



Is the alliance between AL and Hefajat really so surprising?

PHOTO: STAR

# WHAT ROCKS HEFAJAT'S BOAT?

NAZMUL AHASAN

In a grand event, Hefajat-e-Islam, a Qawmi Madrasa-based Islamist pressure group, recently thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her government's recognition of Dawrae Hadith (Takmil) Certificate in Qawmi Madrasa. Hefajat enjoys considerable support among the country's conservative populace. Therefore, its endorsement of the current government can make a difference in the forthcoming elections.

The irony of the event was inescapable, though. Hefajat and the ruling Awami League, which is supposedly a secular entity, shared mutual animosity even just a few years ago. Since 2013, when Hefajat organised a massive rally demanding death penalty for those who insulted Islam and its prophet, the government has employed a carrot and stick approach to "tame" the influential group. Not only have the two groups overcome what once seemed like an insurmountable ideological difference

but also forged a virtual alliance.

Many may find the latest twist highly surprising, but the history of Qawmi-based Islamist politics suggests otherwise. It's a history of a never-ending power struggle, with leaders leaning towards where power lies.

While Islamist political parties, except for Jamaat-e-Islami (which Qawmi-based parties renounce), have never been politically popular, they have been an important part of the contemporary political discourse. Their true political prowess lies in their position as religious leaders and their ability to summon hundreds of thousands of madrasa students within a short period of time. While scattered in countless factions, their hardcore ideological stance has barely changed over the years and is largely identical. Hefajat's much-criticised 13-point charter best resembled these parties' collective ideological stance.

Hefajat-e-Islam, at its best form in 2013, was perhaps the culmination of Qawmi-based Islamist politics. While claiming to be apolitical, the organisation consists of several traditional Islamist political parties.

## The origin

Before Chittagong-based Hathajari Madrasa and Allama Ahmad Shafi, the traditional leader of these madrasas used to be Mawlana Mohammadullah, better known as Hafezzi Huzur, who co-founded Jamia Qurania Arabia, Lalbagh.

In 1981, Hafezzi Huzur made inroads into politics by forming Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan. He contested in the two presidential elections, finishing third in 1981 and second in 1986 elections.

In Khelafat Andolan, three of his disciples, Allama Azizul Haque (popularly known as Shaikhul Hadith who once headed Jamiatul Ulama), Mufti Fazlul Haque Amini (his son-in-

law) and Mawlana Fazlul Karim (Charmanai Pir) held senior positions.

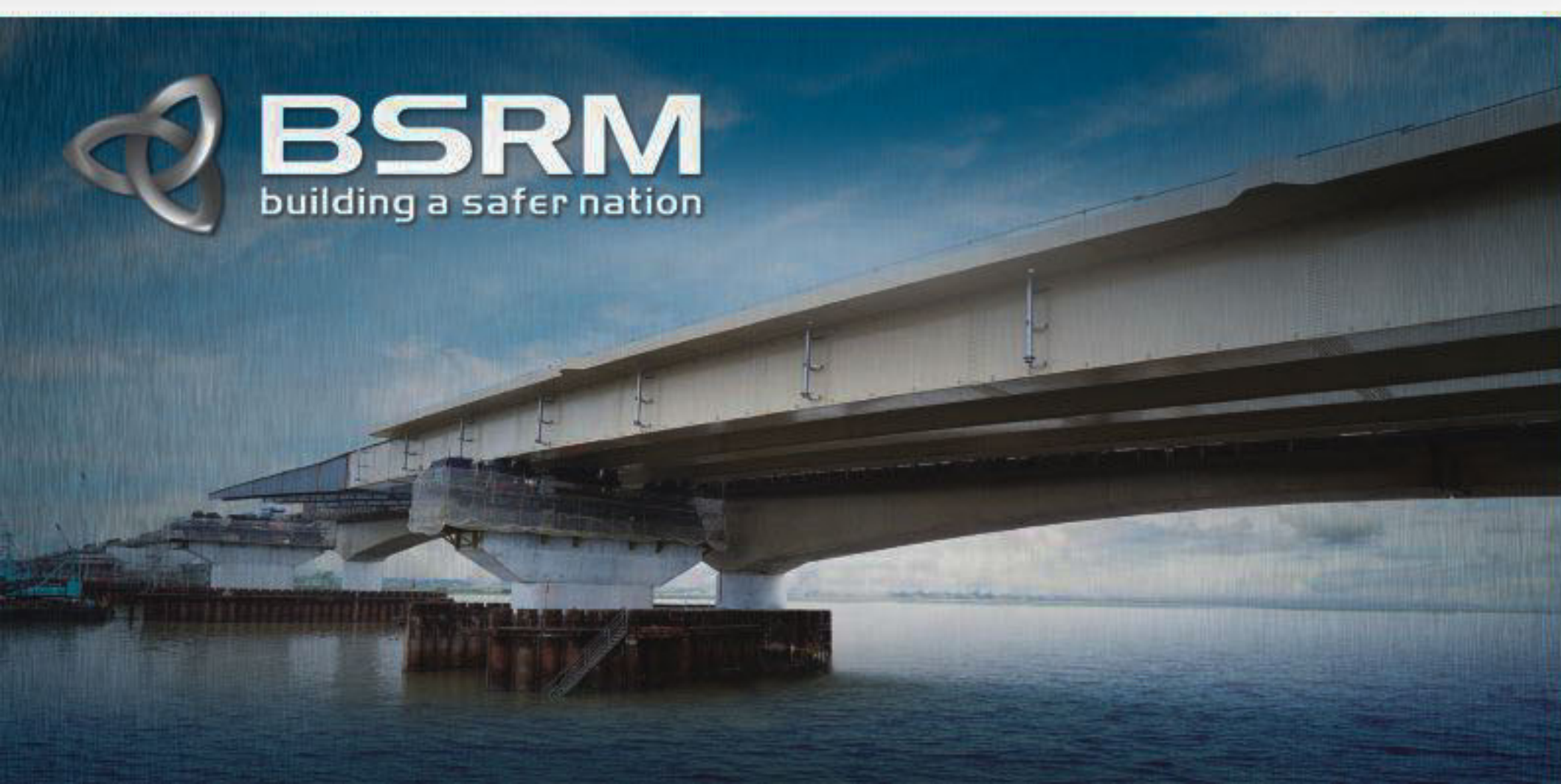
After Hafezzi Huzur's death, all of them left the party, presumably having fallen out with his sons. In 1987, they formed a new political party, Islami Shashantantra Andolon (now known as Islami Andolon). However, it took just two years for them to fall apart, once again.

In 1989, Allama Azizul Haque formed his own party, Khelafat Majlish, while Mufti Fazlul Haque Amini founded another, Islami Morcha. Mawlana Fazlul Karim, the Chormonai Pir, retained his control over Islami Andolan.

In 1990, with a view to winning some parliamentary seats, all of these parties, barring Mufti Amini's, formed a new alliance, Islami Oikyojot (IOJ). The IOJ, while now divided into two factions, has great political sways in Hefajat-e-Islam.

Continued to page 5

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