

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: ASA 37/26/93

Distr: UA/SC

This is a limited action. Please restrict appeals to 5 per section.

UA 416/93 Arbitrary and unacknowledged arrest/
Fear of "disappearance"

26 November 1993

SRI LANKA Runanin Predip Kumar Sebagnanam (20), student at the English
Medium School

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Runanin Predip Kumar Sebagnanam who was reportedly arrested on 20 October at his grandparent's house in Colombo by a group of 15 army personnel, two in uniform and 13 in civilian dress. His family attempted to lodge a complaint with the police, but were turned away. They later succeeded in registering a complaint with the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross. However, his arrest still appears not to have been acknowledged and his whereabouts remain unknown.

Thousands of Tamil people have been arbitrarily detained in the capital, Colombo, and its suburbs since 15 October 1993 in the latest wave of arbitrary arrests by the Sri Lankan security forces. Relatives often do not know where the prisoners are held.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Widespread arbitrary arrests of Tamils in and around Colombo began in June 1993 soon after elections to provincial councils had been held. Thousands of people appear to have been arrested solely on the basis of their ethnic origin.

Since June there have been several waves of arrests, apparently connected with investigations into the assassinations of opposition leader Lalith Athulathmudali and President Ranasinghe Premadasa on 23 April and 1 May respectively, and with reports that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have infiltrated the city. Police attributed both assassinations to the LTTE, which is engaged in armed conflict with government forces to establish a separate state in the northeast.

In June the government agreed with Tamil leaders to implement measures to guard against arbitrary arrest, including assurances that relatives would be given in writing the name and rank of the arresting officer, and the place to which the prisoner would be taken. However none of the measures have been implemented, and arrests continue in an arbitrary manner.

The most recent wave of arrests began on the night of 15 October following a statement by the Defence Ministry that a body-bomb (to be worn by a suicide bomber) had been found in a box on a beach at Modera, north of Colombo, on 14 October. The bomb was said to be of the type used to kill both former President Premadasa earlier in the year and former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in 1991, raising fears that LTTE suicide squads may have entered the city.

Many of those arrested are released within hours or days. Hundreds, however, have reportedly been kept in custody. For example, from 15 to 17 October some 1,500 Tamil people were reportedly arrested in the Colombo area, of whom 500 were kept in detention. Reports received in the past three months suggest that in many cases there are no valid grounds for arrest and that people are simply held while police check their identities and whether there is any existing intelligence information about them. In June, Amnesty International called upon the government to ensure that people are only arrested when there are genuine grounds for doing so.

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

- expressing concern that the arrest of Runanin Predip Kumar Sebagnanam appears not to have been acknowledged, and that there are fears for his safety;
- urging that the government swiftly investigate the whereabouts and welfare of Runanin Predip Kumar Sebagnanam and ensure that, if there are not recognisably criminal charges against him, he be immediately and unconditionally released;
- expressing concern at reports of widespread arbitrary arrests of Tamil people in the Colombo area apparently solely on the basis of their ethnic origin;

APPEALS TO:

1) President D B Wijetunge
 Presidential Secretariat
 Republic Square
 Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

Telegrams: President Wijetunge, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Telexes: 22650 PRESEC CE

Faxes: + 94 1 446657

Salutation: Dear President

2) Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe
 Prime Minister's Office
 150 R A de Mel Mawatha
 Colombo 3, SRI LANKA

Telegrams: Prime Minister, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Telexes: 22229 MINDEF CE

Faxes: + 94 1 446091

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

3) Ernest Perera
 Inspector General of Police
 Sri Lanka Police Headquarters
 New Secretariat
 Colombo 1, SRI LANKA

Telegrams: Inspector General of Police Perera, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Salutation: Dear Inspector General

4) Justice Soza
 Chairman
 Human Rights Task Force
 75 Norris Canal Road
 Colombo 10, SRI LANKA

Telegrams: Justice Soza, Human Rights Task Force, Colombo 10, Sri Lanka

Faxes: + 94 1 696470

Salutation: Dear Justice Soza

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: Diplomatic representatives of Sri Lanka accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 January 1994.