

## Hefazat-e-Islam, a growing cancer in Bangladesh?

*By Kishor K. Das*

### **Introduction:**

Compromise between Present governments with Hefazat-e-Islam Islam, the biggest Islamic group backed by radical Muslims of the country has reached into an ominous stage according to the non-communal people of Bangladesh. It is thought by the secular people of Bangladesh that the present government is intentionally patronising Islamic groups to ensure their continuing dominance in the political field and to survive in the power. Present ruling party, Bangladesh Awamileague formed a government in 2014 in a non-participated election by all political parties of Bangladesh where 154 parliament member were elected uncontested. Since then the present government has been continuously controlling the opposition parties by extrajudicial activities and has been succeeded to do so apart from those radical Islamic religious groups like Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam who are currently acting as policymaker of Bangladesh even not being part of the government. To understand their influence in Bangladesh and realise the power of Hefazat-e-Islam this article intends to go through the evolvment, recent activities, influence and impact of Hefazat-e-Islam in the secularism in Bangladesh.

### **Background and powerhouse of Hefazat-e-Islam:**

Hefazat-e-Islam was formed in 2010, comprising of the teachers of several Madrasas (Islamic Schools) of Chittagong, opposing the proposed plan of giving men and women equal rights in inheritance. They conduct their activities based on Qawmi Madrasas of Bangladesh. According to a report of BANBEIS (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and statistics there are 13902 Qawmi Madrasas where more than 1.4 million Quranic students are studying there in Bangladesh. Teaching Islam through Arabic medium is the sole goal of most of these madrasas. Most of the students there are orphans. In Bangladesh, the term orphan not only refers them whose parents died but also referred to them whose parents do not have the capability to feed them.

The Madrasa authorities house those orphans, feed them and most importantly teach them even to sacrifice their lives to establish an 'Islamic Society' for the sake of here and hereafter. Being deprived of the minimum opportunities of the life, those young orphans think people who are giving them shelter and food are 'angel' ready to carry any order made by them.

Those orphans from the very early life are thought there is only one God who is Allah and the Islam is superior than any other religion, anyone apart from Muslim are deprived of 'God's blessing', worshipping the sculpture is 'Haram' and should not be allowed anybody to do so, women shouldn't be allowed alone outside and they should stay within veil, every Muslim of the world is their brother and they have to be accountable in the final judgement for what they have done for the fellow Muslims in the world. Apparently, they have also thought the West is the enemy of Islam and they even should sacrifice their lives to kill their enemy to ensure Zannat (heaven), a place of endless luxury with 70 Huris (beautiful women) for each man. By getting brain drained and in expectation of getting Jannat (heaven) most of those students there get ready to do anything for the sake of Islam and quite a significant number of them get ready to engage themselves in Zihad to kill the enemies of Islam.

These Quami Madrasas run by Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam are not at all financial dependant on Bangladeshi Government. These 13902 Madrasas comprising of 1.4 million students with food and accommodation totally depend on private donation which enables them to avoid state control. It is alleged that this huge amount of donation comes from some individuals from the Middle East

who plan to make Bangladesh as a Sharia government state. Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam is the sole authority to run all these Madrasas and Hathazari Madrasa a resident of more than 14000 students is used as the headquarter of them. Shah Ahmed Shah Ahmed Shafi, who opined once “women are nothing but mouth-watering tamarind for men” is the supreme leader of the Islamic group.

### **Early Roar:**

By getting backed by thousands of fearless radical young Muslims, who are ready to die for the ‘sake’ of Islam, Hefazat-e-Islam decided to inform their existence in 2010 for the first time. They declared to hold a rally and meeting in Laldighi, a significant political place of Chittagong City against the then government plan of banning Madrassa education, religious-based politics, and cancellation of the fifth amendment of the constitution and a proposed education policy that would have ended Madrasha education.

\*Present ruling party Awami league was the then government took a strong stand against the Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam’s procession and did not give them permission to hold the rally. Despite not getting permission from thousands of desperate Hefazat-e-Islam activists, almost all of them were madrasa students, started to head towards Chittagong city with different regional weapons. A clash broke down with Police in the entrance of Chittagong city and many were injured including police. Realising the government’s zero tolerance against them Hefazat-e-Islam confined themselves in the bottle. Since then until 2013 nothing was heard about that radical group.

### **Resurgence:**

Hefazat-e-Islam became talk of the house and real threat of the secularism of Bangladesh in time of the movement of the young generation demanding capital punishment of the crime against the humanity by the Bangladeshi during the liberation war, 1971. Hefazat-e-Islam declared those young bloods demanding the capital punishment of the war criminal as atheist and insisted to protest them. It is worth mentioning that most of the suspect war criminals were a member of another similar radical Islamic religious group Jamat E Islam. Secular blogger and online activists became the target of Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam and a few were killed though they never admit their involvement in any killing. However the non-communal community of Bangladesh started to be concerned of Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam since then.

### **13-point Demand Agitation & Muscle Display:**

On 06 April 2013, hundreds of thousands people wearing ‘Islamic Dress’ gathered in a rally lead by Shah Ahmed Shafi the head of Hefazat-e-Islam to present their demand. This was the first national scale movement by the radical group. They declared 13 points charter heading with changing the constitution of Bangladesh by restoring the phrase ‘Complete faith and trust in the name of almighty Allah’. Secularism was one of four principles adopted in the constitution of Bangladesh after the liberation war in 1972. Though Bangladesh is a pre-dominated Muslim country ‘secularism’ was rather than ‘Islamic Republic’ was adopted in the mother constitution to honour all the martyrs’ regardless religion during the liberation war.

Other notable part of the whole 12 points charter is introducing new law with capital punishment for any defamation of Islam, stopping male and female free movement, making Islamic education mandatory from primary to higher level of education, removing all the sculptures and cancelling the women policy which intends to empower the women of Bangladesh.

It was declared by the Islamic radical group Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam in that rally that there

is no way other than accepting their demands by the government. Shah Ahmed Shafi the supreme leader of the group worded outrageously "Regardless whoever in the state power or wish to form government in future, they must accept our 13 points charter." He also urged to his follower to get ready even to sacrifice their lives for their future programs.

His Fanatic orphan (most of them were teen-age) followers took his evocation as sacred order and did not take long to respond their 'sacred leader'. After series of separate attacks to the non-communal groups, hundreds of thousands young Islamic dressed Muslims flocked together in the centre of Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh on 05 May, 2013 to establish their 12 points charter in an rally led by Shah Ahmed Shafi. Eyes were firing, Body language was like ready to die of those Madrassa students attended in that rally. It is estimated that more than 500,000 students and teachers from Madrasha clogged in that instigation and many were waiting in the nearby areas to back up if necessary.

Most of the people of the country thought they would leave the place after the rally until the late evening. Even after the whole day programs there was no sign of leaving them rather their arrogance was peaking with time. The whole country specially the non-communal people stood still in the late evening for something very ominous when Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam activists started violent fierce clash by burning 100s of shops in the nearby places.

After a whole day discussion with the Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam leader at last the government which was formed by Present ruling party Awamileague came into the realisation that the Islamic radical group is aiming at even change in the state power to establish their demands. The government decided to go in 'hard line' and Police Procession with tear gas and firing started at about 2 a.m. by cutting electricity power. Hundreds including police died though the actual number of death is never known. Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam was forced to leave the place. It has been alleged by Hefazat-e-Islam and many Human Rights organisation that thousands of madrasa students died by Police firing. The main reason of not knowing the actual number of death is that most of those died were orphans and they do not have anybody to claim for their death body.

### **Control or Compromise?**

Since 05 January 2005, the leaders and activists of Hefazat started to avoid public appearances for a while. However the non-communal people of Bangladesh got relieved and appropriate step of the then government was appreciated from all the secular activists of the country. But, Alas! The trust and faith to the government of controlling any religious extremism lasted for very short time until it started to be appeared that government compromised with the Hefazat-e-Islam rather controlling them. Now a days it is believed by the non-communal people of Bangladesh that, Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam's inactivity was technical rather than incapability and more likely to be an intern negotiation with the government. Some decisions by the government in recent past back that doubt. Actually during the silence period of Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam in 2014-2016 before and after General Election of Bangladesh, they were getting more organised a stronger so that they can achieve their demands from the government.

### **First & Firm Strike:**

Secularism principle was struck firmly for the first time in many years by a verdict of Supreme Court in March 2016. Though theoretically judicial department is independent than executive department practically it is, as biased as anytime of the history of the country.

In the very beginning of the Bangladeshi Constitution, 1972; secularism was adopted one of the four basic principles. This principle was repealed after 8th amendment of Constitution which

was done in 1988 by lieutenant General Hussain Muhammed Ershad by declaring Islam as the state religion in a symbolic bid to win popular support. A petition was filed against the amendment by some of the elite secularists warning that naming Islam state religion would lead the country towards fundamentalism. Apparently their agitation was proved by the later occurrences of Bangladesh. However the petition was ignored for 28 years by the court surprisingly. After forming government by the Awamileague in 2009 with overwhelming majority they made a further amendment in the constitution reaffirming the Islam as religion state with additional term 'Secularism' and 'equal status' of other religion. The wording of the 2011 amendment shows itself how contradictory the wording is. Moreover, the 2011 amendment including Islam as state religion carries much more significance as it has been done by elected government rather than a military government. Actually 1988 an autocrat made decision was legalised in the 2011 amendment of the constitution by the government of a party which was believed to be more likely to uphold the dignity of secularity in Bangladesh. The secular class of the country got absolutely stunned by the decision of the government and a supplementary to its 1988 case was filed in the court. High court then passed an order asking the giver why reaffirming Islam as state religion should not be declared void.

After prolonged waiting, 28 March 2016 was set to hear the petition by High Court. By the time, Bangladeshi politics has changed immensely. In 2014 Awamileague formed government in a non participated election and led them rely on administrative power rather than will of common people. Hefazat-e-Islam-e-Islam knew very well about the weakness of government. They took the chance to implement their agendas using the weakness of the government and sentiment of the fanatic Muslim of the Country. Before the verdict date Hefazat-e-Islam with other Islamic fundamentalist group of Bangladesh started to threaten continuously that abolishing Islam as religious state from constitution would bring disaster for a country compromising 90% Muslims.

Threat of the radical Muslim group's worked like tonic. The Court rejected the petition and at last Bangladesh, which established as secular country turned into an Islamic Country declaring as State Religion is Islam' by the verdict of 'biased' court. The most alarming part of that verdict was that it happened during the ruling time by a party which used to be thought as committed to uphold the dignity of Secularism in Bangladesh. The rejection of the petition by the court or in other words making the court to reject it put the government in a favourable position. It is reported that such a strategy allowed the government to avoid setting out its position, which could have been fraught with political danger.

Going back to the 13 points Charter from Hefazat-e-Islam, the rejection of the case by the Court is the first massive success to attain their Goal. The first point of their charter was to restore the term 'complete faith and trust in the name of almighty Allah'. Upholding Islam state religion does not fully but nearly recognise 1st point of Hefazat-e-Islam's charter. Since bringing public, the 13 points charter in 20013, Hefazat-e-Islam got their first massive success on 2016 within 3 years of time.

### **Pushing Hard:**

This success encouraged them to go further down to achieve their goal. Shah Ahmed Shafi the supreme leader of Hefazat-e-Islam started to be vocal more than ever regarding different contemporary issue of Bangladesh. They started to push harder the government for their fanatic Islamic demands. In late 2015 amid frequent occurrence of the rape in Bangladesh Shah Ahmed Shafi the Ameer of Hefazat-e-Islam opined that 'dresses' of female is the reason for rape. By the term 'dresses'; he pointed that not maintaining the Islamic dress code is the reason of Rape. Instead accusing the rapper, his blaming towards girls for wearing dress accordingly their choice is nothing but justifying rape. His word came like as 'Fatwa'. His hundreds of

thousands fanatic young Muslim followers since then, have been carrying the messages through social media and every possible means that if the women of Bangladesh do not follow the Islamic dress code they might have to be victim of rape. It is alleged that a lots of female have been the victim of rape just because not following the Islamic dress code. Very recently a prominent media person of Bangladesh had to apologise public amid extreme threat from radical Muslims of the country for saying “dresses” is not the reason of rape in a television program. Shah Ahmed Shafi further opined the women are nothing but mouth-watering tamarind which means Women have nothing do in the world but satisfying men’s physical demand. His every word is being sent through in every single corner of the country and social media is being used for that. As a result, apart from the main cities of the country girls are scared to go for outing with their boyfriends in fear of being harassed or even something worse. Though all these radical activities is visible in the social media and the government has been using ICT act strictly to control any opposite opinion they are more likely to reluctant to take steps against those fanatic Muslims.

The more Hefazat-e-Islam are achieving the more they are getting outrageous to achieve their demands. From 2016 they started demand to remove all the sculptures from the country which is 7<sup>th</sup> of their 13 point demand agitation. In 2017 they went to hard-line to remove statue of lady justice symbolising justice from all from the Supreme Court premises claiming the statue represents idol worship which is forbidden by Islam. They demanded to replace the statue with a gigantic Quran. Hefazat-e-Islam warned they would go for mass movement if the statue remained there. Progressive people of Bangladesh strongly protested against the demand of removing the statue but the government got scared of another demonstration and removed the statue amid Islamist’s demand. Removing the lady’s justice statue is thought as one of the biggest slaps in the secular characteristic of Bangladesh in time to remember. However this was not the first time a statue has to remove by radical’s demand. Numerous numbers of sculptures or artworks either had to remove or vandalised by the Islamic radicals themselves, in Bangladesh claiming existence of idols is against Islamic structures.

From the middle of 2016 Islamic Scholars (led by Hefazat) of Bangladesh started to demand change in the text book of national curriculum by removing the ‘atheistic’ contents. Changing the book of national curriculum was the 5<sup>th</sup> demand of Hefazat-e-Islam’s 13 charters. When the books were distributed in January 2017, it was appeared that 17 poems and stories, deemed ‘atheistic were removed from Bangla book. Some other changes were made as well. On first grade, studying ‘o’ for ‘ol’ a type of yam was replaced by ‘orna’ a scarf which a girl in the starting of her puberty, is insisted to wear by the devoted Muslim parents. Furthermore, in 6th grade a travelogue describing Hindu-Dominated place was replaced as well.

### **Steeping Next:**

The biggest achievement was gained by Hefazat-e-Islam is compelling the government to recognise the degree of Qawmi Madrasha, the ultimate power house of Islamic radicalism in Bangladesh. The decision by the government to recognise Qawmi degree raised many eyebrows in the country as nobody actually knows what the curriculum in those Madrasas is. None of those Madrasas teach Science, literature categorising them to encourage atheism. Only a few numbers of those Madrasas teach Bengali and English in their curriculum.

Demand of recognition of Qwami Madrsa degree came to the force font for the first time in 2006. The then PM, Khaleda Zia, declared on 21 August 2006 that, they decided to recognise Qwami Madrasha degree. This was nothing but a political announcement which was made just 3 months before the General Election of the country. The main target of such a declaration was to be

supported by the Islamists of the country during the transitional period.

However, Awamileague instead of BNP formed the government in the next election which was held in 2009 instead of 2006. Madras teacher and other 'Islamic-Scholar' kept pressuring the government for the recognition. In the face of their demand current government initiated steps to reform Qwami Madrasha education system, by forming a commission of 17 members and making a draft policy to improve their education system with inclusion of modules like Bengali, English, Science and then recognising their degree.

A draft was proposed by the commission and was scheduled to be placed in the Cabinet meeting for approval on 28 October 2013 but the ministry stepped back on the face of threat of 'breaking civil war in the country' by Hefazat-e-Islam chief Shah Ahmed Shafi for any attempt of controlling Qwami Madrassa education system.

After 4 years of that threat by Shah Ahmed Shafi a curriculum was revived by a committee led by Shah Ahmed Shafi and PM Sheikh Hasina declared to recognise Qwami degree on April 12, 2017 in a meeting with 350 Qwami Madrasha representative led by Shah Ahmed Shafi.

### **Conclusion:**

After the introduction of 13 Charter by Hefazat-e-Islam in 2013, within 5 years unexpectedly and surprisingly they have managed to establish some of their demands. And the achievement was made during the power of such a political party in Bangladesh that was thought to be more committed than others to uphold the dignity of secularism in the country.

Current Ruling Party who allegedly compromised with Hefazat-e-Islam apparently controlled the radical demands of Hefazat in their first term of power from 2009-2014. But during the second consecutive period of their state power they started to be more amicable to the radical group.

It is thought by the common people of Bangladesh that an uncontested election led Awamileague, present ruling party, to negotiate with Hefazat. Such an approach has brought a disastrous effect by allowing Hefazat-E-Islam to influence in the important policy of the country.

Minority safety has reached in a critical stage in time to remember in the Bangladesh. Many a number of Hindu Families of the country is crossing the border everyday due to continuous systematic oppression. Secularists have been cornered. Bloggers and Writers are being attacked continuously. It is warned by the secular people of Bangladesh that if the Hefazat-E-Islam can't be stopped not they are turning in yet another Islamic Radical Monster in South Asia.

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Political Manhunt: Alongkarpur Local Wanted By RAB For 'Anti-Government' Activities



*“There is no freedom in this country. It is barbaric to invade and assault someone’s home just because of the way he expresses himself.”* These are comments made by a spokesperson (who wishes to remain unnamed) of the Upazilla BNP headquarters, and they come after another raid last night involving the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) no less.

In what was a confusing, but uneasy few hours for the residents of Alongkarpur village, Baliakandi, Rajbari, a team dispatched by the local RAB headquarters shut down the whole area denying access in our out. Their objective was to locate one Md Sabbir Hossain, a local, whom they accuse of “actively partaking in anti-government activities”.

Mr Hossain, son of Moslem Uddin Biswas (a long time local of Alongkarpur) has been accused of producing deceptive and hostile content towards the current regime and publishing them across several media platforms including popular social media outlets. According to local sources, Mr Hossain is an active supporter of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). He apparently has also dabbled in politics quite early in his life, namely as one of the leaders of the Monsur Ali degree College Chatradal. Mr Hossain currently resides in the United Kingdom.

At around 12 am on Friday night after the locking Alongkarpur down, the RAB team proceeded to locate Mr Hossain’s family home, before infiltrating it and staying there for a good few hours. There are rumours that the RAB team engaging in destruction of valuables inside Mr Hossain’s home, but we were unable to confirm that for Mr Hossain’s family refused to speak to journalists following the incident. We were told Mr Hossain’s father is nowhere to be found in the immediate aftermath of the raid, but the rest of his family are fine for now. The whole ordeal though has made for a tense atmosphere inside Alangkarpur and it is likely to be that way for the next few days.

We approached the Rajbari RAB headquarters for comments and one of their spokespersons offered, *“We cannot say much, for we are yet to concluded preliminary investigations on it. We are carefully considering all the information available to us, with regards to any possible conspiracy against our government”*. We were told to vacate the premises immediately afterwards.

Anup Roy/56AR/23/Delhi

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## Sociedad thrash Atletico to leave Barca on brink of title

Atletico Madrid slumped to a 3-0 defeat at resurgent Real Sociedad on Thursday which means runaway La Liga leaders Barcelona need one more victory to wrap up a 25th Spanish league title.

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Second-placed Atletico were outplayed by the Basques from start to finish and fell behind in the 27th minute to a thumping strike off the post from forward Willian Jose after a cut-back from former Manchester United winger Adnan Januzaj.

Real Sociedad have been on a good run of form since Imanol Alguacil succeeded sacked coach Eusebio Sacristan and they welcomed Atletico after hammering Girona 5-0 and winning 1-0 at Las Palmas in their last two games.



They continued to create chances against Atletico, who were missing striker Diego Costa through injury, and sealed a deserved victory when forward Juanmi knocked in a pass from Willian Jose in the 80th minute. Juanmi struck again in stoppage-time to complete Atletico's heaviest league defeat this season, sending Real Sociedad up to 11th in the standings.

Second-placed Atletico have 71 points after 33 games while Barca have 83 and third-placed Real Madrid 68. Barca, who drew 2-2 with Celta Vigo on Tuesday and are still unbeaten in the league, will clinch the title if they win their next league game away to Deportivo La Coruna on April 29.

"We need to analyse what has happened and take steps to improve in our final few games because recently we have suffered a lot away from home," said Atletico coach Diego Simeone, whose side have lost three of their last four away games in all competitions.

"We had a bad first half and although we improved we couldn't manage to score and Real Sociedad finished the game stronger than us and we have to congratulate them on the victory."

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## UK Awami League demonstrates in London, demands Tarique's extradition

A day after Sheikh Hasina said her government is trying to negotiate the extradition of Tarique Rahman, the UK chapter of the Awami League has demanded that the top BNP leader be sent back to Bangladesh to face justice.

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They staged a demonstration in front of the British Parliament at London's Westminster on Wednesday to put pressure on Prime Minister Theresa May's government.



The protest was also meant to counter demonstrations by BNP activists in London on the same day as Prime Minister Hasina is attending the Commonwealth summit. Now heading the BNP from exile, Tarique is convicted of money laundering and corruption in two separate cases.

He is also being tried in many other cases, including one on charges of attempted assassination of Hasina.





The prime minister on Tuesday said they were trying to get the British government to extradite the BNP leader from London. "The UK is a free country, anybody can take shelter, refuge...that's true. The crime that the person committed... and already he is convicted," Hasina said.

"And I don't understand how UK enjoys keeping a convicted person," she had remarked.

Hasia also said her government was "eager" to take Tarique back.



"He should face the court," she said. "Well, we are talking to the British government about it and definitely one day we will take him back," she added. BNP Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique, in London for a decade, is standing in for his mother Khaleda Zia who was jailed for five years for corruption on Feb 8.

He has also been sentenced to 10 years in prison in the same case. He had earlier got a prison term

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### Govt. to impress diplomats with tourist safety measures

The Tourism Development Ministry will be reaching out to the diplomatic community to show the remedial action taken by the government to ensure that tourists aren't harassed or harmed in the future after the recent trouble experienced by tourists in Mirissa and the local communal violence which took place in Kandy.

"We will invite foreign ambassadors to visit Mirissa and brief them on the safety measures taken by the government.

The Kandy Hotels Association President has also invited ambassadors to visit the hill country to show that all is well," Tourism Development and Christian Religious Affairs Minister John Amaratunga said.

He said that this is being done to address any reservations foreign governments are holding on their citizens visiting Sri Lanka. Law & Order and Public Administration and Management Minister Ranjith Madduma Bandara said that due to the recent incidents which were covered by the media, bad publicity is being spread about Sri Lanka in foreign countries.

The government has now called on all tourism service providers in Mirissa to register with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, while 17 establishments constructed on the beach illegally would be removed next month by the Coast Conservation Department.

Amaratunga, who stressed that the two recent incidents in Mirissa were isolated, said that his ministry would also contribute funds to the Tourist Police to increase its effectiveness in ensuring the safety of tourists, in addition to the Rs. 50 million allocated in the 2017 budget and Rs. 30 million allocated in the 2018 budget for such purposes.

The Tourist Police, which is currently present in 11 tourism hotspots, would be expanded to another 20 locations as fast as possible, Inspector General of Police Pujith Jayasundara said. He admitted that there weren't enough police officers in the force to cover all tourism hotspots. "There aren't enough police officers. Those who are appointed to the Tourist Police however have a fair knowledge of English. We're also training them in languages like French and appointing officers who have a knowledge of Mandarin. We aren't treating this as a second tier

responsibility. We are doing the best we can given the resource constraints," he said. Amaratunga added that until new officers are recruited and trained, the police is exploring a possibility of appointing officers from other regions to tourism hotspots during the peak season of each hotspot.

Jayasundara however requested tourists to lodge complaints with the police as soon as any incidents occur, instead of complaining only to diplomats, or making complaints after going back to their home countries, as such actions delay the process of justice.

So far, 14 suspects have been arrested and remanded for their connection to the incidents in Mirissa, but the process of identifying them out of a line-up has been delayed since the tourists have returned to their home countries.

Meanwhile, Amaratunga added that the Excise Department also has to bear some responsibility since such incidents usually occur at establishments which sell liquor illegally and remain open until dawn.

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### Demonstrations turn aggressive as Indian tricolour ripped during PM Modi's UK visit

LONDON: Some groups protesting against atrocities in India during Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s visit here turned violent after a tricolour was torn down from one of the official flagpoles set up for all 53 Commonwealth countries.

Modi, who is in the UK for bilateral talks and the multilateral Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), was greeted by protesters as he met his British counterpart [Theresa May](#) on Wednesday.

Some of the protesters at [Parliament Square](#) turned aggressive after the Indian tricolour was torn down from the flagpole.

"Police are investigating after an Indian flag in Parliament Square was pulled down at 1500 (UK time) on Wednesday, 18 April. The flag has been replaced. There have been no arrests. Enquiries continue," a Metropolitan Police statement said.

The [Ministry of External Affairs](#) (MEA) said the matter was taken up with the British authorities, who expressed their regrets and immediately had the torn flag replaced with a new one.

"We're deeply anguished with the incident involving our national flag. Matter was taken up strongly with the UK side. They have regretted the incident. The flag was immediately replaced. We expect legal action against the people who were involved in this," MEA spokesperson [Raveesh Kumar](#) said at a press briefing on Thursday.

[View image on Twitter](#)

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<blockquote class="twitter-tweet" data-lang="en"><p lang="en" dir="ltr">We're deeply anguished with the incident involving our national flag. Matter was taken up strongly with the UK side. They have regretted the incident. The flag was immediately replaced. We expect legal action against the people who were involved in this: Raveesh Kumar, MEA Spox. <a href="https://t.co/c5ZxUv8zAa">pic.twitter.com/c5ZxUv8zAa</a></p>&mdash; ANI (@ANI) <a href="https://twitter.com/ANI/status/987027087507804160?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw">April 19, 2018</a></blockquote><script async src="https://platform.twitter.com/widgets.js" charset="utf-8"></script>
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A UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) spokesperson said, "While people have the right to hold peaceful protests, we are disappointed with the action taken by a small minority in Parliament Square and contacted High Commissioner Yashvardhan Kumar Sinha as soon as we were made aware.

“The visit to the UK by Prime Minister Modi has strengthened our relationship with India and we look forward to working even more closely together on a number of important areas.”

A senior broadcast journalist from one of the leading Indian media channels covering the protests was caught in a violent scrum with some of the more aggressive pro-Khalistani protesters and Scotland Yard officers on duty had to step in to the rescue. The group is planning to file a complaint with the Metropolitan Police on the incident.

“We have expressed our concerns with the British authorities and they have apologised for the incident. We have been warning against some of these elements out to make trouble and they have assured us of action. The Indian flag has now been replaced,” a senior Indian official associated with the PM’s visit said.

The pro-Khalistani demonstrators from Sikh Federation UK and demonstrators from the so-called “Minorities Against Modi” group, led by Pakistani-origin peer Lord Ahmed, were among nearly 500 protesters who descended upon Parliament Square. These included groups led by some Kashmiri separatist groups and at one point, some of them had surrounded the Mahatma Gandhi statue at the square with their banners and flags.

Officials involved with the prime ministerial visit to the UK had said that protests and demonstrations are “part and parcel of any democratic society” as long as they remain peaceful. There are now concerns that some of the more aggressive elements hijacked the tone of the protests.

Earlier on Wednesday, flash mob of sari-clad women with dhols set the tone for the pro-Modi crowds opposite 10 Downing Street as the Indian PM arrived for his breakfast meeting with British Prime Minister Theresa May. They were joined by the Friends of India Society International (FISI) group, which spearheaded a crowd of Indian diaspora from across the UK waving banners such as “Chak De India” and “Jai Hind” outside Downing Street and nearby Parliament Square.

“We want to welcome the Indian PM to the UK and show him the diaspora support he enjoys,” said one of the members of the gathering.

On the other side, the anti-Modi protesters from Caste Watch UK and South Asia Solidarity group waved banners such as ‘Modi, you have blood on your hands’ and ‘Modi Not Welcome’.

“Hindu nationalism must be curtailed to avert India sliding towards wholesale dictatorship threatening democratic fabric, rule of law and the unity of India,” a Caste Watch UK spokesperson said.

They were joined by other protestors carrying images the eight-year-old rape victim from Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir, and Gauri Lankesh, the Indian journalist who was shot at her doorstep last year.

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### Concern over Khaleda’s health grows as jail authorities cancel planned family visit

The jail authorities have cancelled a planned meeting of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia with her family members citing illness, the party says.

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Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir says they are worried about her health. Khaleda’s

sister Selina Islam, son Tarique Rahman's mother-in-law Iqbal Mand Banu and Tarique's sister-in-law Shahina Khan Zaman Bindu, and several other relatives went to visit her at the old jailhouse on Nazimuddin Road in Dhaka on Friday afternoon.

Mirza Fakhrul said they had permission to visit her, but the jail authorities did not allow them to see her. He said the authorities told Khaleda's relatives that she was "unable to come downstairs".

"It seems her condition has deteriorated a lot. We (BNP leaders) have also been denied an appointment," he added. Mirza Fakhrul and two other BNP leaders went to visit the former prime minister in jail on Thursday, but the jail authorities did not let them in.

"Her family members have expressed concern after hearing about her condition from the jail authorities. We are also concerned," the BNP secretary general said. Senior Superintendent of Dhaka jail Jahangir Kabir neither took bdnews24.com calls nor did he answer text queries on the issue. Khaleda has been in the prison since Feb 8 when a court sentenced her to five years in prison for corruption in Zia Orphanage Trust case.

Mirza Fakhrul met her in jail for the last time on Apr 6. The BNP chief underwent a medical checkup at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University the following day. On Mar 29, the jail authorities cancelled her meeting with Mirza Fakhrul, citing her illness.

The authorities also formed a team of doctors for Khaleda's treatment. After a checkup, the doctors said Khaleda's condition was 'nothing serious'.

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### 36 accused in biggest blasphemy lawsuit of recent times



In what is potentially one of the most significant blasphemy lawsuits of recent times, 35 individuals have been accused of having "offenses against religion" in Bangladesh. In accordance with Bangladesh Penal Code 295, C. R. case number 273/18 was filed with the Judicial Magistrate Court this past 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2018.

The plaintiff, one Mr. Shamim, has named 36 individuals in this lawsuit, and accused them of writing abusively about religion, in particular, Islam. The other accused are Nazmul Hossain Ghatok as the main accused, Editor Arifur Rahman, Roosevelt Halder, Adnan Saqib, Suranjoy Sarker, Sharmin Khan, Tahera Sultana, Syed Sunvy Anick Hossain, Syed Mohammad Sajeeb Abed, Saiful Islam, Faysal Hossain Onik, Pinaki Deb Apu, Miltan Kumar Dey, Sujan Chandra Dey, Abu Taher Muhammad Mustafa, Enyetul Huda, Husni Mubarak, Syed Isteak Hossain Shawon, Tofail Hossain, Naymul Hossain, Ashef Abrar Titu, MD Abdullah Al Hasan, Tamzid Hussain, Siddikur Rahman, Reana Trina, Hussain Muhammad Parvez, Shahadat Hosain, Syed Samun Ali, Abdul Ahad Shanto, Saiful islam, Shipon Ahmed, Zubayer Ahmed and Kamrunnaher Shahana.

The primary defendant, one [Mr. Nazmul Hossain A.K.A "Ghatok"](#), and a magazine called "Atheist In Bangladesh", who published an article he wrote, seem to be at the center of this lawsuit.

Our court correspondent reports that the plaintiff Mr. Shamim came across Mr. Hossain's article first in this particular magazine. The abusive content he found in the said article, prompted him to go through the entire magazine which he found to be inundated with crude, offensive and vehemently demeaning words towards religion as a whole.

We launched a small investigation in an attempt to uncover the history of this magazine. It appears "Atheist in Bangladesh" have been publishing such obscene content about religion, Islam in particular, for a good while now. Alongside that, it has also been endorsing and facilitating several individuals, particularly those accused in the lawsuit, who devote themselves towards producing such obscene, rude content.

This lawsuit comes of course on the back what is currently rather a fragile environment in Bangladesh. On one side we have a society readily embracing and accepting fundamentalism. And on the other, we have a government and law enforcement authorities currently engaged in an almighty tussle with bouts of terrorism, militancy that have plagued the nation in recent times.



Nevertheless, we were unable to get in touch with Mr. Shamim. Unsurprisingly our correspondent was not able to get in touch with any of the accused. However, he did manage to track down Mr. Nazmul Hossain's house in his hometown of Kalkini, Madaripur but found it to be devoid of living souls. When he queried some of the neighbors they revealed that the house has been empty for some time now and no one knows the whereabouts of its previous inhabitants.



Reactions towards the lawsuit have been generally mixed. Social media platforms which have been rife ever since news of the lawsuit broke in, are a perfect indicator of that. There were several users on Facebook for instance who claimed that “justice had been served”. Some stated that ‘Kafir’s Munafiks and Indian agents like that’ should be hanged till death. Some claimed that the accused should be grateful that they are even getting a chance at

fair trial, instead of being shot dead.

Meanwhile, several writers, bloggers, and online activists have firmly criticised Mr. Shamim for his actions. They described the Bangladesh Penal code 295 as the nation’s excuse for stifling freedom of speech. Some claimed that it encourages individuals like Mr. Shamim, who do not even have the required depth to understand religion and its roots, to take up arms against free-thinking souls at will.

We spoke to Mufti Babunagari, spokesperson of Hefajat E Islami Bangladesh, He condemned the accused for their actions, lauding Mr. Shamim meanwhile as a true Muslim. He claimed that Kafirs, Munafiks like that should either be stripped of their rights or deported to India.

The Police Bureau of Instigations (PBI) meanwhile has taken charge of this incident. One of their spokespersons, who wished to remain anonymous, revealed that the PBI is hard at work on investigating the claims made in this lawsuit. With time he promised all the details will be revealed, but for now, there is nothing to report.

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[Bangladeshi gay couple marriage goes viral online, prompts incessant abuse](#)



In breaking news, a Bangladeshi Muslim gay couple tied the knot in London, United Kingdom this past 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2017.

Mr Shahadat Hosain and his long-term partner Mr Masud Rana decided to tie the knot.

The union, which is a rather rare occurrence in its own right, in light of the fact that Mr Shahadat Hosain and his partner are both reported atheist gathered even more attention when the news of its occurrence spread across social media platforms like wildfire. The couple tried desperately to keep the marriage as low-key as possible, leaving Walthamstow council (where they tied the knot) as soon as they had gone through the formalities, and inviting no-one apart from their best friend Mr Sujjan Chandra Dev to the wedding, according to our sources.

Meanwhile, it is unclear as to how or when social media hawks caught wind of the couple's union. But it created a domino effect which spread endlessly across popular social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, generating quite a bit of attention.

The vast majority, sadly, condemned the news and the couple's 'illicit relationship'. Some cited the rules of Islam that prohibit such relationships in order to vilify the couple, while some resorted to downright foul language and verbal abuse of all kinds. Indeed most of the write-ups and links shared or uploaded across the aforementioned platforms, regarding the couple's marriage of course, were inundated with dozens of comments. While some did offer them their sympathies, the number of users actually congratulating them, were next to non-existent.

Some of those shared links and articles referred to above are given below,

<https://www.facebook.com/boysloveworld71/posts/1684269248357985>

<https://www.facebook.com/BengaliFaizlamis/posts/2018045411788769>

<https://www.facebook.com/Almostidiot/posts/1004539943051865>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/MairalaGroup.Net/permalink/1740828042678468/>

[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=1819143381719194&id=100008706493453](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1819143381719194&id=100008706493453)

Our readers are advised to exercise caution whilst going through the abovementioned links, as they contain some strong and explicit language. Worryingly enough some of the comments appeared to be rather extreme in nature, with some users threatening to kill the couple if they 'ever get wind' of them. There are some comments which we suspect to have stemmed from religiously extremists. The comments vary in nature, but have elements of religious extremism ingrained into them. A few links to those specific comments can of course be seen below. Please bear in mind again that the images contain strong language and are inappropriate for some of our readers. Proceed with caution.

It is hard to gauge what sort of effect it has had in Bangladesh, the newly wed couple's country of origin of course, but it cannot have been a good one. Bangladesh as a nation, has a reputation for harbouring core fundamentalist ideals, and as such its society strictly abhors anything to do with homosexuality. Of course, it has devised a legalized method of punishing those who practice homosexuality, namely via the Bangladesh Penal Code 377. For now, our correspondent reports that it is strictly limited to social media now but 'will not be long' before it reaches Bangladesh's national media and indeed other news local media outlets.

Our correspondent managed to round up a few of the local residents of Naraynganj (where Mr Hosain was born). The majority of them expressed great disdain over their union. A select few offered pity and sympathy rather than congratulations. There were few people who expressed their anger to the higher extent and told our correspondent that this entire act was nothing but a sin and a disgraceful act.

It is also worth mentioning that the same-sex marriage is perfectly legal in Britain. Legislation to allow same-sex marriage in England and Wales was passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom in July 2013 and came into force on 13 March 2014.

We did manage to track down Mr Hosain's parents in his hometown of Naraynganj in Bangladesh. They however flatly refused to speak to our correspondent regarding the incident, and instead stated that Mr Hosain is 'no longer a part of the family'.

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[Modhukhali Besieged: Minority households looted, demolished](#)





The Modhukali upazila Faridpur district was the scene of utter devastation this past 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2018 as around 50 households, all belonging to minority inhabitants were destroyed, leaving at least 2 people with major injuries.

The attack was carried out by Mr. Babu, the Chairman of Dumain, a village right next to Modhukhali. Mr. Babu and his gang of hooligans unleashed their fury upon the innocent families of Modhukhali after learning that one of Modhukhali's own, one Mr. Suranjoy Sarker, a resident of New Zealand currently, has been writing blasphemous content against Islam and its constituencies in his personal blog ([www.suranjoysarker.wordpress.com](http://www.suranjoysarker.wordpress.com))

Mr. Suranjoy Sarker, son of Modhukhali local Kamol Chandra Sarker, was accused of publishing blasphemous articles about Islam on his blog and across other media channels. Mr. Babu and his goons reportedly invaded Mr. Suranjoy Sarker's and demanded to speak to his father. It is reported that he verbally abused his father, Mr. Kamol Chandra of afterward Babu constantly berated Mr. Kamol Chandra Sarker by telling him that his son has been posting crude, abhorrent and lewd articles about Islam and its "Beloved Prophet (PBUH)" on the internet and his personal blog.

Later on, our correspondent queried some of the locals about the incident. They stated that Babu demanded a public apology from Mr. Kamol Chandra over his son's antics and he was being very aggressive. His goons were armed with machetes, small to large knives and thick wooden bats and had surrounded the place.

That upset some of the younger local inhabitants of Modhukhali and they stepped in to help Mr. Kamol Chandra Sarker. Chairman Babu and his goons did not take very well to that and it prompted them to launch an all-out assault on Mr. Sarker and his family (those who were present in the house at that time) along the young men who showed their support for Mr. Kamol Chandra Sarker. The goons managed to gravely injure two young men in the process, one Arunavh Bishwas, and Bikash Ronjon. They have been taken to Faridpur Medical ever since and are receiving treatment.

Unfortunately, that began at Mr. Kamol Chandra's house, quickly spilled over to other minority households in the area as the goons demolished everything within their arm's length. There are several reports of looting and property destruction from more than 4 dozen or so minority households.

Meanwhile, there is an air of apprehension amongst the majority of the inhabitants of Modhukhali as they live in constant fear of another small-scale attack. We can confirm that representatives of the Faridpur Kotowali Police Station have inspected the scene of devastation. One of their spokespersons who was initially reluctant to speak to our correspondent at first did manage to inform us that the police has completed preliminary inspections of the crime scene.

However, he denied that a formal complaint has been lodged as told us that the matter needs "proper investigations" before being pushed up to the next stage. He declined to comment on when that will take place.

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