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Al Jazeera

Pakistani investigative journalist killed

6/1/2011

A Pakistani journalist who investigated [al-Qaeda's alleged infiltration of the country's navy](#) has been found dead near the capital Islamabad.

Syed Saleem Shahzad had earlier told a rights activist he had been threatened by the country's intelligence agencies. He was found dead on Tuesday, and police said his body showed signs of torture.

Ali Dayan Hasan, Pakistan representative for Human Rights Watch, said Shahzad had told him that he was under threat by Pakistan's military intelligence agency.

"He told me he was being followed and that he is getting threatening telephone calls and that he is under intelligence surveillance," he told Reuters news agency.

"We can't say for sure who has killed Saleem Shahzad. But what we can say for sure is that Saleem Shahzad was under serious threat from the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) and Human Rights Watch has every reason to believe that that threat was credible."

Shahzad, a correspondent for the *Asia Times Online* as well as Italian news agency *Adnkronos International*, went missing on Sunday from Islamabad while on his way to appear on a television show.

His death underscores the dangers of reporting in Pakistan, which in 2010 was called the deadliest country for journalists.

It could also increase scrutiny of Pakistan's security agencies, already under domestic pressure since the May 2 US raid that killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Signs of torture

The journalist's brother-in-law identified his body after it was found some 10km from his car in Mandi Bahaudin district outside the capital.

An initial examination found signs of torture, but autopsy results were pending, police official Bilal Ahmad said.

A senior Pakistani intelligence official spoke to the Associated Press and denied allegations that the agency had anything to do with Shahzad's case.

"It's absurd," the official told the AP on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to media on the record.

Al Jazeera's Pakistan correspondent, Imtiaz Tyab, reported from Islamabad that "Very quickly fingers were pointed at the Pakistan's top intelligence agency, ISI.

"It is very unlikely that they will acknowledge these allegations, which at this point are just allegations."

Shahzad, 40, had dabbled in some sensitive topics, which would likely have caught the eye of Pakistan's security establishment.

He wrote a story on the attack on a Pakistani naval base in the southern city of Karachi this month in which 10 people were killed, suggesting that some naval officials had suspected links with al-Qaeda.

The country's military and spy networks regularly try to pressure media outlets and individual reporters.

Pakistan has an outspoken media that has mushroomed in recent years. It often attacks the government, but media criticism of the military is rare in this South Asian nation.

Several Pakistani journalists have been found dead in similar circumstances, triggering protests by reporters and media organisations.

Journalists have also been killed by suspected militants in the tribal areas of the northwest, the epicentre of militancy in Pakistan.

Hasan said Human Rights Watch has called for an inquiry into the death of Shahzad.

Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State condemned the abduction and murder of Shahzad.

"The United States strongly condemns the abduction and killing of reporter Syed Saleem Shahzad," she said in a statement.

"His work reporting on terrorism and intelligence issues in Pakistan brought to light the troubles extremism poses to Pakistan's stability," she said.

Clinton said Washington welcomed Pakistan's launch of an investigation into the killing.