

PUBLIC

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16 February 2006

Further Information on UA 30/06 (ASA 13/001/2006, 15 February 2006) Fear for Safety

BANGLADESH Members of the Ahmadiyya community in Dhanikhola village, Dhaka province

On 10 February, the Bangladeshi security forces prevented members of the Islamist group, the International Khatme Nabuwat Movement (IKNM) from holding a rally at the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat* mosque in Dhanikhola village, in Mymensingh, a district of Dhaka Division. However, IKNM leaders have threatened to hold further protests at two Ahmadiyya mosques in the coming months, leading to renewed concern for the safety of the Ahmadiyya religious community.

The IKNM had threatened to use the rally to denounce the Ahmadiyya religious community and to place a placard outside the mosque, asking Muslims not to "mistake it for a mosque". However, after security forces prevented the IKNM supporters from reaching the mosque, the protesters hung a placard on a tree in Boilor Bazar, two kilometres outside Dhanikhola, denouncing the Ahmadiyya community.

The security forces reportedly deployed several hundred police and paramilitary personnel to prevent an estimated 4,000 IKNM protesters from reaching the mosque. Local residents had left their houses in anticipation of violence at the rally. However, no violence was reported. Shortly after the rally, IKNM speakers repeated their demands that the government legally declare members of the Ahmadiyya community as non-Muslim.

The leaders of the IKNM then announced that they would hold further protests at an Ahmadiyya mosque in Sylhet province on 24 March and another in the town of Shyhamnagar in Satkhira province on 12 May

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

Over the past two years Amnesty International has repeatedly raised concerns about the safety of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh following documented abuses by Islamist groups including the killing of an Ahmadi preacher, the illegal house arrest of Ahmadi villagers, street agitations against Ahmadis and the rising wave of "hate speech" and public rallies calling for the declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslims. The government initiated a ban on Ahmadiyya publications, which is currently suspended by the High Court.

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

- welcoming the measures taken by the authorities to prevent attacks on the Ahmadiyya community in Dhanikhola village on and around 10 February;
- expressing concern at the threat by the IKNM to hold further protests at the Ahmadiyya mosques in Sylhet on 24 March and at Shyhamnagar in Satkhira province on 12 May;
- calling on the authorities to take action to protect the Ahmadiyya community in these areas;

- calling on the authorities to publicly denounce these threat as well as previous threats and attacks against the Ahmadiyya community;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that all members of the Ahmadiyya community in Bangladesh 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
Old Sangsad Bhaban, Tejgaon,
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 8113244 / 8113243 / 8111015 / 8151490 / 8151157

Email: Please send appeals to one of the following email addresses:

pm@pmobd.org
psecretary@pmobd.org
presssecy@pmobd.org
pmo@pmobd.org

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

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

Fax: + 880 2 7169667

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, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 7168577 / 8618557

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 30 March 2006.