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Attempt to Sabotage the Upcoming Election through Killings and Vandalism

The government must improve the law and order situation, arrest the perpetrators, and ensure justice

Statement by Odhikar

Recently, a bleak picture of a severe deterioration of the law and order situation and a culture of impunity has emerged in Bangladesh. On 12 December, Osman Hadi was shot and critically injured. He was later sent to Singapore for medical treatment, where he breathed his last on 18 December. Osman Hadi was an organiser of the 2024 mass uprising and later the convener of the political-cultural organisation *Inqilab Mancha*. He was vocal against Indian hegemony in Bangladesh, as well as against the misrule of the Awami League. He was also a candidate for Dhaka-8 in the 13th National Parliamentary Election.

Immediately after the news of Osman Hadi's death broke, on the night of 18 December, certain individuals and groups identified the English and Bangla news media *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*, as well as the cultural organisation Chhayanaut, and on 19 December, the cultural organisation Udichi, as part of Indian hegemony. They carried out arson attacks on their offices and vandalised property. On the night of 18 December, 30–35 journalists were trapped on the roof of the *Daily Star* building and were later rescued by the Fire Service. On the same day, Nurul Kabir, President of the Editors' Council and the Editor of the newspaper *New Age*, was harassed and assaulted by attackers.

On the other hand, also on the night of 18 December, Dipu Chandra Das (25), a Hindu garments worker and employee at the Pioneer Knit Composite factory was beaten, tied to a tree and brutally assaulted to death on allegations of "making derogatory remarks about religion," in Bhaluka, Mymensingh. After confirming his death, a group calling itself "Tawhidi Janata" burned his body. In addition, on the night of 19 December, the residence belonging to Tanvir Hasan Zoha—prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal and investigating officer in cases against Sheikh Hasina—in Magura District, was set on fire.

During Sheikh Hasina's 15 and a half years in power—which ended with the 2024 mass uprising and her fleeing to India—three national elections and all local government elections were farcical. Indian interference in the national elections during Hasina's tenure was evident. It is alleged that the person accused of shooting Osman Hadi, who is also linked to the Awami League, fled to India on the very day after the schedule for the upcoming election was announced.

Following the news of Osman Hadi's death, a severe deterioration of law and order has been observed across the country. Odhikar strongly condemns the killing of Osman Hadi, the killing of Dipu Chandra Das, attacks on the newspaper offices, the assault on journalist Nurul Kabir, the attacks on Chhayanaut and Udichi, and the arson attack on the prosecutor's residence.

Odhikar believes that certain groups are actively attempting to sabotage the long-awaited election. The Awami League, whose activities have been banned, had earlier threatened that the election would be violent. The lack of intelligence surveillance and timely action by law enforcement agencies ahead of such grave acts of violence and sabotage has placed citizens' security at serious risk.

Odhikar believes that it is the responsibility of the interim government to protect the lives and property of the people and to assist the Election Commission in holding the upcoming election in a free and fair manner. Odhikar believes that these killings, acts of sabotage and threats are deliberate attempts to derail the upcoming election.

Odhikar's recommendations to the interim government are as follows:

1. Arrest all those involved in the murder of Osman Hadi and bring them to justice. The government should exert pressure on the Government of India—if necessary, at the international level—to return the accused killers of Osman Hadi who had fled to India.
2. Arrest and prosecute all those involved in the murder of Dipu Chandra Das.
3. Ensure the safety and protection of journalists, media outlets, dissenting voices and all citizens.
4. Provide security to all candidates contesting in the upcoming election, and to all leaders and activists associated with the July movement who are facing threats.
5. Increase intelligence activities so that any unwanted incidents can be prevented before they occur.
6. Improve the overall law and order situation. The government must remain extremely vigilant to ensure that no killings or acts of sabotage take place under the guise of violent extremism.

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