

---

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 128/94

---

TO: PRESS OFFICERS  
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE  
DATE: 17 JUNE 1994 NO OF WORDS: 645

AI INDEX: NWS 11/128/94  
DISTR: SC/PO

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - BANGLADESH

**PLEASE NOTE:** Following are some changes to the Turkey news release with new information - particularly that DEP was banned on Thursday. They make it more up-to-date, but are not essential: Paragraph 6 should read: "...871 villages being deserted -- most forcibly evacuated and burnt to the ground by security forces. More..."; And paragraph 8 should read: "...Kurdish business men -- all active supporters of DEP, a legal parliamentary party perceived as the party of the Kurds which was banned last Thursday -- were..."

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Turkey - 22 June - SEE NEWS SERVICES 118/94 AND 104/94

\*\* United Kingdom - 14 July - Forcible deportation and ill-treatment of asylum seekers

Pakistan - 27 July - PLEASE NOTE NEW DATE. SEE NEWS SERVICE 81/94

Myanmar - 20 July - PLEASE NOTE THIS IS AN INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASE SEE NEWS SERVICE 99/94

\*\* India - 16 August \*\* - News release and report on Amnesty's first research visit to India

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Denmark - 21 June -

Mozambique - 23 June - SEE NEWS SERVICE 115/94

\*\* Lusophone Summit - 27 June \*\* - SEE NEWS SERVICE 124/94 for item

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Annual Report - 0600 hrs GMT 7 July 1994 - SEE NEWS SERVICE 51/94

**News Service 128/94**

**AI INDEX: ASA 13/WU 02/94**

**17 JUNE 1994**

**BANGLADESH: BLASPHEMY CHARGES BROUGHT AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND WRITER**

**Just days after the writer Taslima Nasrin was forced into hiding after a warrant was issued for her arrest on charges of blasphemy, the Bangladesh authorities have brought similar charges against four journalists.**

**The four men are all editors of "Janakhanta", a Bangladeshi daily newspaper which has recently been the victim of repeated violent attacks by Islamist groups for what they claim are its "anti-Islamic activities".**

**On 8 June, two of the editors, Toab Khan and Borhan Ahmed, were arrested in connection with articles they had written. Borhan Ahmed was granted bail on 15 June but Toab Khan's bail application was turned down.**

**Arrest warrants were also issued against two other editors, Shamsuddin Ahmad and Mohammad Aiqullah Khan Masud, but they have gone into hiding. Masud's application for anticipatory bail was reportedly accepted by the Supreme Court in the last two days.**

**"It appears these men have been targeted simply for carrying out their work as journalists and peacefully expressing their opinion", Amnesty International said.**

**All four may be facing up to two years' imprisonment, which is the punishment for blasphemy under the Bangladesh Penal Code. Amnesty International does not know if the two detained men have been allowed full access to legal counsel and their families.**

**For some time, Islamist groups have launched public campaigns against those they consider to be "anti-Islamic". Earlier this month, several thousand people launched an attack on the Dhaka offices of "Janakhanta" following the publication of an article criticizing the fatwas issued by Muslim clergy against non-governmental organizations training poor women. Thousands of copies of the paper were burnt in the attack and 15 people were injured.**

**Taslima Nasrin, who is still reportedly in hiding, has been the victim of threats by militant groups since 1993. And demonstrations of Islamists demanding her death have continued to be reported almost every day. On 10 June over 10,000 protesters in Dhaka called for "death for the infidel" and threatened they would kill her if the government did not ensure that she is punished. A Muslim cleric in Khulna announced a cash reward for anyone who would kill Taslima Nasrin.**

**"For some time we have been concerned that the government has not acted to curb groups which attempt to bypass the judicial system and taking the law into their own hands", Amnesty International said.**

**Amnesty International is calling on the Government of Bangladesh to immediately and unconditionally release Toab Khan and Borhan Ahmed and to drop the charges against all four journalists and Taslima Nasrin.**

**All possible measures should be taken to ensure their personal safety and to prevent anyone from issuing such threats again.**

**ENDS\**