

June 2, 2010

Odhikar Condemns the Closure of Amar Desh and arrest of Mahmudur Rahman

The publication of the Bangla-language daily Amar Desh has been closed as the government cancelled the declaration of the newspaper on June 1, 2010. The police sealed off the press of Amar Desh at about 11.00 pm that night.

At about 4am on June 2, 2010 Mahmudur Rahman, the acting Editor of Amar Desh, was arrested by armed police from the newspaper office amid protests and resistance by the journalists. Police resorted to baton charging the protesting journalists in order to arrest Mahmudur Rahman. They have entered by force into the newspaper office around 2 AM in the morning and about 4 AM into room of the Editor.

Earlier at around 9:00 am on June 1, 2010 the publisher of the newspaper, Md. Hashmat Ali, was allegedly picked up from his residence by the members of the National Security Intelligence (NSI). It is alleged that while sitting in the office of the NSI, Md. Hashmat Ali signed some blank papers and then was allowed to leave the office of that agency.

The papers signed by Md. Hashmat Ali, now mention that although he has handed over his shares of the newspaper sometime back to Mahmudur Rahman, the latter was still publishing his name as the publisher; and for this he was also sued for publishing certain reports along with Mahmudur Rahman. However, an application had been submitted by Mahmuder Rahman to the Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka, to include his name as the publisher of Amar Desh. This application had been submitted along with the share documents that belonged to Md. Hashmat Ali, as part of the handing-over process. A case has been filed against Mahmudur Rahman under sections 419, 420 and 500 of Penal Code.

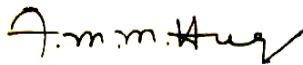
Odhikar is gravely concerned by the manner the case against Mahmudur Rahman has been filed and the use of coercive technique and terror to break into the printing press to seal the plant and a newspaper office to arrest an editor of a daily Newspaper, allegedly without any arrest warrant. Odhikar also believes that the arrest of Mahmudur Rahman on such grounds will only add to the continuation of the suppression of media by the State.

Odhikar demands that Mahmudur Rahman be released immediately and Amar Desh is allowed to resume its publication, as per the Constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression. It is to be noted here that the newspaper Amar Desh is very vocal about human rights issues and is critical of the government inactions to curb human rights violations. It has also questioned some irregular activities carried out by some government officials. There are 28 cases, including defamation cases, pending against Mahmuder Rahman.

We are also deeply concerned that till the writing of this report (11:45 AM), the whereabouts of Mahmuder Rahman are still unknown. Given the law enforcement agency's propensity towards torture and ill treatment and the government inactions to combat such practices, it is strongly suspected that Mahmuder Rahman may be physically abused or tortured by those who have arrested him.

It must be mentioned here that earlier the government temporarily closed down You Tube in 2009, has recently closed down a television channel 'Channel1' and has temporarily shut down Face book on various pretexts.

Signed:



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