

INDIA:

Ram Singh Biling - Punjab

Ram Singh Biling, a journalist from Tathogal village, Malerkotla sub-division, Sangrur district, was reportedly taken into custody by police at a police check post in Bhogiwal village at 8.45am on 3 January 1992. He was travelling by bus from Malerkotla to Jalandhar. Ram Singh Biling, aged 35, is a reporter for Az di Awaz and Ajit, two Punjabi daily newspapers published from Jalandhar. He is also the district secretary of the Punjab Human Rights Organisation (PHRO).

Ram Singh Biling was reportedly taken to the police check post of Lohat Baddi on the Malerkotla - Rai Kot road, where a farmer from Palasour village spoke to him. Ram Singh Biling reportedly said he feared that he might be killed. The following day, his uncle and the elders of his village council went to the Lohat Baddi police post and also saw Ram Singh Biling, but were not permitted to speak to him. Officials at the police post told them that they had been instructed not to let Ram Singh Biling talk to anyone.

On 6 January, a delegation of villagers met with the Sub-Superintendent of Police (SSP) of Sangrur. The latter first denied Ram Singh Biling's arrest but when the villagers told him they had seen Ram Singh Biling in police custody, the SSP replied that other security agencies might have ordered his detention and that the police were temporarily keeping him in the police post at Lohat Baddi. He promised an inquiry. The Journalists' Union made a similar request. It is not known whether an inquiry was held or what its outcome was.

Several organisations of journalists and minority committees have expressed concern about his arrest to the local authorities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Amnesty International regularly receives reports of "disappearances" and unacknowledged detention of people arrested in Punjab on suspicion of being members or sympathizers of one of the Sikh opposition groups advocating a separate Sikh state, "Khalistan". In some cases the detainees are eventually found to have died in custody, while others are found to have been deliberately killed in custody although official reports say they died in "encounters" with the police. Even though legal safeguards against unacknowledged detention exist in India's ordinary criminal law and procedural code, they are often simply not adhered to and prisoners are held in illegal detention for weeks and sometimes months under special legislation granting the security forces arbitrary powers to arrest and detain people without ordinary legal safeguards.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams and airmail letters:

- expressing concern about the reports that Ram Singh Biling was reportedly taken away on 3 January 1992 by policemen believed to be from the Lohat Baddi police post;
- urging that reports of his arrest and unacknowledged detention be investigated and that he be allowed immediate access to lawyers and relatives and be brought before a magistrate forthwith;
- seeking assurances that Ram Singh Biling is being humanely treated and is granted full legal safeguards while in custody;
- urging that he be released if he is not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:

Governor of Punjab:

1) Mr Surinder Nath
Governor of Punjab
Office of the Governor
Chandigarh
Punjab
INDIA

Telegrams: Punjab State Governor, Chandigarh, Punjab, India
Salutation: Dear Governor

Director General of Police:

2) Mr K. P. S. Gill
Director General of Police
Police Headquarters
Chandigarh
Punjab
INDIA

Telegrams: Director General Police, Chandigarh, Punjab, India
Salutation: Dear Director General

COPIES TO:

Punjab Human Rights Organisation (Regd.)
Head Office
H. No. 22, Sector 2
Chandigarh (U.T.)
Punjab
INDIA

- and to diplomatic representatives of India in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 February 1992.