

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WEB FEATURE

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New arrests of journalists overshadow Pakistan releases



Caption: Police officer chases and beats a local journalist outside the Karachi Press Club

Pakistan is continuing to arrest journalists and others across the country, contrasting with government announcements that thousands of protesters have been released from the country's jails.

While the world's media highlighted the reports that 3,400 people are to be set free after the recent clampdown on peaceful anti-government protests, police in Karachi today (Tuesday) baton-charged and arrested over 100 protesting journalists. These arrests undermine General Musharaff's claims that media freedoms are being restored.

Police arrested the journalists as they protested against a ban on Geo TV and other media restrictions. After protesting outside the Karachi Press Club, the journalists proceeded to the Office of the Governor of Sindh Province in an attempt to meet with officials. Police halted the march and baton-charged the group. Those arrested include more than five women journalists.

Early reports suggest that these detainees are being released, but they and other journalists across Pakistan remain at risk of further intimidation, detention and possible ill-treatment. Since the imposition of emergency law on 3 November, a pattern has emerged of a "revolving door" of arrests and releases of those attempting to peacefully protest against emergency rule.

Pakistan's free media was one first groups impacted by the imposition of emergency rule on 3 November. All independent TV channels, including international channels

transmitted by cable, were blocked hours before the emergency came into force. Whilst restrictions on international news channels have been lifted, independent channels transmitting from Pakistan remain blocked.

In addition, existing laws regulating the media were amended to tighten restrictions on freedom of speech, with breaches attracting prison sentences and heavy fines.

Further harassment and arrests of journalists remain likely. On 17 November, the editor of the Islamabad Urdu-language daily newspaper Tulu was arrested by the plainclothes police from his office. During his detention he was blindfolded, taken to an unidentified location and questioned about his writings. He was informed that he had been arrested on the orders of senior government officials. He was released on 19 November.

Read more:

Women protesters face police batons (News, 14 November 2007)