

EXTERNAL

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Fear for safety

23 November 1995

PAKISTAN

Masood Alam KHAN, aged 35
Waheed Shariff KHAN, aged 25
Tanvir Shariff KHAN, aged 16

There are serious fears for the safety of three brothers arrested in recent days by the paramilitary Rangers in Karachi. Family members have not been able to establish their whereabouts and fear that the three could be tortured or killed in custody. The three men belonged to the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) till about 1991 but are not now members of any political party.

Following attacks several days ago on a police station in Gulshan-e-Iqbal area of Karachi, police and the Rangers searched the area and detained an unknown number of people. On 20 November, Rangers searched the home of the three brothers; they made all the men line up outside and shone lights in their faces one by one. They then selected Masood Alam Khan and took him away without an arrest warrant.

On 22 November, the Rangers searched the house again, this time also without a search warrant. A relative who happened to phone the family at the time, heard the Rangers beat them and question them where they were hiding the Kalashnikov. When the men denied having any arms, the Rangers took Waheed Shariff Khan and his younger brother Tanvir Shariff away with them.

The father of the three brothers has since contacted local police stations and the Rangers headquarters but all the officials have denied holding the men.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Over the last months, Amnesty International has received numerous reports of law enforcement personnel in Karachi arresting people whom the authorities describe as "terrorists" without fulfilling legal requirements of arrest and detention. Detainees are frequently blindfolded, subjected to beating, kicking and sometimes electric shocks. Most are released within a few days but several people are reported to have died in custody of police and Rangers in recent months, allegedly as a result of torture. The authorities have sought to disguise some of these deaths as due to "encounters" with police. Some of those "disappeared" are believed to be held in unacknowledged custody.

The current spate of arrests, torture and killings in Karachi occur in the context of an ongoing struggle between two factions of the MQM and the government. So far some 1,600 people have died this year in Karachi, with up to ten killings reported every day.

While law enforcement personnel appear to be responsible for some of these human rights violations, there is strong evidence that armed opposition groups have also perpetrated torture, hostage-taking and killings.

Situations of armed conflict sometimes tempt governments to adopt harsh measures to restore law and order; however, such situations may never be used as an excuse for governments to commit human rights violations. Amnesty International has repeatedly appealed to the Government of Pakistan to ensure that every reported case of human rights violations is investigated and the perpetrators are brought to justice. At the same time Amnesty

International has called on armed political groups to abide by minimum standards of humanitarian law.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of the three brothers, detained on 20 and 22 November 1995 in Karachi and believed to be in the custody of the Rangers;
- calling on the authorities to urgently establish the whereabouts of the three brothers;
- calling for their release if no criminal charges are to be brought against them;
- seeking assurances that they are not being subjected to torture while in detention.

APPEALS TO

1. President Farooq Ahmad Leghari
Office of the President
Islamabad

Telexes: 54058 PSPUB PK

Telegrams: President Leghari, Islamabad, Pakistan

Salutation: Dear President

2. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto
Office of the Prime Minister
Islamabad, Pakistan

Telexes: 5742 PMH PK

Telegrams: Prime Minister Bhutto, Islamabad, Pakistan

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Pakistan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 January 1996.