

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 13/002/2005

09 March 2005

UA 55/05 Fear for Safety

BANGLADESH Ahmadiyya Community in the city of Bogra

Leaders of Islamist groups have threatened to attack members of the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat* religious community, on Friday 11 March, in the city of Bogra. This attack is intended to be a strong statement by Islamist groups to pressure the government to declare Bangladesh's Ahmadis "non-Muslims".

This attack will be the culmination of a hate campaign led by the Islamists in Bogra and the nearby regions of Rajshahi, Natore and Gaibandha over the past week. Members of Islamist groups have been conducting this hate campaign in an attempt to raise support for the planned attack in Bogra this Friday.

This planned attack follows a pattern of similar attacks on Ahmadi places of worship in the districts of Chittagong, Patuakhali, Narayangonj, Brahmabaria, Nakhhalpara and Dhaka over the past year. Civil society groups and NGOs have come forward in solidarity with the Ahmadis in the face of previous attacks, and will be present in Bogra to support the Ahmadi community on Friday.

Previous attacks on the Ahmadis have been foiled by the assistance of local police and civil society groups, but it is feared that public speeches by Islamists inciting mobs to violence, the possible confiscation of Ahmadi prayer books and the hanging of signs on the place of worship, warning all Muslims that this is a place of worship for non-Muslims, will lead to violent attacks on members of the Ahmadi community this Friday.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

By targeting the Ahmadiyya community, Islamist groups are believed to be attempting to force the government to yield to their political demand for the introduction of more stringent Islamic law in Bangladesh. The groups are hoping to obtain mass support from poor and disenfranchised sections of society, whom they feel they could influence by appealing to their religious beliefs.

Although the local authorities have reportedly in the past taken measures to ensure the safety of the Ahmadis, the national government has yet to take the important step of publicly condemning this incitement of violence against the Ahmadiyya community.

In the past year, Amnesty International has documented abuses by Islamist groups including the killing of an Ahmadi preacher; a ban on Ahmadiyya publications; rallies inciting violence against Ahmadis; and the rising wave of hate speech and public rallies calling for the Ahmadis to be declared non-Muslims. Amnesty international has also expressed concern by an edict by a local Islamist leader which forbade Ahmadis from buying or selling goods in their village, harvesting their crops, sending their children to school or even talking to one another in the presence of other villagers, which effectively confined the Ahmadis to their homes, and only ended when the Home Ministry intervened after 25 days.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to publicly halt the planned attacks by Islamist groups on members of the Ahmadiyya community in Bogra;
- calling on them to ensure that all members of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh, including those in Bogra now under threat from Islamist groups, are protected by the police and local authorities;

- urging the government to take strict measures to curb the use of hate speech and public rallies to incite violence against Ahmadis;
- urging the government to declare that no member of any group has the right to intimidate or persecute any members of the Ahmadiyya community, and to bring those responsible for such incidents to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia
Office of the Prime Minister
Gona Bhaban
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Dhaka

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Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Md. Lutfuzzaman Babar
State Minister for Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Building 4
Dhaka

Fax: + 880 2 8619667

Salutation: Dear Minister of State

Barrister Moudud Ahmed
Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Dhaka

Fax: + 880 2 7168577
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Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 March 2005.