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Anti-Musharraf Lawyer Is Suddenly Freed, Then Abruptly Arrested Again

By [DAVID ROHDE](#)

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — For 24 hours on Friday, the leader of Pakistan's lawyers movement was a free man.

Aitzaz Ahsan, a Cambridge-educated lawyer who is the president of the country's Supreme Court Bar Association, was freed from house arrest early Friday. He began his day by announcing plans to mount nationwide protests if the country's Supreme Court was not restored to power by February. His day ended with the Pakistani police hurling him into the back of a police truck and threatening to shoot his son.

"One of the plainclothes guys had a pump action shotgun," said his son, Ali Ahsan, 31. "He put it on my chest, pumped it and said, 'I will shoot you.'"

Mr. Ahsan is considered one of the most skilled political opponents of [Pervez Musharraf](#), Pakistan's president. This spring, Mr. Ahsan masterminded a series of legal challenges and protests by lawyers that resulted in the reinstatement of [Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry](#), the chief justice of the Supreme Court, several months after Mr. Musharraf had suspended him on ethics charges.

Mr. Ahsan's rearrest suggests that Mr. Musharraf still considers the lawyers' movement one of his most dangerous political foes.

A longtime member of former Prime Minister [Benazir Bhutto](#)'s political party, Mr. Ahsan deftly turned Mr. Chaudhry's suspension into a multiparty political movement calling for an independent judiciary in Pakistan.

On Nov. 3, days before Mr. Chaudhry's court was expected to rule that Mr. Musharraf was ineligible for a third term in office, the Pakistani leader declared a state of emergency, suspended the Constitution and placed 13 of the country's 17 Supreme Court justices under house arrest after they refused to back his actions. He also dispatched the police to arrest Mr. Ahsan.

In a speech on Wednesday, Mr. Musharraf accused Mr. Chaudhry, Mr. Ahsan and former Prime Minister [Nawaz Sharif](#) of being part of a conspiracy to deny him a third term in office.

"Today," Mr. Musharraf said, "I want to disclose as to what conspiracy was being hatched to sidetrack democracy."

Then early Friday, just after midnight, government officials released Mr. Ahsan from house arrest in the eastern city of Lahore for three days to celebrate Id al-Adha, or the Feast of Sacrifice, one of Islam's most important holidays.

Emerging from his home that morning, Mr. Ahsan met with judges who had also been detained and with fellow lawyers to plan the February protests. He later mocked Mr. Musharraf's conspiracy theory to reporters at the Lahore press club.

"He announced he is going to sue Musharraf for libel for two billion rupees," or about \$33 million, said his son.

Friday night, Mr. Ahsan set out for Islamabad, the capital, where he hoped to celebrate the holiday with Mr. Chaudhry, who remains under house arrest with five other Supreme Court justices. As Mr. Ahsan drove down the highway, his wife received a call that he had been ordered rearrested.

As Mr. Ahsan waited for tea in a highway rest stop outside Islamabad at 1 a.m. on Saturday, seven police officers approached him, according to his son. Four of them dragged him toward a nearby police truck as three others pointed guns at him.

When his son protested, the shotgun was pointed at him, he said.

After seven hours in the back of the police truck, Mr. Ahsan was returned to his home in Lahore, placed back under house arrest and barred from giving interviews.