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**INDIA: TORTURE AND KILLINGS OF UNARMED CIVILIANS IN KASHMIR**

Amnesty International has expressed grave concern to the Indian government over renewed reports of indiscriminate killings of unarmed civilians by security forces in Kashmir.

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Since January, there have been repeated allegations of extrajudicial executions and other human rights abuses as the government moves to suppress an escalating independence campaign in Kashmir.

On 21 May, 47 people were reported killed by official sources when police shot at thousands of men and women who were mourning the death of Srinigar's Islamic leader, Maulvi Mohammed Farooq, who had been shot dead earlier that day. Unofficial reports say the number of deaths was higher, with at least 60 killed.

Government ministers said Kashmiri militants mingling in the crowd of mourners had opened fire first, and civilians were subsequently killed in the "cross-fire" between Central Reserve Police forces and armed Kashmiris. But survivors, journalists and other witnesses said security forces opened fire without warning or provocation and the shooting was indiscriminate. As on previous occasions in Kashmir when unarmed demonstrators have been shot by paramilitary personnel, doctors and journalists reported that most victims bore head, neck or chest wounds, suggesting the security forces were shooting to kill. A senior police officer has reportedly opened an investigation into the killings.

The incident is the latest in a series of indiscriminate killings of unarmed demonstrators which have occurred in Kashmir since January. Amnesty International acknowledges that the security forces' task of maintaining law and order in Kashmir is a difficult one, where several armed groups have resorted to violence. These groups have killed members of the security forces, government officials, and civilians alleged to be "informers". On 10 April, one such group killed three people it had taken as hostages. Amnesty International condemns the torture or killing of prisoners by anyone but says killings by armed groups can never justify security forces resorting to extrajudicial executions.

Thousands of people are reported to have been arbitrarily arrested and detained without charge or trial since January for suspected involvement in Kashmir's independence campaign or for the state to join Pakistan. In mid-May, the government said many of those arrested had been released shortly after arrest and that only 500 were still held. However, unofficial sources alleged that well over 1,000 detainees were still held. None are known to have been tried but the Governor of Kashmir, who resigned on 25 May, said those with specific charges against them would be brought to trial in Jammu. Some detainees have also reportedly been transferred to prisons outside Kashmir - relatives say they do not know where they are being held.

Many of those arrested are said to have been tortured, with some released detainees bearing marks of beatings and of burnings with cigarettes. One victim said he was suspended from a rotating ceiling fan. During house-to-house searches, paramilitary forces are alleged to have ill-treated suspects and raped women. An assistant commissioner for local administration claimed he was beaten in January by the Border Security Force when he inquired about shootings and killings by the security forces.

Amnesty International has not been able to visit Kashmir to investigate any of the recent human rights abuses allegations although it has asked for access to do so. But it says there is mounting evidence from independent sources supporting these allegations and has called on the Indian government to take urgent measures to prevent further abuses.

The organization has also appealed both to the state authorities in Kashmir and to the Indian government to ensure that security forces are given strict instructions to exercise restraint and avoid the use of unnecessary force.

Amnesty International has repeatedly made requests to visit India since the new government assumed office last November but in April, the government indicated it would not give the organization access to any part of the country.