
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 163/93

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 8 DECEMBER 1993
NO OF WORDS: 1535

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - BAHRAIN, BHUTAN

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

India - 15 December - PLEASE SEE NEWS SERVICE 159

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

South Africa - IMMINENT - SEE NEWS SERVICE 151/162
Human Rights Day Speech - 9 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 162

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES 1994

Children - 7 January - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161
Tunisia - 12 January
USA death penalty - 26 January - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161
South Africa - 16 February SEE NEWS SERVICE 159
Women - 8 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161
Colombia - 16 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56+57/93

*

News Service 163/93

AI INDEX: MDE 11/WU 02/93
EMBARGOED FOR 16 DECEMBER 1993

BAHRAIN: CITIZENS TURNED AWAY AND FORCED INTO EXILE

Amnesty International is calling on the government of Bahrain to end the practice of forcible exile of its own nationals, in a report launched on the country's National Day, 16 December.

According to Amnesty International, countless Bahraini citizens are being turned away from their home country, as part of an explicit government policy of exiling suspected critics and opponents.

Since the early 1980s, following an alleged coup attempt, many people have been rounded up, stripped of their Bahraini passports and forced onto boats out of Bahrain. To this day, Bahraini nationals returning from lengthy periods of residence in self-imposed exile abroad are questioned on arrival about their political activities or publications they have written - and are then all too often bundled onto the first plane back to their former country of residence.

Said Amnesty International: "We know of cases where the wives and families of political prisoners, who fled to escape harassment in the 1980s, have tried to return to Bahrain - only to be held for days at the international airport, before being forcibly expelled from Bahrain.

"Sometimes they go through this process over and over again, before finally being allowed in to their home country. When they are expelled, they are not told why and they have no chance to defend themselves or appeal against the decision."

In one recent case, a medical doctor was refused entry to Bahrain - for the fifth time - only last month. For over a week, Dr 'Abd al-'Aziz Rashid al-Rashid was shunted about between countries, expelled from Bahrain four times but repeatedly returned from other countries in the region, before ending up in the United Arab Emirates.

Dr al-Rashid's first unsuccessful attempt to return to his country was on 6 October 1991, when he was held and interrogated for four days before his expulsion. He tried again to return to Bahrain two years later, on 12 November 1993, but was expelled the following day to Syria via Kuwait. On arrival in Kuwait, however, the authorities refused to allow him entry as he had no valid travel documents - his Bahraini passport had expired - and returned him to Bahrain the same day, 13 November.

At Bahrain's international airport Dr al-Rashid was refused entry once again, and expelled to Syria. The Syrian authorities also refused him entry and returned him to Bahrain, apparently on 14 November. On 18 November 1993, the Bahraini authorities sent him back to Syria, who refused him entry and sent him back to Bahrain again the following day. He was kept at the international airport for 24 hours, before he was given a new passport, valid for one year, and was then put on a flight to the United Arab Emirates.

Amnesty International has appealed to the Bahraini Government to allow Dr al-Rashid and all other Bahraini nationals who have been forcibly exiled to return to Bahrain, in accordance with international

human rights standards and Bahrain's own Constitution.

Officially, the government of Bahrain justifies its behaviour by saying the exiles had no valid travel documents. But states are obliged to take back their own citizens, with or without passports, and in reality, Bahrain often issues them with new passports - sometimes only valid for one year, specifically to facilitate their expulsion from their country.

Said Amnesty International: "Bahrain's own constitution says it is forbidden to expel Bahraini citizens, or prevent them from returning home - and yet forcible exile is still being used as a conscious tactic by the government there.

"We believe it is past time that the government of Bahrain lived up to its own constitution and to international standards. We have urged the government to stop this hateful practice of forcible exile and issue a public declaration on Bahrain's national day that all Bahraini nationals are entitled to return to Bahrain."

ENDS/

News Service 163/93

AI INDEX: ASA 14/WU 01/93
8 DECEMBER 1993

BHUTAN: PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT

Amnesty International is concerned to learn that Tek Nath Rizal, whom the organization has adopted as a prisoner of conscience, was sentenced to life imprisonment on 16 November by the High Court in Bhutan.

He has been found guilty of four out of nine charges against him under the National Security Act. Although King Jigme Singye Wangchuck issued a Royal Decree on the 19 November pardoning Tek Nath Rizal, it states that he will only be released from prison when the Governments of Nepal and Bhutan have resolved the problem of the southern Bhutanese refugees living in refugee camps in Nepal.

Tek Nath Rizal, a former Royal Advisory Councillor, was first arrested in 1988 after petitioning the King about alleged unfair practices adopted during the 1988 census, including retroactive application of the 1985 Citizenship Act. He was released after three days, after signing an agreement barring him from attending public functions and on condition that he left the capital, Thimphu. He went into exile in Nepal where, in 1989, along with Sushil Pokhrel and Jogen Gazmere, he set up the People's Forum for Human Rights, through which information in the form of booklets and pamphlets was disseminated. Bhutan: We Want Justice protested against the Bhutan Government's policy of *driglam namzha* or cultural integration, which attempted to impose northern Bhutanese cultural norms throughout the country, including on the Nepalese speaking people of southern Bhutan.

Tek Nath Rizal was arrested again in November 1989, along with Sushil Pokhrel and Jogen Gazmere, by police in Nepal who handed them over to the Bhutanese authorities. Ratan Gazmere, Vishwanath Chhetri and Bakti Prasad Sharma, who had assisted in the writing and distribution of the pamphlets, were also arrested at this time. All six men were said by the Bhutanese Government to have organized a campaign of civil disobedience, involving acts of terrorism, protesting against the government's policy of national integration. They were detained in solitary confinement at Wangdi Phodrang prison and were told that they were to be imprisoned for life. Tek Nath Rizal was made to wear shackles for 20 months until they were removed in October 1991.

Amnesty International believes the accusation of involvement in terrorist activities is without foundation and called for the immediate and unconditional release of the six men as prisoners of conscience. In December 1991 Ratan Gazmere, Bakti Prasad Sharma and Vishwanath Chhetri were released, shortly before an Amnesty International delegation visited the country. Jogen Gazmere and Sushil Pokhrel were also released in January 1992. However, Tek Nath Rizal, regarded by the government as the "ring-leader" responsible for the unrest in the southern part of the country remained in detention.

On 30 December 1992, after over two years in detention without trial, Tek Nath Rizal was charged with nine offences under the Thrimshung Chhenpo (General Law of the Land) and the National Security Act 1992. The charges included treasonable acts against the Tsa-Wa-Sum (King, Country and People), attempts to create misunderstanding or hostility between Bhutan and friendly countries, and sowing communal discord between different communities in the Kingdom.

Amnesty International informed the Royal Government of Bhutan of its wish to attend Tek Nath Rizal's trial, which began in January 1993 and lasted 10 months, but was refused permission.

From 1990 onwards hundreds more Nepali-speaking people from southern Bhutan who had protested against the arbitrary withdrawal of citizenship during census operations in the south and the policy of national integration were arrested and charged with "anti-national" activities. In a series of amnesties announced by the King, most of these detainees were later released, but at least 170 political prisoners are reported to remain in detention without charge or trial in one prison alone.

ENDS/