

Pakistan / Gilgit-Baltistan : Dangerous politics - On the arrest of lawyer and rights activist Ehsan Ali

Saturday 24 February 2018, by [The News \(Pakistan\)](#) (Date first published: 20 February 2018).

Yet one more arrest of a well-known lawyer and rights activist in Gilgit-Baltistan has highlighted how the Pakistani state continues to arrest activists working for human rights. Last weekend, Advocate Ehsan Ali, the president of the GB Supreme Appellate Court Bar Association, was arrested by the police on the flimsy charge of sharing an offensive post on social media. The arrest of the elected representative of GB's lawyers was seen as more insult to the injury inflicted on those living in Pakistan's peripheral regions. Ehsan is the lawyer representing popular GB leader Baba Jan, who remains in jail on anti-terror charges and was prevented from contesting elections earlier last year. The Baba Jan case has become a symbol for how the Pakistani state treats dissent, and GB and other peripheral regions in the country. Jan was one of the campaigners asking for compensation for those affected by the formation of the Attabad Lake. He is now serving a life sentence in prison for allegedly instigating riots. The charges themselves have been seen as politically motivated and, in any case, are clearly exaggerated. Interestingly, Advocate Ehsan Ali was arrested as Baba Jan's health deteriorated and there was a chance that another appeal could be presented before the court to allow his release.

In what can only be seen as major luck, Ehsan was bailed out on Monday after protests were held across the country for his release. But other activists, such as Raza Khan from Lahore, remain missing. The possibility of another arrest if Advocate Ehsan Ali does not toe the line is still very much there. More dangerously, the shadow of religiously motivated violence has been cast on him. This is part of a dangerous trend that needs to be condemned. Even in the darkest days of dictatorships, activists used to be arrested for their activism. Now, they are arrested on concocted charges that threaten their lives even after their release. In Advocate Ehsan's case the relatively mundane matter of sharing a photo of the recent protests in Iran became the excuse for his arrest under anti-terrorism laws. Young students from Gilgit-Baltistan have led the protests against Ehsan's arrest; the lawyer is a popular figure for the region's disaffected and politically energised youth. He was also active in the recent taxation protests in GB. The unfortunate smear campaign orchestrated against him before his arrest shows the new challenges faced by those who dare to question the status quo. Perhaps, those who matter should realise that this form of politics will not quell unrest in GB, it will only make grievances more severe.

Editorial, *The News*, February 20, 2018

P.S.

* <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/283138-dangerous-politics>