

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Dhaka**

Press Release

Dhaka, 19 October 2021:

When the people of Bangladesh were celebrating the Durga Puja in a joyous mood, there emerged reports of attacks on Hindu religious sites and idols in different parts of the country. The Government of Bangladesh unequivocally condemned those incidents and took serious note of the reactions from within and outside the Hindu community. As an immediate measure, the Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) forces were deployed in 22 districts of the country in aid of the civilian administration.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister herself has assured of bringing the perpetrators to justice, including by taking recourse to technological means available with the law enforcement and investigative agencies. She urged all concerned to exercise restraint under any provocation and to refrain from spreading or acting on unfounded rumours. She called upon all to maintain communal harmony at any cost. Senior government leaders have visited a number of affected sites, and assured the Hindu community members of adequate protection and compensation for the damages incurred. 71 cases have been filed in connection with these incidents. The alleged mastermind behind the attacks in Cumilla has already been arrested.

The Government remains concerned that certain vested quarters are carrying out such pre-meditated attacks to gain some dubious political mileage. It is regrettable that the local elements that opposed Bangladesh's independence 50 year ago are still propagating their toxic narratives to instigate violence, hatred and bigotry. They are trying to undermine Bangladesh's secular, non-communal and pluralistic credentials in the international context by deliberately targeting one of the biggest religious festivals of the country. The Government appreciates the Hindu community for concluding the festivities in a befitting spirit and also welcomes the overwhelming show of solidarity by people in general.

In this context, the Government would like to reiterate that communal harmony and peaceful co-existence are cornerstones of our democratic polity. For centuries, people from different faiths, ethnicities and religions have been living in this land in peace and harmony.

Our long-standing commitment to tolerance and inclusion is safeguarded by Constitutional provisions. While the supreme law of the land guarantees protection of all its citizens from any kind of discrimination and intolerance, the democratic governance of the country ensures enjoyment of fundamental rights of its citizens irrespective of their religions, beliefs and ethnicity. The Government of Bangladesh strongly upholds that every religious community has the right to establish, maintain and manage its own religious institutions and to perform religious rituals.

The Government of Bangladesh, under the guidance of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has set an example by advocating the motto of “Each unto his or her religion, festivals are for all.” Bangladesh is perhaps the only country where the major religious festivals of all religions are observed as public holidays. The government has also been supporting different religious groups by setting up special trust funds for their well-being. This year, on the occasion of Durga Puja, Hon’ble Prime Minister donated Tk.30.00 million to the Hindu Kalyan Trust for the smooth observance of the festival.

Under the current circumstances, the Government urges all concerned to uphold the spirit of tolerance, inclusivity, peace and pluralism and to stand guard against further efforts to malign the state institutions and tarnish the image of the country. The Government remains committed to prevent the recurrence of such untoward incidents and would expect that further complication or misunderstanding would be averted through responsible and fact-based reporting through all media platforms.
