

Blasphemy lawsuit submitted against secular writers

On 17th October 2018 the perennially busy and overworked Dhaka Judicial Magistrate Court-1, Amoli Court, added a blasphemy lawsuit to its already burgeoning workload. The blasphemy lawsuit, which sent shockwaves across the court premises today according to our sources, has been filed against a total of 55. The defendants (whose names have been disclosed below) have been accused of being derogatory and abusive towards religion, particularly Islam. Unsurprisingly thus, the lawsuit has been filed in accordance with Bangladesh Penal Code 295.

For those of our readers who are unaware, the Bangladesh Penal Code 295 is a law which when breached can lead to serious legal consequences including fines, and long jail terms. Naturally, it was introduced in a bid to discourage blasphemy indeed or indulge in it at all.

The plaintiff of this lawsuit has been identified as one Munshi Mokidul Islam his full identity is unknown to us at the moment, as are the explicit reasons as to why he has taken such an initiative. But our court sources cite that the plaintiff "felt compelled" from "his sense of duty as a Muslim" to punish those that seek to harm Islam. An attempt to contact the plaintiff ended in failure as his premises appeared to be vacant at the time we tried to establish contact. However our court correspondent is still working away diligently in order to obtain the plaintiff's current whereabouts. More on that to follow in future reports.

Meanwhile we were able to extract a lot more information on the defendants of this lawsuit. The list comprises of rather well-known bloggers, online activists. It appears the plaintiff has named one Zobair Hossain, who the plaintiff along with his other (listed) colleagues accuses of producing 'crude and perverted' content on religion in general. It appears that the accused have had the alleged blasphemous content they produced, published properly on to a magazine called "Atheist in Bangladesh". An attempt to contact the defendants was futile as well for our correspondent understands that most of these individuals are currently residing on foreign soil. The names of these bloggers and activists are now listed below,

Zobair Hossain, Arifur Rahman (Editor), Md. Tofail Hossain (Assistant Editor), Hosni Mubarak (Assistant Editor), Publisher (Secular Publishers Ltd), Arunangsho Chakrabarty, Chinmoy Debnath, Adnan Saqib, Abdur Rahman, Abu Hanif, Syed Mohammad Sajeeb Abed, Syed Sunvy Anick Hossain, Naymul Islam, M D Abdullah Al Hasan, H.M Atiqur Rahman, Asif Abrar Titu Abul Hasnat, Hayat Hamid Ullah Robin, Shafi Nawaz Shipu, Milton Kumar Dey, Sharmin Jannat Bhutto, Abu Taher Muhammad Mustafa, Md. Mostafa Saiful Islam, Arman Ahmed, Nazmul Hossain, Sujan Chandra Deb, Suranjoy Sarker, Syed Samun Ali, Faisal Hossain Anik, Abdul Ahad Shanto, Syed Ishtiaq Hossain, Pinaki Deb Apu, Enyetul Huda, Yeaz Kawsar, Syed Isteak Hossain Shawon, Farhana Yasmin, Masud Khan, M.D Sabbir Hossain, Jawad Nirjhor, Kisore Das, Hafizur Rahman, Abdul Kader, Shipon Ahmed, A.F.M Abdullah Masum, Farzana Islam, Bani Mahmud Shuvo and others

What was surprising, however, was that this magazine already has a rather chequered history in terms of facing legal charges, with already quite a few other lawsuits to its name. We are trying to obtain more information on that as we write this.

Our correspondent next got in touch with the local police station in a bid to determine whether any formal investigations have been launched or not. However, a spokesperson for the station (the chief inspector refused to speak to us) cited that if a complaint has indeed been launched, it will take time for the place to receive official instructions to carry out an investigation. Before ushering our correspondent out the spokesperson stated that they take all matters of blasphemy very seriously.

Meanwhile, social media channels have been rife with a discussion once news of the lawsuit

broke today. The popular opinion here appears to be that of general approval, several agreeing that the plaintiff has 'taken the right' measures in order to preserve the holiness of this 'Land of Allah'.

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 evolvement, 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 of 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 Madrasa 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 raper, 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 7th 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 5th 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 front 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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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'.

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 19th 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 Sujan 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

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'.

Recovers from 5.7% in last quarter; Infrastructure output grew 4.7% in October from a year ago, driven by higher refinery production.

Reversing five quarters of slowing GDP growth, the Indian economy expanded by 6.3% in July-September on the back of a pick-up in manufacturing.

The gross domestic product (GDP) growth had hit a three-year low of 5.7% in the first quarter of 2017-18. It was 7.5% in the September quarter of 2016-17.

According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) data, the economic activities that registered growth of over 6% in the second quarter are manufacturing, electricity, gas, water supply, other utility services and trade, hotels, transport and communication, and services related to broadcasting.

The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector is estimated to have grown by 1.7%.

Infrastructure output grows 4.7%

Eight core sectors grew at a slower pace of 4.7% in October, chiefly due to subdued performance of cement, steel and refinery segments.

The eight infrastructure sectors – coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity – had clocked a growth of 7.1% in October 2016.

Meanwhile, the Industry Ministry has revised downwards September growth print of these eight sectors to 4.7% from the earlier estimate of 5.2%.

Official data released this evening showed that cement production contracted by 2.7% as against an expansion of 6.2% in October 2016.

Output growth in the steel segment too slowed to 8.4% in the last month compared to 17.4% in the year-ago period.

Similarly, there was slowdown in refinery output, whose growth was 7.5% in October 2017. This compares with 12.6% expansion in the same month in 2016.

Electricity generation, too, was slower on an annual basis.

Meanwhile, the coal segment has shown significant improvement as it expanded by 3.90%. It witnessed a decline of 1.9% in the year-ago period.

The fertiliser sector grew by 3% as against 0.7% last year.

Crude oil production and natural gas output have shown improvement, too.

Cumulatively, the growth in the eight core sectors slowed down to 3.5% as against 5.6% in the comparable period of the last fiscal.

The eight core industries constitute 40.27% of weight of items in the index of industrial production (IIP).

The Rooppur plant is expected to add 2,400MW of electricity to the national grid by 2024

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has inaugurated the main construction work of the much-awaited Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, the maiden nuclear plant of Bangladesh.

She formally launched the main construction work of the plant by pouring concrete at the plant site at Rooppur in Ishwardi of northern Pabna district Thursday morning.

Science and Technology Minister Architect Yeafesh Osman, PM's Economic Affairs Adviser Dr Moshirur Rahman, Energy Adviser Dr Towfique-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Security Adviser Major General (ret'd) Tariq Ahmed Siddiq, Chief of Army Staff General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiul Huq, PM's Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, Press Secretary

Ihsanul Karim, Russian Ambassador to Bangladesh Alexander Ignatov, Russia's state-run atomic energy body Rosatom's Director General Alexey Likhachev, Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission Md Abdur Razzak and project director of the plant and senior officials of Bangladesh and Russia were present on the occasion.

The Rooppur plant is expected to add 2,400MW of electricity to the national grid by 2024, helping Bangladesh meet its increasing demand for electricity.

The mega project is being implemented by the state-run Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) under the Science and Technology Ministry, with financial, technical and technological support by Russia through its state nuclear agency, Rosatom.

Also Read- [Bangladesh all set to join nuclear club](#)

The Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) and Russian company, JSC Atomstroyexport, signed a general contract for construction of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP) on December 25 in 2015.

BAEC Chairman Md Monirul Islam and Vice President of Atomstroyexport Vladimir N Savuskhin signed the contract on behalf of their respective organisations.

Atomstroyexport, the contractor appointed by Russia's state-owned atomic power body, Rosatom, will construct the RNPP at a cost of \$12.65 billion, out of which, \$10.1 billion has been fixed as base price, \$1 billion for soil stabilisation and further cost, and the remaining \$1.65 billion for price escalation.

On December 15 in 2015, the government finalised the amount for the biggest-ever investment project in the country's history by inking an initial agreement with Russia.

Earlier in January 2013, an inter-governmental agreement was signed for the provision of a \$500 million Russian loan to finance engineering design, site development and personnel training.

On November 2, 2011, Bangladesh signed a deal with Russia's state-owned nuclear giant Rosatom to construct the nuclear plant.

Russia will provide all assistance under the agreement for setting up the plant, including providing the fuel and taking back the used fuel.

A total of 262 acres of land have been acquired to set up two units of the plant with a capacity of 2,400-MW.

On October 2, 2013, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina laid the foundation stone of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant at Ishwardi in Pabna.

Awami League civil war: Rajoir the scene of destruction as Shamsuddin & Shahjahan groups clash

For the residents of Rajoir, Madarpur according to our local correspondent, this was an inevitability. Tensions had long since existed between prominent local Awami League Leaders, Advocate Shamsuddin Mia, and Shahjahan Khan. And locals feel MP Shahjahan Khan has made the first move, although others disagree and state that Shamsuddin Miah's public declaration started it all.

Nevertheless, it was supposed to be a normal working day, intermingled with Mr. Shamsuddin Miah's aggressive political campaign in a bid to be Rajoir's next elected official, on behalf of the Awami League of course. Unfortunately, it did not turn out to be the case as a public election campaign quickly took a turn for the worse as a group of armed men, laid siege to the whole scene. People dispersed in panic, shop owners quickly forced down their shutters, whilst the attending political leaders were left stunned. Led by the notorious Kali Khan, sponsored by none other than current Member of Parliament and Awami League Leader Shahjahan Khan flung themselves at Mr. Shamsuddin Miah and his entourage which includes advocates Advocates Kader Ali, Hasan Firoj, along with South Rajoir Awami League leader Mobin Hossain.

The group dismantled everything in sight. Indeed there are unsettling reports that they used petrol to set ablaze some surrounding houses. 4 people were confirmed to be critically injured, and the list includes Mr. Shamsuddin Mia, Advocates Kader Ali and Hasan Firoj. They were rushed to the nearest hospital and according to latest reports are in a vulnerable physical state.

Our local correspondent swiftly identified the source of the enmity between these two Awami juggernauts of Rajoir. Namely (as stated above) Mr. Shamsuddin Miah's public declaration of intent towards installing himself as the prime electoral candidate, did not go down well with Mr. Shahjahan Khan, with Mr. Khan hoping to reassert his own authority as an existing Member of Parliament, and eligibility as the ideal candidate in the upcoming general elections. It wasn't until today that ensuing political tension, as a result, boiled over to actual civil unrest, with Residents of Rajoir now left embattled and devastated by the very men they were going to root for in the upcoming elections. Strangely the locals blame the attending law enforcement agencies in allowing a tragedy like this to happen. They claim Kali Kahn and his hoodlums approached the on-site police first in their bid to provoke Mr. Shamsuddin Miah and his attendees, with Kali Khan even loudly declaring that,

"There is only one leader in Rajoir, and that is Shahjahan Khan, everyone else are Jamat-Shibir lap dogs".

The police of course flatly declined to comment on their potential role in the incident as suspected by the local of course. In fact, our local correspondent was not allowed inside the

police station even with a spokesperson for the police stating that any outstanding investigations need to be concluded first and “an official complaint needs to be lodged in the first place in order to do that”.

This of course tells us that no one has officially pressed any charges yet, so we urge our readers to stay tuned and watch this space for future information.
