

December 27, 2011

Odhikar's concern about the proposed Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Bill 2011

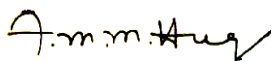
Odhikar is deeply concerned to learn from the media of the proposed amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009, approved by the Cabinet meeting on December 26, 2011, which has widened the scope of the Act by approving death penalty for financing terrorist activities. The existing law stipulates that a person guilty of the offence of financing acts of terrorism shall be sentenced to not more than 20 years and not less than three years of imprisonment. According to new amendments, as reported by media, a person or entity will be considered a terrorist if they harm or help harm another country while staying in Bangladesh,

The Bill will now be placed in the next session of the Parliament for approval. Under the proposed Bill the 'authorities' now will be allowed to inquire about any 'doubtful' transactions through banks or financial institutions including NGOs, which is likely to bring repressive measures and highhandedness.

Ever since the Act was passed in the very first session of the current Parliament on February 24, 2009, Odhikar has been strongly expressing concerns regarding the vagueness of the definition of terrorist activities and therefore scope for potential abuse. Earlier, on February 19, 2009, the Government, at a Cabinet meeting, approved the Anti-Terrorism Bill to be made into law, without any public consultation disregarding the need for comprehensive preventive approach to address violent social and political acts precipitated by the failure of the democratic polity; and systematic repression of human rights. When the Anti-terrorism Ordinance was first promulgated by the military-backed Caretaker Government Odhikar drew the attention of the human rights defenders around the world about the broad sweep of the law and its vague definitions that increase the likelihood of its abuse. In the preceding thirty four months the law has been used against a cross section of people including opposition activists, teachers and journalists, proving the apprehension of Odhikar. The said law is against human rights norms and undermines the democratic aspirations of the people.

Odhikar appeals to the Government to withdraw the proposed Bill, repeal the Act and urges the human rights defenders to exert moral pressure on the government to rescind the legal instrument that has already been proved to be abusive and a violation of human rights.

In Solidarity,



Farhad Mazhar
Advisor



Adilur Rahman Khan
Secretary