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Indian executions would be blow to human rights

The Indian President's decision to approve the country's first executions since 2004 would be a blow to human rights, Amnesty International said today.

President Pratibha Patil has accepted the Home Ministry's recommendations to reject the mercy petitions of death row prisoners Devinder Pal Singh Bhullar and Mahendra Nath Das, according to Indian media reports.

"Reports that India will execute two men after an encouraging seven-year hiatus are hugely disappointing, and would be a step backwards for human rights in the country," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director.

"For India to use the death penalty now would also be bucking the global trend towards ending executions, numbers of which continue to decline."

Bhullar was sentenced to death in 2001 for plotting terror attacks that killed nine people in Delhi in 1993. Das has been on death row since 1997 for committing a murder in Guwahati, Assam in 1996.

Although India voted against the resolution for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, 2008 and 2010, President Patil had commuted the death sentences of 20 prisoners since November 2009.

The last execution in India was that of Dhananjoy Chatterjee in Kolkata in August 2004.