

PAKISTAN Najam Sethi (m), journalist

Journalist Najam Sethi was arbitrarily arrested and severely beaten by police on 8 May 1999. He has not been charged with any offence, and is held solely of the exercise of his right to freedom of expression. His current whereabouts are unknown, and Amnesty International fears that he may be tortured in detention and that his life is in danger.

Najam Sethi, editor of the national newspaper the *Friday Times*, was arrested at 2.30am at his home in Lahore. His wife, Jugnoo Mohsin, herself a journalist and the publisher of the *Friday Times*, described how about 20 plainclothes and two uniformed police officers broke into the house: "They beat up our security guards, came into the bedroom and dragged Sethi off without letting him put on his glasses or shoes... When I asked them to show me the warrant of arrest and permission to enter private property, one of the intruders said, 'you can have his dead body instead of a warrant'." The men beat Sethi heavily about the head, neck and shoulders, using batons and handcuffs. Before they left, they tied up Jugnoo Mohsin and locked her in a dressing room.

Government officials, including the Information Minister, have stated that Sethi's arrest is connected with a speech he gave to the India-Pakistan Friendship Society in New Delhi on problems facing Pakistan. Jugnoo Mohsin disputes this, saying that Sethi was applauded when he gave the same speech to army staff at the National Defence College in late 1998. (The speech, *Pakistan on the Eve of the new Millennium*, was reprinted in the *Friday Times* and can be read on their website, www.thefridaytimes.com)

Jugnoo Mohsin and other journalists in Pakistan believe that Sethi's arrest is connected to his journalistic contact with a BBC team investigating corruption in Pakistan. Several other journalists who have been in contact with the BBC have also been targeted. They include Hussain Haqqani, who writes for the *Friday Times* and another national newspaper, *Jang*, detained since 4 May for alleged "financial irregularities"; M.A.K. Lodhi, investigations bureau chief of the national paper *The News*, who spent two days in unacknowledged detention without charge, accused by police of "destabilizing the country"; Ejaz Haider of the *Friday Times* who received threatening phone calls; and Imtiaz Alam, whose car was set on fire. A magistrate who saw Hussain Haqqani after he had spent several days in unacknowledged detention reportedly noted that he could hardly walk. His lawyer reported that Haqqani had been severely tortured.

Jugnoo Mohsin filed three petitions in the Lahore High Court:

- a habeas corpus petition to produce Sethi before the court;
- a writ petition to have him given a medical examination;
- a petition requesting that the police record a complaint regarding Sethi's unlawful arrest and abduction.

On 10 May the Lahore High Court asked the Punjab state to respond but did not insist on the production of Sethi in court; that day, the Deputy Attorney General said that Sethi was not in the custody of the Federal Investigation Agency.

In a further hearing on 12 May, the High Court dismissed all three petitions on the grounds that Sethi was under investigation for anti-state activities, in the custody of military intelligence, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI),

over which the High court had no jurisdiction. It reportedly admitted that no charges had been brought against him. However, the acting director general of the Inter-Services Public Relations department told *The News* on 12 May that the ISI had nothing to do with Sethi's arrest and that he was not being tried by a court-martial.

A petition was subsequently filed in the Supreme Court, reportedly asking for Sethi to be produced in court and for his defence to be informed of the grounds for his continued detention. A bench of three Supreme Court judges are reportedly due to hear this petition on 17 May.

Amnesty International is concerned that Najam Sethi was arrested and is detained solely on account of his legitimate journalistic activities, and that a range of legal safeguards have been violated: he has not been charged with any offence, has not been brought before a magistrate within 24 hours of arrest, has not been allowed access to his family and lawyer, his whereabouts have not been revealed, and he has been severely beaten.

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

- urging the immediate and unconditional release of Najam Sethi;
- urging the authorities to ensure that Najam Sethi is not tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- urging that a judicial inquiry be set up to investigate the wide-ranging violations of Najam Sethi's rights during his arrest and detention with a view to bringing the perpetrators to justice;
- ensuring that no other journalists are unlawfully arrested, detained, harassed or threatened for the exercise of their professional duties and their right to freedom of expression.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif
Office of the Prime Minister, Islamabad, Pakistan
Telegrams: Prime Minister, Islamabad, Pakistan
Faxes: 92-51-9208890
e-mail: primeminister@pak.gov.pk
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Interior Minister Chaudhary Shujat Hussain
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Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister for Information Mushahid Hussain
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Salutation: Dear 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 25 June 1999.