

Declare Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims

Khatme Nabuwat unveils year-long programme at Suhrawardy Udyan rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sammilito Khatme Nabuwat Parishad yesterday launched a year long programme at an international conference in Dhaka, demanding that the government declare Ahmadiyyas a non-Muslim minority.

"If the Qadianis [Ahmadiyyas] are not declared non-Muslim, tougher programmes will be announced," Mohiuddin Rabbani, secretary general of International Majlis-e-Tahafuz-e-Khatme Nabuwat, Bangladesh, told the conference at Suhrawardy Udyan.

The programme includes mass signature collection from alevi, Islamic scholars and supporters until April 30 next year; submission of memorandums to all deputy commissioners in May and June; and divisional Khatme Nabuwat conferences between July and November.

If the demand remains unmet, they will organise a national ulema mashayekh conference in December 2026 with leading Islamic scholars to determine the course of action.

At least 90 clerics, scholars and politicians from Bangladesh and abroad, including Pakistan, India, Nepal, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, addressed the event. Leaders from the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolok Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis and Hefajat-e-Islam also took part.

This is the first international conference organised by Khatme Nabuwat in Bangladesh.

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Thousands gathered for a conference of the International Khatme Nabuwat Grand Council at Suhrawardy Udyan in Dhaka yesterday. The organisation announced a yearlong programme calling on the government to declare members of the Ahmadiyya community non-Muslim.

PHOTO: STAR

BB moves to tighten grip

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The draft also proposes removing the "wilful defaulter" classification, introduced in 2023, which obliges banks to list borrowers deemed deliberately unwilling to repay loans. Bangladesh Bank officials argue the category has created additional workload and allowed room for corruption due to subjective interpretation; instead, banks will maintain a single defaulter list after the amendment.

"There are no specific criteria to define the wilful defaulters. And that creates scope for corruption," Huda said.

Another amendment will allow the central bank to relax the current 10 percent limit on individual shareholdings for "strategic institutional investors", if deemed beneficial for the sector. That will potentially pave the way for deeper investment by foreign or domestic institutions.

Lending rules for business groups will be tightened. Under the current law, sister firms of a defaulting company may still borrow from banks. The draft amendments will end this practice, meaning a default by one unit of a conglomerate will bar other units from obtaining loans.

Internet freedom

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against harassment and sexual exploitation online".

But they also caution that "the CSO retained concerning rules related to content removal, criminal penalties for online speech and surveillance".

On political repression, the report points out retaliatory actions by the interim government: it says prosecutors obtained a court ruling in December last year that "prohibited the online dissemination of former Prime Minister Hasina's speeches".

Then in May, the government "banned all AL party activities under an antiterrorism law".

Freedom House also questioned the arbitrary arrests.

"Security forces arbitrarily arrested hundreds of people based on their real or perceived support for the AL, including online journalists. Others were detained in connection with their social media activities."

In the detailed scoring, under Violations of User Rights, the report notes that repealing the CSA improved that subcategory.

The score improved because of the repeal of the CSA, which prescribed severe penalties related to online speech.

However, the CSO "retained an overbroad 'cyber terrorism' provision that carried significant criminal penalties".

Despite the reforms, Freedom House still classifies Bangladesh as "Partly Free" in terms of internet freedom.

After taking office, Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, the Special Assistant to the chief adviser with executive authority over ministry of posts, telecommunications and Information Technology, introduced a new telecom ordinance, initiated fundamental reforms in the surveillance framework and oversaw the passage of the Personal Data Protection Ordinance and the National Data Management Ordinance, said the ICT Division in a statement.

These measures collectively contributed to the improvement in Bangladesh's internet freedom score.

A World Bank delegation has already described the Personal Data Protection Ordinance and the National Data Management Ordinance as "world-class", the statement added.

Underworld back in play, raising alarm

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money transfers. Political actors are exploiting these networks.

Sources said top gangsters are again fighting turf wars over extortion, land grabs, and drug money, often using teen gangs as foot soldiers.

Following the regime change, several notorious criminals – including Abbas Ali, alias Killer Abbas; Sweden Aslam; Imamul Hasan Helal, alias Pichchi Helal; Sanjidul Islam Emon; Khondaker Nayem, alias Titon; and Khorshed Alam, alias Freedom Rasu – were released from jail, while others like Molla Masud and Tokai Sagor returned home from abroad.

Upon their return, they reclaimed territories, summoned old followers, and demanded "collections". Clashes broke out when local cadres resisted.

Shafiqul Islam, chief of Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Detective Branch, said the rivalry between gangster Sanjidul Islam Emon and top criminal Mamun intensified recently. Mamun was killed over dominance in Dhaka's underworld, allegedly ordered by Rony, Emon's associate, who paid two gunmen Tk 2 lakh for the hit after several failed attempts.

Asked about efforts to control underworld crime, DMP Commissioner Sheikh Md Sazzad Ali told The Daily Star, "Crime in Dhaka is very much under control. Compared to previous months, muggings and daylight attacks have dropped significantly. Police have maintained order without using lethal force."

However, locals and media reports suggest the picture is messy, with groups led by Emon, Pichchi Helal, Molla Masud, and Subrata Bain continuing to carry out extortion and land grabbing.

Subrata and Masud were arrested in Kushtia earlier this year, but others have fled abroad.

THE NETWORKS

Subrata Bain, once influential in Moghbazar, Motijheel, Paltan, and Malibagh, reportedly lost ground after his arrest. The Jisan group now controls Malibagh, Motijheel, Moghbazar, Badda, and Mohakhali, extorting hefty sums from major contracts, land deals, and businesses.

Meanwhile, top criminal Emon, operating from abroad, is believed to control large parts of Mohammadpur, Dhanmondi, Jigatola, Hazaribagh, and sections of New Market. His key associates – Rony, Kallu, and Shahidul – collect "protection money" from Baroikhali to Rayerbazar.

A trader at the Sadek Khan Ghat poultry market near Rayerbazar graveyard said "Emon's associates" used

to forcibly collect extortion money and even take chickens from the wholesale market. "Early this year, we negotiated a monthly payment of Tk 1 lakh to keep the peace, and we have been paying them regularly since," he added.

In Paikpara, Kalyanpur, Adabor and parts of Mohammadpur, Pichchi Helal's group extorts money from contractors, local sources say.

In Mirpur-1 and Shah Ali, local businesses, contract work, and waste management are reportedly controlled by associates of top criminal Shahadat, who is currently living abroad.

In Mirpur-10, Mirpur-13, Mirpur-14, Ibrahimpur, Kachukhet, and Bhashantek, individuals linked to Killer Abbas and Ibrahim have been accused by contractors of extorting "protection money". They also extort money from broadband and cable operators, and construction firms.

In Bhashantek and Mirpur-13, men invoking Ibrahim's name force contractors to buy building materials at inflated rates. Those who refuse are pressured to pay large sums before work can start.

An officer of a law enforcement intelligence unit said they received reports that associates of Killer Abbas and Ibrahim blocked work at four under-construction buildings in Mirpur-13 to collect extortion money.

According to police and media reports, most top gang leaders now operate from abroad, running large criminal networks that keep them beyond the reach of law enforcement. They fund bail and living expenses for arrested members until they return to the gang.

In Chattogram, fugitive crime boss Sazzad Ali, alias Boro Sazzad, runs the underworld from abroad. His armed gang collects tolls, controls turf, and eliminates rivals on his orders, police sources say.

Sazzad had once ruled through deputies Sarwar Hossain Babla and Akbar Ali, alias Dhakaia Akbar. A decade ago, both split to form separate gangs.

Sarwar was shot dead on November 5 during an election campaign in the port city's Panchlaish area. Akbar was killed on May 23 in Patenga. Police said both killings were carried out on Sazzad's orders.

Sazzad's followers reportedly don't hesitate to open fire if extortion demands are unmet. Since August last year, his group has been linked to 10 murders, according to police sources.

Apart from the recent killing of Sarwar, local businessman Abdul Hakim and Jubo Dal activist Mohammad

Alamgir were shot dead last month in Chattogram's Raosan as rival politicians fight for dominance.

ILLEGAL ARMS

All these killings involved the use of illegal firearms. Sources report the spread of pistols, revolvers, rifles, and submachine guns in different parts of the country.

The recent intelligence report submitted to the PHQ identified at least 18 border points through which illegal weapons regularly enter the country.

The most active points include Teknaf, Benapole, Chapainawabganj, Kushtia, Dinajpur, and Meherpur. Smugglers are also using river routes.

Between August 1 and November 9, the Rapid Action Battalion recovered 189 firearms and arrested 98 people linked to illegal arms.

Border Guard Bangladesh said it recovered 1,225 firearms and large quantities of ammunition along the border during the first nine months of this year. Of these, 97 weapons were seized between January and April, and over a thousand from May to September.

Meanwhile, more than 1,300 firearms looted from police stations during the July uprising remain missing, with many reportedly now in the hands of criminals and being used to commit crimes across the country.

Omar Faruk, professor of criminology and police science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, said many top criminals who were released from jail after the August 5 changeover have become active again. "Now, they are aligning with different political parties and engaging in violent criminal activities."

Although police earlier said they would keep these criminals under surveillance, Faruk questioned how that would be possible.

"With so many chaotic incidents happening every day, police currently lack the capacity to maintain effective surveillance."

Regarding illegal firearms, he said, while there have been some drives to recover looted arms, no effective operation has been carried out to control the overall flow of illegal weapons, leading to a politically and socially unstable situation.

"At this point, the government and law enforcement agencies must take decisive action to re-arrest the identified criminals. They must also recover illegal firearms through targeted operations."

"Otherwise, the upcoming election is unlikely to be peaceful, and incidents of killings and violent crimes are expected to rise, pushing the country further into uncertainty," he warned.

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The party's presence on the ground remains weak in several districts, as many local units have not yet started full-scale activities, which could affect voter engagement.

To fix this, they have asked district leaders to hold gatherings, introduce candidates early, and increase communication with voters.

BNP is also closely monitoring government activities ahead of the election, including administrative transfers, actions of local officials, and the Election Commission's preparations.

In this regard, Tuku said the party will also make a decision on the vacant constituencies, and announce it.

MANIFESTO INCOMPLETE

BNP's manifesto committee has prepared draft proposals on employment, economic recovery, education, healthcare, agriculture, foreign policy, and governance. However, these drafts have not yet been merged into a final document.

A standing committee member said, "The manifesto will be very important especially for young voters. But several parts still need editing."

PROTESTS AGAINST NOMINATIONS

Protests have erupted in over two dozen districts over BNP's nominee list, with many grassroots activists alleging that weak candidates were favoured over popular leaders.

Road blocks, human chains, rallies, and slogans against central leaders have been reported in 33 districts where BNP has announced candidates.

Party sources said BNP has engaged independent organisations to assess grassroots acceptance of its nominees.

CAMPAGN STRATEGY BEING PREPARED

Once the polls schedule is announced, BNP will have only around two months

for full campaigning. To ease the pressure, the party has already begun preparing its campaign strategy.

The plan includes sending top leaders to key constituencies, preparing area-based schedules, coordinating speeches and messages, and creating social media content in advance.

The party is also working on how Tarique Rahman's return could energise its campaign.

A BNP media team member said, "Online campaigning is now a major part of elections. Videos, graphics, and messages must be ready before the schedule so we can move quickly when the campaign starts."

Senior leaders admit that the party's presence on the ground remains weak in several districts, as many local units have not yet started full-scale activities, which could affect voter engagement.

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Meanwhile, the party is advancing its candidate selection process.

At a press briefing on Friday, NCP Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary announced that the party has already sold over 1,200 nomination applications. "Our target is to sell 3,000

applications by November 20, which will

Protect constitutional rights of Ahmadiyyas

Nagorik Coalition urges govt, parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Nagorik Coalition urged the government and political parties to safeguard the constitutional rights of Ahmadiyya citizens following what it described as "communal and threatening" remarks at a public gathering yesterday.

In an emergency statement, the citizens' rights platform said it was "deeply troubled" by comments made at the International Khatme Nabuwat Conference at Suhrawardy Udyan, where several speakers reportedly issued "hateful and threatening" statements against the Ahmadiyya community.

It expressed particular alarm over major political parties deploying anti-Ahmadiyya rhetoric for political gain ahead of the polls, calling the trend "highly worrying".

Citing article 41 of the constitution, it stressed that Ahmadiyyas hold the same right as all citizens to practice, observe, and propagate their faith.

The statement said Khatme Nabuwat groups have a long history of provocative rhetoric targeting Ahmadiyyas. It said the organisation's activities "contributed to instability and violence" in the early 1990s, when Bangladesh was navigating a democratic transition. It added that similar movements in the early 1950s in then Pakistan had weakened democratic processes, which is a warning for Bangladesh.

The platform said Bangladesh reclaimed freedom of expression and association through struggle and sacrifice. While differences of opinion must be respected, it warned that there can be no tolerance for efforts to stoke communal hatred or target fellow citizens.

It urged the interim government and relevant authorities to remain vigilant against any group seeking to destabilise national life in this sensitive moment, especially those using religion to incite hostility or encourage violence.

the perpetrators. No casualties were reported in these incidents.

Police arrested four leaders and activists of the AL and its affiliated bodies yesterday for allegedly attempting sabotage.

Outside Dhaka, a bus caught fire in the Hurricane area of Gazipur on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway around 8:00pm. No casualties were reported, and the cause remains unclear.

In Pirojpur, miscreants set fire to the July Memorial on the premises of the Central Shaheed Minar early yesterday, damaging part of the structure. Two on-duty police personnel were withdrawn to the police lines for negligence. A case is being filed over the incident.

In Narayanganj, a parked bus caught fire on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway at Shimail in Siddhiganj around 6:00am. Firefighters extinguished the blaze soon after.

Arson, crude bomb attacks go on