

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/fear of torture

11 November 2002

INDIA (ASSAM)

**Lachit Bordoloi (m) Chairman of Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti,
Organization for the struggle for human rights (MASS)
Other MASS activists**

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Lachit Bordoloi, a journalist, human rights defender and chairman of MASS. He has been harrassed and intimidated by the Superintendent of Police (SP) in Nagaon district, Assam, since September 2001.

On 1 September 2001, an article by Lachit Bordoloi was published in the Assamese daily, Asomiya Protidin. It highlighted corrupt practices at Nagaon Police Office and led to a high level departmental inquiry against the SP for Nagaon.

The SP began a campaign of intimidation against Lachit Bordoloi. This has reportedly included an attempt to fabricate evidence of a link between Lachit Bordoloi and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), an active armed group in the state. Alleged ULFA supporters have in the past reportedly been extra-judicially executed or tortured by the security forces.

On 4 September 2001, Lachit Bordoloi was visited by a police officer who threatened him with a defamation suit, or jail, if he did not retract the article. Lachit Bordoloi refused.

Other MASS activists have been arrested and reportedly tortured by Nagaon police, apparently in an attempt to make them confess that MASS, and Lachit Bordoloi have links with the ULFA. On 24 January 2002, Dimbeswar Lahon, a MASS activist from Nagaon, was detained by police on the charge of harbouring ULFA militants. Attempts were made to coerce him into signing a statement against MASS and Lachit Bordoloi in particular. He refused and was released the following day.

Also on the 24 January, Tulu Sharma, an activist from the women's rights organisation, Sanmilita Mahila Mancha, was detained by the police and made to sign a blank sheet of paper. On 27 January the SP held a press conference stating that Tulu Sharma had confessed that MASS has links with the ULFA.

On 17 March, Nagaon police picked up a MASS activist from Nagaon. He was tortured by the police and asked to sign a document implicating Lachit Bordoloi for allegedly having links with the ULFA. He signed the document after the SP threatened to shoot him by placing a gun to his temple. The activist was released about a month later.

On 24 September, Habibur Rahman, an executive member of MASS Nagaon District Committee was arrested and beaten up in the presence of the SP. During the assault police officers said that human rights activists such as himself and Lachit Bordoloi were "working for the rebels". Habibur Rahman was subsequently jailed in relation to a case in April 2002 and remains in detention.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1991, Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti (MASS) a non-profit human rights organization was founded in Assam by a group of intellectuals and journalists. It works to unite the people of the region in the defence of civil and human rights. MASS also challenges human rights violations allegedly committed by the Indian Army, paramilitary forces and state police.

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) is an armed group which advocates the establishment of a "sovereign socialist Assam" and is engaged in a violent conflict with the Indian state.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language (*fax numbers may be difficult to obtain, please keep trying*):

- asking the authorities in Assam to guarantee Lachit Bordoloi's safety;
- requesting that the police authorities do not interfere in his legitimate activities as a human rights defender;
- urging that a judicial inquiry should be initiated to clarify the alleged pattern of harassment by police against MASS activists in Nagaon district;
- asking for the Superintendent of Police for Nagaon to be immediately suspended from duty pending the inquiry to establish his possible role in the harassment of Lachit Bordoloi and other MASS activists.

APPEALS TO:

Mr Tarun Gogoi

Chief Minister of Assam
Office of the Chief Minister
Janta Bhawan, Dispur
Guwahati, Assam
India

Fax: 0091 361 2262069

Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

Mr Hare Krishna Deka

Director General of Police
Office of the DGP
Police Headquarters
Guwahati, Assam

Fax: 0091 361 2540397

Salutation: Dear Director General

COPIES TO:

Justice Rajkumar Manisana Singh
Chairperson

Assam Human Rights Commission
Staffed HO Building (2nd floor)
Medical College Road
Guwahati 781 005, Assam
India

Fax: 091 361 2527076

Salutation: Dear Justice Singh

and 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 23 December 2002.