

RAN #44: November 30, 2007

INDIA: Bangladeshi Writer Taslima Nasrin

BACKGROUND: Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin is in a government safe house in Delhi following violent protests by Muslim extremists in Kolkata, West Bengal. PEN welcomes efforts by Indian authorities to provide her protection, and urges them to ensure her safe passage to her home in Kolkata at the earliest opportunity.

According to reports, police in Kolkata used tear gas and baton charges to control crowds calling for her Indian visa to be cancelled. Rioters blocked roads and set cars alight, and at least 43 people were hurt. More than 100 arrests were made. The protests are believed to have been organised by the predominantly Muslim All-India Minority Forum, who say Nasrin has "seriously hurt Muslim sentiments" in her writings. In August she was attacked in the city of Hyderabad during a lecture, by Muslims upset by her remarks on the Prophet Muhammed and the Koran.

In 1993 Nasrin was publicly condemned to death in Bangladesh for 'blasphemy' and a reward offered for her execution by an armed militant Muslim group, because of her novel *Lajja (Shame)*. In 1994 Bangladesh authorities charged Nasrin with 'deliberate and malicious intention of hurting the religious sentiments' for an interview given to an Indian newspaper. Nasrin has lived abroad since 1994 and cannot return to Bangladesh without fear for her security. She has applied for Indian citizenship. Her current visa reportedly expires in March 2008.

APPEAL LETTER

Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee
Honorable Chief Minister of West Bengal
Writers Building
Kolkata
India
Fax: +033- 22145480

Dear Sir:

As a member of PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of International PEN, the worldwide writers' organization, I join with my colleagues to express serious concern for the safety of Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin, currently in a safe house in Delhi following recent protests in Kolkhata, West Bengal.

We welcome the efforts by the Indian authorities to provide for her protection and we urge you to ensure safe passage to Ms Nasrin and to enable her to return to her home in Kolkata at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely

[your signature, name and address]

Messages of support can also be sent to: taslima.nasrin@gmail.com

Please send copies of your appeal to the following:

Mr. R.L. Narayan, High Commissioner
High Commission of India
10 Springfield Road
Ottawa, Ontario
K1M 1C9
hc@hciottawa.ca

Mr. RRPN Sahi, Minister (Political and Consular)
High Commission of India
10 Springfield Road
Ottawa, Ontario
K1M 1C9
mpo1@hciottawa.ca

Please also send copies of your appeal to the following Canadian authorities:

Barbara Richardson
Canadian High Commissioner
7/8 Shantipath, Chanakyapuri
New Delhi 110 021, India
Facsimile: +91 (11) 4178-2020
E-mail: delhi@international.gc.ca

Sandra Rossiter
Senior Policy Officer, India
Foreign Affairs Canada
sandra.rossiter@international.gc.ca

Robert Sinclair
Deputy Director, Human Rights Division
Foreign Affairs Canada
Email: robert.sinclair@international.gc.ca