

Torture Trials of Islamic Activists

THE trial of 44 Egyptian policemen charged with torturing Islamic activist prisoners which began in December last year has given strong indications that the activists were badly tortured by the security men.

In September last year Egypt's attorney general charged 41 officers and four non-commissioned officers with torturing prisoners while investigating an alleged coup attempt after the assassination of president Anwar Sadat on Oct 6, 1981.

If convicted the policemen may face prison terms of up to ten years.

The trial is seen as a test of Egyptian justice as it puts officers on trial on torture charges for the first time and admits that people have been tortured since president Mubarak took office in 1981.

The Egyptian interior minister Zaki Badr however says that prison torture has not existed since he took over last February 28.

The charges were first made during a trial which began in December 1982 of 299 members of a Muslim group called Jihad on charges they tried to

overthrow the government in the aftermath of the Sadat assassination. They were also charged in connection with riots in the southern town of Assiut in which 87 people were killed, 60 of them policemen.

After a two-year trial during which the defendants accused the police of torturing them a court sentenced 107 of them to prison terms up to life with hard labour. The rest were acquitted.

An investigation into the torture accusations began in December 1984. Last September attorney general Muhammad Abdul Aziz el-Gundi said 28 of the claims appeared to be correct on the basis of medical examination and witness accounts and 22 remained under investigation. The 45 policemen were charged in connection with the 28 cases.

Prosecution witness Youssef Saqr, a defence lawyer in the Jihad trial, told an international press agency that about 10 of the 28 torture victims remain in jail. He said that he would ask to appeal against the verdict of the Jihad trial. In sentencing the Jihad defendants in 1984 Judge

Abdul Ghaffar Ahmad said he found convincing evidence of police torture and called on authorities to prosecute.

Many however doubt a fair trial. They say that the government would never allow its policemen to be found guilty of unlawful activities as they acted not on their will but on the orders of their officers and high officials including senior ministers. The main obstacle which the government may encounter in getting policemen acquitted is the statement of the attorney general which gives conclusive evidence to the torture charges. But observers point out that on several occasions in the past the government has got away with such evidence.

If the accused officers are acquitted the Mubarak government might come under pressure from political quarters to change its judicial policy. But as the political freedom is not existing in the country it is least likely that the pressure from political parties may force the government to allow the judiciary to play an independent role.

Zionist Censorship

'PERDITION', a play by the English writer Jim Allen, was scheduled for production at the upstairs studio of the internationally renowned Royal Court Theatre in London. The subject of the play is the well corroborated allegations that the Zionists betrayed other Jews to the Nazis in Hungary during the Second World War.

After a full rehearsal period, and the day before the play was to open, the theatre cancelled the production. The Artist Director, Max Stafford-Clark, had already stated publicly that the quality of Allen's research had been 'very impressive'. The cancellation, therefore, had nothing to do with doubts about the play's veracity.

Immediately after the Royal Court had announced its intention to produce the play a storm of protest erupted from the British Jewish community. It was after the Jewish Board of Deputies had denounced the play that Max Stafford-Clark decided to cancel the production. Many see this as a failure of nerve on his part and yet another example of overt Zionist censorship.

Sri Lankan Muslim Council Demanded

MUSLIMS in Sri Lanka have been asking the Jayewardene government to set up a separate provincial council for them as part of the government's peace settlement with Tamil separatists. The government has reportedly agreed to look into the Muslim demand. Muslims say that the creation of such a council would help ensure ethnic peace in the eastern province of the country.

Muslims make seven per cent of Sri Lanka's 16 million population. Their population in the eastern province is over 33 per cent. Muslims say that they are entitled to one-third of the land mass of the eastern province on the basis of a 1981 census.

The demand has come at a time when the Jayewardene government has offered to set up elected provincial councils with limited regional autonomy if Tamil separatists end their

struggle for an independent Eelam state in the northern and eastern provinces of the country.

This however is not the only demand which the Muslim community has placed before the government. It has been asking the government to close down the special interest section which Israel was allowed to open up at the US embassy in 1985. Muslims say that the government is neglecting Muslim sentiments in developing cordial relations with Israel. Last year when the Israeli president visited Sri Lanka Muslims brought out huge demonstrations and protest rallies against government's attitude towards Israel.

Israel's secret service Mossad is said to be involved in providing logistics training to the Sri Lankan army to combat the Tamil separatists.

Brent Bias Against Islamic School

The Labour controlled Brent Council has rejected the application of Islamia Primary School seeking an extension to its existing educational activities. The decision taken by the Development Sub-committee in its January 7 meeting has angered the school trustees and the local Muslim community which number over 20,000.

In a statement the London based Islamic Circle Organisation has condemned the decision saying that the refusal contrasted sharply with recent instances whereby some Christian denominational schools in the Borough had their intake allowance almost doubled.

The Labour controlled council says that the refusal was mainly due to the effect of extension on neighbours and traffic. Its report given to the

Islamia Primary School says that the extension and addition of five more class rooms would result in noise, increased activity, loss of privacy, loss of outlook, obtrusive appearance, over intensive use of the site and an increase in the number of cars. But the school headmaster Dr Azam Beg says that these grounds are weak and do not stand up to honest scrutiny, especially considering that last September 19 primary schools in Brent had an increased intake.

The Islamic Circle Organisation also says that the Labour party while paying lip-service to the decision of the previously hung-council to support the school's bid to become the first voluntary aided school for Muslims in the UK is determined to hinder the school's

UAE Bid

Afghan Refugees

WORRIES of shrinking economy have motivated the UAE government to relax immigration controls in order to keep expatriates in the country. UAE has a population of 1.6 million and three quarters of that are expatriates. Among them are 400,000 Indians, 225,000 Pakistanis, 100,000 Iranians, 75,000 Bangladeshis, 55,000 Filipinos, 45,000 Europeans and 25,000 Sri Lankans.

The move has come as thousands of workers who came to the country during the 1970s oil boom have started leaving on the receding tide of economic activity.

Under the new relaxations workers earning under 900 dollars a month can now bring their families. Previously workers at the lower end of the pay scale were not allowed to bring their wives and children. The government has also allowed workers to bring in other relatives for helping them in household work.

The new relaxations have come under criticism from many natives who say that the presence of foreign culture in their country has been posing a serious threat to their traditions. ■

ALTHOUGH the Najibullah regime in Kabul has announced a cease fire from January the exodus of Afghans from their country is nowhere in sight. During the last four months around 150,000 Afghans are believed to have crossed over to Pakistan and Iran. This is confirmed by the Iranian interior minister Hojjatollah Ali Akbar Mohtashami who recently said that the number of Afghan refugees in Iran has increased since the coming of Najibullah in Kabul.

Mohtashami attributed the increase to rising brutal bombing of Afghan villages. The minister also said that the Najib regime has sent many spies to influence the Iranian views on the Jihad. Iran recently arrested a large number of Afghan spies with the help of Mujahedeen. The number of Afghan refugees in Iran is said to be over 2 million. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) shoulders only about 1.5 per cent of the total expenditure for Afghan refugees in Iran.

Pakistan has also made a similar complaint. Pakistani officials say that during the past few months it has uncov-



red a series of plots of Afghan spies directed against the people of Pakistan and refugees. Pakistan also says that the UNHCR assistance in meeting the expenditure of refugees is far less than the expectations.

Meanwhile in Iran the number of Iraqi refugees has also increased. They are estimated to be about 500,000. During the past five months over 4000 Iraqis, 10 per cent of whom are college graduates, have sought

asylum in Iran. The Iraqi refugees are lodged in 18 border and quarantine camps throughout the country. Unlike elsewhere they are allowed to participate in national economic life as they are free to work without any restrictions. Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran feel that their presence should not overburden their host countries. They have been asking for a fair deal from the UNHCR.



progress and that this determination does not even stop at unduly influencing the council's full-time officers, as their inaccurate and padded-out report suggest.

The Islamia School Trust chairman Yusuf Islam who founded the school in 1982, will now appeal to the Department of the Environment to over-turn the Brent council's

decision.

The Brent council handed over its objections to the Islamia Primary School only two days before the meeting, not giving enough time to prepare the reply. Moreover the objections contained in the council report when compared with the extension application suggest that the council subcommittee misinformed its mem-

bers on the subject.

The council report said that the "addition of 200 more children to the school will generate an enormous amount of additional traffic in the area in which there is already a very bad traffic problem". The school application in fact had asked for an intake of only 65 students. The school has at present 85 students with over 500 on waiting list.

The council report also said that the school was almost exclusively in a residential area ignoring the fact that there are five schools within a quarter-mile radius of the Islamia Primary.

The council report said that a great majority of the residents of the area objected to the school's extension. The fact is that over 95 per cent of the residents have no objection to the school.

The Islamia Primary School Trust says that the council report was unfair in suggesting a refusal, which is likely to effect

the application pending with the Education Secretary.

The application seeking a voluntary aided status for the school was placed before the Department of Education following the then Conservative controlled Brent council's decision to approve the school.

The Conservative party members have however assured them that they would continue to back the demand of the Islamia Primary School to seek a denominational status.

It would also appear that there is more to the refusal of planning permission than meets the eye. It may well be that there is some horse-trading between the Department of Education and the Brent council over the issue. Whatever the case may be, the refusal is one more piece of evidence that perhaps, as the relevant authorities are hoping, patrons will run out of funds and be forced to close the school! (See: Inquiry January 1987 I.P.S. Brent Delays it Again). ■