

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 20/25/96

29 May 1996

Further information on EXTRA 75/96 (ASA 20/22/96, 21 May 1996) and follow-up (ASA 20/24/96, 24 May) - Fear for safety

INDIA Civilians in Jammu and Kashmir

and new concern: House arrest of political leaders

Leaders of the All Parties Hurriyet Conference (APHC) (an umbrella organization of over 30 opposition groups in Jammu and Kashmir) have been placed under house arrest in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, a day before elections take place in the Srinagar and Udhampur districts of the state. Omer Farooq, Shabir Shah, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Abdul Gani Bhat and others have been prevented from leaving their homes by security forces. The homes of several other leaders including Abdul Gani Lone, Yasin Malik and Javed Mir have also been cordoned off by security forces.

Amnesty International fears for the safety of these leaders while under house arrest. In recent months, leaders of the APHC have been the target of numerous attacks (see background below). The APHC has alleged that those responsible for the attacks are members of armed groups operating with the support of security forces (known as "renegades").

Amnesty International is gravely concerned at this action by security forces in Jammu and Kashmir which it believes is an attack on the right to freedom of expression. Shabir Shah had recently called for peaceful demonstrations to oppose elections which are to take place on 30 May. A recent demonstration in Baramulla town was broken up by security forces using teargas and batons during which journalists and others were injured.

FURTHER BACKGROUND

Political leaders, including leaders of the APHC have been the target for several attacks by unidentified persons. On 11 April 1996 grenades were thrown into the houses of Abdul Gani Lone and Syed Ali Shah Geelani -- the third attack on them in only a few weeks. Abdul Gani Lone has been quoted as saying "We are afraid of the gun, whoever holds it. Whether it is the "renegades", the security forces or the militants. In case elections are held, the people will be ground between them". Government authorities consistently claim that these attacks are perpetrated by armed opposition groups. However, "renegades" have been fully implicated in many of these attacks.

The APHC has called for a boycott of elections in the state and has called instead for tripartite talks between the Government of India, the government of Pakistan and representatives of Kashmiris in Jammu and Kashmir.

Shabir Shah, Abdul Gani Lone and Syed Ali Shah Geelani have been the focus of previous Amnesty International action as political prisoners, detained for many years under legislation which Amnesty International believes contravenes international standards.

IN ADDITION TO PREVIOUS RECOMMENDED ACTIONS PLEASE FOLLOW THE RECOMMENDED ACTIONS BELOW. PLEASE ALSO NOTE CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES BELOW:

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

- expressing concern that leaders of the APHC have been placed under house arrest and urging the authorities to immediately release the leaders from house arrest;
- urging the authorities to ensure that civilians and political leaders are permitted to express their views freely and openly without fear of violence or coercion.

APPEALS TO:

Mr H.D. Deve Gowda
Prime Minister of India
Office of the Prime Minister
South Block
New Delhi 110 001
India

Faxes: +91 11 301 9817

Telegrams: Prime Minister, New Delhi, India

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

General K.V. Krishna Rao
Governor of Jammu and Kashmir
Office of the Governor
Raj Bhavan
Srinagar
Jammu and Kashmir
India

Faxes: +91 194 452 207

Telegrams: Governor, Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar, India

Salutation: Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

Mr K. Padmanabhaiah
Home Secretary
c/o Office of the Prime Minister
South Block
New Delhi 110 001
India

and 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 25 June 1996.