

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 13/008/2004

12 May 2004

UA 171/04 Fear for safety

BANGLADESH Members of Ahmadiyya communities in Patuakhali and Chittagong

Members of the "Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat", a religious community which considers itself a sect of Islam, are at imminent risk of violent attack following threats issued against them by Islamist leaders.

On 6 May 2004 leaders of Khatame Nabuwat Committee, a radical Islamist group, reportedly called on its members to lay siege to all Ahmadiyya establishments in the cities of Patuakhali and Chittagong, southern Bangladesh, and to "evict" Ahmadis from their places of worship and community buildings. This call was repeated in a rally on 11 May, and in distributed leaflets which detailed the programme. In Patuakhali, the threat affects some 27,000 members of the Ahmadiyya community.

Although local authorities have reportedly stated that they will take measures to ensure the safety of the Ahmadis, the government has yet to take the important step of publicly adding its support for such measures, and to condemn this incitement of violence against Ahmadiyya communities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The recent targeting of members of the Ahmadiyya community is believed to be a tactical measure by Islamist groups 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.

In the past year, Amnesty International has documented abuses by these groups including the killing of an Ahmadi preacher, the 'excommunication' and illegal house arrest of Ahmadi villagers, a ban on Ahmadiyya publications, street agitations against Ahmadis and the rising wave of hate speech and public rallies calling for the declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslims.

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

- Calling on the Bangladeshi government to ensure the protection of all members of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh, including those in Patuakhali and Chittagong who face current threats from Khatame Nabuwat;
- Urging the government to take strict measures to curb the use of hate speech and public rallies for inciting violence against Ahmadis;
- Urging the government to declare that no member of any group has the right to lay siege to or persecute any members of the Ahmadiyya community, and to bring those responsible for such incidents to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia
Office of the Prime Minister
Gona Bhaban
Old Sangsad Bhaban, Tejgaon,
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 8113244 / 8113243 / 9133722

Telex: 672802 PSEC BJ / 632220 RAPA BJ / 672803 PM SEC BJ

Email: pm@pmobd.org

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

State Minister for Home Affairs

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

Fax: + 880 2 8619667

Salutation: Dear Minister of State

Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs

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

Fax: + 880 2 7168577

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 10 June 2004.