

AI INDEX: ASA 22/03/97
4 JULY 1997

Japan: Ill-treated Chinese activist may be prisoner of conscience

The Minister of Justice should immediately initiate a full enquiry into the circumstances leading to the detention and alleged ill-treatment by police of two Chinese activists in Japan last month, Amnesty International said today in a letter sent to Minister Matsuura Isao.

The two activists, Lin Guohui and Li Song, were detained on 4 June in connection with a demonstration commemorating the killing of unarmed demonstrators in Beijing in 1989. Lin Guohui has since been released.

“It is unacceptable that the two men were detained simply for planning to take part in a peaceful demonstration and that they appeared to have been ill-treated at the hands of the police,” Amnesty International said. “The Minister of Justice should now clarify the circumstances which led to the continued detention of Li Song who the organization believes may be a prisoner of conscience.”

Li Song was detained as he was driving to pick up other Chinese activists at a railway station, before taking part in a peaceful demonstration in front of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Tokyo to commemorate the violent crackdown against pro-democracy activists in Beijing on 4 June 1989.

Police had apparently set up a roadblock and attempted to stop Li Song’s car. Li Song apparently did not stop immediately but drove beyond the “stop” sign and hit a barrier. About 10 policemen rushed toward his car, broke the front window, unlocked the door, and dragged him out, without allowing him the chance to get out of his car voluntarily. Police officers reportedly beat and kicked Li Song several times, although he was not attempting to flee or threatening the officers.

Li Song appeared on 23 June before Tokyo district court. He wished to question the grounds for his detention, and to reiterate his complaint that he had been ill-treated by police. According to his lawyers, police exercised a high level of violence at the time of Li Song’s arrest. The prosecutor failed to provide clear answers on the circumstances surrounding Li Song’s arrest but despite this failure the court decided to charge Li Song, who is now awaiting trial on charge of “resisting officials”.

Amnesty International believes that, while Li Song appears to have been charged in connection with a traffic offence, his continued detention seems to be related to his attempt to participate in a peaceful demonstration.

Lin Guohui, the second detainee, was also detained in front of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Tokyo, when he and fellow activists were about to hang a banner with a slogan on the wall of the compound. The police reportedly removed the banner, leading to verbal protests by Lin Guohui. Following this, a policeman reportedly pinioned his arms while two other policemen beat him on the legs. He was punched and kicked and then pulled to the middle of the road. Other policemen then joined in, apparently beating Lin Guohui further.

At that point, due to the severe pain, Lin Guohui fainted and fell to the ground but police reportedly continued kicking him. He was beaten with clubs on the shoulders and thighs and was severely kicked as he fell. He was then handcuffed and detained. According to reports, Lin Guohui needed hospital treatment, and was still being medically treated 10 days after the incident.

At the court hearing on 25 June, Lin Guohui's lawyer stated that he had been further ill-treated while in police custody (*daiyo-kangoku*, substitute prison). Despite this complaint, the court apparently did not order the police to investigate the matter.

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