

INDIA Civilians in Jammu and Kashmir

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of civilians in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the run-up to elections in the state which are to take place on 23 and 30 May. In a situation where human rights violations are endemic, numerous fears have been expressed that security forces and armed groups backed by security forces (so-called "renegades") will use force to ensure that civilians vote in the elections.

At the beginning of the month, the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee General Secretary, Taj Mohiuddin, alleged that armed groups, operating with the backing of security forces, were attempting to rig elections and would not allow voters to exercise their right of franchise. He later alleged that members of an armed group had threatened him with guns while preventing him from addressing a political rally in Anantnag on 6 May.

On 20 May, Yasin Malik, leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, alleged that Indian security forces were telling people "If we don't see a mark of indelible ink on your finger [a mark made by election officials to prevent fraud] we'll chop off your hand." He earlier alleged that armed groups backed by security forces were threatening to force citizens to cast their votes.

A four-day general strike, called by several armed opposition groups to protest elections, which began on 20 May, is said to have been observed by the majority of people in the Kashmir Valley. However, Amnesty International has received reports that in some towns in Anantnag district, members of the security forces have used force to make people open their shops in defiance of the strike.

The presence of up to 60,000 additional troops, brought in to Jammu and Kashmir to supplement the hundreds of thousands already there, has increased the atmosphere of fear in a situation where human rights violations by security forces continue to occur.

In order to ensure the safety of civilians in Jammu and Kashmir, who appear to be caught between the conflicting perspectives of the authorities who desire elections and many armed opposition groups who have called for a boycott of the electoral process, Amnesty International is once again urging security forces to abide by international human rights standards and to disarm and disband so-called "renegades". It is also continuing to urge armed opposition groups to abide by principles of international humanitarian law.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Polling in the Indian general elections has concluded in all parts of the country with the exception of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Two polling dates remain, 23 and 30 May, covering the remaining four constituencies in the Kashmir valley.

On 7 May, Amnesty International expressed concern about the escalating levels of human rights abuses in the state, in the context of the election. It called on the government and all armed groups to respect human rights and to stop targeting journalists and human rights defenders monitoring the electoral process. On 14 May, Amnesty International expressed further concerns about a death threat publicly issued by seven armed opposition groups operating in

the state to electoral officials, warning them not to carry out polling duties (see EXTRA 66/96, ASA 20/19/96, 14 May and follow-up ASA 20/21/96, 21 May).

Arbitrary killings and arrests by the security forces have continued in recent days. On 13 May, Ghulam Hassan Mukhdoomi, a medical assistant at a health centre and son-in-law of Syed Ali Shah Geelani of the All Party Hurriyat Conference, was arrested by members of the Rashtriya Rifles during a crackdown in Sopore district and taken to a nearby camp for interrogation. He was released after three days at the camp during which time he was reportedly subjected to torture.

On 15 May, Professor Bashir Ahmed Mattoo, a professor of physics, involved in education and welfare work in the Kashmir valley, was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen while boarding a bus in Soura, Srinagar. Reports suggest that those responsible were members of an armed group backed by security forces.

The print media has virtually ceased to operate in the Kashmir valley, in response to censorship that has been imposed by the government and by armed opposition groups, in the run-up to the elections, denying citizens the right to their freedom of expression.

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

- urging the government to ensure that the human rights of citizens in Jammu and Kashmir are protected from abuse by members of the security forces and "renegades", particularly during the election period;
- urging the government to give strict orders to all security forces to abide by international human rights standards;
- urging the government to take immediate steps to disarm and disband groups of so-called "renegades" (members of armed groups and criminal elements given direct support by security forces);
- pointing out that Amnesty International continues to urge members of armed opposition groups to abide by international humanitarian standards.

APPEALS TO:

Atal Bihari Vajpayee
Prime Minister of India
Office of the Prime Minister
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New Delhi 110 001
India

Faxes: +91 11 301 9817

Telegrams: Prime Minister, New Delhi, India

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

General K.V. Krishna Rao
Governor of Jammu and Kashmir
Office of the Governor
Raj Bhavan
Srinagar
Jammu and Kashmir
India

Faxes: +91 194 452 207

Telegrams: Governor, Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar, India

Salutation: Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

Manohar Joshi
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
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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 20 June 1996.