

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 13/001/2003

03 January 2003

Further Information on UA 342/02 (ASA 13/020/2002, 16 December 2002) and follow-ups (ASA 13/017/2002, 27 November 2002) and (ASA 13/018/2002, 3 December 2002) - Fear of torture/ill-treatment/prisoners of conscience/legal concern

BANGLADESH

**Pricila Raj (f), Bangladeshi national, interpreter
Saleem Samad (m), Bangladeshi journalist**

Pricila Raj was released on 22 December. On her release she confirmed earlier reports that she had been tortured while in custody. She was granted bail by the High Court on 18 December however she was not released for a further four days as jail authorities claimed the court order did not reach them until 22 December.

Saleem Samad remains in detention despite a High Court order granted on 23 December for his release on bail. Due to the delay in Pricila Raj's release, the High Court directed officials to send the court order to the jail (only a few kilometers away) by special courier in order that Saleem should be released immediately. However, the following evening, before the court order had arrived, a one month detention order issued under the Special Powers Act (SPA) was sent to the jail. During Saleem Samad's transfer from police custody to jail, he reportedly shouted to journalists that he had been tortured while he was on remand.

The SPA allows the authorities to detain people for a month without charge. The SPA cannot itself be challenged before a court and it overrides safeguards in Bangladeshi law for protection against arbitrary arrest. It has been widely abused by all Bangladeshi governments. The present government claimed that they would abolish the SPA when they came to power, but since their election victory in October 2001, they have regularly used the law to detain their opponents.

Amnesty International considers Saleem Samad to be a prisoner of conscience who is being held solely for engaging in lawful professional activities as a guide for two European journalists. His wife and son are reportedly currently in hiding after their house was allegedly ransacked by the police.

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

- welcoming the release of Pricila Raj but expressing serious concern at reports that she was subjected to torture while in custody;
- expressing serious concern at reports that Saleem Samad has been subjected to torture while in custody;
- urging that reports that Pricila Raj and Saleem Samad have been subjected to torture are investigated immediately and that those found responsible are prosecuted and brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to release Saleem Samad immediately and unconditionally;
- expressing concern that Saleem Samad is being held as a prisoner of conscience.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia
Office of the Prime Minister
Gona Bhaban
Sher-e Bangla Nagar
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Telegrams: Prime Minister Zia, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Fax: + 880 2 811 3243 / 3244 / 1015 / 1490
Email: pm@pmobd.org or psecretary@pmobd.org
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mr Altaf Hossain Chowdhury
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Bangladesh Secretariat
Building 4
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Telegrams: Minister of Home Affairs Chowdhury, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax: + 880 2 861 9667
Salutation: Dear Home Minister

Mr Muddabir Hossain Chowdhury
Inspector General of Police
Police Headquarters
Fulbaria
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Telegrams: Inspector General Chowdhury, Fulbaria, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax: + 880 2 956 3362
Salutation: Dear Sir

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 14 February 2003.