

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 13/017/2002

UA 342/02 Fear of torture/ill-treatment/ 27 November 2002
possible prisoners of conscience/
legal concern

BANGLADESH Zaiba Malik (f), British national, Channel 4 journalist
Bruno Sorrentino (m), Italian national, Channel 4 director
Pricila Raj (f), Bangladeshi national, interpreter
Mujib (m), Bangladeshi national, driver.
Saleem Samad (m), Bangladeshi journalist

Two journalists for the British television network, Channel 4, were arrested on 25 November as they were leaving Bangladesh for India. Their interpreter and driver were reportedly arrested on the same day. All four are possible prisoners of conscience, detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression. They are at risk of torture or ill-treatment in detention.

On 26 November, director and cameraman Bruno Sorrentino, reporter Zaiba Malik and their interpreter, Priscilla Raj appeared in court in the capital Dhaka and were remanded in police custody for five days pending further police questioning. Their driver, Mujib, did not appear in court and remains in police custody. Initial charges against the detainees reportedly include sedition and criminal conspiracy but they have not yet been formally charged. In the past, the government of Bangladesh has continued to detain prisoners after their release has been ordered by the court. There are fears that if the detainees are granted bail, the authorities will block their release.

According to reports, the four were arrested for gathering information and video footage for a documentary about the political situation in Bangladesh. The authorities allegedly confiscated films and other documents from the detainees. The documentary was commissioned by Channel 4 to make a film for its foreign affairs strand Unreported World. The journalists were working for the independent production company Mentorn Midlands.

A warrant of arrest has also reportedly been issued against a Bangladeshi journalist, Saleem Samad, who worked with the crew as a local guide during their stay in the country. He has allegedly gone into hiding.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture is endemic in Bangladesh. Most torture takes place during the initial period of interrogation in police custody. In the past, Bangladeshi governments have done little to end torture. Amnesty International has continued to urge the Bangladeshi authorities to protect detainees against torture and ill-treatment.

The Bangladeshi authorities have been particularly sensitive to a number of reports in the international media this year which were critical of Bangladesh. They have termed such reporting as tarnishing the country's image.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Zaiba Malik, Bruno Sorrentino, Pricila Raj and Mujib, arrested on 25 November;
- urging the authorities to ensure the four detainees are not subjected to torture or ill-treatment;
- calling on the authorities to ensure the detainees are held in conditions which conform to international standards for the treatment of prisoners;

-urging the authorities to allow the detainees access to lawyers, family visits and medical attention;

-urging the authorities to ensure the safety of Saleem Samad and to respect his fundamental human rights;

- urging the authorities not to detain the prisoners should their release be ordered by the court.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia
Office of the Prime Minister
Gona Bhaban
Sher-e Bangla Nagar
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Telegrams: Prime Minister Zia, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 811 3243

Email: pm@pmobd.org or psecretary@pmobd.org

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mr Altaf Hossain Chowdhury
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Building 4
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Telegrams: Minister of Home Affairs Chowdhury, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 861 9667

Salutation: Dear Home Minister

Mr Muddabir Hossain Chowdhury
Inspector General of Police
Police Headquarters
Fulbaria
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Telegrams: Inspector General Chowdhury, Fulbaria, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 956 3362

Salutation: Dear Sir

COPIES TO diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 January 2003.