

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 14/06/97

UA 341/97

Torture / Fear of torture

30 October 1997

BHUTANThinley

Sangay Tenzin, son of Dorji

Druki, son of Tshering Dorji

Ugen Wangdi, son of Urpi

and dozens of others

Continuing reports of torture of detainees in police custody have heightened concerns for the dozens of people detained in eastern Bhutan in recent days.

Twenty-six people, reportedly participating in a peaceful demonstration, were arrested by the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) in the Samdrup Jonkhar district in eastern Bhutan on 23 October 1997. Reports indicate that they were held for two days with their hands tied behind their back. In addition, when arrested, they were reportedly chained in groups of four and then made to walk to Samdrup Jonkhar prison.

Four of the 26, Thinley, Sangay Tenzin, Druki and Ugen Wangdi, have reportedly been subjected to *chepua*, a form of torture in which the thighs are pressed between two rods. While being tortured they were reportedly told that they would be subjected to further torture should their anti-national activities not cease immediately.

Dozens of others were reportedly taken into custody in the aftermath of a nation-wide poster campaign on 21 and 22 October. Amnesty International has also received reports that demonstrations and sit-ins were held in various other parts of the country, which have, in turn, resulted in arrests.

None of the detainees is known to have had access to a *jabmi* (legal adviser) or relatives or to have been charged.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The arrests appear to be part of a recent crackdown by the RBP against people suspected of being sympathizers of two political organizations set up in exile, the Druk National Congress (DNC) and the United Front for Democracy (UFD).

In connection with this last spate of arrests, the Bhutanese authorities have recently acknowledged in a radio communiqué that Khempo Thinley Ojer, a 41-year-old religious teacher, chief of a Buddhist monastery in Samdrup Jonkhar district, died of gun-shot injuries in what the authorities have described as an accident involving the Mongar district Administrator. However, according to reports received by Amnesty International, Khempo Thinley Ojer was beaten to death while in police custody. He was reportedly arrested with 16 other people, during a sit-in, and subsequently detained in Tashigang jail.

Another man, by the name of Dhendup, who had confessed to being a DNC supporter, was reportedly beaten about the head with the butt of a rifle which caused him to bleed. He was not arrested but was told to keep quiet about the incident. He has since left the country.

The fear that those arrested may be tortured or ill-treated is heightened by reports received in the past few months by Amnesty International that many individuals suspected of being DNC/UFD sympathizers have been tortured or ill-treated while in custody (e.g., see UA 270/97, ASA 14/02/97, 12 August

1997, UA 281/97, ASA 14/03/97, 20 August 1997 and UA 311/97, ASA 14/04/97, 1 October 1997).

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

- expressing deep concern at reports that Thinley, Sangay Tenzin, Druki and Ugen Wangdi were subjected to *chepua*;
- urging the authorities to immediately end any form of torture or ill-treatment, including keeping people with their hands tied behind their back for long periods of time;
- urging the authorities to provide anyone in their custody with adequate medical care, and to grant all detainees immediate access to a *jabmi* and to their family members;
- asking for information concerning the reason for the arrests, and urging that unless they are to be promptly charged with recognizably criminal offences, they be immediately and unconditionally released.

APPEALS TO:

Lyonpo Dago Tshering
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Royal Government of Bhutan
Tashichho Dzong
Thimphu, Bhutan

Telegrams: Home Affairs Minister, Thimphu, Bhutan

Salutation: Dear Minister

Major Kipchu Nangyal
Chief of the Special Branch
Royal Bhutan Police
Police Headquarters
Zhilnen Namgyelling
Thimphu, Bhutan

Telegrams: Chief, Special Branch, Royal Bhutan Police, Thimphu, Bhutan

Salutation: Dear Major Nangyal

No fax numbers were obtainable for the two addresses supplied but faxes may be sent to the following numbers with a request for them to be forwarded to the above addressees:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Faxes: + 975-2-22079

Speaker of the National Assembly: Faxes: + 975-2-24210

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

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 December 1997.