55 Accused of Blasphemy Now…Crackdown Continues with No Signs Of Ceasing



Main Accused Zobair Hossain

It will perhaps go down as one of the most astonishing lawsuits ever filed in a court of law of Bangladesh, but it has happened and this time 55 individuals have been accused of committing blasphemy, an act worthy of being punishable by death according to certain sections of the Bangladeshi society. The accused here certainly face some serious legal repercussions, and of course the wrath of the Bangladeshi society, even its administration as the case will surely be well-publicised.

In accordance with Bangladesh Penal Code 295, C. R. case number 719/18 was filed with the Senior Judicial Magistrate Court, Dhaka this past 17/10/2018. The plaintiff, one Mr Munshi Makidul Islam, has listed more than 4 dozen individuals whom he believes to have “hurt the religious sentimentality of a nation” and are culpable of “concocting various obscenities” about Islam and its Prophet (PBUH).

The 55 individuals, that is their exact number, have been named as follows,

Zobair Hossain (primary accused) (31), Arifur Rahman, Md. Tofayel Hossain, Hosni Mobarak, Secular Publishers Ltd, Arunangsho Chakrabarty, Chinmoy Debnath, Adnan Saqib, Abdur Rahman , Abu Hanif , Syed Mohammad Sajeeb Abed , Syed Sunvy Anick Hossain, Taushnuva Fardousi , Naymul Islam , M D Abdullah Al Hasan , H.M Atiqur Rahman , Asif Abrar Titu , Abul Hasnat , Hayat Hamid Ullah Robin , Shafi Nawaz Shipu , Miltan Kumar Dey , Sharmin Jannat Bhutto, Abu Taher Md. Mostafa, Saiful Islam, Arman Ahmed, Nazmul Hossain, Sujan Chandra Deb, Suranjoy Sarker, Syed Samun Ali , Faisal Hossain Anick, Abdul Ahad Shanto , Syed Ishtiak Hossain , Pinaki Deb Apu , Sohag Kazi , Enayetul Huda , Roosevelt Halder , Yeaz Kawsar , Maruf Hasan, Syed Ishtiak Hossain Shaon , Tahera Sultana , Farhana Yasmin , Abdul Ahad , Masud Khan , M.D Sabbir Hossain , Jawad Nirjhor , Kishore Das , Hafizur Rahman , Abdul Kader , Shipon Ahmed , A.F.M Abdullah Masum , Tamzid Hossain , Rakibul Islam Pintu , Farzana Islam , Bani Mahmud Shuvo , Al Mamun Ahmed

The above-named individuals have been accused of writing and contributing blasphemous content to a magazine called “Atheist in Bangladesh”. The magazine reportedly features crude and vociferous articles against religion in general, Islam in particular. More than anything the plaintiff Mr Makidul Islam appeared most perturbed at the lewd and disrespectful portrayal of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). Mr Makidul Islam states the Prophet (PBUH) is his role model, whose lifestyle is his guiding principle.

Our court correspondent reports that the plaintiff Mr Makidul Islam came across the magazine shortly after it was published. Mr Makidul could gauge just by the title, as he states, that the magazine was abusive. However, once he delved deep, he was rocked to the core at the vile and baseless lies aimed at religion, pointedly at Islam and Muslims, the emissaries of peace.

However, we are not surprised to see ‘Atheist in Bangladesh’ in the midst of it all again. The organization, which sponsors these magazines, have gained a notorious reputation here in Bangladesh so far for their anti-religious stance, and have been subjected to multiple lawsuits over recent years, similar to the one we are focusing on now.

Nevertheless, our court correspondent decides to conduct a one-man brief investigation and his first move was to get in touch with the accused. That was easier said than done. He tried contacting ‘Atheist in Bangladesh’ proper but information available on their website (as unearthed from court sources) is scant, however, we did manage to find an email address. We are still waiting for a response from them. What was unsurprising again, was that none of the accused were available for comment. In fact, our correspondent was able to discover fairly quickly that most of them were already residing abroad.

Mr Makidul, of course, was available to spare us a few choice words. For the purpose of keeping this space clean, we will refrain from publishing the colourful language Mr Makidul employed at times. Speaking to us via Skype, Mr Makidul says, “I’m proud to have taken the initiative to do something about this unwanted epidemic which threatens to cripple our nation. No one is doing anything about it! Least of all the government who have seemingly given up after being overwhelmed by the sheer numbers these (colourful language) have. As a responsible citizen, pious Muslim, I felt compelled to have them tried for the obscenities they have concocted, none more so that the unwarranted criticism of our beloved Prophet Mohammed (PBUH)”

This lawsuit comes of course on the back what is currently rather a fragile environment in Bangladesh. From a social standpoint, the nation is divided into factions now, some embracing the growing trend of fundamentalism, some like the government and law enforcement authorities who are currently struggling to subjugate the random bouts of terrorism, militancy that has spread throughout the nation in current times. And there is another faction much like the accused, who chose to be liberal, perhaps too liberal in their thinking and their actions. The recently murdered bloggers, free-thinking souls, journalists, activists, writers can also be included in this group.

Reactions towards the lawsuit have been decidedly hostile. Social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit which were the ones we tracked for reaction) which have been rife ever since news of the lawsuit broke in, indicate that the public agrees with Mr. Makidul Islam ’s action.

In stark contrast though, several independent writers, bloggers, and online activists have firmly criticised Mr Makidul Islam, and accused the law of being “biased and medieval”.

Meanwhile, our correspondent did pay a visit to The Police Bureau of Instigations (PBI), seeking to have a word with the person in charge of investigating the charges brought forth in

this lawsuit. We were sadly unable to get a hold of him. Our correspondent, however, promises to bring our readers an update as soon as we know more.