

## **Spotlight thrown on policing in South Asia**

### **South Asians share experiences of policing and plan for reform**

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Fifty delegates from around South Asia will come together in New Delhi, India, over the next two days to share experiences of policing in South Asia and plan for police reform and accountability in the region, at a roundtable facilitated by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI). Delegates hail from Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and from across police organisations, government, human rights institutions, media and civil society. The roundtable is the first time that the key players in policing from across South Asia will have the opportunity meet and discuss and debate the challenges, commonalities and future of policing in a South Asian context.

The roundtable will be opened by Mr Shivraj Patil, the Hon. Minister for Home Affairs in India. Mr Patil is expected to emphasise the critical importance of police reform in South Asia and to share his vision for the future of policing in India.

“This roundtable – the first opportunity for South Asians to sit together and talk about policing – is absolutely key to getting a conversation going on police reform and accountability in the region,” said Ms Daruwala, Director of CHRI, “Each of the countries of Commonwealth South Asia share similar policing backgrounds, and face similar challenges. Talking through these challenges within the context of each different country’s particular situation and looking for ways to support one another and the reform movement in South Asia is a big step towards giving the people of South Asia the police that they want and the police that they need and deserve.”

The roundtable begins today by looking at the state of policing in each of the countries of Commonwealth South Asia. Today’s speakers include Mr N.B.K. Tripura, Additional Inspector General of the Bangladesh Police, Mr Prakash Singh, a retired police officer from India, Ms Aminath Najeeb, editor of the Minivan Daily in the Maldives, Mr Mukhtar Ahmad Ali, Executive Director of the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives in Pakistan and Basil Fernando, the Director of the Asia Human Rights Commission, who will look at the situation in Bangladesh.

Ms Daruwala celebrated the opportunities for a new united and informed push towards reform that the roundtable had given the people of South Asia this morning. “The people of South Asia have suffered for too long under brutal, regime style policing. The time has come for real change and a move toward reform – and we can see governments and police starting to take steps towards that change. In Bangladesh the government is embarking on a wholesale overhaul of the police laws and infrastructure. In India a drafting committee has put together a new Police Act, while the Supreme Court has required governments to implement accountability. In the Maldives, new laws are on their way, along with independent oversight mechanisms to ensure police accountability. In both Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the governments are working towards transforming the police – and in Pakistan, this process is taking place across the criminal justice sector.”

“We have the impetus for reform, we have the desire for reform, and we have the means for reform,” finished Ms Daruwala, “Now what we need is demonstrations of serious political will to come from government and police leadership.”

For more information, contact Swati Mehta ([swati@humanrightsinitiative.org](mailto:swati@humanrightsinitiative.org)) or visit the CHRI website at [www.humanrightsinitiative.org](http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org).

*The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-partisan, international NGO working for the practical realisation of human rights in the countries of the Commonwealth.*