

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

BANGLADESH: Stop stifling the whistleblower, Mr. Adilur Rahman Khan arrested

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is informed that, at 10:20 p.m., on 10 August, officers from the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police have taken into custody, Mr. Adilur Rahman Khan, one of the most respected human rights defenders in Bangladesh, from his residence in Dhaka. Adilur is the Secretary of Odhikar, a prominent human rights organisation in the country, known for its critical assessments of human rights in performance and practice, by the Government of Bangladesh. Adilur has also served as the Deputy Attorney General of Bangladesh and is a Senior Lawyer practicing at the Supreme Court.

Adilur's arrest will have a chilling effect upon the entire civil society in the country. That such arrest in Bangladesh often is accompanied by brutal forms of torture, leading to even deaths in custody, places Adilur's life and security at great peril in the hands of the state agency.

The AHRC and all of its partners condemn Adilur's arrest and detention, and calls upon the Government of Bangladesh to immediately release Adilur from custody. We further request the government, to ensure that Adilur is neither tortured nor inhumanly treated by the police.

The AHRC is informed that the arrest is allegedly on the accusation, that Adilur has committed offences under the Information and Communications Technology Act, 2006, a legislation misused at will in Bangladesh, to silence freedom of opinion and expression, and often used by the government in violation of personal privacy and professional indemnity of the citizens. The AHRC urges all diplomatic missions in Dhaka to intervene in this case so that Adilur will not be ill treated by the police or tortured in custody.

The AHRC is in contact with Adilur's family and is provided with the following information:

At about 10:20 p.m., Adilur was returning home in his vehicle along with his wife and children. When the vehicle entered the compound of the house where the family resides, at No: 35, Road 117, Gulshan, Dhaka; an SUV and a white minibus approached the house. About 8 to 10 men in civilian dress, who came in the two vehicles, entered the compound. The security guard at the house tried to prevent the strangers from entering the compound and demanded to know who they were. The men did not bother to respond and they surrounded Adilur's car.

When Adilur came out of his car and demanded to know from the men who they are and what business they had without permission at his residence, they reportedly informed Adilur that they are from the Detective Branch of Bangladesh Police. The men then ordered Adilur to accompany them immediately. It is reported that without waiting for Adilur to respond, the men forced

Adilur into their vehicle and left. Neither Adilur, nor the family was informed why they were taking Adilur into custody and where they were taking him.

It is reported that Adilur is detained at the Office of the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, at 36 Minto Road, Dhaka. It is suspected that the reason for the government to arrest Adilur is a report Odhikar has published, after its fact-finding mission concerning the 5 May 2013 violence in Bangladesh.

In the report, Odhikar has alleged, that 61 persons were killed in the violence. The Government of Bangladesh demanded Odhikar to produce proof regarding the murder of these people, with the details of the family members, who spoke to Odhikar in confidence. Fearing that the government, after receiving such information would hunt down the families who spoke about the deaths of their relatives to Odhikar, Odhikar requested the government to constitute an independent enquiry commission to probe the deaths, and assured the government that it will produce its findings before such a body and not to the government. The Government of Bangladesh has been denying any deaths in the 5 May incident and has been trying its best to silence everyone who has spoken against the killing spree that hit the country in May this year.

Adilur's son, while speaking to the AHRC has expressed serious concern about his father's safety in police custody. Adilur's wife, Mrs. Saira Rahman Khan, a barrister and Professor of Law at the BRAC University in Dhaka, has informed the AHRC that the family has convened a press conference at Odhikar's office.

Adilur's arrest and detention is a chilling proof of the witch-hunt the Government of Bangladesh is systematically carrying out in the country, silencing all forms of voices against the incumbent government's human rights abuses. Adilur's arrest, and the manner in which it has been carried out, is further proof to the fact that the space for human rights, free expression and opinion has drastically reduced in the country.

Adilur being a senior member of the Supreme Court Bar, his arrest and detention can also be viewed as unjustifiable encroachment into professional freedom and indemnity of lawyers in Bangladesh. The AHRC hopes that the Supreme Court Bar Association and the country's judiciary will not let such arrest and detention continue without being legally challenged.

The AHRC, therefore requests all of you to intervene in this case, and call upon the Government of Bangladesh to release Adilur from custody immediately.

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