

18 July 2000

UA 217/00

Fear for SafetyRolff Harfurt, German tourist, aged about 40

A German tourist has been abducted by armed men, possibly members of an armed opposition group, in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir.

Rolff Harfurt was travelling through the remote Panikar belt of Kargil. On the night of 11/12 July he accepted a lift in a truck. Four labourers and two other passengers were already on board. During the journey a group of four or five armed men who had blocked the road forced the driver to take them on board as well. According to police sources, when the truck reached the Rungdun Buddhist monastery four monks flagged it down. The monks regularly check vehicles that pass through their land to check for stolen timber. The men on the truck argued with the monks, and shot them. Three were killed on the spot, and another later died of his wounds.

The truck driver, Nazir Ahmad Bakshi, said that after the shootings the men forced him to drive towards Kargil. After around 60 km they told him to stop, and got out of the truck, taking Rolff Harfurt with them. Rolff Harfurt has not been seen since.

The men told the driver and other passengers they would be killed if they told anyone about what had happened. The driver continued to Nunar, where he lived, and told no one. Monks from Rungdun alerted the police, who recovered the truck from the driver's house the next day. Rolff Harfurt's backpack was still on board.

No one has claimed responsibility for the abduction.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ladakh is a predominantly Buddhist region, except for the Kargil area, which is mainly Shiite Muslim. Tensions between the two religious groups have developed recently since the state government recommended that the state be given greater autonomy and be divided along religious lines into Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist administrative units. On 11 July, the day before the shootings, the leader of the Ladakh Buddhist Association had allegedly made derogatory remarks about the Koran in a speech, and there had been calls for him to be charged with blasphemy, both highly unusual occurrences in the region.

This is the first time in five years that a tourist has been kidnapped in Jammu and Kashmir. In 1995 five tourists, Keith Mangan, Paul Wells, Fred Hutchings, Dirk Hasert and Hans Christian Ostro were abducted; another, John Childs, managed to escape. The body of Hans Christian Ostro was recovered in August 1995, but the fate of the others remains unknown. Another German tourist was recently shot dead, and another one seriously injured, in the neighbouring state of Himachal Pradesh.

The abduction of unarmed civilians in situations of armed conflict is strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law. The Geneva Conventions prohibit the taking hostage, torture or killing of civilians in armed conflict situations (Article 3).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- urging the government of Jammu and Kashmir to ensure that everything possible is done to discover the whereabouts of Rolff Harfurt;
- urging that the government of Jammu and Kashmir ensures that there is a judicial enquiry into the killing of the monks from the Rungdun monastery;
- calling on the government to ensure that all measures are taken to protect the human rights of all this living in Ladakh or travelling through it during a time of heightened tension.

APPEALS TO:

Head of Jammu and Kashmir government

Dr Farooq Abdullah
The Chief Minister
Office of the Chief Minister
Raj Bhavan
Srinagar
Jammu and Kashmir
India

Faxes: + 91 194 452356 / 191 545649 (fax lines to India are frequently engaged and callers may receive messages that the lines are out of order or not known - please keep trying)

Telegrams: Chief Minister, Srinagar, India

Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

Minister responsible for law and order

Mr P L Handoo
Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs
Government of Jammu and Kashmir
Raj Bhavan
Srinagar
Jammu and Kashmir
India

Telegrams: Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Srinagar, India

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of India accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 August 2000.