

Indian authorities must investigate online video of Kashmir detainee abuse

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Amnesty International has urged Indian authorities to carry out an effective investigation into a video clip that appears to show detainees in Kashmir being stripped and humiliated by security forces. The three-minute clip, described on social networking sites as "Kashmir's Abu Ghraib video", apparently shows Jammu and Kashmir police and Central Reserve Police Force personnel herding at least four naked young men to a nearby police station. "This behaviour is in clear violation of the universal and absolute right to freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," said Donna Guest, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific programme.

The video, apparently recorded by one of the security personnel, has since been removed from social networking sites, including Facebook and YouTube, after the Jammu and Kashmir police reportedly began legal action against the publishers of what it termed a "baseless and malicious clip". It is unclear when the clip was recorded, although it was reportedly taken in the north-western town of Sopore. The recorded conversation in Hindi-Urdu suggests that the security force personnel suspected the young men of being involved in throwing stones at the security forces, and that they had been caught after a long chase.

Amnesty International has consistently received reports of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees in various police stations and interrogation centres in Jammu and Kashmir. Such accounts have often included men being stripped naked and humiliated by security force personnel. The Indian Parliament is currently debating new legislation criminalizing torture and the Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram has said the video will be investigated. However, a statement by Jammu and Kashmir Police to local media indicated that a formal case had been registered against the clip's distributors. "The approach of the local police raises serious concerns. Instead of investigating and identifying the perpetrators of the humiliating treatment, the police appear to be more concerned about who uploaded and circulated the video clip," said Donna Guest. "The Indian and Jammu and Kashmir authorities must ensure that the content of the clip is subjected to an independent, impartial and effective investigation. Any officials who are suspected of offences involving human rights violations should be prosecuted in fair trials."