

19 June 2001

AI Index ASA 20/035/2001 - News Service Nr. 106

India: Excessive use of force in Manipur riots must be investigated

Reports that 13 demonstrators were killed and 50 injured as a result of indiscriminate and excessive use of force by police in Imphal, Manipur on 18 June 2001, should be immediately investigated, Amnesty International said today. According to reports, police fired on them without warning.

Additional paramilitary forces have been deployed to the state and an indefinite curfew is now in place in three Manipuri districts.

"Amnesty International is concerned about reports that troops have been ordered to "shoot on sight" anybody defying the curfew -- the Manipur government must ensure that protests are policed in accordance with UN standards," the organization said.

Wide-scale rioting broke out on the final day of a 66-hour statewide general strike protesting the announcement of an extension of the ceasefire agreement with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaak Muivah) to all Naga inhabited areas in the North East including Manipur. According to reports crowds had been gathering from around 11am outside the Raj Bhavan after which time protestors forcibly entered government complexes and set ablaze government buildings. By 1pm around 50,000 people had gathered outside the governor's residence demanding that the governor come out to listen to them and accept a memorandum of protest. When the governor did not come out the protestors converged outside the Chief Minister's bungalow and reportedly tried to enter the complex to set it ablaze.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), who were stationed in the observatory deck of the bungalow, are reported to have started firing indiscriminately and without warning at protestors who reportedly had already started to disperse due to heavy rain. At the same time CRPF personnel standing inside the gates of the Raj Bhavan came out and allegedly started indiscriminately firing at protestors as well. The CRPF reportedly continued to give chase and fire at protesters, including women, children and the elderly. As demonstrators fled the scene some continued to set fire to ministers houses.

Government officials have said that the curfew was announced at 1pm, however a human rights activist has said that the curfew was only announced after the rioting had started, at around 2.30pm.

Although a magisterial inquiry has been announced, Amnesty International urges the government to order a high-powered, prompt, thorough and independent judicial inquiry to match the seriousness of the incident. The findings and recommendations should be made public. It urges that the inquiry be carried out in conformity with standards contained in the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions.

The organization is also calling on armed opposition groups and other influential groups which may be able to exercise control over the protesters to urge restraint to those who may take part in any protests over the coming days.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>