

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 20/48/00

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Fear of t

INDIARajiv Singh

A key witness in the trial of police officers accused of abducting a human rights activist has been arrested by Punjab police. Amnesty International fears this is an attempt to prevent him testifying, and is extremely concerned for his safety in police custody.

Rajiv Singh was arrested as he attempted to hand a petition to UK Home Secretary Jack Straw in Amritsar, Punjab, on 5 September. The petition reportedly called on the UK government to persuade the Indian authorities to take action over human rights violations in Punjab.

He was held overnight and brought before a magistrate the next day and reportedly charged with the murder of two people who were killed in a bank robbery in Amritsar. He was remanded in police custody until 8 September.

This is the third time that Rajiv Singh has been arrested by Punjab police and charged with serious offences. Earlier this year the Punjab Human Rights Commission ruled that police had "concocted" previous charges to persuade him not to testify against them. He had been accused in July 1998 of setting up an organization to fight for a separate Sikh state of Khalistan, called Tigers of Sikh Land. The Commission recommended that the police officers involved should face criminal charges and that there should be further investigations. Rajiv Singh was awarded compensation for being illegally detained.

Today is the fifth anniversary of the "disappearance" of human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra, who unearthed evidence that Punjab police had illegally cremated the bodies of hundreds of people who had been arrested and then "disappeared". A number of Punjab police are now on trial for his abduction, and Rajiv Singh is a key eyewitness in the case.

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

- expressing grave concern about the arrest and detention of Rajiv Singh on 5 September in Amritsar;
- expressing concern that since the Punjab police have unlawfully detained and charged Rajiv Singh before, to try to prevent him from testifying in the case of Jaswant Singh Khalra, the current charges against him may be false, and that he is at grave risk of further harassment or torture in police custody;
- calling for an immediate review of the charges against him by a judicial body;
- calling for commitments from the authorities in Punjab to ensure that he will not be ill-treated in custody.

APPEALS TO:

Mr Prakash Singh Badal
Chief Minister of Punjab
Office of the Chief Minister
Chandigarh
Punjab
India

Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

Fax: + 91 172 740936

Telegrams: Chief Minister, Punjab, India

Mr S. Sarabjit Singh
Director General of Police
Office of the Director General
Police Headquarters
Punjab
India

Salutation: Dear Director General

Telegrams: Director General of Police, Punjab, India

COPIES TO:

Mr L.K. Advani
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
North Block
New Delhi 110 001
India

Salutation: Dear Minister

Fax: + 91 11 301 5750

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 18 October 2000.