

Pakistan Hunza Five case: Gilgit rights activist being given the 'third degree'

Monday 23 July 2012, by [HASNAIN Khalid](#) (Date first published: 23 July 2012).

LAHORE, July 22: Baba Jan, a rights activist in Gilgit is allegedly being subjected to severe physical and mental torture by a joint investigation team for the last couple of days after he was implicated in a 'criminal case' registered against him under Anti Terrorism Act (ATA) on July 20 at the time when he was in jail. Rights activists and legal experts say the case was registered against Baba Jan after the court accepted his bail petition and ordered his release in another case registered against him in August last year while he was leading a protest procession taken out by those affected by Attabad lake against the government for not compensating them.

"Baba Jan and another rights activist, Iftikhar Hussain, were abducted from Gilgit jail on July 20 by a joint investigation team (JIT) and are being tortured and kept in illegal detention. He (Baba Jan) is a member of the Labour Party Pakistan's federal committee. LPP Youth Secretary Iftikhar Hussain, Rashid Minhas, Amir Khan and Sher Khan have also been imprisoned in various jails in Gilgit since September 2011. They have been charged under the ATA despite the fact they have not committed any crime. They are being victimised for the support they rendered to Attabad lake victims, last year," LPP spokesman Farooq Tariq told Dawn.

He said in August 2011, during a protest by the lake victims the police opened fire on peaceful demonstrators, killing a student, Afzal Beg. When his father went to recover his body, he too was shot and later died, he added. Instead of charging the officers responsible for these murders, the Gilgit-Baltistan administration got registered a false-case against more than 100 political activists, including Baba Jan. It is on these charges that he has been imprisoned for the past nine months, Mr Tariq said.

"The former premier (Yousuf Raza Gilani) repeatedly lied, stating that there are no political prisoners in Pakistan. At present there are 14 LPP workers languishing in prison cells in Faisalabad and Gilgit. The ATA is being used unjustly," he deplored.

"Whether citizens protest against loadshedding, lawyers for democracy, workers for fair wages or natural disaster victims for compensation — as in the case of Attabad — the anti-terrorist law is immediately invoked to stifle their voices".

Amanullah Kariapper, another LPP activist, said that on April 28, a dozen Rangers and police officials entered the Gilgit jail and severely tortured three inmates, including Baba Jan, and humiliated them by shaving their heads. The next day, the three were 'kidnapped' by the security forces, he said. The Rangers and police were committing such atrocities with total disdain for basic human rights, he added.

"Baba Jan, Iftikhar Hussain, Amir Ali, Ameer Khan and Rashid Minhas are all human rights defenders and have been illegally detained for nine months in total violation of their fundamental rights", Kariapper said. He demanded an immediate end to what he called misuse of the ATA and release of Baba Jan.

Baba Jan's lawyer advocate Muhammad Nafees Ahmad told this reporter on phone from Gilgit that though he and other members of the legal team had succeeded in getting Baba Jan and his companions released through court orders on July 20, the police again arrested him in another 'false' case under the ATA.

He said those affected by the Attabad disaster "actually launched the protest after the compensation cheques given to them by the government got bounced".

He alleged Mr Jan and his comrades were being victimised politically by the PPP-led G-B government, police and sensitive agencies.

Muhammad Ayaz, the officer investigating the case against Baba Jan, said the case (No 64/2012) had been registered against Baba Jan and some others on July 20 under the ATA for instigating fellow prisoners against the state. He rejected reports about torture of Baba Jan or his comrades during the on-going investigation by the JIT.

"If we are involved in torture, Baba Jan's legal team and heirs should immediately file a petition against us in the court," he said, claiming that Gilgit police were not like the traditional police.

"We are investigating this case purely on merit and will release the accused persons if they are found innocent," he added.

Khalid Hasnain

P.S.

* From the Newspaper Dawn, July 23, 2012 (published under the title: "Gilgit rights activist being given the 'third degree'"):

<http://dawn.com/2012/07/23/gilgit-rights-activist-being-given-the-third-degree/>