

SECURITY

## **'Pakistani intelligence plotted my assassination'**

Thursday 7 June 2012, by [JAHANGIR Asma](#), [SHAMS Shamil](#) (Date first published: 5 June 2012).

**Pakistan's most renowned human rights activist Asma Jahangir claims that the country's security agency plotted to murder her. In an exclusive interview with DW, Jahangir talks about her fears.**

Asma Jahangir is Pakistan's leading human rights activist and former president of the Supreme Court Bar Association of the country. She was the chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, a non-governmental rights-based organization, and has also worked with the United Nations as Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

**DW: You have made some very serious allegations against the Pakistani security agencies, including the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Are your sources credible?**

Asma Jahangir: I am a very responsible person, and I do not usually make these kinds of allegations. I have been threatened many times in my life but I never went to the police and never made any hue and cry about it. I believe now it is my duty to speak up and say what is needed to be said. My sources are extremely reliable.

**You have been very critical of the Pakistan Army's role in politics, and also of the military agencies' human rights abuses inside Pakistan. Do you think this could be the reason they would want to eliminate you?**

It is true that I have been critical of them but I have never been unduly critical. I am critical of their policies, which I do not agree with. I think that, in whatever I have said - for instance in my role as a lawyer in the missing people's cases - I have repeated what people said in court. I hoped that there would be a change in the mindset of the establishment, which unfortunately doesn't appear to have happened.

**You are a prominent human rights activist and lawyer. Do you think the ISI and other security agencies could kill an internationally renowned person like yourself?**

Let me remind you of our history. Prominent people have been killed in Pakistan just like in any other country. The difference between Pakistan and other countries is that in Pakistan nobody ever knows who is responsible for these murders. Akbar Bugti (the Baloch nationalist leader) was also a very prominent person. There was a warning that he would be killed. There was a warning that they would go after him. And when he was actually killed, nobody was held responsible.

**But there is a democratically-elected government in Pakistan right now. Is it incapable of protecting its citizens or are the military agencies so omnipotent in Pakistan that they can do anything with impunity?**

Well, I have sent a very clear message to the Pakistan People's Party's government that they are the ones who are responsible for my protection, and if my protection is not adequate I will hold them responsible. So far, some protection has been provided to me but it is not sufficient. And more importantly, I have communicated to the government that it is not for me to go to the intelligence agencies and speak to them; it is the government's duty to talk to them. And they should not do it only for me but to change the way they deal with the people of Pakistan.

**Do you feel more threatened by the Islamists or the Pakistani security agencies?**

To explain that, I would like to give you an example. There was an attack on me in 1995. People tried to kill me inside my house. Subsequently, after the failed attempt, there was a trial and some people were arrested. During the trial, the people who were arrested were protected by two people (as bodyguards) all the time. When the lawyers protested and demanded that they wanted to know who these people who always accompanied the accused were, we came to know that one of them was from the Intelligence Bureau, and the other one was from the ISI. All this is recorded in court's proceedings.

**So you are saying that it was actually the intelligence agencies that wanted to kill you?**

There is a nexus. I am not saying that agencies have connections with all groups, but they used a lot of these groups. Now the information that I have about this recent plot to kill me is not related to small groups; unfortunately it deals with the highest levels in the security services.

**Are you satisfied with the recently established National Human Rights Commission? Prior to its setup, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) had requested President Asif Ali Zardari not to sign it into effect on the pretext that the Commission had no powers to investigate military agencies. Do you share the HRW's reservations about the Commission?**

It will depend on the commissioner they are going to appoint. I have seen the draft of the commission. I agree with most of its clauses, if not all. It can truly be a workable commission. But in a system where even the highest judiciary is hesitant to question the military, I do not think the commission can play a big role. Nevertheless, I do not underestimate the fact that you have to setup more and more civilian organizations for justice and accountability in all fields.

**Last but not least, what is your stance as rights activist and lawyer on the case of Dr. Shakeel Afridi, who has been sentenced to 33 years by a tribal court for helping the CIA in finding the whereabouts of al Qaeda's former head Osama bin Laden?**

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has already said that every citizen has a right to due legal process, which was certainly not given to Dr. Afridi.

**Interviewer: Shamil Shams**

Editor: Richard Connor

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\* <http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15999080,00.html>