

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 20/009/2001

UA 18/01

Fear for

INDIA (JAMMU AND KASHMIR) Massrat ALAM BHAT, Muslim League General Secretary

Massrat Alam Bhat is at serious risk of being ill-treated, tortured or killed following his arrest by the Special Operations Group [SOG], a police division known to routinely torture detainees.

Massrat Alam Bhat, the General Secretary of the political party the Muslim League, was arrested on 17 January by the SOG, a division of the police created to combat armed opposition in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. At the time, he was participating in a demonstration in the state capital, Srinagar, to demand the return of the bodies of militants killed during a shootout at Srinagar airport. Several other political activists arrested at the same time were released on 18 January. However, despite rumours that he is being held at a Joint Interrogation Centre [JIC] in Srinagar, the whereabouts of Musrat Alam Bhat remain unknown.

In the last week alone, two men, Mushtaq Ahmed Bhat, a member of the Muslim League, and Bilal Ahmad Mir, have died while in the custody of the SOG. At least one of these was killed at a JIC in Srinagar. Several other detainees have allegedly been subjected to torture over the past few days. (See UA 14/01, ASA 20/006/2001, 19 January 2001 and follow-up ASA 20/008/2001, 23 January 2001).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The SOG is consistently and frequently mentioned in connection with human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir, including in reports of rape, torture, deaths-in-custody, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions. Deaths-in-custody and extrajudicial executions occur on a regular basis: from January to June 2000 Amnesty International documented 150 cases of deaths-in-custody and extrajudicial executions allegedly perpetrated by police, including the SOG, and the army. The authorities often portray these deaths as taking place in encounters with militants or during escape bids.

Members of the police and security forces who perpetrate human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir operate with virtual impunity. This only serves to encourage further violations.

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

- urging the authorities to guarantee that Massrat Alam Bhat is not subjected to torture or any other form of ill-treatment while in detention;
- urging that he is given prompt and regular access to his family, lawyers and any medical attention he may require;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release, unless charged with a recognisably criminal offence and brought before a court of law;
- calling on the government to immediately take all necessary measures, including rigorous human rights training, to ensure that those detained by the SOG are not subjected to torture or ill-treatment while in detention.

APPEALS TO:

Please note that it can be very difficult getting through to fax numbers in India. Please be patient and keep trying.

Dr Farooq Abdullah
Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir
Chief Minister's Office
Raj Bhavan
Jammu
Jammu and Kashmir
India

Fax: + 91 191 545649

Telegrams:Chief Minister, Srinagar, India

Salutation:Dear Chief Minister

Mr Sardar Gurbachan Jagat
Director General of Police
Office of the DGP
Police Headquarters
Srinagar
Jammu and Kashmir
India

Telegrams:Director General of Police, Srinagar, India

Salutation:Dear Director General

COPIES TO:

Mr L K Advani
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Room No.104
North Block
New Delhi 110 001
India

Fax: + 91 11 3015750

Salutation:Dear Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of INDIA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 March 2001.