

The controversial organisation Odhikar is again involved in murky activities*

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The right-leaning, controversial, human rights organisation, Odhikar is again in the spotlight. It does not have registration from the NGO Affairs Bureau but it is taking all the advantages of an NGO and getting involved in various nefarious activities critical of the forthcoming elections, the state and the government. The organisation became controversial after publishing false information regarding the Hefazat assembly at Shapla Chattar. Various influential intelligence agencies have cautioned the government that (Odhikar) is now on a special agenda and giving the international community wrong, unproven information regarding the forth coming elections and electoral atmosphere. Numerous [Intelligence] agencies reports and letters from the Election Commission, DUDAK [the Anti-Corruption Commission] and the NGO Bureau highlight Odhikar's non transparent activities.

Intelligence agencies have recommended that the activities of Odhikar be shut down due to its violating a circular issued by the Prime Minister's Office with regard to the NGO Bureau; suspicious monetary transactions from ten accounts; taking cash money from donor agencies after funds were closed due to cessation of projects; and other non transparent activities. At this point in time Odhikar is not registered under the NGO Affairs Bureau. As a result, the EC has not given it permission to act as a local election observer in the forthcoming elections. In a letter to the Election Commission, the NGO Affairs Bureau stated: 'The Bureau has found a list of 119 election observation organisations registered with the Election Commission. Of the 75 organisations registered with the Bureau, the registration of Odhikar expired on 25 March 2015.

At that time, 10 projects of the Organisation were under audit, of which 8 were not cleared; the contents of a letter sent by the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence Headquarters were not resolved; and there was discrepancy between the projects activities of the organisation and the monetary transactions involved. Due to this, its registration was not renewed. Furthermore, this organisation is under investigation by the Anti-Corruption Commission.'

It has been learnt that the Organisation's office is in Gulshan. It began to function in Bangladesh since 1994. An intelligence report states 'although the NGO Odhikar was founded to establish human rights, 24 years ago, it is continuously involved in anti-state conspiracies. After Adilur Rahman Khan Partho [sic] became the General Secretary, after removing the founding members of the Organisation, it has been constantly involved in controversial activities.' Odhikar's Executive Committee revolves mainly around Adilur Rahman Khan Partho [sic]. The Committee is headed by Dr. C.R. Abrar (Chowdhury Rafikul Abrar) Professor of International Relations at Dhaka University, its Treasurer is Advocate Ruhul Amin Bhuyan of the Supreme Court and members are women's rights activist Farida Akhtar and J. Hasan.

International networks associated with Odhikar are Asian Network of Free Elections [sic] (ANFRL) in Thailand, Asian Federation against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) in the Philippines, Forum Asia in Thailand and ICJ, FIDH and OMCT in Switzerland.

Odhikar's new activities: A reliable law enforcement intelligence report states that Odhikar's report on the Hefazat rally in Dhaka, its assembly at Shapla Chattar and the police operation to remove the assembly from the Shapla Chattar, was full of distorted and untrue information. Although it gave a report that 61 persons had been killed, the list recovered from it by the Detective Branch of Police shows that many of the persons on it did not take part in the Hefazat rally or assembly, some died elsewhere due to other reasons. A Madrassa student of Chandpur who was shown as deceased in the list is very much alive. Odhikar even sent this controversial list of victims to several international human rights organisations.

The same intelligence report goes on to state that the Organisation always gives the wrong information to the international community regarding elections and the human rights situation; and as a result constantly destroys the image of the country. Furthermore on the website of the Thailand based organisation ANFREL, it has given false information regarding the current situation of the country [Bangladesh] and also uploaded a column written by the Secretary of Odhikar Adilur Rahman Khan. Some of the false information written by Odhikar's Secretary in that, include: after the '14 controversial elections when the current government came to power a second time, Bangladesh now faces an undemocratic and unaccountable government. The present Awami League government has not created a level playing field for the forthcoming parliamentary elections and is instead repressing the opposition parties and barring their freedom of expression and opinion.

The opinion cited in the said intelligence report is that this Odhikar report is being used by the opposition parties; and that the BNP in particular, is using that published Odhikar report to fulfil its political agenda to denounce the current government, both in the country and internationally. Furthermore, the organisation continues its activities by ignoring a circular issued by the Prime Minister's Office regarding the NGO Bureau, even though it currently has no projects.

The intelligence agency has recommended that all the activities of Odhikar be barred immediately. Odhikar is constantly spreading false propaganda against Bangladesh and the government and is malicious towards the government. Furthermore, suspicions are further raised about the organisation since it continues to work by ignoring a circular from the Prime Minister's Office regarding the NGO Affairs Bureau.

Currently, the Organisation is still functioning despite having no funds. The source of the operational costs of the organisation are suspicious. It has been learnt from a secret source that it receives hard cash from various donor agencies to carry out its activities. Under such circumstances, it is recommended that the registration of this organisation be cancelled and all its activities stopped.

All efforts were made to get a convincing response from the organisation regarding the accusations of providing the international community with false information and other related matters. The Chairman of the Organisation, Prof. C.R. Abrar was asked and he replied 'I do not know anything about this. I was abroad. Please talk to people like Adilur Rahman, they will be able to tell you.' Then a call was made to

the cell number of Secretary Adilur Rahman. After the caller gave his identity and wanted to speak to him, he was given a TNT (landline) number. That number was called several times, but no one answered the phone.

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