
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 176/94

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 9 AUGUST 1994 NO OF WORDS:1322

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **BHUTAN/NEPAL** (See news schedule below. This item will be sent by the IS press office to targeted media and by the research team to their regional contacts.) **INDIA** (This item is being sent to Indian media by the research team)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

India - 16 August - SEE NEWS SERVICE 175/94

Kosovo - 19 September - **PLEASE NOTE NEW DATE** SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Algeria - first week of October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

France - 12 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

**** Thailand - 18 August**** - A document on refugees in Thailand is being written plus a news service item which will be sent to Thai media. We want to release this as far as possible before the start of the Indonesia campaign so that it does not jeopardise the campaign launch. This means there won't be time for it to go out in the Weekly Mailing before the 18 August, sorry about this, but if you do want to do any media work on it please contact us and we will Swiftair the report to you as soon as it is completed.

Bhutan/Nepal - 25 August - See news service 168/94

Brazil - 14 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Togo - 15 September - See news service 168/94

Indonesia - 28 September - LAUNCH OF CAMPAIGN

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EMBARGOED FOR 25 AUGUST 1994

BHUTAN/NEPAL: GOVERNMENTS MUST RESPECT RIGHTS OF BHUTANESE EXILES IN FORTHCOMING TALKS

The Governments of Bhutan and Nepal must make human rights the priority when they meet next month to discuss the fate of some 86,000 Bhutanese exiles living in refugee camps in eastern Nepal, Amnesty International said today.

According to the human rights organization, most of the exiles are Nepali-speaking people from southern Bhutan who have been systematically driven out because of their ethnic origin or political beliefs.

"Many of these people were born in Bhutan and lived there for many years and they are not nationals of any other country," Amnesty International said. "Therefore, in keeping with international law, Bhutan should be recognized as their "own country" and they should have the right to return to live there in safety from human rights violations."

So far, since talks began in 1992 between the governments of Nepal and Bhutan, there has been no indication that this aspect of the exiles' right to return is being considered.

Instead, Bhutanese citizenship is apparently being taken as the determining factor in establishing individual's right to return to Bhutan, even though Bhutanese citizenship laws are vague and applied arbitrarily in the south to deny some people citizenship, according to Amnesty International.

Many people who left in 1990 and 1991 did so out of fear of the mass arrests, torture and rape that were committed at that time by the security forces. Such violations have declined since mid-1992 but, administrative methods used by the Bhutanese authorities have continued to drive Nepali-speaking people out of southern Bhutan.

These methods include a continuing census operation which classifies many Nepali-speakers as non-nationals or "illegal immigrants", even though many of them have been recognized as Bhutanese citizens in an earlier census exercise.

In some cases, it has been reported that everyone from a particular village or area has been forced to leave as a punishment inflicted by the authorities following a murder or robbery in the area attributed to "anti-nationals".

Others reportedly have been forced to sign so-called "voluntary migration forms" under threat of fines or imprisonment by the authorities, even though they had been recognized as Bhutanese nationals.

Some of the people in the camps in Nepal still fear human rights violations if they return to Bhutan. Amnesty International has therefore recommended to both governments that before any people begin to return to Bhutan, a thorough and independent assessment of the human rights situation in southern Bhutan should take place to ensure that returnees are not victimized again by the kinds of violations that originally made them leave.

The human rights organization also believes that any person who fears human rights violations if they return to Bhutan should have an opportunity to have their asylum claims fully considered, as required under international law.

"No person should be returned to Bhutan before they have been guaranteed that they would not be at risk of human rights violations," Amnesty International said.

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INDIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLING FOR INQUIRY INTO ALLEGED POLICE INVOLVEMENT IN ATTACKS ON CIVIL LIBERTIES GROUP

In the last few days, Andhra Pradesh police have reportedly been involved in attempts to prevent members of a local civil liberties group from testifying before the National Human Rights Commission visiting that Indian state.

"We are calling on the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh to order an immediate, independent investigation into these reports," Amnesty International said today.

Senior members of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) were reportedly harassed and subjected to verbal and physical abuse by crowds, apparently including plainclothes policemen, during the Commission's sessions at Warangal and Nalgonda on 5 and 7 August.

The APCLC was to address the Commission about reports that 496 people, whom the police alleged to be members of the Naxalite People's War Group, had been deliberately and arbitrarily killed by the police in staged incidents called "encounters" between 1991 and 1993.

It is thought the crowds were largely made up of victims of atrocities committed by the Naxalite People's War Group. This group have tortured, maimed and killed many people they suspect to be police informers. They have also taken police officers hostage in past incidents.

A crowd outside the Nalgonda hearing reportedly tried to attack K.G. Kannabiran -- a lawyer and a senior member of the APCLC, who is also the Vice-President of the People's Union for Civil Liberties -- and a journalist from the Calcutta Telegraph as they left the 7 August hearing.

Although uniformed policemen then moved in to protect Mr Kannabiran, the journalist told Amnesty International that his colleagues had identified the plainclothes police officers among the attackers in the crowd as a circle inspector, a sub-inspector and two police constables, naming them in a memorandum they submitted to the Chief Minister the same evening.

The journalist said it was not clear whether the state government had taken any action to investigate the allegations, which have been denied by the local police. The National Human Rights Commission is reportedly conducting its own inquiry into the allegations.

Amnesty International is urging India's central government to ensure that police in every Indian state visited by the Commission are clearly instructed to facilitate and not obstruct the work of the Commission and to protect those wishing to testify before it.

"These are not the first reports of Indian state police trying to stop victims of human rights violations or their representatives from testifying before the National Human Rights Commission," Amnesty International said.

In April, the Chairman of the Commission had to intervene personally to gain the release of two Sikh women arrested by the Punjab Police while on their way to testify to the Commission. The Director General of the Punjab Police has still not responded to Amnesty International's letter, sent that month, asking why the two women were arrested and what the police had done to investigate their allegations that they were tortured and that a two-year-old child was held in police custody.

Amnesty International unequivocally condemns the grave human rights abuses committed by the Naxalite People's War Group and reiterates its appeal to all armed opposition groups resorting to such practices to halt them.

"But no such abuses can justify the police themselves resorting to the torture and killing of suspected political activists," the human rights organization said.

"The Andhra Pradesh Government has done nothing to investigate these persistent charges, it should take prompt action to investigate the detailed allegations that have been made and to halt them, including bringing the perpetrators to justice".

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