16 individuals have been slapped with an ICT lawsuit

Bangladesh has some broad media laws to tackle issues ranging from defamation to fake news, and the spread of propaganda, but many in the local media allege these laws are now being used to curb free speech and rein in press freedom in the country. Basically, section 57 of Bangladesh's Information and Communication Act is an attack on freedom of expression and repressive.

As it turned out a lawsuit was filed on 27th February 2017 against 16 individuals in accordance with section 57 of Bangladesh's Information and Communication Act 2006, the merits of which will be contested in the Magistrate's Court in Madaripur. The case number is 93/2017.

What is of greater importance however is the lawsuit's connection to the Prime Minister herself. Our court correspondence informs us that there is no direct. However, the plaintiff, one Mr MD Monir Hawlader, Sub Inspector of Rajoir Police Station states the accused individuals in this lawsuit have slandered the good name of the Prime Minister Hasina, her government, made seditious statements and conspired against Bangladesh.

Speaking of the accused, a total of 16 individual (listed below, starting with the primary defendant) have been named as defendants in this lawsuit. The defendants allegedly had an abusive statement published in the social media platform 'Facebook'. The said post, our correspondent states, contain 'vile and provocative' comments against Prime Minister Hasina.

The names of those accused in this lawsuit are as follows:

Kasem Sarder, Dilip Chandra Sarkar, Mohammad Hafizur Rahman, Toiyeb Ali, Nihar Ranjan Sarkar, Zafar Hawlader, Azgar Bepary, Yousuf Chokder, Sajib Khan, Rajib Khan, Dipak Majumder, Palash Kumar Das, Samir Kumar Shil, Kamal Das, Sudeb Mandal.

Our correspondent did try to get in touch with the plaintiff but was unsuccessful. Our correspondent also reached out to the Police for comments. We were refused entry into the station proper as a spokesperson for the police chose to speak to us outside instead. He stated, "These are very serious allegations and our officers are trying their best to coordinate their efforts into investigating them. Of course, we are yet to conclude primary investigations before producing a charge sheet, but nevertheless the media will be notified in due course if there are any significant developments."

Meanwhile, we got in touch with the Bangladesh Home ministry regarding this lawsuit and are yet to receive a response, so watch this space.

Although the courts of Bangladesh are fairly saturated with defamation lawsuits, high profile ones such as this one tend to bear added implications rather than just legal ones.

According to Section 57 of Information and Communication Act 2016, the accused, if found guilty of slandering Prime Minister Hasina and government, will be liable to not only face a sizeable fine but also a significant amount of jail time.