

Hefajat, Olama league demand removal of SC sculpture

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hefajat-e Islam, Awami Olama League and the editor of an online news portal have demanded immediate removal of a sculpture of what they claimed to be a Greek idol installed in front of the country's apex court.

Hefajat, a Qawmi madrasa-based Islamist organisation, yesterday announced to hold a rally and discussion at the Jatiya Press Club today to press home the demand.

Hefajat has recently submitted a memorandum to the Supreme Court demanding removal of the sculpture.

Earlier on Friday, Khelafat Andolan, a component in the BNP-led 20-party alliance, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh held a procession and rally in front of Baitul Mukarram Mosque.

Several other Islamist organisations including Jamait Ulama-E-Islam, another component in the BNP-led 20-party alliance, have been making the same demand for several weeks.

In a latest incident, Muhammad Arifur Rahman, who claimed to be the editor of online news portal bishwabarta.com, and Kazi Alhaj Maulana Mohammad Abul Hasan Sheikh Shariatpuri sent a letter to the Registrar General of the Supreme



Court on February 2 demanding removal of the sculpture.

A copy of the letter carries a seal of the Registrar General's office and a signature of receipt. However, Supreme Court Registrar General Aminul Islam on Saturday said, "The letter may be written, but I have not seen it yet."

Bangladesh Awami Olama League claims affiliation with the ruling Awami League, but the latter denies any such links.

Nur Hossain Kasemi, convener of Hefajat, Dhaka city, yesterday told The Daily Star: "They will not tolerate the Greek idol in the country where 92 percent people are Muslims."

Contacted, eminent sculptor Mrinal Haque said the sculpture is a symbol of justice, not of any goddess. Globally, it is used as the symbol of justice, he added.



Eighteen dead sharks at a ghat near Bhandaria Police Station in Pirojpur yesterday. The previous night, coastguard members recovered them from a fishing boat in the Kacha river near Bhandaria upazila's Telikhali village. The sharks were being transported for sale. Eight fishermen were caught and imprisoned in this connection.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

They target graves

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real name. Humayun only agreed to talk to The Daily Star over the phone.

"We usually target unclaimed, unidentified bodies of mostly poor people buried unceremoniously at unguarded public graveyards," said Humayun.

They mostly work in the rural areas because most graveyards in the urban settings have security guards. However, they sometimes steal bodies from graveyards in cities by bribing the guards.

They usually do not steal from large well-known graveyards, like the Azimpur or Banani graveyards, as those are well protected.

After spotting a grave of an unclaimed body, Humayun and his men usually wait at least one month to make sure that there are no late claims of the body.

"We work late at night, usually after 12 midnight," Humayun said. They dig the graves in the dark, collect the body and hand it over to the other groups, who turn them into sellable skeletons.

People like Humayun get around Tk 5,000 for the remains from one grave. The pay might sound good but there is no reason to believe they get work every day.

This is pretty much all that the people, who belong to the bottom tier of the racket, know about the trade.

The rest is foggy, even to Humayun. According to police, however, several such rackets of "skeleton thieves" are active across the country.

A gang of corpse traders used to supply decaying bodies from Mymensingh graveyard allegedly to Kamruzzaman Rony, who was arrested at the capital's Kafrul on November 5 for hiding 35 skeletons in a rented flat.

They used to sell the skeletons between Tk 25,000 and Tk 30,000.

While talking to the tenants of the building where Rony used to stay and from where skeletons were recovered, and from Mymensingh police, more information on this trade was revealed.

According to the tenants, they were suspicious of Rony's activities. They themselves found out what he was actually doing and then handed him over to the police.

Rony told police that they would bring bodies from Mymensingh graveyard and other areas then separate the flesh from the bones by boiling or

chopping. They would then sell them to first-year medical students.

Rony and his cohorts would bring in the decaying bodies in cartons. They used to sell the skeletons in Mymensingh but due to a few problems there, they moved to Dhaka to continue their trade.

At times, the tenants witnessed suspicious handing over of cartons at night.

The tenants, who had grilled Rony before handing him over to the police, said a man named Tonmoy from Mymensingh and his men would provided Rony with skeletons in cartons for Tk 5,000-10,000.

Contacted, Kotowali Police Station of Mymensingh OC Kamrul Islam said, "In 2014 and 2015 we arrested a few people involved in stealing corpses and they told us that they supply skeletons to Dhaka."

Asked if Rony had any connection with Mymensingh's gang, OC Sikder of Kafrul Police Station said, "We are still investigating this matter."

On November 5, pungent odour and sputtering sound from the second-floor flat of a building at Kafrul in the capital seriously annoyed the tenants. Rony had been living there for about 8-9 months claiming himself to be a doctor of Mitford Hospital.

Tenants of the building had been vexed with the noise and odour but on that evening, it was more than bearable. They knocked at the door of the flat and got response after a suspicious delay.

When Rony finally opened the door, the tenants stormed the flat and demanded to know what Rony and his men were doing.

What they saw was horrifying. Human flesh, bones, and skulls were scattered everywhere on the floor. They found electric heaters for boiling the bodies so that the flesh separate from the bones.

They found a room which was used for hiding decaying corpses.

Several litres of perfume and kerosene were there apparently to conceal the odour. Threads and bone cutters were also found.

The landlord of the building, Elias Saifullah, said, "I didn't know what Rony and his men had been doing in there but they told me that since they were doctors they conduct a few experiments which cause noise and bad odour."

'Lost continent'

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Containing rocks up to 3.6 billion years old, Gondwanaland split into what now are Africa, South America, Antarctica, India and Australia.

Professor Lewis Ashwal, lead author of the paper, says there are a number of pieces of "undiscovered continent" of various sizes spread over the Indian Ocean, left over by the breakup.

"This breakup did not involve a simple splitting of the ancient supercontinent of Gondwana," says Ashwal, but "a complex splintering took place with fragments of continental crust of variable sizes left adrift within the evolving Indian Ocean basin."

The team made the discovery by analyzing a mineral -- zircon -- found in rocks spewed up by lava during volcanic eruptions.

They said that remnants of the mineral were way too old to belong to Mauritius. "Mauritius is an island, and there is no rock older than 9 million

years old on the island," says Ashwal. But by studying rocks on the island, they found zircons that were 3 billion years old.

The researchers say these findings corroborate a study done in 2013 that found traces of ancient zircons in beach sand. But critics said the mineral could have been blown in by the wind, or carried in by the scientists.

Ashwal says the fact the team found ancient zircons in rock "refutes any suggestion of wind-blown, wave-transported or pumice-rafted zircons."

The researchers say their results demonstrate, in no uncertain terms, "the existence of ancient continental crust beneath Mauritius."

That continent might be lost forever, but it's still leaving traces to remind us of its existence.

"The fact that we have found zircons of this age proves that there are much older crustal materials under Mauritius that could only have originated from a continent," said Ashwal.

Skeleton trouble

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donated bodies. But people donate their bodies to government hospitals only and these skeletons are used in the college classrooms and labs; they are not meant for personal use.

Doctors and students say making a law, change in the culture of body donation and updating the curriculum could solve this problem.

Knowledge of human anatomy is essential for medical students. It's an 18-month course, at the end of which students have to take 500 marks' exams.

Last year, 3,162 students enrolled in 29 public medical colleges for MBBS programme and 5,325 students in 64 private ones. In addition, nine public dental colleges have 532 seats for BDS course and 24 private dental colleges have another 1,280 seats, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

All medical students need to spend months to fathom the tiny details of the skeleton consisting of the 206 bones of the human body. But what is more difficult than mastering the course is getting their hands on a full set of human skeleton.

Most of the time, they buy those from senior students or lab assistants at their institutions or at the morgues of public medical colleges. The lab assistants buy those from illegal traders who steal those from graves.

Those that they get from their seniors are often very old, and therefore those no longer retain the delicate curves and contours that help specify or identify bones. In many cases, these older sets have some bones missing and so they hardly serve the purpose.

Normally, human skeletons remain in good shape for 30 years. After that they start to give way.

"In that case we try to get fresh sets from morgue or lab assistants at high prices," Islam said.

But many students cannot afford to buy alone. So they buy one in groups and then study together.

"Sometimes we have to spend nights on end in college hostels with our classmates so we can use the college labs to prepare for the exams," said a female student of a public medical college.

WHAT ABOUT PRIVATE MEDICAL COLLEGES?

Although government medical colleges receive some donated bodies for use in classrooms and labs, private ones rarely get any directly from the government or donors. They have to rely on the goodwill gesture of state-run colleges. In other cases, they get those from illegal traders.

Professor Dr MA Bashar, principal of Dhaka National Medical College, said they usually borrowed human bodies or skeletons from various government medical colleges and hospitals.

"We need at least two bodies a year. But in the last few years, we didn't receive any from state-run hospitals. So whenever we need skeletons, we request our management and they get those for us [from underground sources]," he said.

Prof Dr Moazzem Hossain, chairman of East West Medical College Hospital, suggested that the government make a law, allowing public and private medical colleges to use some unidentified bodies and their skeletons for education purposes.

ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL Skeletons aren't easy to get. In the US, for example, most corpses are promptly buried, and bodies donated to science usually end up on the dissec-

tion table, their bones sawed to pieces and destined for cremation. So most skeletons used for medical study come from overseas, according to a 2007 article published by American magazine WIRED.

India has long been the world's primary source of bones used in medical study, including in Bangladesh. In 1985, however, the Indian government banned the export of human remains, and the global supply of skeletons collapsed.

Over the years, while the number of medical students has risen manifold, the supply of skeleton both through legal and underground sources has dropped, said Prof Dr Rashid-e-Mahbub, chairman of the National Committee on Health Rights Movement.

Prof Shamim Ara, head of Anatomy Department at Dhaka Medical College, said that for the last several years they had been working on a draft of a law, which could solve the students' problem. The final draft might be ready in the middle of this year.

Islam, the student at Dhaka National Medical College, said they felt bad about the way they had to collect skeletons, as if they were committing an offence.

"We know these skeletons are stolen from graves and that is unethical, but we are helpless. There is no other way to get them," he said.

Asked about the problem, Abdur Rashid, Director of Medical Education and Health Manpower Development of the DGHS, said, "We do not know how the public and private medical colleges collect human skeletons. We do not monitor the issue."

DONATION CULTURE IN BANGLADESH

People in Bangladesh rarely donate their bodies for medical purposes, which is why skeletons are stolen from graves to meet the demand of the thriving public and private medical colleges.

Between 1990 and 2000, the DMCH received just eight bodies. Then from 2010 to 2016, it got another 26 donated bodies.

In recent years, the DMCH received the bodies of two notable personalities -- that of popular singer-songwriter Sanjeeb Choudhury in 2007 and that of Language Movement veteran Abdul Matin, popularly known as Bhasha Matin, in 2015, said Prof Shamim Ara.

DEVELOPED COUNTRIES VS BANGLADESH In developed countries, the rate of donation of bodies is high, which is a good source of skeletons for the students and practitioners.

Also, they use artificial skeletons made of plastic and Gypsum plaster or "plaster of Paris" for their study. These skeletons are very hard and long lasting. (In Bangladesh, only plastic skeletons are available.)

Most importantly, many western countries have updated the curriculum. As a result, manual dissection of human bodies is no longer required there. Instead, they use computer simulation as part of virtual learning method.

In contrast, Bangladesh's curriculum is decades-old, said Prof Rashid. "The module for anatomy education in the country should be restructured."

Charity organisation Anjuman Mufidul Islam buries about 1,500 unidentified bodies every year. This could be a legal source of human skeletons if the government makes a law in this regard, students and teachers said.

NoBanJFK group springs up

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Volunteers working with the NoBanJFK group in Terminal 4 at JFK continue to offer 24-hour legal service and advice and translators for incoming individuals who are subject to the restrictive immigration ban. Lawyers and translators had filled up the food court on the lower level of the airport, with their laptops pulled out and sandwiches and fries at hand as they tirelessly offer to protect the rights of immigrants and refugees. A few stood near the arrival gates holding up signs in different languages beckoning people to come seek help from the lawyers and translators if they faced issues.

Nausheen Akter, a Bangladeshi American teacher, zipped through the crowd of volunteers, a flash of her purple hijab seen attending to new faces who wanted to help those victimized by the ban. "I'm a volunteer coordinator" she stated when asked about her role as part of the NoBanJFK group. "I got training as a coordinator which is basically to oversee who is coming in and is being sent out. We need lawyers there, we

and do whatever is in their means to serve society. I'm fortunate and blessed to be a lawyer and I know that, that skill set is something that can be used here. I wanted to put that into good use and come here today."

According to NoBanJFK's twitter page, the group has assisted over 100 people coming into the United States from Muslim majority countries. Even though the group has come across a few successful cases and the federal court for the Eastern District of New York issued a stay on the executive order concerning immigration, volunteers feel there is more to do.

Hallam Tuck, who works for the New York Immigration Coalition, points out that NoBanJFK is still operating at the airport to make sure the stay is being observed. "There's a lot of thinking going on right now about how we move this forward from an advocacy perspective. I think it's very important to build on the momentum that has been created both through this project [NoBanJFK] and the myriads of actions and protests that have gone on in the past weeks," he replied

surely. Nausheen felt relieved when New York stayed the immigration order and she added, "It felt like we can take a breath and go forward." When discussing the success they've had so far with client cases, she stated, "Anyone who is being detained isn't getting help at that point unless there's a relative who can help them. Anyone who is coming in and reaching out to a lawyer is starting the process of representation. That's a process that is going to take a while." However, she felt "anyone who is getting help from us is a success."

Even with the amount of work lawyers and translators are faced with in JFK, Akter feels hopeful about the current situation. "I think it's beautiful that a lot of people, my friends who are attorneys and non-attorneys have expressed an interest in helping out in whatever way possible." Hallam feels the same as he said "one of the things that definitely lifted peoples spirits here is the willingness of a diverse group of people, private law companies, and community to get together and fight the ban in whatever way possible."

Tigers begin warm-up today

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a go in the warm-up game, just so they get a look at the conditions ahead of the Test.

The inclusion of Liton Das in the 15-member squad has made things interesting as far as the final eleven for the Test in Hyderabad is concerned.

Mushfiqur has been practicing his keeping during the last few training sessions. However, if they want the skipper to play as a specialist batsman, in order to provide his battered fingers some space, then they will have to drop either a batsman or a bowler from the team. If they drop a bowler, then they

will probably go with just two pacers in the Test.

All in all, a lot of the strategy will become clearer once the two-day warm-up game begins.

The Bangladesh national team attended their second practice session yesterday with a special focus on field-

ing. Coach Richard Halsall, in order to counter the poor fielding effort that the Tigers had shown in New Zealand, introduced a few different fielding training tactics yesterday and the players, according to Taskin Ahmed, enjoyed them quite a lot.