

Happy Hefajat to target all sculptures

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Emboldened by the removal of the statue of Lady Justice from the Supreme Court premises, Hefajat-e-Islami leaders yesterday said they now want to gear up their agitation against all "idols" in the country.

They said they would keep mounting pressure on the government to realise their 13-point demand of 2013.

Removal of all statues, what they term "idols", is one of their demands.

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"The government removed this sculpture to get support from Hefajat-e-Islam and to retain power."

NASIRUDDIN YOUSUF
stage and film director

"We fought in 1971 to build a non-communal nation. Removal of the sculpture is a shameless surrender to fundamentalists."

GOLAM KUDDUS
president of Sammilita Sangskritik Jote

"It's not just the removal of a sculpture; it's the expulsion of an ideology."

SYED HASAN IMAM
eminent cultural activist

At a protest rally at the Central Shaheed

Minar in the capital yesterday

THE WAY THINGS WERE THEN

Hefajat-e-Islam placed its 13-point demand from a rally in the capital on April 6, 2013. Later on, the law ministry came up with its opinion on the demands. In its opinion, the ministry said six out of the 13 demands went against the constitution and added that the remaining seven were well covered by the existing laws.



HEFAJAT'S DEMAND		LAW MINISTRY'S OPINION
Reinstate the phrase "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah" in the constitution as one of the fundamental principles of state policy	1	The demand goes against the basic spirit of the constitution; therefore, there is no constitutional obligation to meet it
Enact a law with provision for capital punishment for maligning Allah, Islam and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and launching smear campaigns against Muslims	2	The existing law was adequate to ensure punishment for this offence. Only one or two Muslim countries have such legal provisions
Stop all propaganda and "derogatory comments" about Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by the "atheist leaders" of the Shahbagh movement, bloggers and other anti-Islamists; arrest them and ensure their stern punishment	3	Such offences could be well taken care of with the existing laws
Stop attacking, shooting, killing, genocide and persecuting the Prophet-loving Islamic scholars, madrasa students and people united by the belief in Allah	4	There was no incident of genocide
Release all arrested Islamic scholars and madrasa students	5	Those arrested during recent violence [in 2013] were not Islam-loving people rather the law enforcers held them on specific allegations of breaking the law
Lift restrictions on mosques and remove obstacles to the holding of religious programmes	6	Certain disciplinary measures were taken against the backdrop of recent "unpleasant" incidents at Baitul Mukarram mosque
Declare "Qadianis" non-Muslim and call a halt to their publicity and conspiracies	7	Referring to Articles-28, 41 and 44 of the constitution, the ministry said the constitution leaves no room to meet Hefajat's demand for declaring "Qadiani" people non-Muslims
Stop foreign cultural intrusions including free-mingling of men and women and candlelit vigils, and put an end to adultery, injustice, shamelessness, etc. in the name of freedom of expression and conscience	8	The demand goes against the constitution. Freedom of individual and speech, and free-mingling of men and women are recognised in the constitution as fundamental rights. Enactment of any law curtailing fundamental rights would be against Articles-7 and -26 of the constitution and would become void. If such laws were enacted, hundreds of thousands of female workers would be unemployed, severely hampering national development. Co-education in schools, colleges and universities would have to be dissolved, which would hamper women empowerment and would be against the spirit of the constitution
Stop turning Dhaka, the city of mosques, into a city of idols, and stop setting up sculptures at intersections, colleges and universities	9	It was the constitutional duty of the state to prevent disfigurement, damage or removal of all monuments, objects, and places of special artistic interest or of historical importance. The country would be isolated in the international arena if Bangladesh, a partner of various UN conventions on cultural heritage and also UNESCO activities, accepts Hefajat's demand and stops setting up sculptures at intersections, colleges and universities
Scrap anti-Islam women policy and education policy and make Islamic education mandatory from primary to higher secondary levels	10	There was no reason or scope to scrap the women development policy and education policy as the policies were formulated as per constitutional provisions and the mandate of the United Nations. The women policy is not against Islam and the issue of religious education was included in the education policy
Stop threatening and intimidating teachers and students of Qawmi madrasas, Islamic scholars, imams and khatibs	11	Law ministry found no specific allegation in this regard and the government did not receive any such allegations
Stop propagating hatred among the younger generation of Muslims by misrepresentation of Islamic culture in the media	12	Law ministry observed that it was a punishable offence under existing laws if any religious sentiments were deliberate misrepresented in cinemas and plays
Stop anti-Islam activities by NGOs, evil attempts by Qadianis and conversions by Christian missionaries in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and elsewhere in the country	13	The law ministry referred to Article-41 of the constitution that gives freedom of preaching and practicing any religion. It further clarified that hurting religious sentiments of others was punishable under existing laws

Cops' mission impossible

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and injured them severely. And by doing so, they committed crimes under the sections 147, 148, 149, 186, 332, 333, 353, 307 and 427 of the penal code," reads the first information report (FIR).

Later, the four youths were shown arrested in the case. Yesterday, a Dhaka court sent them to jail after they were produced before it.

Meanwhile, protests and condemnation poured into the streets and on social media for the second day yesterday against the removal of the statue, a variation of the Greek Goddess of Justice Themis, from in front of the SC building -- a move seen by many as "surrender to radical Islamists".

Also, different socio-cultural and political organisations and dignitaries protested the filing of the case and demanded its immediate withdrawal.

On the other hand, ruling Awami League leaders tried to defend taking down the statue. Party insiders said the Awami League felt relieved as the work was over before the start of Ramadan, a deadline set by some radical Islamist groups.

According to the insiders, the government "avoided a possible movement" by the groups, including Hefajat-e-Islam, as the statue was brought down. The government also pleased them who are thought to be an important factor in the upcoming general elections in 2019.

The hardline Islamist groups also threatened that they would not allow the reinstallation of the statue anywhere in the country.

Although several ministers and AL leaders have been claiming that it was the Supreme Court that took the decision to take down the statue, several Islamist organisations have thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

THE PROCESSION

As the news of taking down the statue spread, people, mostly youths, gathered on the road outside the main gate of the SC and began a demonstration in the early hours of Friday. They also blocked the road in front of the court. From there, the protesters announced that they would march towards the SC from Dhaka University campus later in the day.

Around 11:30am, some 100 protesters gathered near the Raju Sculpture on the DU campus and started moving towards the SC. Three Daily Star reporters and one photojournalist were covering the incident.

The agitators were holding a banner and none of them had any stick or



**GONO FORUM PRESIDENT
DR KAMAL HOSSAIN**

Attempts are being made to misuse religion to get votes, said eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain, also president of Gono Forum.

"Secularism was incorporated in the constitution in order to separate religion from politics, but an attempt is being made to misuse religion," he said at a programme at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

He said mass killings and rapes were committed and lakhs of people had been maimed in the name of religion in 1971. "What was their religion who conducted genocide during the war? Did they believe in Islam... We have to remember these," he said. About the removal of the sculpture, he said, "I want to say nothing now. A conference of lawyers will be held and decision will be taken there. ... but division should not be created on any issue."



WORKERS PARTY

Politburo of Workers Party, an ally of ruling Awami League, viewed the removal of the Lady Justice's statue from the Supreme Court premises as not good a sign for secular democratic politics.

A statement of the party read, "The debate after the installation of the statue of Themis, symbol of justice, at the Supreme Court premise and the way the statue was removed were in conflict with the spirit of our Liberation War, Independence and the Constitution."

It read, "We earlier said that removal of this statue will make the fundamentalists' demands to remove the sculptures upholding the spirit of the Liberation War and Bangabandhu stronger. Bigots, including Hefajat-e-Islam, have made joint announcements to this end in today's papers."



**AWAMI LEAGUE GENERAL SECRETARY
OBAIDUL QUADER**

"The sculptures of our heritage and the spirit of the Liberation War will not be removed. Rather, such types of sculptures will be installed by the government," said ruling Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader. Ruling out Hefajat-e-Islam's demand for removal of all sculptures, Quader, also minister for Roads, Transport and Bridges, said, "There is no similarity between the sculptures upholding the spirit of the Liberation War and the statue of Lady Justice. So, our government has the firm stance against the demand of Hefajat-e-Islam to remove all sculptures in the country."

Quader said only the location of the statue of the Lady Justice was a matter of concern as it was close to the country's main Eid Jamaat (congregation). "In this context, our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has raised a question about the location of the statue of the Lady Justice," he said.

Growing cancer

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preceding quarter. The toxic loan rose to 10.5 percent of total loans in March this year from 9.2 percent in the previous year.

The total amount of NPL in six public banks went up to Tk 35,717 crore from Tk 31,026 crore in the previous quarter.

The think-tank said the flexible loan rescheduling policy adopted by Bangladesh Bank in December 2013 didn't bring positive outcomes as expected.

According to the organisation, Sri Lanka and India has a much lower NPL than Bangladesh. However, Pakistan has seen a poorer performance in terms of NPL.

"Increased non-performing loans in Bangladesh were the result of relaxed recovery efforts, financial fraudulences, lack of governance and political influence," it added.

The CPD questioned the regular recapitalisation of state banks with taxpayers' money.

"In a resource-constrained country, the opportunity cost of such a large amount is high. The fund could be used for social sectors where budgetary allocation falls short of requirement," said Towfiqul.

The CPD demanded formation of a financial sector commission to look into the challenges facing the sector.

Implementation of the new VAT law, possible depreciation of Taka, rise in rice prices and another round of increase in the prices of electricity and gas might cause a rise in production costs, said the organisation.

About putting the provisional GDP growth at 7.24 percent for the 2016-17 fiscal by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the CPD said growth would decline at the final count as the latest estimate was made based on limited available information and without considering the recent trends in the key economic sectors.

It observed that projection was made based on data of the manufacturing sector for five-six months which could not capture the falling growth rate of export earnings in the latter months.

The growth of agricultural GDP was shown higher than last year's although floods in the country's haor areas, blast attacks in some districts and heavy rainfall caused losses of around 16 lakh tonnes of rice, according to Towfiqul.

Replying to a question on the issue, Debapriya said discussions

should focus on transformational changes of the economy instead of growth.

"Our perception is that the economy is growing, but jobs are not being created proportionately. It appears that a capital intensive growth is taking place."

About the sluggish private sector investment, the economist said despite efforts in the last few years, the private sector didn't see a breakthrough.

"The growth of the economy is being driven by the state at the moment, not by the private sector," he said.

Three symptoms were signaling a stagnant private sector investment, he said citing illicit flow of money out of the country. "The CPD's past analysis suggests that capital flight goes up significantly as elections get closer."

Debapriya said Bangladeshi entrepreneurs were considering many African countries as attractive investment destinations instead of investing in the country. "Entrepreneurs are willing to export capital from a capital starved country where investment is not picking up. It sends out a big signal about the prevailing situation."

Another major change was the move towards consumption compared to investment, added the economist, citing Bangladesh becoming the fifth largest market for BMW in Asia as an example.

Referring to the sluggish growth of export and decline in remittances, he said, "There is a crack in the wall. But the most important change is that we have not seen proactive macroeconomic management."

Prof Mustafizur said it was important to look into the source of growth, job creation and whether it was helping the country boost its competitiveness.

"We have to ensure quality education, introduce a universal health insurance scheme, and transition towards social security from social safety net. These have to be implemented in phases, not in a single year."

About the cost escalation of projects, he said discipline was not maintained during procurements when a project's implementation time overruns, creating scope for lack of governance and corruption.

The CPD recommended formation of a public expenditure review commission to ensure quality of public investment.

country's largest Eid congregation at Sholakia of Kishoreganj, termed the decision wise. "The Alem and Ullema are feeling happy thanks to the decision taken by the prime minister."

In another statement the Olama League, which claims to be affiliated with AL, also thanked the PM.

PROTESTS

In Dhaka, demonstrators held a rally at Shahbagh protesting the arrest of the four youths and demanding the withdrawal of the "false" case.

Later, the agitators brought out a procession there, demanding their release within 24 hours.

They also threatened to stage demonstrations at all public universities and government colleges today, if the demands were not met.

Similar protests were held in Rajshahi, Chittagong, Gaibandha and Bogra, report our correspondents there.

Main accused

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deputy director of Rab-1 said that after the incident on April 29 Faruq fled to Kapasia upazila in Gazipur. When Rab-1 members raided the area he went to the mazar of Atroshi Peer. Later he moved to Islamnagar and started working as a construction worker there.

Additional police super of Gazipur Golam Sabur said, another accused in the case - 35 year old Borhan Uddin - was arrested from Jhajor village under Durgapur upazila in Netrakona district on Friday dawn. The third accused, a member of ward no 1 of Goshinga union parishad under Sreepur, was arrested from Sreepur on April 29. They both have been sent to jail.

Hazrat Ali along with his eight-year old daughter Ayesha Akhter committed suicide by jumping under a running train near Sreepur Animal Hospital at 9:30am on Saturday. Hazrat took his own life after he failed to get justice for sexual assault of his minor child. He had to face a variety of harassments including threats from neighbors, theft of his cow etc for pursuing the case he filed back in January for the attempted rape of his daughter.

Hazrat Ali lived at Komapur Sitpara village under Sreepur upazila.

The day after the father and daughter took their own lives, Hazrat's widow Halima Begum filed a case with Kamalapur police station against seven persons including the main accused Md Faruq, Borhan Uddin and Md Abul Hossain.

brick in their hands.

Immediately after they crossed the Shishu Academy, police started firing tear gas canisters and water cannons at them. They were dispersed.

Only, 10 to 12 of them stayed there and managed to reach near a police barricade close to the High Court Mazar gate. Some of them, including Liton Nandi, were raising both of their hands up.

Police detained Liton as he tried to talk to the law enforcers. Another protester was also held and the two were taken into a prison van parked nearby.

Some agitators reappeared and tried to make it to the police barricade apparently to talk to police. However, the law enforcers resumed firing tear gas canisters at them. According to the FIR, 55 canisters were shot in the incident.

Some 10 minutes later, police released Liton and the other youth.

However, Liton was detained again when Arif Noor, a central committee

member of Udichi, tried to approach the law enforcers.

Arif and two other youths were also held.

Yesterday, police produced them before a Dhaka court. The defence counsel filed a bail petition, which is scheduled to be heard today. Later, the arrestees were sent to jail.

On being informed that journalists and eyewitnesses did not see any arms in the hands of the protesters, Maruf Hossain Sarder, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Ramna division), said, "I didn't see the FIR. Please contact the Shahbagh Police OC."

Abul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said he would not make any comment on the matter.

Asked how many police members were injured, he said the number was two but did not give any details about them.

Contacted, Manzurul Ahsan Khan,

adviser to Communist Party of Bangladesh, said the police action against the unarmed protesters proved that the government wanted to "gag all the voices who still dare to protest its misdeeds".

He also said the aggressive police stance is aimed at pleasing Hefajat.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, noted jurist Shahdeen Malik said the case clearly demonstrated that the government was out to gag all the voices against it with the use of police force and criminal laws.

AL RELIEVED, ISLAMISTS THANK PM
The removal of the statue from in front of the SC building came as a relief for the ruling Awami League as it had feared that several radical Islamist organisation could take to the street in the month of Ramadan, demanding its removal.

According to the party insiders, the AL wanted to avoid any sort of conflict with the groups over the issue and the

government conveyed to the chief justice its desire to take down the statue. The PM herself discussed the matter with the CJ.

At a programme in mid-April, the PM suggested Chief Justice SK Sinha either remove the statue or reinstall it elsewhere so that it could not be seen from the National Eidgah.

AL leaders were sure about removal of the statue before the Eid-ul-Fitr after the PM assured the Ullema about the move during a meeting on April 11, the party insiders said.

Now, the ruling party leaders believe this has made "thousands of religious people" happy and it would ultimately translate into gains for the AL.

They also think the decision also would not give the opposition any scope for doing politics over the issue. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Jamiatul Ulema Chairman Maulana Farid Uddin Masoud, also the grand imam of the