



27 February 2021

Death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in jail while detained under the Digital Security Act

Statement of Odhikar

Odhikar is deeply concerned over the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed on 25 February 2021, who was detained in Kashimpur Central Jail under the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018. Police also attacked anti-government student organisations in Dhaka when they brought out a rally in protest of his death and to demand the repeal of the Digital Security Act, 2018. Many were injured and arrested and all were deprived of their freedom of peaceful assembly.

During the tenure of the present authoritarian government, freedoms of speech, conscience, thought and expression of the citizens are being severely violated. Citizens of different walks of life, including writers, cartoonists, journalists, photographer, university teachers, and opposition political leaders, lawyers and human rights activists are being arrested under the repressive Digital Security Act, 2018 and are also being held in overcrowded prisons, where medical facilities are inadequate. Furthermore, many of them were allegedly tortured in custody. Since the enactment of the Digital Security Act 2018, a reported total of 202 individuals have been arrested for expressing their views on social media against persons affiliated with the government until 31 January 2021.

On 4 May 2020, a group of men claiming to be from RAB-3 picked up writer Mushtaq Ahmed and cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore from their residence, for criticizing the government's failure to handle the Covid-19 pandemic, through writings and posting cartoons on Facebook, at the beginning of the pandemic. RAB initially denied their arrest. They were later charged under the Digital Security Act, 2018 and allegedly tortured after their arrest. Mushtaq Ahmed later applied for bail six times but the court rejected his bail application and he was kept in jail for about nine months. Under these circumstances, Mushtaq Ahmed died in prison. Despite being seriously ill due to torture, cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore is still being held captive.

Odhikar demands justice for Mushtaq Ahmed's death through a proper investigation and the immediate and unconditional release of cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore and those who were arrested for protesting Mushtaq's death. Odhikar also demands the repeal of all repressive laws, including the Digital Security Act, 2018.

In solidarity,
The Odhikar Team
www.odhikar.org