

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 20/13/98

16 June 1998

Further information on UA 157/98 (ASA 20/10/98, 20 May 1998) - Police brutality / Use of excessive force / Fear of ill-treatment

INDIA Protesters against the Maheshwar Dam project in Madhya Pradesh, India

Since 20 May 1998, there have been further arrests of peaceful protesters at the site of the Maheshwar Dam project in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Many of the protests have been broken up by police using force. "People's checkpoints", set up by protesters at various points around the site in an attempt to prevent materials from reaching the site, have been attacked by police on several occasions. On 31 May around 500 people, including well-known activist Medha Patkar, were arrested and several were beaten. They were released on the same evening.

On 10 June, 10 policemen reportedly attacked a protester -- Jagannath Chowdhury -- and tore at his clothes until he was naked. He was not provided with clothing until he reached the temporary jail in a school where he was held until the evening with around 490 others who were also arrested. Some of those arrested were beaten and had to be hospitalised. Several women who were arrested have alleged that they were threatened that the next time they protested their saris would be torn and they would be stripped naked in a similar manner to Jagannath Chowdhury. When protesters attempted to file a complaint (known as a First Information Report) about the stripping of Jagannath Chowdhury at the police station, police refused to file it. As a result, the protesters have begun a fast in front of the Mandleshwar police station, which is continuing.

Amnesty International is concerned at the continuing use of force by police, and in particular at threats made against women protesters.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In response to earlier allegations about the use of excessive force against women protesters, a team from the National Commission for Women recently visited the area, looking specifically at allegations of violations on 22 and 23 April 1998. The Commission's report finds evidence of "extensive" use of violence against peaceful protesters. In its conclusion, it recommends that "The State Government should ensure that the presence of police at the dam site is there to protect people, the police should be prevented from becoming a private army working against people".

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

In addition to the previous recommendations, please send appeals:

- expressing concern at the continuing use of force against peaceful protesters, the stripping of Jagannath Chowdhury and the threats made against women protesters;
- urging the authorities to implement the recommendations of the National Commission of Women: to investigate practices of arresting and detaining peaceful protesters and take action against those who have not followed correct procedures; to provide compensation to those who have suffered injuries; and to ensure the protection of peaceful protesters.

APPEALS TO:

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee
Prime Minister of India

Office of the Prime Minister
South Block
New Delhi 110 001, India
Telegrams: Prime Minister, New Delhi, India
Faxes: + 91 11 301 9817
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mr Digvijay Singh
Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh
Office of the Chief Minister
Vallabh Bhavan
Bhopal
Madhya Pradesh, India
Telegrams: Chief Minister, Bhopal, India
Faxes: + 91 755 540 501/551 781
Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

COPIES TO:

Mr Lal Krishna Advani
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
North Block
New Delhi 110 001, India

and to diplomatic representatives of India accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 July 1998.