

PUBLIC

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11 May 2007

UA 109/07 Fear of torture/Possible prisoner of conscience

BANGLADESH Tasneem Khalil (m), journalist, human rights defender

Journalist Tasneem Khalil was arrested on 11 May by men from the Joint (army and police) Forces. Amnesty International believes he may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely because of his activities as a journalist and human rights defender and exposing human rights violations by the security forces, and is seriously concerned that he may be at risk of torture.

Tasneem Khalil writes for the Bangladeshi *Daily Star* newspaper and is a contributor to CNN. He is also a consultant for Human Rights Watch. He was arrested at his home at about 1.30am on 11 May by four men who identified themselves as working with the Joint Forces. The men told his family that Tasneem was under arrest and would be taken to the Sangsad Bhaban army camp, outside the parliament building in the capital, Dhaka. The Joint Forces men reportedly searched the house and confiscated Khalil's passport, two computers, documents and two mobile phones.

Tasneem Khalil is known to human rights activists in Bangladesh as a committed journalist who has reported on the activities of the Rapid Action Battalion, who are alleged to have carried out extrajudicial executions, and on deaths in army custody.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

People detained by the Joint Forces are usually arrested without a warrant. They are held incommunicado and tortured to extract confessions to crimes such as illegal possession of firearms.

On 11 January President Ijuddin Ahmed declared a state of emergency after weeks of violent election-related clashes between supporters of the former ruling coalition and supporters of parties opposing them. Elections scheduled for 22 January were postponed indefinitely and a new civilian caretaker government, backed by the army, sworn in. Under the state of emergency, political rallies and other political activity were banned, and some restrictions were imposed on the right to freedom of expression.

According to reports in the Bangladesh media, more than 100,000 people have been detained, since early January. Arrests, usually conducted by the Joint Forces, are on grounds of alleged corruption or criminal activity. Many of the detainees are believed to have been released but Amnesty International has not been able to establish the total number still in custody. There are serious concerns that many of the detainees may have been held without due process of law. Amnesty International has received credible allegations of torture following such arrests.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Tasneem Khalil, now in custody of the Joint Forces;
- urging the authorities to ensure that he is not subjected to torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment;
- asking them to ensure that Tasneem Khalil has access to his family, legal counsel and medical assistance at all times while he is in custody;
- calling on the authorities to either charge him with a recognisably criminal offence, or release him immediately and unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

Equivalent to prime minister, in caretaker government

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed

Chief Adviser

Office of the Chief Adviser

Bangladesh

Fax: +880 2 8113243

Email: info@pmo.gov.bd

Salutation: Dear Chief Adviser

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Bangladesh accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 June 2007.