

PAKISTAN

@Unlawful detention and torture of journalists

Introduction

Two journalists, Mohammad Ishaq Tunio of the English daily, *The Nation* and Shafi Bejoro of the Sindhi daily, *Aftab*, were reportedly detained and tortured on 28 April 1992 by police officers and armed officials of the ruling alliance¹ as they were covering a by-election in Sanghar district in Sindh province. Their detention and torture are believed to have been occasioned by their plan to report an incident of vote-rigging which Mohammad Ishaq Tunio had photographed. The photographs reportedly showed the Assistant Presiding Officer stamping ballot papers in favour of the ruling alliance candidate Jam Ashiq Ali.

Mohammad Ishaq Tunio and Shafi Bejoro were reportedly kicked and beaten with rifle butts for several hours. The police and armed officials of the ruling alliance demanded that Tunio should hand over photographs of the alleged vote-rigging incident. Tunio told them that he had already sent the film to Karachi but the torture of the two journalists continued.

Two other journalists, Dastagir Bhatti of the English daily *The Muslim* and Khalid Khaskheli of the Sindhi daily *Kawish*, who also covered the Sanghar by-election on 28 April, were reportedly beaten and ill-treated by the same police officers and armed officials of the ruling alliance.

Amnesty International is urging the Government of Pakistan and the Provincial Administration in Sindh to institute a full and impartial investigation into the unlawful detention and torture of Mohammad Ishaq Tunio and Shafi Bejoro, and into the ill-treatment and beating of Dastagir Bhatti and Khalid Khaskheli, by the police and armed officials of the ruling party alliance in Tandu Adam in Sanghar district in Sindh. The terms and scope of this investigation should be made public at the earliest opportunity and the police and other officials alleged to have been responsible for the incident should be brought to justice without delay.

Details of the incident

¹ The ruling alliance in Sindh at the time of this by-election was a coalition of the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) which includes Islamic and right wing parties as well as the *Mohajir Qaumi Movement*.

According to reports from independent sources, journalists assigned to cover a by-election in Sanghar constituency (identified as PS-67) received reports of alleged vote rigging in favour of the ruling alliance candidate, Jam Ashiq Ali². They also received reports of ill-treatment by the police of the opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP) polling agents as well as large-scale arrest of PPP supporters. The journalists mentioned above including Mohammad Ishaq Tunio, who had been issued with a Polling Station Entry Pass by the Election Commission of Pakistan to cover the by-election, undertook to investigate these allegations.

Three of the journalists, Mohammad Ishaq Tunio Shafi Bejoro and Khalid Khaskheli, arrived at Sachidno Waryah polling station (about 10 Kilometres from Tandu Adam in Sindh) on 28 April in the morning and witnessed an incident of vote rigging. In a testimony received by Amnesty International Mohammad Ishaq Tunio has stated:

".. we saw that assistant presiding officer (male booth) was stamping the ballot papers in favour of Jam Ashiq Ali and ... about 85 ballot papers were not put in the ballot boxes. I noted the serial number of the book and took three photographs of the stamped ballots."

He then went with the other two journalists to meet a former Member of Provincial Assembly and the leader of the Women's Wing of the PPP, (Mrs) Munira Shakir to receive the account of her reported ill-treatment by the police and the officials of the ruling alliance.

At about 1 pm on 28 April, four journalists, Mohammad Ishaq Tunio, Shafi Bejoro, Dastagir Bhatti and Khalid Khaskheli were on their way in a car to the office of the Election Commissioner. Their car was suddenly stopped by a Toyota Jeep bearing a GS (Government of Sindh) number plate. Eight persons reportedly jumped out of the jeep and dragged the four journalists out of their car beating them with rifle butts. Two of the attackers were reportedly in police uniform and all of them were armed with semi-automatic weapons. Two of the armed men in civilian clothes were identified by the journalists as Fazli Chakrani a ruling party politician and his brother, a polling agent for the ruling alliance.

The attackers pushed Mohammad Ishaq Tunio and Shafi Bejoro into the jeep threatening to kill them and drop their bodies in a nearby canal. The other two journalists managed to leave the scene. Mohammad Ishaq Tunio and Shafi Bejoro were continuously beaten as they were being driven in the jeep.

² Sanghar is the constituency of the former Chief Minister of Sindh, Jam Sadiq Ali who died in May 1992. During his tenure, Amnesty International received continuous reports of arrest, imprisonment and torture of government opponents in Sindh. After Jam Sadiq Ali's death, his son, Jam Ashiq Ali, was nominated as the IDA candidate for Sanghar constituency. Jam Ashiq Ali won this by-election with a large majority amid reports in the Pakistani press of alleged vote-rigging.

"They were continuously beating us with rifle butts asking about the photographs. They snatched camera, rupees 5,000 cash (sic), identity cards of our organizations and were continuously threatening to kill us."

According to reports, the two journalists were then taken to Jam Tamachi Rest House In Tandu Adam for further interrogation and torture. There they were reportedly dragged out of the jeep and were beaten severely.

"Two of those who tortured us were in green uniform, holding semi-automatic rifles. All of them were continuously kicking us or beating us with rifle butts and sticks. .. I was thrown in a dirty ditch."

Their torture reportedly stopped at about 2 pm when two influential local politicians, Samar Ali Shah and Ghazi Salahuddin, who had come to know of the incident, intervened. Those involved in the torture and detention of the journalists left and other police officers took their place. The journalists were then allowed to use the bathroom and the shower in the rest house.

At about 4 pm, Sanghar's District Magistrate Imdad Raza and Sanghar's Superintendent of Police Mazoor Mughal arrived to inquire about the incident. The two journalists complained to them about the police involvement in their torture. The two officials apologised for the incident and ensured that the journalists's personal belongings which had been taken away by the attacking party would be returned to them. The two officials, however, "advised" the journalists not to file an FIR³ nor to publish the incriminating photographs.

The journalists, fearing for their own safety, refrained from filing an FIR in Tandu Adam, but when they reached Karachi they sent a telegram to the Chief Justice of the Sindh High Court and to Sindh's Inspector General of Police, reporting the incident and requesting that an FIR be filed with the police and that a criminal investigation into the incident be ordered. However, several visits by the journalists to the police headquarters in Karachi indicated that no FIR had yet been filed.

On 13 May, the Karachi Union of Journalists sent a 4-member delegation to meet with Mahmood Haroon, the Governor of Sindh. The governor promised to "take action", but so far none of those responsible for the unlawful detention and torture of these journalists have been brought to justice.

³ First Information Report filed by the aggrieved person at a police station.

Reports of the incident, including the photographs of the alleged vote-rigging have been published in a number of Pakistani newspapers. Reports of vote-rigging at Sanghar by-election are consistent with the findings of the non-governmental Human Rights Commission of Pakistan whose investigating team reported on 20 May that there had been several irregularities in the Sanghar by-election including unlawful detention and ill-treatment of several opposition officials by armed officials of the ruling alliance in connivance with the police.

Amnesty International is urging the Government of Pakistan to institute a full and impartial investigation into the unlawful detention and torture of Mohammad Ishaq Tunio and Shafi Bejoro, and into ill-treatment and beating of Dastagir Bhatti and Khalid Khaskheli by the police and armed officials of the ruling party alliance in Tandul Adam in Sindh, and to bring to justice without delay the police and officials of the ruling alliance responsible for the incident.

Human rights violations in Sindh

Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of mass police arrests, series of detentions, and widespread torture of members of the PPP opposition party and other government critics in Sindh. Since the dismissal of Benazir Bhutto's government nearly two years ago, members of the PPP and other opposition parties have been arrested, and sometimes even abducted, in the run up to elections, apparently to stop them from campaigning. Journalists have reportedly been intimidated and warned not to report allegations of vote-rigging while government forces have reportedly continued to harass political opponents.

In a report published in June 1992⁴, Amnesty International cited dozens of incidents of arrests of opposition leaders during and after elections and repeated arrests of opposition party members, torture of political detainees, harassment of family members and associates of political detainees and possible extrajudicial executions including during elections. It urged the Government of Pakistan to immediately release all prisoners of conscience and to take specific steps to prevent torture and other human rights violations of concern to Amnesty International. On 1 June the government began to deploy the army in the province of Sindh, describing this as a move to restore law and order. There were fears of a new wave of human rights violations targeted at members of the opposition in Sindh.

⁴ Please see *Pakistan: Arrest of political opponents in Sindh province, August 1990 - early 1992* (AI Index: ASA 33/03/92).

Torture marks were visible on Mohammad Ishaq Tunio's body after he had been beaten by the police and armed officials of the ruling alliance in Sindh who warned him not to report an incident of alleged vote-rigging in favour of the ruling alliance candidate.

APPENDIX TO name of the document**Index names and phrases**

page numbers to be added after approval of the text

Benazir Bhutto's government
Dastagir Bhatti
District Magistrate Imdad Raza
First Information Report (FIR)
Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
in connivance with the police
Jam Sadiq Ali
Jam Ashiq Ali
Karachi Union of Journalists
Khalid Khaskheli
Mahmood Haroon, the Governor of Sindh
Mohammad Ishaq Tunio
Munira Shakir
Pakistan People's Party
ruling alliance
Sanghar district in Sindh
Shafi Bejoro
Superintendent of Police Mazoor Mughal
Tandu Adam in Sanghar district
vote-rigging
Women's Wing of the PPP