

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 14/02/97

UA 270/97

Fear of torture/ill-treatment

12 August 1997

BHUTANKarma Chogyel, aged 26, businessman, son of Sonam Phintsho
Rinzin Samdrup, aged 43, Religious Coordinator, son of Nagphey
Thinley Wangdi, aged 56, son of Sangay Thinley
Yeshey, Buddhist monk, son of Sangye Dorji
Karma Chogyel, Buddhist monk
Dhendup Tshering, aged 35, Buddhist monk, son of Banthang
Sangye Wangdi, aged 39, shopkeeper, son of Tulung
Zamtsho, aged 30, farmer, son of Singye Dorji
Dorji, aged 32, farmer, son of Rinzin
Wangchuck, aged 37, farmer, son of Zamtsho

The 10 people named above, all recently arrested in eastern Bhutan by the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP), are feared to be at risk of torture or ill-treatment in incommunicado detention. Some of those arrested are reported to have been subjected to flogging and to be now held in solitary confinement.

Wangchuck, Dorji and Zamtsho, three farmers from Drametsi, Mongar district, were arrested on 28 July 1997 and initially taken into custody at Mongar town.

The following day, Sangye Wangdi, a shop-keeper from Changmi village, Tashigang district, was arrested at his shop in Samdrup Jonkhar town. Also on 29 July, Dhendup Tshering, Karma Chogyel and Yeshey, all Buddhist monks from Kheri Gompa Monastery, Pema Gatshel district, were arrested. On 31 July, Thinley Wangdi, a retired attendant to the King of Bhutan from Lumang, Tashigang district, was arrested in Wamrong, Tashigang district. All eight men are currently believed to be in Samdrup Jonkhar prison, Samdrup Jonkhar district. On 1 August, Rinzin Samdrup, a village Religious Coordinator, was arrested in Chimung, Pema Gatshel district. His place of detention is not known.

Also on 1 August, Karma Chogyel, a businessman from Drametsi, was arrested in Samdrup Jonkhar town and taken to Samdrup Jonkhar prison. Karma Chogyel is Sangye Wangdi's younger brother. According to the information received, Karma Chogyel was arrested because he informed people in Nepal -- where he had recently travelled to -- of his elder brother's arrest. This would appear to be substantiated by reports that RBP officers have threatened other people to keep quiet about the recent spate of arrests or to face arrest themselves.

None of the detainees has yet been charged and or given access to a *jabmi* (legal adviser) or relatives. There is a suspicion that they may have been arrested because of their alleged membership of the Druk National Congress (DNC), a political organization set up in exile in Nepal. Reportedly, they are also supporters of Rongthong Kunley Dorji, the founder of the DNC, who is currently detained in India where he is opposing his extradition to Bhutan. Amnesty International fears that, as a result of their actual or suspected membership of the DNC and association with Rongthong Kunley Dorji, they may be tortured or ill-treated while in police custody, possibly in an attempt to extract from them the names of other DNC supporters.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The arrests described above appear to be part of a crackdown carried out by the RBP during the past two weeks on people suspected of being DNC sympathizers.

Some reports suggest that as many as 50 people, all from Mongar, Pema Gatshel

and Tashigang districts in eastern Bhutan, may have been arrested, but the exact number of those taken into custody cannot currently be confirmed.

The fear that the above-named individuals may be tortured or ill-treated in custody is heightened by recent reports that four members of the DNC were tortured by police shortly after their arrest in eastern Bhutan in early February 1997. According to a relative of one of them, the four men, Taw Tshering, Tshampa Wangchuck, Tshampa Ngawang Tenzin and Chhipon Samten Lhendup, currently detained at Tashi Yangtshi prison, were held completely naked for one week in very low temperatures. Rongthong Kunley Dorji himself was reportedly tortured by members of the Royal Bhutan Bodyguards after his arrest, in 1991, on charges of treason.

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

- expressing concern at reports that some of those arrested since late July have been subjected to flogging, and seeking assurances that none of the above-named individuals is now facing any form of torture or ill-treatment in police custody;
- urging the authorities to grant the detainees immediate access to a *jabmi*, family members, and medical care as necessary;
- asking for information on the grounds for their detention, and urging that unless they are to be promptly charged with recognizably criminal offences, they be immediately and unconditionally released.

APPEALS TO:

Lyonpo Dago Tshering
 Minister of Home Affairs
 Ministry of Home Affairs
 Royal Government of Bhutan
 Tashichho Dzong
 Thimphu, Bhutan

Telegrams: Home Affairs Minister, Thimphu, Bhutan

Salutation: Dear Minister

Major Kipchu Nangyal
 Chief of the Special Branch
 Royal Bhutan Police
 Police Headquarters
 Zhilnen Namgyelling
 Thimphu, Bhutan

Telegrams: Chief, Special Branch, Royal Bhutan Police, Thimphu, Bhutan

Salutation: Dear Major Nangyal

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Bhutan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 September 1997.