

PUBLIC

AI Index: EUR 62/02/99

25 February 1999

UA 34/99

Fear for

UZBEKISTAN Mamadali Makhmudov

Munira Nasriddinova (f)

Amnesty International fears for the safety of two people reportedly detained by the authorities on 19 and 21 February 1999, after a series of explosions in the capital, Tashkent, on 16 February. Munira Nasriddinova was reportedly beaten just after she was taken into custody, and both she and Mamadali Makhmudov are detained incommunicado.

President Islam Karimov swiftly blamed the explosions in Tashkent on "Islamic extremists" and others who wished to undermine the government. People tried in Uzbekistan on charges of terrorism or attempting to overthrow the constitutional order regularly allege they have been beaten, ill-treated and tortured while in detention, to force them to confess.

Both of those named above have connections with opposition, or perceived opposition figures. Mamadali Makhmudov is a well-known writer whose earlier arrest in 1994 was believed to be linked to his association with poet and exiled leader of the banned *Erk* opposition party, Muhammad Salih. Munira Nasriddinova is the wife of independent Islamic leader Obidkhon Nazarov.

Mamadali Makhmudov was reportedly detained on 19 February by officers of the Committee for National Security (KNB), who stopped the car in which he and his wife were travelling and took them away in a police vehicle. After a few kilometres, the police let his wife out of the car and drove off. Since then she has reportedly been unable to locate her husband. Between 1994 and 1996 Mamadali Makhmudov served half of a four-year sentence for embezzlement and abuse of office, charges which Amnesty International believes may have been brought only because of his association with Muhammad Salih. This belief was supported by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's conclusion in 1996 that there appeared to be no justification for Mamadali Makhmudov's detention.

On 21 February Munira Nasriddinova and her mother-in-law were reportedly taken from their home in Tashkent to a local police station, where both were allegedly beaten. Her mother-in-law was reportedly released eight hours later, but Munira Nasriddinova was tried and sentenced to 10 days' administrative arrest for "hooliganism" and has not been seen since. Her lawyer has been unable to locate her. A warrant for the arrest of her husband, Obidkhon Nazarov, for promoting "Wahhabism" (a strict form of Islam), preaching illegally and trying to set up an Islamic state, is believed to have been out since 1997. His youngest brother Abdumalik is serving a nine-year prison sentence for drug possession and forgery of official documents, charges which Amnesty International believes may have been brought only because he is Obidkhon Nazarov's brother.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International is concerned that the investigation into the explosions on 16 February 1999 may be used as a pretext to clamp down on perceived sources of opposition to President Karimov. During a clampdown on political opposition groups in the early 1990s, scores of opposition activists were arbitrarily detained on charges of calling for the state to be overthrown and were convicted on what appeared to be fabricated criminal charges. In the course of a recent campaign against the perceived spread in Uzbekistan of "Wahhabism", Amnesty

International believes that people may have been imprisoned solely for their alleged affiliation to independent Islamic congregations. Scores of men were sentenced during 1998 to long terms of imprisonment on charges including terrorism, attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and seeking to establish an Islamist state. Their trials were marked by allegations that defendants were beaten and otherwise ill-treated in detention to force them to confess. The organization is not aware that these allegations have been investigated by the relevant Uzbek authorities.

On the same day that Mamadali Makhmudov was detained, Muhammad Salih's brother, Komil Bekzhon, was also detained, in the Khorezm region of Uzbekistan, after police searched first his house and later, at the police station, his car. He was reportedly released on 22 February. Another of his brothers, Rashid Bekzhon, reportedly had his house searched on 20 February. On 23 February President Karimov announced that some 30 people had been arrested in connection with the 16 February explosions, but that the "main perpetrators" remained at large.

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

- expressing concern at the detention of Mamadali Makhmudov, Munira Nasriddinova and Komil Bekzhon;
- urging that the whereabouts of Mamadali Makhmudov and Munira Nasriddinova be immediately established and made known;
- urging that they be protected from any form of ill-treatment and be allowed immediate access to family and legal representatives;
- urging the authorities to initiate a prompt and impartial investigation into the allegations that Munira Nasriddinova and her mother-in-law were ill-treated on 21 February, and to bring to justice anyone found responsible, in accordance with international law.

APPEALS TO:

President of Uzbekistan, Islam Abduganievich KARIMOV
700000 g. Tashkent, pr. Uzbekistansky, Rezidentsiya Prezidenta, Prezidentu Karimovu I.A., UZBEKISTAN

Telegrams: Prezidentu Karimovu, 700000 Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Faxes: (998) (71) 139 5315

Salutation: Dear President Karimov

Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan
Zakirzhan Almatovich ALMATOV
700029 g. Tashkent, ul. Novruz, 1, Ministrstvo vnutrennikh del
Ministru Almatovu Z.A., UZBEKISTAN

Telegrams: Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Salutation: Dear Minister

The Oliy Majlis (Parliamentary) Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Sayora Rashidova
700008 g. Tashkent, pl. Mustakillik, 2, Oliy Majlis Respubliki Uzbekistan
Upolnomochenoy po pravam cheloveka pri Oliy Majlis Rashidovoy S., UZBEKISTAN

Telegrams: Human Rights Ombudsman, Tashkent Uzbekistan

Salutation: Dear Ms Rashidova

COPIES TO:

diplomatic representatives of Uzbekistan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 April 1999.