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Bangladesh: Human rights defender Nahid Hasan Knowledge charged under Cyber Security Act for hurting religious sentiments

On 15 March 2025, human rights defender **Nahid Hasan Knowledge**'s home in Chilmari was raided by the Detective Branch (DB) police from Kurigram, in an attempt to arrest him. The authorities have filed a First Information Report (FIR) against the human rights defender, which includes charges under the Cyber Security Act for hurting religious sentiments.

[Nahid Hasan Knowledge](#) is a human rights defender, writer, and community organiser dedicated to environmental and cultural rights. He is a member of the Bangladesh Shilpi Kalyan Trustee Board (Artist welfare trust) under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. He has played a crucial role in mobilising local communities on issues regarding geographical marginalisation, gender, and religious discrimination. His activism extends to opposing destructive sand mining from local rivers and advocating for the rights of farmers, fishermen and marginalised communities in Char areas.

On 15 March 2025, Nahid Hasan Knowledge's home was raided by the Kurigram DB police following an FIR filed against him for hurting religious sentiments under the infamous Cyber Security Act. The authorities conducted the raid in an attempt to arrest the human rights defender, however he was not at home during this time.

On 25 February 2025, a massive protest had erupted in Kurigram due to the authorities' failure to arrest Nahid Hasan Knowledge, following accusations of hurting religious sentiments. Organised under the banner of Touhidi Muslim Janata (Believers of Allah), the demonstration drew over a thousand participants. The rally commenced in the afternoon at the Thanahat Bazaar Mosque, and continued through the town's main streets before protesters gathered at the office of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO). There, protest leaders submitted a memorandum demanding swift action, underscoring growing mobilisation by the conservative muslim population in the region.

The allegations under the Cyber Security Act came from a First Information Report (FIR), a document prepared by the police following a complaint which sets the process of criminal justice in motion. The FIR was lodged against the human rights defender on 22 February 2025. That same day, a protest demanded the arrest of NHK for disrespecting the Prophet Muhammad on social media. Although the identity of the organizers of the protest remains unclear, they purported to act on behalf of the Muslim community in Chilmari. An ultimatum was given by the protesters to the authorities, that the human rights defender must be arrested by 24 February 2025, otherwise such protests would escalate. The protest march started from a mosque, gathered in front of the Chilmari Model Police Station, and the group concluded their protest at the Upzilad Parishad.

On the same day, prior to the protests and FIR lodged against Nahid Hasan Knowledge, the human right defender shared a post from Islamic speaker Abu Taha Muhammad's Facebook account, commenting, "The vile people calling our mother 'Qaumi Janani' are threatening to kill. Will they not be arrested?" This comment sparked anger among the followers of the Islamic speaker, and he later deleted the post, after receiving threats of arrest and reprisals.

Front Line Defenders is extremely concerned for the safety of human rights defender Nahid Hasan Knowledge, who is currently facing legal persecution, online harassment, and risk of reprisals due to his exercise of freedom of expression. The charges filed against Nahid Hasan and all other Bangladeshi human rights defenders under the Cyber Security Act of 2023 are part of a broader

pattern of state-led efforts to silence dissenting voices and suppress critical thought in Bangladesh, undermining human rights in the country.

Front Line Defenders calls on the Bangladeshi authorities to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Nahid Hasan Knowledge under the Cyber Security Act, and end all legal action that violates his right to freedom of expression;
2. Ensure the safety and security of Nahid Hasan Knowledge and his family, including introducing measures to ensure his physical safety and prevent any form of violence or harassment directed towards him;
3. Conduct an immediate and thorough investigation into the campaigns and protests organised against Nahid Hasan Knowledge, and hold accountable those responsible for inciting violence and hate speech against him, with the aim of publishing the findings and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Terminate the Cyber Security Act, as promised by the current interim government, to fully comply with international human rights law, and immediately release all those who remain detained under the law for peacefully exercising their freedom of expression;
5. Uphold the right to freedom of expression as guaranteed under Bangladesh's constitution and international human rights law;
6. Ensure that human rights defenders in Bangladesh are protected from reprisals from State and non-state groups and end the persecution and punishment of human rights defenders in the State, including for exercising their right to free expression and peaceful dissent.

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