

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

25 November 2009

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Pakistan: Treatment by authorities of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) activists in Lahore and Karachi (January 2009 - October 2009)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Reports on the treatment by authorities of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) activists in Lahore and Karachi from January 2009 to October 2009 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Reports on the treatment by authorities of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) activists in Lahore and Karachi from January 2009 to October 2009 were scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Following the February 2008 elections, the PPP and PML-N briefly formed a coalition government (BBC 5 Oct. 2009). The PML-N pulled out of the coalition in August 2008, reportedly due to the PPP's reluctance to reinstate judges that had been unseated by former president Pervez Musharraf (BBC 5 Oct. 2009; *The Guardian* 11 Mar. 2009; see also Aljazeera 12 Mar. 2009). According to Aljazeera, anger that Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudry had been dismissed developed into a protest led by lawyers, which later included political parties (12 Mar. 2009).

Sources indicate that relations between the PPP and PML-N were further "strained" in February 2009 when the Supreme Court barred Nawaz Sharif, the leader of the PML-N, and his brother, from holding political office (BBC 15 Mar. 2009; FIDH 12 Mar. 2009, 2; IPS 12 Mar. 2009). A 27 February 2009 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) article reports that protests took place in Karachi and Lahore following the court ruling, resulting in the filing of 300 cases by the authorities against "leaders and activists" of the PML-N party. The court ruling was overturned in July 2009, when the Supreme Court acquitted Sharif of plane hijacking charges, allowing him to run for public office once again (BBC 5 Oct. 2009; *Dawn* 18 July 2009).

Sources indicate that police arrested hundreds of lawyers and opposition activists ahead of a 12 March 2009 protest, referred to as the "long march," which was organized in order to pressure the PPP government to reinstate dismissed judges (*The Guardian* 11 Mar. 2009; BBC 11 Mar. 2009). Protesters planned to convene in Islamabad after days of marching from various cities, in order to stage a demonstration outside parliament (RFE/RL 12 Mar. 2009; 123 Breaking News 11 Mar. 2009; *The Guardian* 11 Mar. 2009).

In response to the planned protest, the government implemented a ban on political gatherings in the provinces of Sindh and Punjab (Reuters 11 Mar. 2009; FIDH 12 Mar. 2009, 2; *The Pakistan Observer* 12 Mar. 2009). According to *The Guardian*, the ban on political gatherings in Punjab was slated to last 3 months, while the ban in Sindh was issued for a 15-day period (11 Mar. 2009).

An 11 March 2009 article from 123 Breaking News indicates that the police "crackdown" on lawyers and PML-N leaders was carried out in several Punjab districts, including Lahore; however, the article does not give details on arrests. Before the protest, PML-N senior leaders were reportedly placed under house arrest (BBC 11 Mar. 2009; *The Guardian* 11 Mar. 2009; 123 Breaking News 11 Mar. 2009). Sources indicate that many opposition leaders went into hiding to avoid arrest (*The Pakistan Observer* 12 Mar. 2009; *The Guardian* 11 Mar. 2009). An 11 March 2009 *Dawn* article reports that "only second line leadership" of opposition parties were arrested during the police response to the "long march," as prominent leaders avoided arrest by going underground. Sources indicate that attempts to place Nawaz Sharif under house arrest were unsuccessful (123 Breaking News 11 Mar. 2009; AFP 22 Mar. 2009).

On 12 March 2009, International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) reported that during the protest, numerous opposition party members were arrested, but was not specific about which parties, or the districts where the arrests took place. A 12 March 2009 *Dawn* article reports that police "rounded up" 200 opposition activists in Lahore; however, a police official reportedly stated that no more than 20 political activists had been arrested. The *Dawn* article does not specify if any of these activists were PML-N party members, nor does it include details relating to the duration of their detainment. The article also reports that police were unable to detain top leaders of the PML-N, but that several party leaders' houses were raided (*Dawn* 12 Mar. 2009).

A 15 March 2009 Geo Television Network article reports that police arrested 20 PML-N workers outside Sharif's residence in Lahore. It is unclear whether these are the same 20 political activists as those mentioned above. Information on the length of their detainment could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. According to an 11 March 2009 article in *The Guardian*, a spokesman for the PML-N party stated that he received reports from party offices across Pakistan that PML-N party members had been

arrested, but he did not have precise numbers. An 11 March 2009 *Dawn* article lists numerous arrests of PML-N workers in multiple cities in the province of Punjab, but does not include a list of arrests for the city of Lahore.

Sources indicate that the PPP conceded to the demands for the reinstatement of Chief Justice Chaudry on 16 March 2009, and that Sharif called off the mass protest as a result (AFP 22 Mar. 2009; *Daily Times* 16 Mar. 2009; BBC 5 Oct. 2009). Chaudry was reinstated on 22 March 2009 (AFP 22 Mar. 2009; *Dawn* 22 Mar. 2009).

Reports on the treatment of PML-N party members by the authorities after the March 2009 protest could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: A professor of political science at the University of Missouri and a senior fellow of foreign policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC did not have information for this Response. A scholar-in-residence from the Middle East Institute in Washington, DC did not respond within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: A Pakistan News, Amnesty International (AI), Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), *The Economist*, Factiva, Freedom House, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Links - International Journal of Socialist Renewal, *The Nation*[Lahore], Organisation mondiale contre la torture (OMCT), South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), United Kingdom (UK) Border Agency, United Nations (UN) Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), United States (US) Department of State.

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