

# Pakistan

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	PAK00001.ASM
<b>Date:</b>	13 January 2000
<b>Subject:</b>	Pakistan People's Party and Muslim League activists in Pakistan
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.
<b>Keywords:</b>	Pakistan / Political opposition / Political repression / Repression methods / Political trials / Freedom of political opinion

## Query:

Please provide information on the Sharif government's treatment of Pakistan People's Party activists, and of the new military government's treatment of activists of both the Pakistan People's Party and the Muslim League.

## Response:

The military junta that took power in Pakistan after an October 12, 1999 coup appears to have targeted for prosecution two groups of people: 1) the ousted premier, Nawaz Sharif, and several close supporters, and 2) major loan defaulters, many of whom allegedly borrowed huge sums of money from state banks with no intention of repaying the loans. There is little evidence that the military authorities have prosecuted, or harassed, rank-and-file party activists. The ousted Sharif government frequently harassed Pakistan People's Party activists, although not necessarily in a systematic manner.

This document is divided into the following sections:

1. The prosecution of Nawaz Shariff p. 1
2. The military government's crackdown on corruption p. 2
3. The military government's treatment of mid-level and grassroots Pakistan People's Party and Muslim League activists p. 3
4. The Sharif government's treatment of Pakistan People's Party activists p. 3

## The prosecution of Nawaz Sharif

The new military government in Pakistan arrested Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, his brother Shahbaz Sharif, and five other senior officials in the wake of the October 12, 1999 coup on charges of treason, conspiracy to murder, and hijacking a plane. The charges stem from the day of the coup, when Sharif allegedly ordered air traffic controllers not to allow a plane carrying General Pervez Musharraf, the chief of the army staff, and some 200 other passengers to land at Karachi. Initially it appeared that the anti-terrorism court trying Sharif functioned with some semblance of due process. One western diplomat noted, "there is a sensitivity here that even the slightest hint of interference would have a very negative fallout." (*Financial Times* 3 Dec. 1999, 12) However, some "western observers" expressed concern with the slow pace of Sharif's trial, noting that on December 22 the court adjourned the case until January 12 without prosecutors bringing any formal indictment against the ousted premier. Moreover, when the trial resumed on January 12, 2000, the judge quit the case on the grounds that government intelligence agents were in the

courtroom. At least one reporter suggested that the summaries of witnesses' statements released by the prosecution did not "neatly" support General Musharraf's account of the events surrounding the diversion of the airplane. (*The New York Times* 13 Jan. 2000, A14)

The military has also taken several ministers from Sharif's Muslim League government into "protective custody" without bringing formal charges. (*Financial Times* 22 Dec. 1999, 8) Authorities have also reportedly arrested all of the Sharif family's male members, on unspecified charges. (*Financial Times* 6 Dec. 1999, 10)

The military government has permitted Sharif's lawyers and supporters to lodge several sensitive court cases. In December, Sharif's Muslim League challenged the legality of the October 12 coup and the junta's subsequent suspension of the constitution. The Supreme Court is expected to hear the petition on January 31. (*Financial Times* 8 Dec. 1999, 16) Lawyers for Sharif have also challenged the anti-terrorism court's jurisdiction to hear Sharif's case, on the grounds that cases involving offenses against the state must be brought by the central or a provincial government. An army colonel brought the original action against Sharif. (AFP 20 Dec. 1999) However, it is of course unclear how the military government would respond if the courts ruled against it. Moreover, General Musharraf, the coup leader and self-styled chief executive, issued a decree ensuring that his actions not be challenged in any court. (*India Today* 25 Oct. 1999, 32)

### **The military government's crackdown on corruption**

Upon taking power, Musharraf pledged to crack down on Pakistan's widespread corruption problem. The new government set up a National Accountability Bureau that established a November 16 deadline for defaulters on bank loans to either begin settling their debts or face arrest. In November, authorities arrested at least 35 politicians and businessmen, "mainly" on corruption charges (note: it is not clear on what charges the others were arrested), and in late December, authorities arrested at least 20 politicians, senior bureaucrats, and businessmen on corruption charges. (*Financial Times* 30 Dec. 1999, 6) There do not appear to be any suggestions that authorities have prosecuted the crackdown on a partisan basis.

Those arrested in the corruption crackdown appeared to be major borrowers. Pakistani banks are holding some \$4 billion in principal and interest on unpaid loans. The central bank estimates that 322 borrowers owe roughly 70 percent of the money, and bankers say that 50 of the largest defaulters may owe up to half the money. The finance minister has said that the government would try to differentiate between "willful" as opposed to "circumstantial" defaulters, in effect suggesting that authorities might permit genuine businesses that had come into hardship to restructure their debt. (*Financial Times* 16 Nov. 1999, 16) It is too early to assess the extent to which the authorities have been able to make such distinctions. Separately, tax authorities are planning to examine housing records across 13 of Pakistan's largest cities in an effort to detect tax evasion in a country where fewer than 1 percent of the population pays income tax. The plan would focus on owners of large homes to examine how many such home owners also pay income tax. (*Financial Times* 23 Dec. 1999, 4)

### **The military government's treatment of mid-level and grassroots Muslim League and Pakistan People's Party activists**

It is difficult to assess the military government's record on civil liberties due in part to the short period of time it has been in office. There have been few if any protests against the coup, which could indicate positive public support for the coup, fear of reprisals, or other factors. Newspapers and magazines have continued to function apparently unimpeded.

Sharif supporters held at least one protest in Karachi that attracted only 12 people. (*Financial Times* 19 Nov. 1999, 12) At one point during Sharif's trial, some 50 Sharif supporters demonstrated outside the court. (AFP 29 Nov. 1999) On December 8, police forcibly dispersed more than 100 Sharif supporters demonstrating outside his trial and

detained more than 20 activists (presumably Muslim League supporters). (AFP 8 Dec. 1999) Overall, there is little evidence to suggest that the military government has specifically targeted mid-level or grassroots activists of Sharif's Muslim League party, or of former premier Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party.

### **The Sharif government's treatment of Pakistan People's Party activists**

In the 1990s, governments headed by Benazir Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and by Nawaz Sharif of the Muslim League at times used a 1960 public order law or outright false criminal charges to arrest or detain political activists. In mid-September 1999, 16 opposition parties including the PPP formed an alliance aimed at forcing Sharif to resign in the wake of the May-July 1999 conflict with India in the Kargil-Drass sector of Kashmir. The authorities detained opposition activists at several demonstrations organized by the alliance, although it is difficult to determine the breakdown by party affiliation given the large number of parties that participated in the protests. On September 21, Clinton administration officials said that authorities detained hundreds of opposition supporters following demonstrations in Karachi. (Reuters, 21 Sept. 1999) By early October, police had broken up numerous rallies organized by the alliance and arrested dozens of its leaders, including MPs, and thousands of activists. (*The Economist*, 18 Sept. – 24 Sept. 1999, 45) The reports are not clear on how long authorities detain those arrested at demonstrations, although in general authorities release most activists arrested at demonstrations rather than prosecute them.

The United States Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998* section on Pakistan covering 1998 contained information on several cases where authorities or police apparently targeted PPP figures:

- a) Authorities charged three police officers with the May 1998 killing of the son of a PPP-supported candidate in Punjab's local government elections. Police had arrested the son on robbery charges brought by the local Muslim League candidate. (*Country Reports 1998*. 1999, 1936)
- b) In April, police beat PPP demonstrators in front of parliament who were protesting PPP leader Benazir Bhutto's trial on corruption charges, and arrested 51 PPP demonstrators. Police beat two PPP Senators who attempted to intervene. (*Country Reports 1998*. 1999, 1940)
- c) The PPP compiled a list of 91 cases in which the government had subjected its supporters to harassment, police raids, or threats. The State Department notes that this includes party workers killed in personal vendettas or in Karachi's political violence. (*Country Reports 1998*. 1999, 1942)

### **References:**

Agence France-Presse (AFP). 29 November 1999 "Pakistan court bans deposed premier from making political statements."

Agence France-Presse (AFP). 8 December 1999. "Pakistani prosecutors accuse Sharif of treason, hijacking"

Agence France-Presse (AFP). 20 December 1999. "Deposed Pakistani premier's lawyers challenge power of court."

The Associated Press (AP). 21 September 1999. "United States urges Pakistani military to stay out of politics."

*The Economist* [London]. 18 September – 24 September 1999. "Pakistan: Not all that

grand."

*Financial Times*. 16 November 1999. Farhan Bokhari. "Airport alert for defaulters in Pakistan: Crackdown on bank loan abuses."

*Financial Times*. 19 November 1999. Farhan Bokhari. "Sharif poised to appear in court as arrests continue."

*Financial Times*. 3 December 1999. Farhan Bokhari. "Pakistan foreign minister vows fair trial for Sharif."

*Financial Times*. 6 December 1999. Farhan Bokhari. "Coup thrusts Mrs. Sharif into spotlight."

*Financial Times*. 8 December 1999. Farhan Bokhari. "Contempt case due to begin against Sharif."

*Financial Times*. 22 December 1999. Farhan Bokhari. "Sharif trial delay weighs on regime: Musharraf under pressure over conduct of court case against ousted prime minister."

*Financial Times*. 23 December 1999. Farhan Bokhari. "Pakistan takes on tax evaders."

*Financial Times*. 30 December 1999. Farhan Bokhari. "Corrupt businessmen and bureaucrats on the run: But some say Gen Musharraf's clean-up campaign may only discourage new investments."

*India Today* [New Dehli]. 25 October 1999. Vol. 24, No. 43. Jason Burke. "Marching to the Brink."

*The New York Times*. 13 January 2000. Barry Bearak. "Judge Sees Threat and Quits Ex-Pakistani Leader's Trial."

*Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998*. 1999. "Pakistan," United States Department of State. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office.

*Last Modified 06/14/2002*