

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 218/92 Fear of "Disappearance"

30 June 1992

Bhutan

H B Sapkota

Amnesty International has recently been made aware of the possible "disappearance" of H B Sapkota. He is a married man with five children who ran a cycle repair shop in Geylegphug, southern Bhutan. H B Sapkota was arrested on suspicion of involvement in "anti-national activities" in September 1990 but Amnesty International is not aware that he has been charged or tried. Since his arrest H B Sapkota's family have not been permitted to visit him and conflicting information concerning his current fate or whereabouts have given rise to concern that he may have died in custody, possibly as a result of torture or ill-treatment.

H B Sapkota was arrested on 4 September 1990 by Assam police from a house he was visiting in Dadghari, Assam, India. On the same day he was reportedly handed over to the Bhutan police. It is not clear where he was taken subsequently but two days later he is reported to have been transferred to Thimphu Central Jail. From there, one report says H B Sapkota was moved to a detention place at Gasa. During the whole period of his detention, his relatives were not allowed to visit him or correspond with him.

On 1 January 1992 H B Sapkota was seen being brought to Thimphu Hospital, wearing shackles and apparently in a very weak state. The cause of his weakness is not known to Amnesty International. The following morning a former prisoner saw that H B Sapkota's bed was empty. Hospital staff told this prisoner that H B Sapkota had died in the night.

In March 1992 the wife of H B Sapkota returned to Bhutan from Nepal, where she had been living in a refugee camp, to seek clarification of what had happened to her husband. She made inquiries at Dadmakha and Gaylegphug police stations. Officers at Dadmakha police station accepted from her a package of clothes for H B Sapkota. But on the next day they returned the package saying that he could not be traced. Mrs Sapkota then visited the police station in Gaylegphug where an officer confirmed that H B Sapkota was not being held there but agreed to inquire as to his whereabouts. Six days later, the officer told Mrs Sapkota that her husband was in good health and that she need not worry about him, but he did not tell her where he was being held. Mrs Sapkota also tried to make inquiries with the Chief of Police in Thimphu but was unable to meet him.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has become concerned since September 1990 about

Tashichchodzong

Thimphu

Bhutan

Telegrams: Foreign Affairs Minister Tsering, Thimphu, Bhutan

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COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: diplomatic representatives of Bhutan

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