

# Amid Terrorism Fears, Activists See More Repression

By Suvendrini Kakuchi

Despite Japan's vaunted social harmony, the rise in global terrorism is fast slamming the door shut on grassroots activism in the country, say human rights groups.

A recent case, criticised by Amnesty International Japan, involves the arrest and continued detention of three activists on 27 February for distributing pamphlets opposing the dispatch to Iraq of troops from Japan's Self-Defence Forces (SDF), the closest thing the country has to an armed forces.

The activists—two men and a woman—were arrested on charges of “trespassing” under Article 130 of the Japanese Criminal Code. But human rights experts say the police action against activists who merely distributed anti-war pamphlets is a disturbing sign of the increasing repression of activism in Japan.

“There is nothing wrong in distributing pamphlets, even if the aim was an anti-SDF deployment protest. The arrests are a clear case of the violation of the freedom of speech and comes during a time when security issues are high in the country,” says Makoto

Teranaka of Amnesty International Japan.

The arrested members belong to the Tachikawa Tent Village, a group that protested for more than three decades against a former U.S. base in a suburb west of Tokyo.

Tamaki Kino, spokesperson for the group, says the arrests came a month after the members left anti-Iraq war pamphlets in mailboxes belonging to the families of SDF personnel. “We were stunned when the police swooped down on our homes a month after we put the pamphlets into mailboxes. They searched our houses on the basis of complaints against us. But there are so many vendors who routinely do what we did,” she says.

The group's pamphlets called on SDF families to think more carefully about the deployment to Iraq.

“The pamphlets were geared to generate debate on the SDF among family members. After all, getting the SDF to rethink their deployment is important for a large number of people who oppose Japan's decision to send troops to Iraq,” says Kino.

A major bone of contention for activists is the unusually long period in detention and daily interroga-

tion meted out to the prisoners. Says Teranaka, “The harassment sends a chilling message to activists because they are up against a police system that has a poor human rights record (on issues) such as access to lawyers during interrogation.”

Public opinion polls show that almost-half of the Japanese public opposed the move by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to send the SDF to Iraq in January, marking the first post-World War II SDF dispatch to a military zone.

Some 1,000 SDF troops are expected to be sent to Iraq, and several hundreds are already there, the last batch having left the country in late January 2004. The dispatch of troops was traumatic for Japanese, who turned their back on military activities after their country's defeat at the end of World War II. The post-war Constitution was designed to prevent Japan from having a military that can have expansionist capabilities, after its occupation of neighbouring countries in the 1930s and 1940s.

But one year after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, that hard-earned pacifism is on a risky path.

Activists point to the consequences of sending the SDF to Iraq—Japan, as

a U.S. ally, now faces bomb threats from terrorist groups against the Iraq war and increasing security measures have begun to target peace activism pre-emptively.

Professor Manabu Ishizuka, who teaches constitutional law at Asia University, says the arrest is one of several incidents in which anti-government protests are not viewed as political rights but as subversive and criminal.

“The rising risk from terrorism is masking the real issue, which is that the government is responsible for terrorism threats because the decision to send SDF to Iraq was not supported by the majority of the public,” he says.

A similar incident was recorded on 3 March, when the public security section of the Metropolitan Police Department arrested a local government employee for distributing anti-war pamphlets of the Communist Party.

The media reported the case, which occurred in November, as an extremely rare one—the last arrest of a public servant for violating a law that prohibits them from engaging in politics even

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# Job Equality Elusive for Women

Although women are entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers, they still face higher unemployment rates, lower wages and barriers to entering high-level positions. According to "Global Employment Trends for Women 2004," an analysis of female employment, about 200 million women joined the work force in the past decade. However, equal pay, balanced benefits and true socio-economic empowerment for women have not been achieved.

The gap between the number of employed men and women has been decreasing across the globe, but at widely different rates. For example, only 40 women per 100 men are economically active in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. Women also make up a greater percentage of the working poor. Sixty percent of people earning less than one dollar a day are women. "Creating enough decent jobs for women is only possible if policy-makers place employment at the centre of social and economic policies, and recognize that women face more substantial challenges in the work place than men," said International Labour Organisation (ILO) Director General Juan Somavia. "Raising incomes and opportunities for women lifts whole families out of poverty and drives economic and social progress."

The second report, "Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management—Update 2004," reports that the number of women holding managerial positions increased by just 0.7 percent between 1996 and 1999, and between 2000 and 2002, while women's share of managerial positions in 60 countries studied ranged from 20 to 42 percent. Women tend to hold more professional jobs in North America, South America and Eastern Europe than in East Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. But regardless of region, it was universally more difficult for women to rise to the top. The report highlights one exception: a large percentage of women hold high-level jobs in legal systems in some countries, particularly in Eastern Europe.

Source: UN Wire, 5 March 2004, <[http://www.unwire.org/News/328\\_426\\_13758.asp](http://www.unwire.org/News/328_426_13758.asp)>

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after work hours, on the basis of observing neutrality, was 21 years ago.

Yet another case that stirred Japan was the resignation in April last year of a former ambassador, Naoki Amaki, who publicly opposed Japan's sending SDF troops to Iraq.

In his immensely popular book *So Long, Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, released in October 2003, Amaki accuses the government of virtually firing him because he expressed an opinion against government policy.

Ishizuka suggests that terrorism is leading to a dangerous situation for political and human rights activism as the government beefs up its call not to show "weakness against terrorism."

He worries about the support this tension could bring to proposals by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to change Japan's Constitution, which prohibits military involvement overseas. Of particular focus is Article 9, under which the country renounces war.

Constitutional reform is planned for 2007. The conservative LDP is calling for new laws to legalise the dispatch of the SDF to support the US war on terrorism in the future.

"In the face of a terrorist attack, people would be more inclined to support a militarily active Japan. This would be disastrous for activists who face the danger of being arrested for simply demanding their rights," he says.

Source: Inter Press Service, <<http://www.ipsnews.net>>, 2 April 2004

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"We explain to young people how to use contraceptives, how to avoid getting pregnant unnecessarily and how to manage family planning," said Gulnara Kadyrova, a project coordinator for UNFPA.

The National Red Crescent Society of Kyrgyzstan is also contributing to efforts to deal with the issue. "We recently opened an anonymous counselling centre where we will provide help for girls with abortion problems," said Natalya Bibikova, the Red Crescent Society's Bishkek coordinator.

Source: <[http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=40421&SelectRegion=Central\\_Asia&SelectCountry=KYRGYZSTAN](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=40421&SelectRegion=Central_Asia&SelectCountry=KYRGYZSTAN)>, 5 April 2004