

# Yet another picture of vandalised temples



**“W**HAT is your religion?”—this peculiar question (yes, it feels peculiar when asked within seconds after being introduced to someone) followed me all through my life as my two names are Bangla words, while my surname is a common one used by people of different religions. I always wondered why knowing someone’s religion was so important. I could believe in anything or nothing with the most “religious” of names and be an ardent believer with a not-very-religious name. “Who gave you this name?” and “how religious are you?” were some other odd questions that bugged me, the worst one being: “Why does your name sound like that if you were born into Islam?”

But I have stopped shrugging my shoulders and shaking my head in disgust as instances of intolerance towards any religion other than Islam (our state religion) have become quite prevalent in Bangladesh. It’s no surprise then that pictures of headless statues of Hindu gods and goddesses have once again appeared in mainstream and social media.

On August 7, four Hindu temples, at least 10 idols of gods and goddesses, six shops, and two homes of the local Hindu community were vandalised in an attack carried out by miscreants in a Khulna village. Any concrete reason behind the attack is yet to be officially stated but it “may have” taken place because some Hindus were singing *Kirtan* (a devotional song) while on their way to a temple. Unfortunately, that very hour happened to be the time of *Isha* prayers, according to newspaper reports.

Earlier in March, several hundred

supporters of Hefazat-e-Islam attacked, vandalised and looted at least 75 Hindu houses in Sunamganj’s Noagaon village over a Facebook post.

Jhumon Das Apon, who made the post criticising Hefazat leader Mamunul Haque, was, among others, detained under the Digital Security Act 2018 and is yet to be released despite demands raised in a written statement by 24 eminent citizens. Here, another point to be noted is that the attackers not only vandalised the homes because their leader was criticised in a Facebook post by one Jhumon, but also vandalised several idols and looted valuables from the houses in that village.

Hefazat has been making the headlines for quite some time now with its violent activities and demands, but one particular instance mentioned in the 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom will leave most in despondence.

The report released by the US Department of State mentions an incident that took place in Brahmanbaria in July last year, when local residents exhumed the body of an Ahmadiyya Muslim infant buried in a government graveyard and later dumped the body by the side of the road. The protesters considered



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PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

her family to be “infidels”; the body was later buried in an Ahmadiyya graveyard.

Human rights groups termed the incident a “crude example of violence against religious minorities and abuse of human rights,” reads the report, which describes the status of religious freedom in every country.

Violence against religious minorities is not the result of people taking their opinions to Facebook. Rather, it is the hatred stemming from a deep-seated sense of superiority that comes with blind faith and a lack of tolerance.

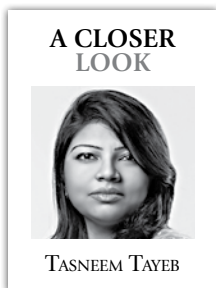
Even amid the coronavirus pandemic, the country saw 17 deaths and 30 cases of rape and torture (motivated by religious

intolerance) from March to September last year, according to Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist, Christian Unity Council and Bangladesh Minority Watch. Their study, carried out on the persecution of religious minority communities throughout 2020, mentions that 37 idols were smashed, 23 temples were attacked, vandalised and set afire, 26 houses were evicted, five religious institutes were taken over, 60 families were forced out of their villages, and four people were threatened with forced conversions and seven others were forced to convert.

Also last year, as many as 88 houses and business institutions were vandalised and

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## The hasty retreat of its western allies leaves Afghanistan in a deeper hole



**A**FGHANISTAN is turning into a bloody mess. With the United States withdrawing its troops from the nation—a move seen by many as premature and not well-meditated—and the Taliban gaining ground at breakneck speed, the situation in the war-

ravaged country is taking a turn for the worse. There have been reports of the Taliban controlling more than half of the 419 districts throughout Afghanistan, and taking hold of seven provincial capitals, including Taloqan, Sherberghan, Zaranj, Kunduz and Farah, among others. Kunduz, Sar-e-Pul and Taloqan fell to the Taliban within hours.

The Taliban is securing control of the customs checkpoints in the border crossing areas and are also collecting the customs duties. And some of these checkpoints are capable of generating a significant amount of money through customs duties. “Islam Qala on the border with Iran was, for example, capable of generating more than USD 20 million per month,” reported BBC. While trade has been disrupted due to violence, the Taliban can turn these customs checkpoints into sustainable revenue sources in the long run.

The Taliban fighters are also looting and plundering the cities they are capturing, and committing slaughter, as they seek to punish those who they suspect of having worked for the Afghan government—or even worse, having supported the foreign troops in any way.

Those who have the means are fleeing Afghan cities, and those who cannot are living in constant fear of retribution. And there are territories which are bowing to the Taliban without even putting up a fight. For instance, it has been reported that in the northern city of Aibak, on July 9, 2021, the governor removed the government forces from the city after the

revealed in a report in July. Reports of Taliban atrocities have been on the rise in the media in the last couple of months. Unicef said on August 9 that, in the last 72 hours, 27 children had been killed, and another 136 had been injured, mostly in Kandahar, where the Taliban and the Afghan army are locked in a tough fight.

And women have become more vulnerable than ever. Recently, it was reported in the international media that the Taliban are going from door to door searching for girls and women between “12 and 45 years for their fighters to forcibly marry. Women are again being told they cannot leave the house without a male escort, they cannot work, study or dress as they please. Schools and colleges are being shut and businesses destroyed.” This was published by *The Print*. Women—especially those who are independent and are working in leadership positions—are in danger of being

the sorties even in September. While the world has come forward with words of concern, these concerns are not being addressed by them. The inaction of the international community to immediately stop the brutality of the Taliban is appalling, to say the least.

Those who are still counting on finding a political solution to this problem, especially through negotiations and the Doha Peace Talks, might be in for disappointment. While Qatar has stepped up diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis and will be hosting two international meetings this week to pressurise the Taliban and the Afghan government to sit at the negotiating table, only time will tell how fruitful these talks will be.

With strengthened hold over multiple major provincial capitals across Afghanistan, and continued sponsorship from foreign players, the Taliban might not be as willing to



**The international community must now think of a Plan B to save Afghanistan, because Plan A is clearly not working.**

PHOTO: AP

targeted by the insurgents, who already have a track record of killing female journalists, activists, and lawyers, among others.

As more cities crumble under the pressure of the Taliban, people fear for their lives. Even a few months ago, the discourse in the media had been about preserving the freedom people had gained in the absence of the Taliban; the conversations were about driving women’s empowerment, gender equality, and upholding human rights. But now, people are back to worrying about surviving the day. The worries are not even about livelihoods, they’re about preserving lives.

On the one hand, about 80 percent of the country is facing serious drought, and on the other hand is the bloody vengeance unleashed by the Taliban. Caught between the two, the people of Afghanistan see a bleak future ahead—if there is a future at all.

Deborah Lyons, the special representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan, recently compared the situation in Afghanistan to the battlefields of Syria and Sarajevo, and suggested that the country risks falling “into a situation of catastrophe so serious that it would have few, if any, parallels in this century.”

The US Secretary of State termed the situation “deeply, deeply troubling”, and warned that Afghanistan might turn into a “pariah state”. The US, in the last few weeks, has launched air attacks targeting Taliban strongholds and assets. However, only air strikes are not sufficient to hold the Taliban at bay. These air strikes will also come to an end with the complete withdrawal of troops later this month, unless the US decides to continue

negotiate as they were before. This is especially feared in the backdrop of the US air strikes in Afghanistan, which the Taliban see as a violation of the Doha deal and have thus threatened the US with consequences.

Incentivising the Taliban with recognition and hoping that they would come round and make a peace deal with the Afghan government seems like a flawed idea. The battle-hardened Taliban have only known violence and power. Thinking that they would be capable of sharing power with another body is a folly.

Even when the US troops were present in Afghanistan, the Taliban had not disappeared. They had maintained a low profile and consolidated their power, especially in the rural peripheries. This is why they have managed to make such a swift comeback.

While a political solution is a desirable outcome, one cannot pin their hopes on it. The international community must now think of a Plan B to save Afghanistan, because Plan A is clearly not working. Strengthening the Afghan government with political, military and economic support can be one way of suppressing the Taliban. The international community can also consider imposing sanctions on the Taliban’s foreign sponsors to cut the channels of their economic resources.

The mess that Afghanistan has turned into has not happened overnight. It is the result of multiple foreign attacks over the decades. The US is certainly one of the perpetrators of this crime. And with time, the wound has festered and become poisonous.

The US needs to play a strong and proactive role in addressing this crisis now. In the past, the country has taken harsher measures against

sovereign nations without any concrete justification whatsoever. Case in point: Iran. If the US can brand the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—a wing of a sovereign nation’s armed forces—“terrorists”, kill their top commander in the darkness of the night, and impose harsh sanctions on Iran (whose only fault was, perhaps, trusting the JCPOA), why it cannot take the harsh route to stop the Taliban remains a mystery.

The international community cannot wash its hands of this moral responsibility either. They must now act together to cut out this rotting wound, and bring peace back to Afghanistan. This will otherwise have a lasting impact on the Central and South Asian regions, the reverberations of which will be felt across the globe.

Tasneem Tayeb is a columnist for *The Daily Star*. Her Twitter handle is: @tasneem\_tayeb

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community leaders pleaded with him not to resist the Taliban advance in order to avoid further bloodshed. It was the sixth provincial capital to fall to the organisation in less than a week.

And it is feared that more cities will fall to the Taliban as the Afghan government is clearly not in a position to fight the insurgents. The rapid surrender of major provincial capitals to the Taliban has exposed the painful yet inevitable reality of the Afghan government—its inability to protect its people. It has also exposed the flaws in the United States’ decision to completely pull out its troops within such a short amount of time. It was on April 14, 2021, that the Biden administration had announced its decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan after two decades of its presence there. From May, a spike in violence was noticed in the country, as United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

### Invitation for Tenders

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH					
01. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Liberation War Affairs				
02. Agency	NA				
03. Procuring Entity Name	Upazila Nirbahi Officer, Damurhuda				
04. Procuring Entity Code	--				
05. Procuring Entity District	Chuadanga.				
06. Invitation For	অসম্ভল বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের জন্য আবাসন নির্মাণ প্রকল্প।				
07. Invitation Ref No	মুকিম/পিডি/অ.বী.মু.আ.নি.প্র/ম-১/২০২১/০৩.				
08. Date	০১/০৮/২০২১ ইং।				
KEY INFORMATION					
09. Procurement Method	Limited Tendering Method (সীমিত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি)				
FUNDING INFORMATION					
10. Budget & Source of Funds	Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh				
11. Development Partners	NA				
PERTICULAR INFORMATION					
12. Project/Programme Code	NA				
13. Project/Programme Name	অসম্ভল বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের জন্য আবাসন নির্মাণ প্রকল্প।				
14. Tender Package No (if applicable)	কার্য-০১৩				
15. Tender Package Name (if applicable)	অসম্ভল বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের জন্য আবাসন নির্মাণ প্রকল্প।				
16. Tender Publication Date	12/08/2021.				
17. Tender Last Selling Date	29/08/2021, 05-00 PM				
18. Price of Tender Schedule	৫০,০০,০০০/- (পঞ্চাশ লক্ষ) পর্যন্ত ১,০০০/- (এক হাজার) টাকা, ৫০,০০,০০০/- (পঞ্চাশ লক্ষ) হতে ২,০০,০০,০০০/- (দুই কোটি) পর্যন্ত ২,০০০/- (দুই হাজার) টাকা।				
19. Tender Closing Date & Time	31/08/2021, 12-00 PM				
20. Tender Opening Date & Time	01/09/2021, 03-00 PM				
21. Name & Address of the office	Office of The Upazila Nirbahi Officer Damurhuda, Chuadanga.				
22. -Selling Tender Document (Principle)	Office of The Upazila Nirbahi Officer Damurhuda, Chuadanga.				
23. -Selling Tender Document (Others)	N/A				
NO CONDITIONS APPLY FOR SALE, PURCHASE OR DISTRIBUTION OF TENDER DOCUMENT					
24. -Receiving Tender Document	Office of The Upazila Nirbahi Officer				
25. -Opening Tender Document	TOC, Office of The Upazila Nirbahi Officer				
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER					
26. Brief Eligibility and Qualification of Tenderer	যে কোন সরকারী, আধা সরকারী ও স্বায়ত্ব-শাসিত প্রতিষ্ঠানের তালিকাভুক্ত ও হলনাগাদ নবায়নকৃত ঠিকাদার/ঠিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠান।				
27. Brief Description of Works	অসম্ভল বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের জন্য আবাসন নির্মাণ প্রকল্প।				
28. Brief Description of Physical Services	NA				
29. Price of Tender Document (TK)					
	Lot No	Identification of Lot	Location	Tender Security Amount	Completion Time in Weeks/Months
30.	01	অসম্ভল বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের জন্য আবাসন নির্মাণ প্রকল্প।	Damurhuda, Chuadanga.	3 % of Estimated Amount	60 Days
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS					
31. Name of Official Inviting Tender	Dilara Rahman.				
32. Designation of Official Inviting Tender	Upazila Nirbahi Officer.				
33. Address of Official Inviting Tender	Damurhuda, Chuadanga.				
34. Contact details of Official Inviting Tender	0247790801				
35. The Procuring Entity reserves the right to reject all the Tenders or annual the Tender proceeding					

(দিলারা রহমান) ১০৪.২০২  
উপজেলা নির্বাহী অফিসার  
দামুড়হুদা, চুয়াডাঙ্গা।