

INDIA: Karang villagers in Manipur suffer human rights violations by the military during a recent military operation

URGENT ACTION URGENT ACTION URGENT ACTION

ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION – URGENT APPEALS PROGRAM

Urgent Appeal

24 October 2005

UA-184-2005: INDIA: Karang villagers in Manipur suffer human rights violations by the military during a recent military operation

INDIA: Human rights violations during military operation; Impunity

Dear friends,

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has received information from the Forum for Indigenous Perspectives and Action in Manipur, India regarding human rights violations committed by the security personnel at Thanga Karang, Bishenpur District, Manipur.

According to the information received, members of the 73 Mountain Brigade under the aegis of 57 Mountain Division led by Major General Govind Dwivedi conducted a massive operation in Thanga Karang between 3 and 5 October 2005. It is alleged that there were as many as 3,000 people at Karang during the operation; all of whom have now been confined to the area where their welfare remains unknown. The fish-traps in the Loktak Lake were destroyed by the motor boats of the army which has heavily affected the Karang villagers who sustain their lives through fishing activities. Also, there is no road communication for Karang villagers (except by way of boat) and they have been suffering from a lack of essential commodities following the army operation.

This major military operation is not the first to be held in Karang. For example, a massive operation was conducted in the Karang area in March 1999. Many human rights violations such as arbitrary arrest, detention, and torture, forced labour and inhuman treatment were reported by the villagers. The local villagers also reported on lost incomes as the army destroyed villagers' boats, fishnets and angles and a large number of fish collections were lost. However, the Manipur state government took no serious action to prevent such violations. The people living in Loktak Lake area, including Karang then lived in fear that another army operation would be conducted. And this is what happened.

The AHRC urges you to immediately intervene in this matter. Please request the Manipur state government to stop on-going military operations in this area and duly compensate the villagers for

their losses. Please also request the Government of India to abolish the draconian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, which affords excessive powers to security personnel.

Urgent Appeals Desk
Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

DETAILED INFORMATION:

Victims: Villagers of Karang, Bishnupur District, Manipur, India

Alleged perpetrators: 73 Mountain Brigade under the aegis of 57 Mountain Division based at Leimakhong Army base, Manipur

Period of the operation: 3 to 5 October 2005

Members of 73 Mountain Brigade under the aegis of 57 Mountain Division based at Leimakhong Army Base, Manipur, along with Assam Rifles, launched a massive operation, code-named 'Operation Stinger', at Karang Island located on Loktak Lake in Bishnupur, Manipur at midnight on 3 October 2005. The operation was supervised by Major General Govind Dwivedi. The operation was conducted over two days at which point it was called off before the army set up a post in Karang.

Upon hearing the news that the army launched an operation in Karang, local journalists tried to enter the operation area but were stopped by the aegis of 57 Mountain Division. They were even prohibited from talking with the affected villagers while the operation was going on.

Later on October 5, when the journalist groups finally met the Meira paibis, local women's human rights defenders groups of the area complained that the people at Karang, who sustain their lives through fishing activities, had not been allowed to go out to earn their livelihood following the army operation and that the fish-traps laid out for catching fish had been destroyed by the motor boats of the army. "All the local people were herded and confined at one particular spot from early morning till late in the afternoon yesterday and were not allowed even allowing to take their meals", the women alleged. They further said that the whereabouts of one Ningthoujam Meiteichaoba (30) who had gone out fishing was not known, although the army had informed the public that another seven fishermen are in their custody.

At the news briefing to the media in Karang on the morning of October 5, Major General Govind Dwivedi said that the army conducted the operation because Karang is a stronghold of underground armed rebels. He also claimed that the villagers "welcomed" the army and extended their full cooperation during the operation. He added that the army personnel would be deployed in Karang to prevent any underground activities. The army reportedly handed over two elderly persons to the Moirang police and they were identified Oinam Menjor (52) of Karang Yongchak Pandon and Laimayum Shyamchand (62) of Karang Bamon Leikai.

On October 5, the Manipur Human Rights Commission (MHRC) asked the State Deputy General

of Police (DGP) to take prompt action and submit a report on the operation in Karang. Acting on a complaint petition filed by the secretary general of the Universal Education and Well Being for Human Rights and Development, the MHRC headed by Justice WA Shishak also asked the Deputy Commissioner of Bishnupur District to submit a report in regards to allegations of violations of human rights as a result of the army operation. The MHRC directed that the report should be submitted before the Commission on October 10. The complaint petition alleged that there are as many as 3,000 people on the island and they have been confined and their fate remains known.

Meanwhile, the National Association of Fishermen, Manipur State Unit submitted a memorandum to the Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil on October 5 and urged him to make arrangements for grants of essential commodities to the people of Karang on humanitarian grounds. The memorandum highlighted that there is no road communication (except by boat) for the poor people of Karang fishing village and that they have been suffering from lack of essential commodities following the army operation.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

This major military operation is not the first of its kind in Karang. For example, "Operation Loktak" was conducted from 10 to 16 March 1999 and Thanga and Karang area were the most affected. Around 2,300 army and police personnel conducted the operation to flush out "insurgents" from Loktak area. Nobody was allowed to go in or out of the area for these six days.

After the operation, a joint fact-finding team consisting of activists from several human rights groups visited these areas to observe the affects of the operation. The fact-finding report revealed that the villagers, who were heavily dependent on their daily essential commodities at the local markets outside of the island, virtually starved during the six-day operation. Furthermore, all males above the age of 10 were paraded under the sun for four to eight hours daily at selected locations and many of the villagers were under virtual house arrest. All the houses were searched more than once a day.

The report also revealed that the security personnel arbitrarily picked up people on any suspicion and detained them at the army camps for interrogation. The army did not inform arrestees of the reason for arrest or issue memos of arrest. Many of the arrested were severely tortured during their detention. The army reportedly used electric shocks to torture people. The army later released most of them without pressing any charges and handed them to the civil police. All the detainees were forced to sign papers that were neither read nor explained to them. Some of the detainees were further produced before a magistrate on charges fabricated by the army.

Many cases of forced labour and inhuman treatment were reported from the villagers. In addition, the villagers' property, including boats, fishnets and angles were severely destroyed by the motorboats used by the army personnel and a large number of fish collections were lost. As a result, many local villagers lost their income.

Despite the local people's strong demand to stop such harassment and human rights violations by the security personnel, the Manipur state government took no serious action either to prevent it or punish those responsible. As a result, the people living in Loktak Lake area, including Karang continued their unsustainable life fearing that another army operation would be conducted at any time.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Manipur was an independent country for centuries but became a British protectorate until 15 August 1947 after being defeated in the Anglo-Manipuri War 1891. After independence, a constitutional monarchy was established but the Indian government annexed Manipur on 15 October 1949. Since then, Manipur, a small border province in the remote north eastern region of India, with a population of 2.3 million, has been the centre of an armed conflict. In order to control the active armed opposition groups, the Indian armed forces have been deployed under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958.

In the past, many cases of human rights violations such as indiscriminate firing at innocent civilians, arbitrary detention, torture and other forms of cruelty by the security forces and the police have emerged. The police and other forces often randomly fire into crowded areas. Since these forces enjoy impunity, these acts of abuse and violence mostly go unpunished. To see our previous Urgent Appeals regarding violations committed by security personnel in Manipur, please click: [UA-13-2005](#), [FA-19-2004](#), [UA-96-2004](#) and [UA-31-2003](#).

It is extremely unfortunate that the very people employed by the government to defend and provide a secure and peaceful environment such that people can live without fear, have now become the offenders themselves. This incident once again exposes the total failure of domestic mechanisms that are designed to defend human rights and safeguard citizen's rights in India.

SUGGESTED ACTION:

Please send a letter to the Chief Minister of Manipur requesting him to order an immediate and thorough investigation in the human rights violations during the operation, punish the responsible security personnel by law and compensate the affected villagers. Please also send a copy of the letter to other relevant local authorities.

Sample letter:

Dear _____,

Re: INDIA: Karang villagers in Manipur suffer human rights violations by the military during a recent military operation

Victims: Villagers of Karang, Bishnupur District, Manipur, India

Alleged perpetrators: 73 Mountain Brigade under the aegis of 57 Mountain Division based at

Leimakhong Army base, Manipur

Period of the operation: 3-5 October 2005

I am deeply concerned to hear of the various human rights violations that took place by the 73 Mountain Brigade under the aegis of 57 Mountain Division at Karang Island between 3 and 5 October 2005 during its military operation.

According to the information I have received, it is alleged that there were as many as 3,000 people at Karang during the operation and who have now been confined and their fates unknown. In addition, the villagers, who sustain their lives on fishing activities, have lost their incomes as the fish-traps in the Loktak Lake were destroyed by the motorboats of the army. Several cases of arbitrary arrest and detention have also been reported.

This major military operation is not the first of its kind in Karang. For example, a massive operation was conducted in the Karang area in March 1999, at which point many human rights violations such as arbitrary arrest, detention, and torture, and forced labour and inhuman treatment were reported on by the villagers. However, the Manipur state government took no serious action to prevent such violation or to punish those responsible. The people living in Loktak Lake area were living in fear that another army operation would be conducted at any time. And this is exactly what has happened now.

I therefore urge you to conduct an independent and thorough investigation into the human rights violations that have occurred during this latest operation. I also urge you to ensure that the affected villagers are duly compensated. I further request you, together with the Government of India, to take speedy steps to withdraw the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 under which the security forces enjoy impunity and which has become a platform for many human rights violations. Lastly, I urge the Government of India to ratify the International Convention against Torture (CAT) and implement it into the domestic level without delay to ensure that such abuses do not continue either in Manipur or any other state in India.

Yours sincerely,

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Thank you.

Urgent Appeals Programme
Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)