

Cops silence protest over statue removal

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Following its installation at the SC premises in mid-December last year, the Islamists organisations started demonstrating for its removal, claiming that the artwork was "un-Islamic".

They demanded that the government remove it before Ramadan, saying the statue was of a Greek goddess, a claim refuted by its sculptor.

At a meeting with the Alem and Ulema in April, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said she personally didn't like the statue on the SC premises, and that she had asked the chief justice either to remove or reinstall it at another place.

The removal of the statue yesterday came as a victory for the Islamist groups, which brought out processions at different places, thanking the PM. The Islamist organisations now demand removal of all statues across the country.

There are hundreds of sculptures and statues across the country in memory of the 1971 Liberation War and other glorious movements, and individuals who contributed to different democratic movements.

The Islamist groups on several occasions raised demands for removal of sculptures. In October 2008, religious zealots vandalised Lalon sculptures in front of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, and the sculptures were later removed.

A month later, several hundred religious fanatics damaged the lower part of Balaka sculpture in Motijheel, saying it is "un-Islamic" to make sculptures.

In April 2013, Hefajat-e Islam placed a set of demands. Two of them were that the authorities must not allow the capital to be turned into "a city of idols", and installation of sculptures at intersections, colleges and universities be put to a stop.

BARRAGE OF PROTEST

Soon after some labourers started working to take down the statue



The statue of Lady Justice is being loaded on a pick-up on the Supreme Court premises at 4:00am yesterday. The statue was taken down in the face of the demands from some Islamist organisations.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

around 11:30pm on Thursday night, journalists rushed to the spot, but they couldn't enter the premises as all the gates were locked.

Mrinal Haque, the sculptor, oversaw the work.

As the news of removing the statue spread, people, mostly youths, gathered on the road outside the main gate and began demonstrating, blocking the road.

"This is not just removal of the sculpture of Lady Justice, it's a compromise between the evil force and the state," Liton Nandi, general secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra Union, told this newspaper around 2:30am yesterday.

This incident would take the country to a path opposite to the spirit of the Liberation War, he said.

Around 3:30am, the protesters announced that they would march towards the SC from Dhaka University campus at 11:00am.

The statue was pulled away by a crane and put on a pickup around 4:00am. The statue was then taken to a spot near the Annex Building of the SC.

In the afternoon, SC officials told this newspaper that no decision was made yet about reinstallation of the statue.

Contacted, Mrinal Haque said no one had contacted him regarding its

reinstallation.

"Those who possess power will decide on it," he told The Daily Star.

Earlier in the morning, left-leaning student bodies held a rally near Raju Memorial Sculpture on the DU campus.

"We fear Bangladesh would gradually be turned into a country like Afghanistan if their [Islamist fundamentalists] demands are met this way," Liton Nandi said at the rally.

Rania Sultana, social welfare secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra Union, said the government made a compromise with the radical Islamists to stay in power.

Why, how it was removed

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Andolan Bangladesh joined in making the same demand.

All the while, Hefajat issued a number of press releases, asking the government to remove the statue, which is a variation of Greek Goddess Themis, from the court premises.

On April 21, Islami Andolan Bangladesh demanded that the government do that before the start of Ramadan.

At a gathering in front of the capital's Baitul Mukarram Mosque, party leaders also threatened to stage countrywide demonstrations on the 17th Ramadan and to besiege the court afterwards, if the demand were not met.

Party Ameer Maulana Syed Rejaul Karim said, "Installing an idol on the court premises which is adjacent to the National Eidgah is an attack on the country's culture, and it hurts religious sentiments of the Muslims."

Earlier on April 11, at a meeting with the Alem and Ulema from Qawmi madrasas, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself said she personally did not like the statue on the SC premises either.

On April 17, Hasina told her cabinet colleagues that she had asked the chief justice either to remove the statue or reinstall it somewhere else so that it could not be seen from the National Eidgah.

A section of SC lawyers also called for its removal. On several occasions, they spoke in favour of the demand.

Against this backdrop, the SC authorities took down the statue in the early hours of yesterday. The work began around 11:30pm on Thursday and ended around 4:00am yesterday. Mrinal Haque, the sculptor, oversaw the dismantling of the statue. He said he was making sure that the statue was not damaged.

Court sources said Chief Justice

Surendra Kumar Sinha decided to remove the statue in a bid to resolve the debate on the issue in a peaceful way.

The chief justice made the decision taking the overall situation, including the PM's stance, into consideration.

There was no pressure from the government in this regard, the sources said, adding the CJ was yet to decide on the figure, which has been brought down.

Some other sources said the CJ had talked about relocating the statue to a place near the Annex Building, which is also on the SC premises.

Contacted, Advocate Zainul Abedin, president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, told The Daily Star yesterday that the government had requested the chief justice to remove the statue from the court premises as the PM was against keeping it there.

"We have suggested that the chief justice relocate it in order to keep the apex court and the chief justice above all debates," he said.

The SCBA president also said the chief justice should be kept above any dispute, as he has been working for establishing justice.

On Thursday, the chief justice held a meeting with the present and former presidents and secretaries of the SCBA to hear their opinions about the statue.

SCBA Secretary AM Mahub Uddin Khokon, who attended the meeting, told this newspaper yesterday that all the meeting participants opined that the statute should be taken down for "upholding the dignity and honour of the apex court".

"As the statue could be seen from the Eidgah Jamaat, all of us suggested removing it from the Supreme Court premises and relocating it on any old road or highways premises to avoid any sort of controversy,"

Advocate SM Rezaul Karim, a former SCBA secretary, who was also present in the meeting, told this correspondent yesterday.

Former SCBA president Dr Kamal Hossain, Attorney General Mahubey Alam, Barrister Rokanuddin Mahub, Advocate Khandker Mahub Hossain, and Advocate AJ Mohammad Ali, its present secretary Barrister AM Mahub Uddin Khokon, former secretaries Advocate AM Aminuddin and Advocate Nurul Islam Sujon, among others, attended the meeting.

On Thursday night, Attorney General Mahubey Alam told The Daily Star that "They [SCBA's present and former presidents and secretaries] opined that the statue should be removed to avert any untoward situation."

They also suggested that the statue might be relocated to a place near the SC museum, which is also on the SC premises.

BRIBERY CASE

Shyamal Kanti's release demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing grave concern, students, cultural and rights activists yesterday demanded immediate release of Shyamal Kanti Bhakta, a Narayanganj schoolteacher who was sent to jail in a bribery case on Wednesday.

Shyamal, headmaster of Piyar Sattar Latif High School in Bandar area, was also insulted in presence of a local lawmaker last year.

The demonstrators also demanded the government withdraw the case

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Back to back tragedy for a family

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the spot, said Selim Sarder, the victim's brother.

Mithu's associate, Nowsher Gazi, who was injured in the attack, died of his wounds in Khulna Medical College Hospital around 12:30am. His father-in-law, Syed Salim, was also injured and receiving treatment at the hospital.

A pall of gloom descended at "Chairmanbari", the house of Mithu and his brothers, following his death.

The victim's wife, Jobayed Khan Suravi, told this newspaper, "My husband was very popular for his

charismatic character. After my father-in-law and brother-in-law had been killed, he was the one who looked after the family and the business. Who will take care of my two children?"

The couple's son, Sami Jubayer, studies in class-VII, and their daughter, Fatema Simi, is sixth grader.

Sources said law enforcers called Mithu a few days ago and asked him to remain careful.

Mithu's brother Raj Sarder said Mithu was buried at their family graveyard. About filing a case, he said they would decide that later.

Contacted, SM Shafiullah, additional superintendent of Khulna police, said they were trying to find the killers. They were taking all possible aspects, including rivalry, establishing supremacy and familial conflict, into consideration to find the motive behind the killing.

Officer-in-charge Asaduzzaman of Fultala Police Station said no case was filed as of last evening.

Mithu's father Abul Kashem Sarder, a former Phultala union parishad chairman, was killed in 1998, and his eldest brother, Abu Syed Badal, was murdered in 2010.

SIX-HOUR HARTAL IN KHULNA

Protesting the killing, Khulna BNP yesterday called a six-hour hartal across the district for today.

The hartal will be enforced from 6:00am and it will continue until 12:00pm, Nazrul Islam Manzu, president of Khulna city unit BNP, made the announcement at a press conference at the party's local office. A four-day protest programme was also announced.

Condemning the murder, Shafiqul Alam Mona, president of the district unit of BNP, alleged that a poor law and order situation in the upazila had led to the situation.

Sultana Kamal

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through their remarks on various occasions.

It's part of a game. It's a compromise with conservative, militant and fanatic forces. It seems the government has taken a policy of conciliation with Hefajat. The Awami League is considering Hefajat very powerful. It has taken the pro-liberation forces for granted, believing that they would cast their votes for the AL anyway. So there is no need to talk to them (the pro-liberation forces); but there is a need to talk to Hefajat.

Such a conduct by the AL is a compromise with ideals of the Liberation War. It is a matter of sorrow that the forces that can flex their muscle are actually winning... They can lay siege to Dhaka and kill people; but we cannot do it. It is a deep crisis of democracy.

Zafar Iqbal

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All these are happening because of Hefajat-e Islam. They do not even own the country, and yet they are dictating the terms to the authorities today.

It seems that the government has surrendered to Hefajat, most probably for the politics of vote. If we sacrifice our core values for the politics of votes, what's the point of such voting? Something ominous is already happening.

Shahdeen Malik

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the spirit of the rule of law.

The AL has become desperate for so-called religious votes and one need only wait to see how far the government goes to accommodate and give in to the medieval demands of the so-called Islamists.

Kamal Lohani

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value of the war. Bangabandhu declared that there would be no use of religion in politics, but the exact opposite is happening now. The conduct of the government today is shaming us and letting our heads down.

It's a great question why the government could not tell Hefajat that the AL is a secular party and that it cannot allow its removal. I am worried if we, as a nation, are walking towards darkness. Such a sculpture, which is a symbol of justice, is seen all over the world and nowhere has such a thing (removal) happened. This proves we have not learned to be civilised as a nation yet.

Arts and sculptures help develop and improve the senses of beauty and free-thinking. So the removal of the Lady Justice is a huge blow to the public psyche. The door to civilisation seems closing, instead of opening.

Kamal Pasha

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artwork could have been improved had it been faulty. Therefore, its removal is saddening and we demand it be reinstalled.

We think its removal goes against the very spirit of the Bangalee culture, which is non-communal, and that of the Liberation War, which was fought for a secular Bangladesh. This incident will impact the psyche of the next generation, which will not develop love for artwork, the symbol of modern civilisations. We can see great sculptures in cities like Paris, Italy and Greece. We go to those places only to see the artworks. We are proud of our sculptures like Aparajeyo Bangla.

There is no clash between sculptures and Islam. We can see many beautiful sculptures in Iran, Iraq and Syria. What happened in Bangladesh is that a certain fanatic group wants the sculptures of Bangladesh's Liberation War removed using religion. This is just the beginning.

Mrinal Haque

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removed?

The statue has been removed following pressure from high-ups. We have conceded defeat to a certain group who was against us, against our Liberation War. It's a slap in the face of the pro-liberation, cultural and freedom-loving people of the country. It seems Razakars, Al-Badr are the winners.

Hard to get justice

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medical test to trial - victims have to prove that they were raped, which is very humiliating and quite difficult.

Often, victims unknowingly take a shower, for example, after the rape and do the medical test later. This results in an inconclusive medical report, weakening their cases.

Police ignorance and negligence in their duties, and failure of prosecution were also key reasons for the extremely poor conviction rate, said experts and rights activists working on the issue.

According to a database of a monitoring cell of the police headquarters,

18,668 rape cases were filed across the country between 2012 and 2016.

In the Dhaka metro areas, five women and children repression prevention tribunals disposed of 2,057 cases out of 4,436 filed with different police stations from 2001 to 2016. Only 22 cases saw convictions, court and prosecution sources said.

Salma Ali, executive director of

Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), told The Daily Star that victims and their families go for out-of-court settlements in most cases.

Those seeking justice lose their will to fight the legal battle as the process, from investigation to trial, is embarrassing for the victims since in every phase - police investigation, two-finger test and cross examination - they have to prove the rape charge.

"These torment them more than what they had suffered during the rape itself," the legal expert said.

They feel discouraged due to the absence of a proper environment,

lengthy trials and accused dodging arrest.

She said in many cases the accused are influential people and the victims and their families get scared and are forced to settle or withdraw cases. "In many cases, the accused 'purchase' witness, police and even prosecutors," she claimed.

Rape case number 379/13 filed on March 28, 2003, with Sutrapur Police Station is one such example.

Investigation officer of the case Sub-Inspector Abdul Jalil submitted the charge sheet on July 12, 2003, and charges were framed on September 15 that year.

Fourteen years later, the case is still under trial with Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-3 because the complainant has not shown up in court in the last 12 years.

Under the law, the tribunal has to dispose of a case in 180 working days. The law, however, does not say what would happen otherwise, said Additional Public Prosecutor Abdus Sattar Dulal.

Last year, a rape case was filed against an individual with Cantonment Police Station in the capital (case number 137/16). The person was accused of raping a 13-year-old house help.

A lawyer said the accused using his influence and money produced a fake marriage certificate, showing he was married to the girl and the girl was adult. And now the case is about to be disposed of

without conviction, the lawyer said.

Saila Sayeed Bristy, litigation coordinator of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, said when domestic helps were the victims, it becomes more difficult to ensure justice as they can be easily "managed" by the accused and usually they do not show up in courts.

She said medical reports in many cases do not show the presence of recent injury marks or spermatozoa as the victims, due to ignorance, do not take proper steps immediately after they are violated.

Saila said if medical tests do not reveal the presence of recent injury marks and intercourse then it becomes very difficult to ensure punishment.

Prof Kamrul Hasan Sardar, head of forensic medicine department of Shaheed Tajuddin Medical College in Gazipur, said, "Since spermatozoa remain alive in female genital for up to 72 hours, it is possible to find evidence within that time, provided the victim had not had a bath or washed the area concerned."

He said it was possible to find other marks of injuries on the victim's body for up to 15 days.

After the recent Banani "rape" incident, a victim went to file a case over a month after the alleged incident. She claimed that the influential and rich accused had threatened her with dire consequences if she filed a case. Banani police then "wasted" two more days for "preliminary investigation".

It is difficult for a victim to get justice even after doing everything accordingly. Section 155 (4) of the Evidence Act allows men accused of rape to question the character of the victim, legal experts said.

The section says, "... when a man is prosecuted for rape or an attempt to ravish, it may be shown that the prosecutrix [the rape victim] was of generally immoral character."

Taking advantage of this provision, defence counsels ask victims indecent questions, embarrassing and humiliating the victim and her family in court,

they said.

Mohammad Forkan Miah, Special Public Prosecutor of Woman and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-4 claimed that the accused often get bail due to the faults of the police.

He told The Daily Star that police often fail to bring in witnesses and sometimes there are mistakes in medical reports and the police probe.

Farida Yeasmin, deputy commissioner (DC) of women protection of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), refuted the claim.

Dadon Fakir, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, claimed that they often face difficulties with rape cases as only 2 percent of all the complaints filed are actually rape cases. The rest are consensual relationships with a bad break up, he said.

The females usually file a case because they had been "deceived, rejected, marriage promises made to them had not been kept or they had not gotten financial benefits", he said.