

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 20/38/00

UA 229/00

Fear for safety

2 August 2000

INDIA

Population of Jammu and Kashmir

Amnesty International is seriously concerned that there may be an escalation of violence in the north Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, after at least 100 civilians were killed there in the past 24 hours. A major point of concern is that the Jammu and Kashmir government have consistently failed to properly investigate the unlawful deaths of large numbers of people in the past or to prosecute the perpetrators of continuing human rights violations.

While Amnesty International appeals to the armed groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir to strictly abide by the appropriate international standards concerning the treatment of civilians in armed conflict we are concerned that the population of Jammu and Kashmir may be used as pawns and put at risk by political or other parties in order to make political gain during proposed peace talks between the Indian government and the leading armed opposition group.

Among the reported killings, 14 Hindus were shot dead by armed men who called them out of their houses in Pogal Peristan village, Doda district, on the evening of 1 August. A former militant and six members of his family, including women and children, were shot dead in Baramullah district, as were 23 labourers, including migrants from Madya Pradesh and Bihar, Anantnag District and village Sund Achabal. In a market in Pahalgam, 30 Hindu pilgrims, two police officers and five local Muslims were shot dead by men who threw hand grenades and opened fire with automatic weapons.

No armed group has claimed responsibility for the killings. An umbrella organization of armed groups, the Muttahida Jihad Council, issued a statement from Muzaffarabad in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (the region of Kashmir under Pakistani administration) denying any involvement and accusing the Indian government of orchestrating the attacks. An Indian army spokesman, Brigadier Subroto Ghosh, was quoted as saying that the army had taken measures to counter further attacks and believed that the Pakistan-based armed opposition group *Lashkar-e-Toiba* was responsible.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Some 30 armed opposition groups are active in Jammu and Kashmir, all of which oppose Indian rule: some want independence, while others want to secede to Pakistan. There are reports that up to 30,000 people have died since the struggle against Indian control became militarised 10 years ago.

The 93 unlawful killings of the last 24 hours follow last week's offer of an unconditional three-month unilateral cease-fire from the largest armed group in Jammu and Kashmir, the Hizbul Mujahideen. It called on other armed groups to join in the cease-fire, but they have rejected the offer. Other armed groups in Jammu and Kashmir reportedly declared they would step up their armed struggle.

In Jammu and Kashmir, large scale massacres have gone without an inquiry and unpunished. The massacre at Chitthisinghpura in March this year, in which 36 Sikh civilians died, has not been subjected to judicial scrutiny. Several men allegedly involved in the killing have been killed by the security forces in highly suspicious circumstances. Many people in Jammu and Kashmir believe that the security or paramilitary forces were involved in the unlawful killings at Chitthisinghpura.

Over the past six to nine months there has been a steep increase in the number of unlawful killings allegedly perpetrated by the security forces and the police in Jammu and Kashmir. Amnesty International knows of 30 deaths in custody reported during June 2000 alone.

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

- urging the government of Jammu and Kashmir to immediately instigate full, exhaustive and transparent enquiries into the recent unlawful killings in Jammu and Kashmir and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- calling on the government to ensure that effective measures are taken to protect the human rights of all those living or travelling through Jammu and Kashmir during a time of heightened tension;
- calling on the government of Jammu and Kashmir to put an end to the widespread impunity in the state, which facilitates and encourages the perpetration of human rights violations.

APPEALS TO:

Head of Jammu and Kashmir government

Dr Farooq Abdullah
The Chief Minister
Office of the Chief Minister
Raj Bhavan
Srinagar
Jammu and Kashmir
India

Faxes: + 91 194 452356 / 191 545649 (fax lines to India are frequently engaged and callers may receive messages that the lines are out of order or not known - please keep trying)

Telegrams: Chief Minister, Srinagar, India

Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

Minister responsible for law and order

Mr P L Handoo
Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs
Government of Jammu and Kashmir
Raj Bhavan
Srinagar
Jammu and Kashmir
India

Telegrams: Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Srinagar, India

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES 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 13 September 2000.