

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 13/07/96

UA 162/96

Fear for safety / Unacknowledged detention

1 July 1996

BANGLADESH Kalpana Chakma (f), aged 23, indigenous rights activist

There are growing fears for the safety of Kalpana Chakma who is reported to have been forcibly detained by security personnel from her home in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh on 12 June 1996 and whose whereabouts remain unknown.

Six or seven security personnel in plainclothes, believed to be from Ugalchhari army camp, are reported to have entered the home of Kalpana Chakma in New Lallyaghona village, Rangamati District in the early hours of 12 June. Kalpana Chakma and two of her brothers were forcibly taken from their home, blindfolded and with their hands tied. At some distance from the house the brothers managed to escape despite being shot at by the security personnel.

The Deputy Commissioner of Rangamati was informed about Kalpana Chakma's abduction and her case was registered at Baghaichari police station. To date, no information has been received as to her whereabouts.

Kalpana Chakma is the organising secretary of the Hill Women's Federation, an organisation that campaigns for the rights of indigenous people in the CHT. It has been suggested that her abduction may have been linked to her support of a candidate representing the interests of indigenous people in the parliamentary elections that took place in Bangladesh on June 12.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Chittagong Hill Tracts, a remote area in southeastern Bangladesh, has long been the site of opposition to the authorities by the indigenous tribal inhabitants. Tribal groups, mostly Buddhist Chakmas, have demanded autonomy for the region and a halt to the settlement of Bengalis from other areas of Bangladesh. Amnesty International has continued to express concern about reports of human rights violations against the tribal inhabitants of the Chittagong Hill Tracts by the security forces of Bangladesh.

Foreign observers monitoring the recent parliamentary elections in Bangladesh noted reports of intimidation of voters belonging to minority groups. Several of them reported witnessing intimidation of minority Hindu voters, especially women, in constituencies of Chittagong District. They also reported hearing of similar incidents taking place elsewhere.

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

- expressing concern at the abduction of Kalpana Chakma by a group of soldiers on 12 June;
- calling on the authorities to reveal the whereabouts of Kalpana Chakma as a matter of urgency;
- seeking assurances that whilst she is in detention she will not be subjected to torture or ill-treatment;
- urging that she be immediately released unless charged with a recognizably criminal offence, in which case she be given access to relatives and a lawyer.

APPEALS TO:

President Abdur Rahman Biswas

Office of the President

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Faxes: + 880 2 866 300; if unable to get through on this number try + 880 2 869 160 (Minister of Foreign Affairs: mark attention of President)

Telegrams: President Biswas, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Salutation: Dear President

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed

Office of the Prime Minister

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Faxes: +880 2 813 244 or +880 2 811 015

Telegrams: Prime Minister, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mr Matin Chowdhury

Minister of Home Affairs

Ministry of Home Affairs

Ramna, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Faxes: +880 2 813 243

Telegrams: Home Affairs Minister, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Salutation: Dear Minister

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 20 August 1996.