</u> of protest signed by 101 of his former students.

Your Excellency, we urge your good offices to intervene and instruct the SAU administration to:

- Rescind its decision and reinstate Dr Bhattacharya with immediate effect.
- Ensure that procedural fairness and due process are fully observed in the resolution of this matter.
- Uphold the academic freedom and rights of faculty and students, which are essential for SAU's credibility as a SAARC institution committed to cooperation, dialogue, and regional excellence.

We submit this appeal in the spirit of collegiality and shared commitment to SAU's founding principles, trusting that your intervention may guide a fair and constructive resolution, help restore trust, protect academic freedom, and uphold the University's mission as a regional centre of excellence.

Sincerely,

Concerned Global Scholars and Academics

[Names of 305 signatories are listed in the following pages. Affiliations are provided for identification purposes only and do not represent the views of the respective institutions.]

Cc:

Director, Education, Security, and Culture (ESC) Division, SAARC Secretariat

Related Officials / Divisions of External Affairs and Higher Education in SAARC Countries

President and Chairperson of the Executive Council, South Asian University, New Delhi

	Name	Position/Affiliation/Location
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2	Antonio Callari	Professor of Economics Emeritus, Franklin and Marshall College, USA
3	C.P. Chandrasekhar	Senior Research Fellow, PERI, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA
4	Ha-Joon Chang	Professor of Economics, SOAS University of London
5	Amitava K. Dutt	Professor Emeritus, University of Notre Dame, USA
6	Daniela Gabor	Professor, SOAS University of London
7	Jayati Ghosh	Professor, UMASS-Amherst, USA
8	Naomi Hossain	Professor of Development Studies, SOAS University of London
9	Mushtaq Khan	Professor of Economics, SOAS University of London
10	Costas Lapavitsas	Professor of Economics, SOAS University of London
11	Prabhat Patnaik	Professor Emeritus, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India
12	Utsa Patnaik	Professor Emerita, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India
13	David F. Ruccio	Professor of Economics Emeritus, University of Notre Dame, USA
14	Sunanda Sen	Former Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India
15	Partha Chatterjee	Professor Emeritus, Columbia University, New York
16	Pratap Bhanu Mehta	Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi
17	Kevin B Anderson	Distinguished Professor of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara
18	Jayadeva Uyangoda	Emeritus Professor, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

19	David Barkin	Distinguished University Professor, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Mexico
20	Rathin Roy	Distinguished Professor, Kautilya School of Public Policy; Former Director, NIPFP, and Ex-Member, Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister of India
21	Guy Standing	Professorial Research Associate, SOAS University of London
22	Patrick Bond	Distinguished Professor (Sociology), University of Johannesburg, South Africa
23	Gilbert Achcar	Emeritus Professor, SOAS, University of London
24	Subir Sinha	Director, SOAS South Asia Institute, London
25	Surabhi Ranganathan	Professor, University of Cambridge
26	Takashi Satoh	Professor, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan
27	Kanchana N Ruwanpura	Professor - Development Geography, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
28	Saurabh Dube	Professor, El Colegio de México
29	Mridula Mukherjee	Professor (Retired), JNU
30	Dave Hill	Emeritus Professor, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge and Chelmsford, UK
31	Serap Kayatekin	American College of Thessaloniki (now Anatolia American University), Greece
32	Ingrid Harvold Kvangraven	King's College, London
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34	Roberto Veneziani	Professor, Queen Mary University of London
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40	Alessandra Mezzadri	Professor of Global Development and Political Economy, SOAS
41	Kumar Rohit	Junior Consultant, Institute of Economic Growth
42	Sahil Mehra	Assistant Professor, Sai University, Chennai
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48	Joshua Budlender	Postdoctoral Research Fellow, SALDRU, University of Cape Town, South Africa
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50	Chirashree Das Gupta	Professor Jawaharlal Nehru University
51	Jeff Powell	Associate Professor, University of Greenwich, London
52	Aftab Alam	Associate Professor, University of Delhi
53	Andrew Denis	Fellow Emeritus, City St George's, University of London
54	Mahalaya Chatterjee	Professor, Calcutta University
55	C Saratchand	Satyawati College, University of Delhi
56	Sudipta Jha	Assistant Professor, Vidyasagar University

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65	Matteo Rizzo	Senior Lecturer, SOAS University of London
66	Anirban Mukherjee	Assistant Professor, University of Calcutta
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78	Rohit Azad	Jawaharlal Nehru University
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96	Anamitra Roychowdhury	Assistant Professor, JNU, India

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103	Anjan Chakrabarti	Professor, University of Calcutta
104	Surajit Das	Assistant Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University
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261	Sebnem Korur Fincanci	Professor Emeritus of Forensic Medicine, Istanbul University/ Human Rights Foundation of Turkey
262	Pramod Kumar Sharma	Assistant Professor, T. U.
263	Sushanta Dattagupta	Sister Nivedita University
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287	Sara Stevano	Senior Lecturer, SOAS University of London
288	Vivek Mehta	Assistant Professor, Tezpur University, Assam
289	Deniz Kellecioglu	University of Gothenburg
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294	Kaveh Yazdani	Professor, University of Connecticut
295	Wolfram Elsner	University of Bremen, Germany
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