

PAKISTAN: AZAD JAMMU AND KASHMIR Around 35 political activists

At least 35 political activists have been detained and ill-treated after staging an apparently peaceful political protest in the state of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Amnesty International fears that they are at risk of further torture or ill-treatment.

Twenty-seven members of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front and several members of the United Kashmir People's National party, both of which favour independence for Jammu and Kashmir, were arrested on or around 7 June. Several of the detainees were reportedly beaten during arrest, in police custody or jail. They are currently held in Kotli jail.

Most of the detainees appear to be held under legislation which permits preventive detention of anyone making a speech which "causes or is likely to cause fear or alarm to the public" or "furthers or is likely to further any activity prejudicial to public safety or the maintenance of public order".

All of the above were arrested after they protested against the Election Commission's decision to reject their candidates' nomination papers for the Legislative Assembly election on 5 July. The Commission rejects the nomination papers of candidates who refuse to sign a declaration declaring support for the accession of Azad Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Azad [literally: independent] Jammu and Kashmir is the area of Kashmir under temporary Pakistani administration. The state has an interim constitution which lays down the "ideology of the State's accession to Pakistan" as a guiding principle for political activity, stating that: "No person or party in Azad Jammu and Kashmir shall be permitted to propagate against, or take part in activities prejudicial or detrimental to, the ideology of the State's accession to Pakistan".

Those who oppose the accession of Azad Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan have been harassed and denied a number of fundamental rights. Some have lost their jobs, other have been denied access to education and employment. Political parties favouring independence have been permitted to function, but have been excluded from participating in elections because of the requirement to declare allegiance to the goal of accession.

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

- urging the authorities in Azad Jammu and Kashmir to guarantee that none of the detainees are tortured or ill-treated;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release, if they are being held solely for their conscientiously held political opinion;
- asking the authorities to refrain from detaining people for peacefully protesting on political grounds, and to change legislation which currently allows for people to be held as prisoners of conscience.

APPEALS TO (The fax numbers below can be difficult to reach. Please be patient and keep trying):

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Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir
Muzaffarabad
Azad Jammu and Kashmir
PAKISTAN
Fax: + 92 58810 39108 / + 92 51 9206288
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir
Muzaffarabad
Azad Jammu and Kashmir
PAKISTAN
Fax: + 92 58810 42433 / + 92 51 9210540
Salutation: Dear President

COPIES TO:

Diplomatic representatives of Pakistan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 27 July 2001.