

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WEB FEATURE

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Bailed Pakistani activists at risk of re-arrest

The pattern of arrest and persecution of human rights activists, lawyers and the political party workers continues in Pakistan.

Of the 54 human rights activists who were released on bail in Lahore on 6 November, 40 are at risk of re-arrest. New arrest warrants have been issued and one activist was arrested yesterday (Monday).

Police raided the houses of two others to arrest them, but they were not there. Five other human rights activists have not been released from Adial jail in Islamabad, despite having obtained bail orders.

Two senior lawyers were arrested in Karachi this morning. Both are former presidents of Sindh High Court Bar Association and one is Deputy Secretary General of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers.

In a related development, the Government is in process of amending the Legal and Bar Practitioners Act to remove the power of Bar Councils to issue or suspend the licences of lawyers and assume this power itself.

The government continues to attempt to fill the Supreme Court with hand-picked judges. Twelve Supreme Court judges were removed from their positions after the imposition of emergency rule and some placed under undeclared house arrest. Two retired High Court judges were inducted to the Supreme Court this morning following the Attorney General's announcement yesterday that Supreme Court strength will be reduced from 17 to 12 judges.

Opposition party leader Benazir Bhutto has been placed under house arrest for a further seven days to prevent her leading a march of her party's workers. Ms. Bhutto was detained late last night in Lahore. She was due to lead a long march of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) workers to Islamabad this morning. No-one received the detention order, but police pasted it on the gate and declared it to be in operation.

The house has been surrounded by hundreds of armed policemen, the area has been cordoned off with barbed wire. Hundreds of PPP party workers have been arrested -- Ms. Bhutto has claimed that, since the imposition of emergency, 7,500 of her party workers have been arrested. It is now possible that she might be forcibly removed from Lahore to Karachi or elsewhere.

Her detention order was issued under section 3 of the Maintenance of Public Order law, which empowers the government to detain or arrest a person to prevent them from acting in a manner prejudicial to public safety or the maintenance of public order.

The foreign ministers of Commonwealth nations, meeting in London on Monday, have given General Musharraf a deadline of 22 November to lift the emergency or Pakistan's membership will be suspended. Pakistan was suspended from Commonwealth in 1999 when General

Musharraf took power. The country's membership was restored in 2004 after he promised to leave the post of army chief. The US government has also called for the emergency to be lifted.

An army spokesperson has stated that a major military offensive against militants in the Swat Valley area of Pakistan could begin at anytime. The Army is reported to have taken command over paramilitary forces stationed in the region.

A Petition challenging imposition of the emergency, received by the Supreme Court yesterday, is due to be heard on 15 November.