

**POLITICAL PRISONERS
IN PAKISTAN**



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When the British left the Indian sub-continent in 1947, one of the few changes that marked the transition was the color of the skin of the new rulers of India and Pakistan. Among the many things that remained unchanged were the social, military and administrative structure and the many laws which the British colonialists had used against the independence movement activists. These laws were, after independence, being liberally applied to crush the political opposition in Pakistan. To give the police a freer hand in persecuting political opponents, new laws (e.g., Defense of Pakistan Regulations) were put in force to supplement the other notorious laws handed down by the British.

These laws found their widespread application in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh, where over 3000 political prisoners were detained in the years 1948 to 1954), Baluchistan and the Frontier Provinces.

In March 1954 Pakistan had its first general election in response to growing political unrest in the country. Afraid of the outcome, the elections were preceded by political repression, especially in East Pakistan, where the left parties commanded a significant support amongst the people. A few weeks prior to the election over 1200 persons, mostly belonging to the Communist Party, were rounded up in 48 hours. In spite of the repressive measures adopted by the Central government, the result of the election failed to come up to its expectations, and on May 30, 1954 the Legislative Assembly of East Pakistan was dissolved. An old semi-fascist bureaucrat, Major-General Iskander Mirza who had distinguished himself by aiding the British to crush the Pathans was appointed Governor. In his first week of dictatorial

rule he arrested 659 activists of the United Front including 13 members of the dissolved assembly. Around the same time in West Pakistan, the Communist Party was banned and its General Secretary, Firozudin Mansur, together with trade-union leaders and other activists—over 1300 in all—were imprisoned.

Fearing the consequences of the next election scheduled in 1959, Ayub Khan staged a coup d'état a year earlier with the help of the army and the number of political prisoners swelled all over the country. Even though the press had been gagged, voices were raised now and then on behalf of the political prisoners. On June 28, 1962 Sardar Bahadur Khan, an old Muslim Leaguer spoke in the National Assembly on the situation in Baluchistan. The next day the parliamentary reporter wrote in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, "A hushed house heard Sardar Bahadur Khan disclose startling details of a concentration camp being run in Quetta and of prisoners being hung by their feet half-naked". In fact Ayub had ruled Baluchistan like a colony. Air force had been used to bomb Baluchi meetings and thousands of political prisoners had been taken and tortured.

Ayub's "decade of development" ended in March, 1969 when the growing opposition in Pakistan forced him to step down. The power was handed over to Yahya Khan in whose time the political repression in the East gave way to literal genocide of the Bengali population and the subsequent break-up of Pakistan. With the creation of Bangladesh and coming of Z.A. Bhutto to power in Pakistan, the political opposition did not get a better deal. Bhutto who had been arrested during Ayub regime and had accused the regime of "violent physical attacks on my person" and "maltreat-

ment in jail even during custody of the court" was now following the footsteps of his predecessor.

(*Affidavit of Bhutto, in the High Court of West Pakistan, Lahore in Writ petition No. 1794 of 1968.)

In the summer of 1972 the American columnist Jack Anderson reported that the Pakistan military attache in Washington had been circulating a "bizarre shopping list of torture devices". The columnist had based his story on a list received by Messrs Aviterra Corporation, a company which deals in the equipment from Col. Shamsad of the Pakistan Embassy. The seventeen item list included powerful interrogation lights with colour changers, electric shock pulse equipment timed one to ten seconds, equipment for bugging rooms and telephones, infra-red equipment and other gadgets used for espionage and brainwashing. Horst Klienbergh, President of the company, a Jewish refugee with bitter memories of Hitler's Germany, told Anderson that he had advised Col. Shamsad to use the funds for feeding hungry children in Lahore and Karachi so that they grew up into nice citizens. (What philanthropy from a peddler in human suffering!)

On being questioned about the list by Anderson, Col. Shamsad had replied that he was merely making enquiries.

However the matter did not rest there because the Pakistan press took hold of the Anderson report which appeared in Rawalpindi's *Nawa-i-Waqt*. This gave rise to a debate in the National Assembly on August 18, 1972. A day earlier, Labour Minister Rana Mohammad Hanif had told the House that the decision for making these purchases had been taken by the Yahya regime and the present regime had nothing to do with them. NAP's Amirzada Khan was not satisfied with the minister's statement, so a full-fledged

debate was scheduled for the next day.

The Labour Minister and Mian Mahmud Ali Kasuri, who was then the Law Minister, put forward the government point of view in a somewhat confused form. The intended purchase was condemned as an insult to humanity and in almost the same breath they declared that it was vital for certain operations. In spite of the prevailing state of confusion, the gist of the government's contention was quite obviously that where foreign agents (CIA?) are concerned, brainwashing equipment is both useful and necessary. The question that the equipment may be meant for use by the civilian government was not to be considered.

The accuracy of such a stand becomes extremely questionable when we come across such disclosures as Dr. Haye Baluch, MNA, made in a press conference in Quetta on August 4 this year, in which he charged that the government had used the "recently imported American instruments of torture against NAP and BSO leaders." He alleged that as a result of applying these torture devices "as many as five persons have lost their balance of mind." (*Dawn*, May 8, 1973)

With such accusations of maltreatment of civilians being hurled at the government, it is not surprising that reports, like the one appearing in the *Nawa-i-Waqt*, Lahore on August 31, 1973; cast a sense of fear and doubt in the public mind: ".....the government is intending to import large quantities of tear gas shells and rifles. For this purpose an import licence was issued on August 13, 1973 for an amount of Rs. 38,45,500. Tear gas is used in order to disperse and terrorise crowds and demonstrators. This information is contained in import list No. 44 issued by the Controller of Im-

ports and Exports, which informs further that the import licence for the above-mentioned amount has been issued in favour of a private firm in Karachi, named Messrs. Research and development Associates."

Government denials notwithstanding, if one is to believe the litany of petitions filed before the High Courts and the statements appearing in the press, about alleged torture of political detainees, Pakistan is well on its way in ranking with the South African race supremacists, the ousted Greek colonels, the new rulers in Chile or the Saigon butchers. The charges do not merely speak of the insulting behaviour of the minions of law or depriving a prisoner of amenities commensurate with his status, but specify in clear language the terrible procedures used for mentally and physically bullying them, inflicting indignities on them to act against their wishes. A chilling picture is sketched of the development of a modern machinery, complete with the dramatic effects like midnight arrests, the curtain of secrecy and the forbidding confines of impregnable fortresses.

The fact that it is no more the accused in criminal cases or espionage suspects that complain of torture, but known political leaders, students, trade unionists and even officers of the armed forces, who have become victims of it, makes the situation more frightening.

Senator Khawaja Mohammad Safdar and MNA Mian Mahmud Ali Kasuri, in separate press conferences, on September 7 and 9, as reported by *Dawn* (8, 10 Sept., 1973) disclosed bizarre details about the alleged torture and inhuman treatment of political prisoners and detainees. Mr. Kasuri charged that there were at least 50 such incidents in a fortnight, and carried on to recall the instance of Malik Qasim, Secretary

General of the Muslim League, who he alleged was "stripped naked, made to lie on a slab of ice and physically tortured mercilessly." Another case recalled was that of the mother and wife of a Multan Tehrik leader who were dragged to the police station in Multan, with the result that the mother's arm was broken. Speaking in his capacity as a lawyer, Mr. Kasuri said he was seriously examining the feasibility of taking the matter to the United Nations committee on human rights.

The catalogue of such allegations seems to be unending as an increasing number of political leaders have resorted to the columns of the press to reveal the indignities they allegedly suffered during police incarceration. The weekly *Zindagi* produced a number of the statement which concern UDF leaders of Multan and Lahore. They include Syed Kaswar Gardezi, Maulana Sher Mohammad, Maulvi Salimullah, Rana Nazrur Rahman, Habib Jalib, Mian Mohammad Yasin Wattoo, Khawaja Abdul Ghafoor, Mr. Irfan Ahmed Ansari, Syed Dabir Ali, Qari Nurul Huq and Mr. Ashraf Khan. Maulvi Salimullah of the JUP relates a specially vicious method used for "breaking him", when his son, Ziaullah was arrested by police on false charges. He alleged that his son was hung upside down by the CIA staff at Chunamandi.

Syed Kaswar Gardezi, one of the top NAP leaders, alleges in graphic detail the torture procedure that was used against him after his arrest, and accused SP Mohammad Ramzan and Inspector Sher Ali and several plain-clothes policemen of conducting the operation at Thana Haram Gate. He recounts that on August 25, at about 1 p.m., only a few hours after his arrest, he was called out of his cell, where he and five others held with him were lodged,

and presented before a *thanedar*. After taking down his name and address, the *thanedar* asked him to remove his clothes. Mr. Gardezi says: "I could not believe my ears. I tried to explain that this was not proper, but before I could say very much a man stepped forward and removed my clothes forcibly." He recalls telling the police officers that he would prefer writing a suicide note and letting them shoot him, rather than being humiliated in this manner. He alleged in his statement that he could see several people watching him from different doors and windows, and that he was later told "that besides the senior police officials the provincial law minister also formed part of the audience." After being "humiliated publically and insulted by the police officials", Mr. Gardezi was taken to a room where he was forced to sit naked on a slab of ice while the officers asked him irrelevant questions. Here again he felt that there were a number of spectators at one end of the room. Twice Mr. Gardezi, who is a heart patient, became dizzy and fell down but was made to get up and sit on the ice again. After some time he was sent outside and told to sit on a bench. He says that while sitting there "I could sense that my companions were being beaten in the room which contained the block of ice. Suddenly a thundering voice ordered us to put on our clothes. It was then that I saw the rest of my companions sitting naked on the bench. Sixty-five year old Syed Dabir Ali Shah had a bleeding nose. Qari Nurul Huq said his ear drum had burst. They later told me that they had been beaten mercilessly." As if that was not enough, after some time the prisoners were again told to remove their clothes and lie face downwards on the ground. Khawaja Ghafoor in his statement says: "We lay down but without removing our clothes. While in this position we were first asked some questions and then beaten with a leather

whip. About this time the morning *aazan* could be heard and we were returned to our cells."

On September 8, 1973 statements of four UDF detainees - Rana Nazrur Rahman, Mr. Niaz Mohyuddin, Maulana Yaqub Rabbani and Mr. Tariq Mahmud - were recorded before Mr. Justice Aslam Riaz of the Lahore High Court, in which they alleged that "they were being subjected to physical torture and even the facilities admissible under the rules to hardened criminals were being denied to them." They also submitted that "while in police custody, they were kept awake and kept standing in different postures". (*Dawn*, 9.9.73). On September 12, 1973 Senator Safdar told a press conference that one of the arrested UDF leaders, Mr. Hamza, President of Punjab PDP, had been in solitary confinement for the last ten days. He was lodged in a cell which was used only for criminals who had been awarded capital punishment. (*Nawa-i-Waqt*, Sept. 13, 1973)

It becomes clear that the police authorities had devised an extensive method for torturing the political detainees, or to effect what has been described as "breaking them". The procedure, as disclosed in the statements and petitions, was somewhat primitive and brutal, but possibly this was an essential part of the whole science. The mechanics of torture included humiliation of the detainee by making him naked and beating him. Then there was the procedure for causing actual physical suffering like making the detainee sit on an ice slab, keeping him standing in uncomfortable postures, keeping the lights on at night, and even housing him in a cell which was filthy and full of vermin. Another method was to harass the relatives of the detainees, to cause mental suffering and thus soften his resistance.

After coming to power, one of Mr.

Bhutto's major efforts has been to build a strong security force. In spite of having inherited a country reduced to half its original size, under him the expenditure on different police departments has begun to show a sharp upward trend and continues to rise steadily. At the close of General Yahya's regime, the total expenditure on special police establishment was Rs. 20,09,462. 1972, the first year of Bhutto's term of office shows an increase of Rs. 37,93,400. The estimates for 1973 are in the range of Rs. 1,66,96,300. If the lump charges of Rs. 23,89,000 paid to the provincial governments are added, the increase is 9.5 fold. Add to this the expenditure on the Federal Security Force, the rise is in the order of 27.6 fold. (Punjab Punch, July 8, 1973)

This trend is viewed, not without reason, with a good deal of apprehension. Walter Schwarz of The Guardian remarks of Mr. Bhutto and his police force: "That his methods and temperament are 'fascist' is a phrase heard on all sides. This is not only a matter of arrests and strong-arm tactics. A large para-military security force has been formed, directly controlled by the Prime Minister." Writing of the tension between the Baluch nationalist guerrillas and the government, Javed Hussain says in the organ of the International Marxist Group, "Red Weekly": "The Shah's gestapo 'Savak', the most notorious secret police force in Asia is also training units of the newly formed 'Federal Security Force' in the art of repression. The torture of political prisoners in Pakistan today has reached new heights."

In this context, a story appearing in the Zindagi (Oct. 22, 73) recounts the operation by the police in Sanghar district after the assassination of a PPP

leader Ali Bakhsh Junejo on October 5. The press reported the killing of six "miscreants" by the police, but the weekly's report gives a totally different account, of how innocent followers of the Pir Pagaro, many of the mujahids who had participated in the defence of Pakistan during 1965 and 1971, were allegedly rounded up and six of them executed by the police. Those killed were Mehrab Sanjarani, Jan Mohammed Sanjarani, Umeed Ali Sanjarani, Ali Sher Shah, Allahdad Wadh alias Dadu and Hamzo Khan Khaskheli. The Zindagi describing the particularly revolting manner in which the six were killed, says, four of them who were alive after a torture session were placed in an open space with the bodies of two who were already killed, and surrounded by the police. Then, despite their pitiable screams of "Don't kill us! What is our crime? For the sake of God and the Holy Prophet do not kill us! What wrong have we done?" they were shot down. Later official photographers took photographs of the "miscreants" and "lawless elements."

A Jang report from Tando Adam appearing on December 6 quoted the D.C. of Sanghar as saying 900 persons were arrested in ten months. But he claimed these were anti-social elements including blackmarketeers, smugglers and the like. He said only 36 persons were held under the Security Ordinance and DPR, and also denied any persecution of the Hur community.

Mr. Bhutto's government has gone to great lengths to improve and perfect the institution of torture against political prisoners and detainees. There is no break with the tradition—the tradition established by men like Mian Anwar Ali whose machine of terror soon after 1947 turned torture into a refined and sophisticated science over the years; or by Governor Kalabagh in dealing with pol-

itical adversaries; or by the men of Ayub regime whose murder of the young communist worker Hasan Nasir in the Lahore Fort is an example of its systematic terror policy. There cannot be any break with the tradition, until the People's Party becomes a people's party.

Abbreviations

NAP	National Awami Party
MNA	Member of National Assembly
UDF	United Democratic Party
PDP	Peoples' Democratic Party
DPR	Defence of Pakistan Rules