

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 13/020/2002

16 December 2002

Further Information on UA 342/02 (ASA 13/017/2002, 27 November 2002 and follow-up ASA 13/018/2002, 3 December 2002) Fear of torture/ill-treatment/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**

Zaiba Malik and Bruno Sorrentino were released and deported to the UK on 11 December. Pricila Raj, their interpreter, and Saleem Samad, a local journalist who had acted as their guide, remain in detention and there are concerns that they may have been tortured in custody. Their driver, Mujib, has since been released and is not believed to be facing any charges.

The Bangladeshi authorities said that Zaiba Malik and Bruno Sorrentino were deported "as an extraordinary gesture of the government of Bangladesh". Their lawyer was quoted as saying that his clients had expressed "sincere regret" for what had happened, and for entering Bangladesh "improperly on tourist visas and on false professional identities." The journalists also agreed not to use any of the material that they had gathered during their stay in the country.

When asked about the fate of Pricila Raj and Saleem Samad, a government spokesman reportedly said that "their cases are different and the laws of the land will take their own course". Amnesty International is extremely concerned at reports that Pricila and Saleem may have been tortured while in custody. These include allegations that Pricila has been given electric shocks during interrogation, and Saleem has been beaten.

After her arrest on 25 November, Pricila was held incommunicado for 11 days. On 5 December she was reportedly allowed to see her lawyer and a relative. A third bail petition for Pricila and Saleem was rejected by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka on 14 December. It is believed that Pricila and Saleem are accused of sedition; however to Amnesty International's knowledge they have still not been formally charged. Amnesty International believes that Pricila Raj and Saleem Samad are prisoners of conscience detained for carrying out their professional responsibilities as an interpreter and a local guide. There is no justification for their continued detention when the two Europeans journalists have been released.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The authorities claimed that Zaiba Malik and Bruno Sorrentino had entered Bangladesh using false identities and that they had been making a film trying to portray Bangladesh as a fundamentalist country with links to al-Qaeda. The Bangladeshi authorities have been particularly sensitive to a number of recent 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:

- welcoming the release of Zaiba Malik and Bruno Sorrentino;
- expressing concern at reports that Pricila Raj and Saleem Samad have been subjected to torture in custody;

-urging that reports that Pricila Raj and Saleem Samad have been subjected to torture are investigated immediately and that those found to be responsible are prosecuted and brought to justice;
-expressing concern that they remain in detention after the European journalists have been released;
-urging the authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally.

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 / 3244 / 1015 / 1490
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 27 January 2003.