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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 49/92

Contained in this weekly update are external items on India x 2, Thailand, Syria and Venezuela.

NEWS INITIATIVES

Bosnia-Herzegovina - 21 January

The Swiss Section, in connection with the IS, is organizing a media event and briefing in Geneva as a conclusion to the letter-writing campaign for human rights in the Former Yugoslavia. We are hoping to have around 250,000 letters from around the world, which will be used for a visual photo opportunity - which should attract tv. The IS will be inviting the international media, including agencies, radio and television - you are encouraged to invite any of your media who may be interested in attending. We will be sending you more details as they are finalized - in the meantime, please contact Daniel Bolomey at the Swiss Section if you have any queries.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Australia - 27 January

News release to go with document on Aboriginal deaths and ill-treatment in custody.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Brazil - no date fixed yet

(New Information)

There will be a weekly update item to accompany a document about human rights violations against indigenous peoples in Brazil. We are hoping to have it available in Brazil to coincide with a planned concert for human rights there, but the concert has recently been postponed and we do not know yet when it will be rescheduled. We shall make every effort to make sure that sections have the document in time.

Cuba - 17 December

(New Information)

PLEASE NOTE the embargo has been changed for the weekly update item on Cuba (sent out last week) and is now 17 December. This is to ensure that Spanish-speaking sections have the document about pocs in Spanish in time.

South Korea - 15 December

(New Information)

An open letter has been sent to all candidates in the presidential election in South Korea, scheduled for 18 December. This IS press office has sent the letter to you in an urgent note to press officers. It is not embargoed, but the IS will be sending it to Asia-interest radio services on 15 December.

Racism and ill-treatment in Europe - 10 February

(New Information)

News release to go with Focus and campaign action on racist ill-treatment in Europe. There has been some confusion about the date: this is now confirmed as 10 February.

2. ASA 20/WU 08/92 EXTERNAL
10 December 1992

INDIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED BY POLICE KILLINGS FOLLOWING MOSQUE DEMOLITION AT AYODHYA

Amnesty International cabled Prime Minister Narasimha Rao on 9 December to express concern about some of the killings which followed the recent destruction of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in the Uttar Pradesh town of Ayodhya on 6 December.

Over 600 people are known to have been killed in violence throughout the country since Sunday. Amnesty International is concerned at the number of deaths that have occurred as a result of police firing on protestors and rioters. This happened in Bombay where at least 40 people died, some reportedly as a result of indiscriminate police firing. Most victims belonged to the Muslim community.

Amnesty International urged the government to take the utmost care to prevent further loss of life and to ensure that the security forces are instructed not to use lethal force unless as a very last resort when they face a life-threatening situation - and only after appropriate warnings have been given. Amnesty International also asked the government for clarification of the nature of the charges and the evidence against the leader of opposition, L.K Advani (who has now resigned), Murli Manohar Joshi, the leader of the BJP and other party members who were arrested on 8 December 1992.

The 16th century Babri Masjid (mosque), now destroyed by rioting Hindus but which the Indian government has assured will be rebuilt - stood at a site in Ayodhya claimed to be the birthplace of the Hindu God Ram. Ayodhya lies in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state ruled by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was dismissed by the central government in New Delhi after it had failed to uphold its undertaking to abide by a Supreme Court ruling prohibiting any construction work of a Hindu temple at the site.

The BJP, which backed the campaign for the last three years for a Hindu temple to be built, and the Hindu revivalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP - World Hindu Council), which organized the current campaign, had given undertakings to the government that, on Sunday 6 December, they would only participate in ceremonial rituals and would not permit the destruction of the mosque and the building of a Hindu temple on its site. But when rioting Hindus stormed the mosque and demolished it, the Provincial Armed Constabulary was reported to have withdrawn quietly, leaving the mosque undefended.

3. ASA 20/WU 09/92 EXTERNAL
10 December 1992

INDIA: NEW ALLEGATIONS OF RAPE BY ARMY PERSONNEL IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Amnesty International is urging the Indian Government to hold a full judicial inquiry into allegations of the rape of up to nine women - including an 11-year-old girl - by army soldiers on 10/11 October.

The women were reportedly raped during a search operation conducted by an army unit of the 22nd grenadiers in the village of Chak Saidapora - 4 kilometres from Shopian, district Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir. There is substantive evidence from various sources, including medical examinations carried out within hours of the search, which indicate that at least six and possibly nine women were raped by several among the party of soldiers, said to number between two and three dozen.

An official statement from the army given to Amnesty International during its recent visit to New Delhi confirms that the army conducted the search to locate a suspected militant. It states that male family members were present during the search; it lasted no more than one hour and 35 minutes; the same three persons carried out the search of the various houses; and "it is therefore inconceivable that four persons could have been involved in rape cases of nine women in different houses". The army claims that two of the women concerned are wives of hardcore militants and that their statements are part of a "well orchestrated disinformation campaign with a view to malign the security forces". However, senior government officials admitted that the raid was in violation of regulations prohibiting the army from entering villages during hours of darkness.

Amnesty International has received the testimony of several women stating they were raped or witnessed the act. One woman said, "They came at night and took my husband away. Two stood outside, they did not search, but raped me. He took my clothes off. They were army soldiers." Another woman, who said two of her daughters-in-law were raped in her presence, told a journalist, "Four army men came. We have orders to search [they said]. They made my brother and father go out. We have orders [to rape you] they said. [I said]: Shoot me but don't rape me."

Early in the afternoon of the same day, 11 October, a local policeman of the Shopian police station reportedly brought eight of the village women to the Sub District hospital, Shopian, seven of whom were immediately examined by a female doctor. Two more women, initially reluctant to be examined, were medically examined on 14 October. According to members of a civil liberties group, visiting the area on 28 October, the doctor carrying out the medical examination found positive evidence of forced intercourse in the case of six of the women, including a 60 year-old woman and the 11 year-old girl, Ziaatoon - whose body reportedly also showed abrasions and bruises. Microscopic tests in the remaining three cases were negative, although there were bruises and abrasions on the women's body suggesting that they, also, had been raped.

All nine reportedly testified under oath to the visiting civil liberties team that they had been raped by soldiers. They also stated that in the morning of 13 October army officers came to the village to inquire, noting their statements, but that a group of more junior officers arrived later that day, threatening the women to withdraw their statements.

In view of the seriousness of the allegations and the contradictions between the army version of events and the testimony provided by the alleged victims, Amnesty International believes that a judicial inquiry into the allegations should be held promptly; that its findings should be published in full; and that all necessary measures should be taken to protect witnesses pending the investigation. If the allegations are found to be substantiated, those responsible should be brought to justice, preferably in the ordinary courts of law, and the victims should be granted full and prompt compensation.

**4. ASA 39/WU 04/92 EXTERNAL
10 December 1992**

THAILAND: THAI GOVERNMENT CRITIC RISKS DETENTION

Amnesty International wrote to King Bhumibol Adulyadej on 8 December expressing concern that Professor Sulak Sivaraksa is at grave risk of arrest and detention as a prisoner of conscience upon his voluntary return to Thailand on 14 December. The organization called on the Thai Government to ensure that Professor Sulak Sivaraksa is not detained as a prisoner of conscience when he returns to Thailand and to ensure that he is at all times safeguarded from ill-treatment.

In September 1991, it was reported that the Thai military authorities had issued a warrant for the arrest of Professor Sulak Sivaraksa for remarks he made about the monarchy and the military on 22 August 1991. Following the issue of the warrant, which includes charges of "lese majesté", he went into hiding and subsequently left Thailand. Amnesty International believes that if detained on these charges, Professor Sulak Sivaraksa would be a prisoner of conscience and the organization would demand his immediate and unconditional release.

The warrant for Professor Sulak's arrest is reportedly based on remarks he made on 22 August 1991 during a talk at Thammasat University. He said that Thai people should "accept that the King, the Crown Prince and the Princesses are just ordinary people", and that he believed the King was "open to honest criticism". Amnesty International believes that his detention for his remarks about the monarchy would be a violation of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The organization is therefore urging that he not be arrested on these grounds.

Professor Sulak Sivaraksa also talked about how General Suchinda and General Sunthorn had visited Burma for talks with leaders of that country's military junta immediately before they carried out a military coup in Thailand on 23 February 1991 overthrowing the elected civilian government. Professor Sulak asked, "Did they go to Burma to learn how to carry out the coup?" He also alleged the Burmese and Thai militaries "are actually working together, in logging, fishing and arms trading."

Amnesty International urges that, should Professor Sulak Sivaraksa be charged with "defamation", he be given a fair trial at which he may be found innocent - if his remarks are judged to be true or to constitute fair comment made in good faith about matters subject to public criticism - as is provided in Thai law. Amnesty International is also urging that Professor Sulak's physical security be properly safeguarded if he is detained.

5. MDE 24/WU 05/92 EXTERNAL
10 December 1992

SYRIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL VISITS SYRIA

Two Amnesty International delegates are visiting Syria for about ten days in order to attend and observe proceedings at trials before the Supreme State Security Court in Damascus. Those standing trial are long-term political detainees many of whom are prisoners of conscience adopted by Amnesty International. During their visit the delegates are not authorized to make any public statements and on their return will submit a report to the Secretary General of Amnesty International.

6. AMR 53/92 04/92 EXTERNAL
9 December 1992

VENEZUELA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED BY HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS FOLLOWING ATTEMPTED COUP

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about reports of killings of a number of people in circumstances suggesting they may have been extra-judicially executed by members of the security forces - in the wake of the attempted coup on 27 November. The organization is also concerned about the safety of hundreds of people arrested under suspicion of having participated in the rebellion.

On 27 November members of the Venezuelan armed forces attempted to overthrow the elected civilian government of Carlos Andrés Pérez for the second time this year. The coup attempt was controlled by loyal forces on the same day, during which several armed clashes were reported and the presidential palace of Miraflores in Caracas was bombed by rebel planes. At least 20 soldiers died in the clashes, and at least 130 civilians are reported to have been killed in Caracas alone. A yet unspecified number of civilians died in cross fire between rebel troops and loyal forces or were killed during bombing raids.

In a Caracas prison of Retén de Catia, at least 63 prisoners were killed by members of the Policía Metropolitana, PM, metropolitan police and the Guardia Nacional, GN, national guard. The police reportedly raided the prison on 27 November to quell an escape which, the authorities claimed, had been organized in relation to the military rebellion. Many of the prisoners were reportedly victims of extra-judicial executions. This seems to have been confirmed by forensic findings, which reported that bullet entrance wounds in the back were found in many of those who died.

On 27 November the Venezuelan President announced a curfew from 6pm to 6am and the suspension of a number of constitutional guarantees, including the right not to be arrested except with a warrant or in flagrante delicto. At least 1000 members of the security forces believed to have participated in the coup, including some of its leaders, were arrested. Scores of civilians, including students, university teachers and community leaders, were also arrested in dozens of raids. Most of the civilian detainees are reportedly being held by the Dirección de Servicios de Inteligencia y Prevención, DISIP, while the members of the security forces are under custody of the Dirección de Inteligencia Militar, DIM, Directorate of Military Intelligence.

On 29 November the government announced that all those detained in connection with the rebellion would be summarily tried by the military courts. According to reports the detainees have remained incomunicado. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of those arrested, and also about the standards of independence and objectivity in their summary trial proceedings.

On 3 December Amnesty International wrote to President Carlos Andrés Pérez to express its concerns about the human rights violations reported after the coup attempt. The organization called on the Venezuelan government to adopt a number of urgent measures to prevent further abuses by members of the security forces, and to bring to justice those responsible for abuses which had been committed. It also called for the government to ensure that the suspension of guarantees would not lead to further human rights violations - including torture of detainees - and that the right to habeas corpus of detainees should be respected.

Amnesty International further requested that the government ensures that representatives of the Attorney General's Office, who are charged with protecting the rights of detainees and prisoners, have unrestricted access to all those arrested - both civilians and members of the armed forces. The organization also called on the authorities to adopt effective measures to ensure adequate forensic examination of all the dead, including those killed in the Retén de Catia. The organization said that under no circumstances should the bodies be disposed of before their autopsies and identification - and recommended that mobile refrigeration units should be used to prevent the decomposition of the bodies as a result of overcrowding of morgue facilities.