

0001 hrs gmt Wednesday 3 June 1992

PAKISTAN-
@GOVERNMENT OPPONENTS FACE HARASSMENT
THROUGH ARRESTS, DETENTIONS AND TORTURE

The Pakistani government is "relentlessly harassing" its opponents in Sindh province - where the main opposition party is based - through mass police round ups, series of detentions, and widespread torture including rape, Amnesty International said today.

The human rights organization said it had collected 600 names of members of opposition parties arrested since the dismissal of Benazir Bhutto's government nearly two years ago - although the total number of arrests is believed to be in the thousands. As far as Amnesty International is aware, none of the 600 has been convicted of any offence, and in fact many have been repeatedly acquitted.

"The first wave of arrests took place just weeks after the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government was dismissed - and the leaders and rank and file members of opposition parties have been targeted for arrest ever since," Amnesty International said.

The most recent mass arrests took place in late May, with some 1,000 PPP members reportedly picked up before a rally to protest alleged vote rigging.

Amnesty International said PPP and other opposition party members have been arrested, and sometimes even abducted, in the run up to elections, apparently to stop them from campaigning.

Thousands of others have been picked up in the wake of violent events which the government has blamed on the PPP without apparently carrying out any investigation. After the murder of a judge in June 1991, several hundred PPP members were arrested, with another 2,500 people reportedly picked up the following week in a sweeping search for the murderers. Most were released shortly afterwards.

Many prisoners have been held in secret detention, in some cases shuffled from one police station to another to make it difficult for their families to find them. Manzoor Hussain Wassan, a former provincial PPP government minister, was arrested by plain clothes officers and then moved nine times to different police stations in about as many days.

The organization said that the pattern of arrests has changed over the last 20 months, but the end result is still mass arrests and lengthy detentions. While political opponents used to be detained under administrative detention orders they are now often repeatedly arrested on criminal charges. When one set of charges cannot be substantiated by the police, new charges have frequently been laid.

"Leading opponents are often slapped with new charges as soon as they have been released - their string of detentions sometimes add up to months at a time," Amnesty International said.

In one case, PPP activist Imdad Obhaya was re-arrested at least four times in a row, each time as he was just ready to leave the police station where he had been held. His detention on a series of charges - none of which ever stood up - totalled more than six months.

Torture of political detainees is also commonly used to try to make them confess to "terrorism". Many prisoners have said they were suspended from the ceiling by their wrists or ankles, whipped or beaten until they bled, given electric shocks and deprived of food or sleep. In some cases prisoners have died after being tortured.

There are also many reports that women political prisoners have been raped in police custody. In one case reported to Amnesty International, a woman said she was beaten, abused and brutally raped by police after leaving her husband's court hearing. Few cases of custodial rape are ever brought to trial, however, because the courts require women to be medically examined by a police doctor, something they are reluctant to do for fear of further ill-treatment.

Amnesty International has also received reports of possible extrajudicial executions of political opponents, including the deliberate killing in 1990 of a supporter of a PPP candidate by a member of the security forces.

EMBARGOED FOR 0001 HRS GMT WEDNESDAY 3 JUNE 1992