

Pakistani critic seeks

His relatives were slain after he testified on rights abuses

By Larry D. Hatfield
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

A prominent Pakistani journalist and government critic whose aunt and uncle were slain after he testified before a U.S. congressional panel has applied for political asylum in San Francisco.

"I am afraid to go home," said Ishaq Tunio, the Karachi-based political correspondent for The Nation, an English-language national newspaper in Lahore. "I believe I would be killed. They have killed my aunt and uncle, and I am afraid for my wife and children and parents."

A petition for asylum was filed for Tunio by San Francisco lawyer Jonathan Melrod, whose firm has successfully represented numerous political refugees seeking asylum in the United States.

Most of those recently seeking asylum from Pakistan were members of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party. Tunio is believed to be the first Pakistani journalist to seek asylum from the present regime.

"Clearly, his case is an example of persecution based on political opinion and under the Immigration Act, that would entitle him to asylum in the United States," Melrod said. "He has been an outspoken critic of the government.

"Speaking to the U.S. Congress about what's going on in Pakistan has clearly endangered him. It was a very courageous thing to do."

Tunio, 35, came to the United States last month at the invitation of the House Human Rights Caucus, co-chaired by Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, to testify about escalating human rights violations against journalists, the political opposition and others by the Pakistani government.

A month before, Tunio said, he and another journalist, Shafi Bejor of the Daily Aftab Hyderabad, were kidnapped and tortured by government agents while trying to cover an election for the Sindh Provincial Assembly.

Tunio said he had been detained because he had taken pictures of ballots being illegally marked by an election official and because he had

written numerous articles critical of the government.

He and Bejor were abducted and beaten with gun butts and bamboo sticks by men in police uniforms and plainclothes, he said.

Finally, a government official intervened, and the journalists were released. Neither was seriously injured, although Tunio displayed color photos of his body covered with bruises.

The Nation and other newspa-

pers were warned not to publish incriminating photos, Tunio said but The Nation and most other English-language newspapers did anyway. Sindhi papers did not.

Tunio, who is staying with friends in the Bay Area temporarily, said he had no choice but to continue to write and publish his critical stories.

"It's my duty," he said. "I'll publish at any cost."

The authoritarian Pakistani

*continued
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asylum in S.F.

government has taken no official action about the alleged kidnappings and beatings despite protests from various Pakistani and international journalists organizations, including the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

Despite being warned not to, Tunio said, he came to the United States and testified before the congressional panel May 20.

On May 24, armed robbers stormed into the home of his aunt and uncle, Asmat and Khair Mo-

ammed Tunio, in the village of Thorhi Bijjar and killed them.

"They were killed because of what I am doing," Tunio said. "It is now very dangerous for my family."

American aid to Pakistan was cut off in October 1990 because of that nation's nuclear weapons program. Since Bhutto was ousted two years ago, the State Department and Congress have expressed concern about the new government's human rights record.



EXAMINER/KATY RADDATZ

Ishaq Tunio believes he would be killed if he returned to Pakistan.

San Francisco Examiner

[★]

Thursday afternoon

JUNE 11, 1992

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San Francisco Chronicle

THE LARGEST DAILY CIRCULATION IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

FRIDAY, AUGUST 14, 1992

Pakistani Journalist Seeks Political Asylum in S.F.

By Jim Doyle
Chronicle Staff Writer

Pakistani journalist Ishaq Tunio, who was tortured by Karachi police for his investigation of an alleged vote-rigging scheme, pressed his claim in San Francisco yesterday for political asylum.

Tunio, 35, is the first Pakistani journalist to seek asylum in the United States as a result of the escalating political violence in his homeland.

His aunt and uncle were killed in Karachi, the Pakistan capital, in apparent retaliation for his recent testimony before a U.S. congressional panel.

He has appealed to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and the State Department for immediate protection for his wife and three children, who remain in hiding in Pakistan.

He met for 1½ hours yesterday with an immigration case officer to try to expedite his asylum request. The INS has refused to comment on his claim.

"He's not simply an asylum applicant, but someone who our government has a special obligation to protect," said San Francisco lawyer Jonathan Melrod, who represents Tunio. "It was the U.S. government who asked him to come here in the first place to testify before Congress."

As a political correspondent for the Nation — Pakistan's third largest daily newspaper — Tunio was among the few journalists who filed stories about the alleged graft of Pakistan's ruling regime.

Tunio's difficulties came to a head April 28, when he took photographs of an alleged vote-rigging scheme in a local election.

An hour later, he was dragged from his car by plainclothes police

officers, who held him for 4½ hours, placed him in a sewage ditch and tortured him. Tunio managed to hide the film, and two weeks later, the Nation published his expose on election fraud.

New U.S. Guidelines On Political Refugees

Applicants for asylum may be 'paroled'

By Jim Doyle
Chronicle Staff Writer

For a soft-spoken refugee named Thayalani Sivasundaram, waking up in America now looks a little brighter.

After spending 72 days in three California jails, Sivasundaram was released Friday under a new U.S. policy for refugees seeking political asylum.

Sivasundaram, 26, is from the war-scarred island nation of Sri Lanka. Traveling with a false passport in the hope of settling in Toronto, she was arrested in April by U.S. immigration authorities at San Francisco International Airport.

Sivasundaram, who said she was arrested, tortured and sexually molested by Sri Lankan soldiers, was among the first detainees nationwide to be released under the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service's new guidelines for asylum applicants. Two other Sri Lankans, Ravindran Krishnasamy and Rasiah Loganathan, were also released.

Immigration service director Gene McNary has instructed his offices across the country to place on "parole" those applicants whose claims appear to be legitimate and who meet certain criteria — such as having a means of support.

Paroled applicants are required to report to an immigration officer regularly, attend hearings in their cases and show up for deportation if their asylum request is denied.

The new policy is expected to spare thousands of political asylum applicants from incarceration while their cases are pending.

Although immigration officials play down the policy switch, human rights advocates insist that the new guidelines are long overdue. They contend that the immigration service's previous practice of detaining all asylum applicants was unconscionable.

"These are not people who have come to the United States in search of employment," said Jonathan Melrod of the San Francisco law firm of Jobe & Melrod, which represents Sivasundaram. "These

people have been tortured. And we ought to extend a humanitarian hand."

In past years, the United States has automatically detained asylum applicants until their cases are resolved — if jail space is available — in hopes that other refugees will be deterred from coming here. But the immigration service has been increasingly overwhelmed by the number of undocumented visitors who arrive in the United States and apply for political asylum.

Nearly 49,000 people were caught at U.S. airports last year without proper documents — including several hundred in the Bay Area.

Duke Austin, immigration service spokesman in Washington, described the new parole policy as "triage" for an overloaded system with space for only 5,000 or so detainees. "We don't have space to detain all these people, (so) we're trying to identify those less likely to abscond."

Sivasundaram, who was the only woman from Sri Lanka during her incarceration, is now residing with an aunt in Palo Alto.

"I never expected that in America I would be put in jail, that I would be punished this way," she told The Chronicle.

Reports on Sri Lanka by the State Department and human rights groups describe a decades-long civil war between Tamil fighters and the nation's Sinhalese majority rulers in which more than 40,000 people have disappeared in the hands of security forces and death squads since 1983.

Sivasundaram, who says she fears persecution from both sides of the conflict, recalls how army soldiers shot and wounded her father in 1984 and massacred nine people from her village of Tiriyaï one day the next year.

She wept during a recent immigration service interview about her life in Sri Lanka, but now wears a bittersweet smile. For those who would doubt her story, she says: "I would show them all my wounds."

San Francisco Chronicle

THURSDAY, JULY 2, 1992



BY STEVE CASTILLO/THE CHRONICLE

Sri Lankans Thayalani Sivasundaram and Ravindran Krishnasamy were among detainees released from jail under new guidelines

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From
Miss S.Thayalini
119, Glen Shephard Drive,
Scarborough.
Ontario.
Canada
M1K 4N4

Dear Mr. Jones ^{Melrod,} Me ~~L~~ Rod,

I'm keeping good health and hope the same with you also. I left Sanfransisco on July 01 1992 and claimed refugee status at Niagara falls Canadian Border on July 02 1992.

I was allowed to cross to Canada on July 21 1992. I'm now staying with my brother in Scarborough. I'm very obliged to you for all the troubles taken for my release and am grateful to you.

I'm sorry for not having inform you earlier as I was busy settling in Scarborough. I would like to again convey my deep appreciation for all the efforts taken by you for my release.

I am Your Ever Grateful,

S. Thayalini
(S.Thayalini)
August 06 1992.

Sikhs Document Torture by India

Group releases study in S.F. as prime minister visits Washington

By Evelyn C. White
Chronicle Staff Writer

Human rights advocates in San Francisco urged the U.S. government yesterday to help end systematic torture and political persecution of Sikh separatists in India.

In a protest timed to coincide with the visit of Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao to Washington, the advocates said a recent report confirms allegations made by about 6,000 Sikhs who have sought asylum in the United States during the past year over human rights violations in their country.

The Sikhs make up about 2 percent of India's population. Sikhs who have waged a bloody decade-long battle for a separate homeland in the northern state of Punjab say they are persecuted by the country's Hindu majority.

"At a time when certain anti-immigrant political forces in this country are seeking to cut back the rights of refugees, this report on India documents massive and brutal human rights violations," said Jonathan Melrod, a San Francisco attorney whose firm represents more than 600 Sikh refugees.

"It supports the stories our clients have been telling us about the brutality of the Indian police and

security forces," Melrod said. "Our government needs to recognize that human rights abuses can be perpetrated by so-called friends of the U.S."

The 103-page document — "Dead Silence: The Legacy of Abuses in Punjab" — details abuses against Sikhs including rape, electric shock, savage beatings, "disappearances" and executions, allegedly by Indian police.

In an address to Congress in Washington yesterday, Rao condemned the report, which is based on a 1992 visit to Punjab by officials from Human Rights Watch/Asia and Physicians for Human Rights. He insisted that his government takes "scrupulous care to protect the rights of individuals under due process of law."

Rao is in this country to highlight the economic growth and opportunity that his nation of 900 million represents. Since the end of the Cold War, India has sought increased U.S. trade.

But in San Francisco yesterday, a 28-year-old man spoke haltingly of being arrested and tortured for his involvement in a Sikh student group. The man, identified only as Mr. Singh, said police crushed his thighs with a metal roller and applied electric shock to his genitals.

"Every time I bathe, I remember what happened to me," said Singh, a Sacramento area resident who was recently granted asylum. "I didn't come here for money. I came because of threats to my life. Hopefully, one day things will change in my country, and I will return home."

A Bay Area physician who participated in the Punjab investigation said violations against Sikhs will continue in the absence of protests from rights advocates.

"It is very draining to work with people who have been hurt so badly at the hands of their government," said Dr. Vincent Iacopino of Survivors International, a Berkeley group. "The idea of not helping them is outrageous to me."

Activists say reject INS pacts

Alameda told to follow lead of Contra Costa

By Donna Wasiczko
Staff writer

SAN FRANCISCO — Opponents of the housing of federal immigration detainees in Contra Costa County jail cells advised Alameda County Sheriff Charles Plummer on Friday to follow the example set by Contra Costa County Sheriff Richard Rainey and listen to concerns expressed by residents.

"We urge Sheriff Plummer to follow the precedent set by the Sheriff's Department of Contra Costa County: 'No federal INS detainees will be accepted in our jail.'" Pinole resident Maria Alegria, chairwoman of the Coalition for Human Rights in Contra Costa County, said.

Alegria made the statement at a news conference at the offices of the Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services in San Francisco. Representatives from human rights coalitions in San Francisco, Contra Costa and Alameda counties, members of the Sikh community, immigration attorney Jonathan Melrod and Salvadorian refugee Jose Cartagena urged officials in Bay Area counties to enact ordinances of non-cooperation with the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

"If they do so, it will only hurt the people of those counties," said David Ilchert, director of the INS's San Francisco district.

Plummer said he has no intention of backing out of a contract with the INS for Santa Rita Jail in Dublin to house undocumented immigrants awaiting hearings for asylum in the United States.

"To think we should just let these people go wander out into the United States and get lost someplace is asinine," he said.

Plummer said the federal reimbursement of \$61.80 per day per inmate brings in badly needed revenue for the financially strapped county. He noted the contract gives regular county inmates priority if the jail becomes crowded.

Rainey, who last year began similar negotiations with federal officials because of budget woes, has responded to community concerns by refusing to house federal INS detainees at West County Jail in Richmond.

"The undocumented immigrant and refugee population that Sheriff Plummer is housing in Santa Rita could very well be our grandfathers or grandmothers, our fathers



Times/David Toerge

MARIA ALEGRIA, chairwoman of the Coalition for Human Rights in Contra Costa County, speaks against jailing federal immigration detainees at a San Francisco news conference Friday. In the background, from the left, are Sikh community members Gurdial Singh and Gurmeet Singh and lawyer Jonathan Melrod, who represents Sikh detainees in the Santa Rita Jail.

'To think we should just let these people go wander out into the United States and get lost someplace is asinine.'

— Charles Plummer, Alameda County Sheriff

or our mothers, our sons or our daughters," Alegria said. "They come to the U.S. to ally their human suffering and to seek solace in our communities."

Earlier this year, Rainey and Federal Marshal's officials entered into a verbal contract to house federal prisoners in the Richmond facility. But that contract is limited to prisoners who are awaiting trial on federal criminal charges, Rainey said.

Still at issue, however, is Rainey's and Assistant Sheriff Gerald Mitosinka's definition of who is included in the category of "INS detainees."

Under Rainey's original proposal, which has since been aban-

doned, two types of undocumented immigrants would have been housed at the West County Jail: people detained at San Francisco International Airport who did not have proper documentation needed to enter the country and convicted criminals who had finished serving their sentences and were awaiting deportation proceedings.

Those two classifications are clearly rejected under the current temporary contract. But, Mitosinka said Friday, people arrested by the INS on substantive criminal counts as well as accused criminals with INS holds on their records could be held in the Richmond facility under the oral agreement.

Under that policy, INS agents

could conceivably do sweeps in West County and put those arrested on drug or other criminal allegations in the jail. The possibility of increased INS raids in this area is a major concern of those who oppose county-INS cooperation.

"This is something we will be looking into," said Juan Guevara, an attorney with the Mexican-American Legal Defense Educational Fund in San Francisco.

Mitosinka added Friday that much of the funding pressure has eased in the Sheriff's Department, because money has been raised through contracts with the state Bureau of Corrections and federal officials for non-INS inmates.

This week, a tentative verbal agreement was also made with San Francisco County, where jail facilities are extremely overcrowded. If that is approved, San Francisco officials will pay to house some of their inmates in Contra Costa's Marsh Creek and West County facilities, Mitosinka said.

The activists Friday critici-

zed the INS for arresting those who come to the United States seeking political asylum.

Cartagena, the Salvadorian refugee, said many who come to escape dictatorships and torture are jailed upon arrival.

Ilchert of the INS in San Francisco said later that, although he has no statistics, he believes 99-percent of those who enter the country without documentation come for economic reasons.

Cartagena suggested Ilchert work to stop torture and establish peace and justice in Central America rather than jail immigrants as they arrive.

"That's a novel approach," Ilchert responded in a later interview. "I'm sure the people unemployed in the United States don't share his opinion that the United States owes the world unlimited resources to develop their own economies so they can compete with the United States."

Staff writer Boni Brewer contributed to this report.

RECORDER

THE BAY AREA'S LEGAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1877

THURSDAY, AUGUST 29, 1991

Waylaid in the U.S.A.

Tamils fleeing the violence in Sri Lanka often end up in INS detention even though they want to go to Canada

By SUSAN FREINKEL

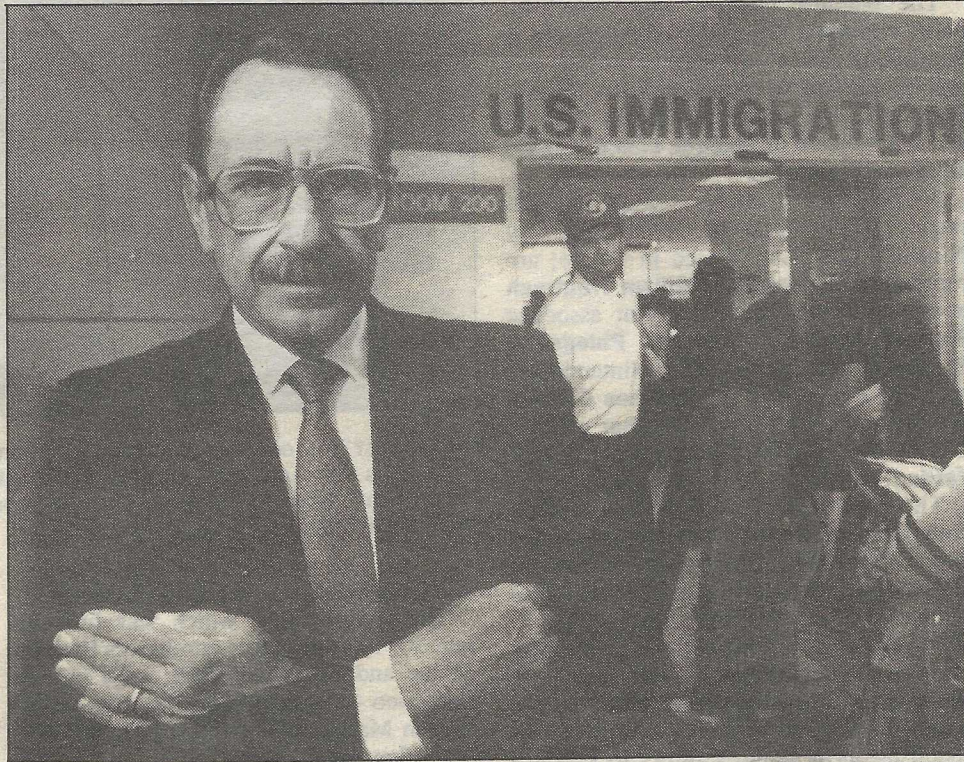
When the Immigration and Naturalization Service picked up Rajendren Murgih at San Francisco International Airport, all he had in his pockets was a beat-up scrap of paper with the phone number of relatives near Toronto.

Murgih was trying to get to Canada, the end point for thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils fleeing the ethnic violence of their homeland. To the INS agents on duty that night, his was a familiar story. They knew Murgih had neither desire nor plans to stay in the United States. But since he lacked the proper documents to enter the country — even if only to cross the airport for the next leg of his flight — they had to arrest him.

For several weeks Murgih was held at the Oakland jail while his lawyer, Jonathan Melrod, tried to reach Murgih's relatives about the case. Overcrowding at the jail finally forced the service to release Murgih in early July, according to Melrod. The Tamil fled for Canada, where he is living today.

Murgih is just one of hundreds of Tamils trying to move through U.S. ports who have gotten trapped in this country's immigration machinery. Though other groups, such as Indian Sikhs, also have been stopped in transit, the Tamils appear to be most frequently affected, according to lawyers and immigration officials.

The situation is one where law and reality clash, imposing a strange choreography on frustrated lawyers and officials who play out their roles fully aware that their actions don't matter. In the end, most Tamils detained in the United States take



RUSSELL D. CURTIS

JUST DOING HIS JOB: "Just because some guy gets off the plane with no documents and says 'I'm on my way to Canada,' we should let him go? No, we're required to follow what the law states, not our own feelings," said deputy district director Philip Waters.

off for Canada at the first opportunity. Even those who stay long enough to win asylum here often leave.

"This is a major headache for immigration attorneys" says one lawyer who has represented Tamils. "They don't want to be here," and everyone knows that, she says.

"It's too bad [this] has to happen, because they really are going on to Canada," says San Francisco lawyer John Ricci, who has made a mini-specialty of the Tamil cases. "I've talked about it casually with the [INS] attorneys and in general their feeling is 'Hey, what are we going to do —

See TAMILS page 8

Use of jails for INS detainees pits rights activists against officials

By Boni Brewer
Staff writer

Should the federal government detain refugees seeking political asylum or let them go free until an immigration judge decides their fate?

The question is one being asked not only at Santa Rita Jail but around the nation as more prisons and jails get undocumented immigrants awaiting hearings for political asylum.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service holds 5,000 undocumented immigrants at federal detention facilities, state prisons and county jails, said spokesman Duke Austin in Washington, D.C.

Austin said the detention policy is designed to deter illegal aliens — many without valid asylum claims — from “barging” into the United States and becoming a drain on the domestic economy.

But advocates for the refugees say putting them in jail violates the human rights of people who fled here

INSIDE

Many seek asylum in the United States, but few refugees are allowed to stay. **10A**

for fear of political, racial or religious persecution in their own countries.

“The INS policy of holding political refugees in custody is cruel and irrational and has the counterproductive effect of deterring victims of political persecution from seeking refuge in the United States,” immigration lawyer Jonathan Melrod said.

“I don’t think it is right that victims of torture and political persecution who come to the United States looking for political freedom are locked up in jail like criminals,” said Chaudhary Zafar Shehiad, a Pakistani

Please see INS, back page.

FROM PAGE 1A

who on Jan. 24 was granted asylum in U.S. immigration court.

Shehiad, who was quoted through an interpreter, was held at Santa Rita Jail for more than two months. He noted he was released Dec. 30 because of overcrowding and still showed up for his court hearing Jan. 24.

"I not run," he later said in broken English from a Berkeley apartment. He's staying with a friend there while working with attorneys on ways to get his family here. Shehiad, who said he was arrested and tortured in Pakistan for supporting ousted Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, said his wife and five children are "not safe" in Pakistan.

'Release refugees'

People fleeing to the United States from governments known to torture political dissidents should be given "the benefit of the doubt" and set free on bonds or on their own recognizance while awaiting asylum hearings, said Ron Bogin of the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant.

"Many of these people fled their homes without anything but the shirts on their backs, so they're not carrying any type of written proof of being persecuted," said Bogin, who works mainly with refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala. "But it's pretty straightforward as far as we're concerned. There have been serious abuses in those countries."

But Austin said that when the INS declined to detain some 30,000 Central Americans illegally entering through Texas over a six-month period in 1989, "less than 10 percent ever showed up" to scheduled hearings. He said the number attempting to enter illegally declined to a couple thousand during the next six months after detention policies were again imposed.

"The law says that people who arrive here at airports without documents or with fraudulent documents ... shall be detained until their status is determined," Austin said.

The INS can waive the detention requirement if it's in "the public interest" or in emergency situations. "But we recognize that if we don't detain people, it will only encourage an increased level of illegal entry ... and make a sham out of our immigration program," he said.

Drain on economy

Although it cost the federal government nearly \$158 million last year for detention and deportation, Austin said what can't be measured is the drain that unlimited immigration would have on the U.S. economy.

But some activists have a different viewpoint.

"I don't think it is right that victims of torture and political persecution who come to the United States looking for political freedom are locked up in jail like criminals."

— Chaudhary Zafar Shehiad, a Pakistani who was granted asylum

Pinole resident Maria Alegria is fighting a proposed contract with the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department for INS detainees to be held in the West County Jail. Alegria says allowing undocumented immigrants to work is less costly than detaining them.

"It's going to cost double to pay to keep them detained, whereas they can be working and paying taxes," she said.

Alegria and other Hispanic and human-rights activists last year joined to form the Coalition for Human Rights in Contra Costa County, which is fighting Sheriff Richard Rainey's money-making plan with the INS.

That plan is currently at a standstill. This month, the county's Human Relations Commission came out against the plan and has recommended that the Board of Supervisors prohibit Rainey from carrying it through.

High levels of immigration have historically occurred when the U.S. economy was healthy, "but something we're seeing now is increased levels of immigration, legal and illegal, at a time of economic downturn in the United States," Austin said. "I think we're going to hear more and more in this coming election year about jobs for Americans."

Phil Waters, deputy director for the Northern California district of INS, said refugees "are eligible for welfare right off the bat."

David Ilchert, the district's director, said that having additional de-

tention space through agreements like the one at Santa Rita enables more undocumented immigrants to be held.

"But it's not a crackdown like we're going out into the streets and up and down BART stations arresting people," he said. "These people are showing up at airports saying, 'Let me in.'"

"If we release them pending their hearings and give them (court-ordered) work authorizations, we'll never see them again," Ilchert said.

"It's in the public interest for immigration laws to be enforced."

Ilchert said the INS had tried to build a privately run federal detention facility in Oakland to increase non-jail capacity and keep families together, but that local activists "shot that down" through the Oakland City Council.

Immigrant advocates say that detaining refugees is contrary to American tradition and complain that immigrants have become "scapegoats" for U.S. economic problems.

"We have to remember our roots, that we're an immigrant nation," said Len Libresco of the International Institute for the East Bay, which has worked with immigrants and refugees since 1919.

Libresco said asylum is sometimes denied based on U.S. foreign policies and not on whether the country in question indeed persecutes its political dissidents. He said that between 1980 and 1990, U.S.

support for the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala meant that thousands of people who fled here were denied asylum, while those from Communist countries were routinely granted asylum. A lawsuit in 1990 prompted Congress to allow Salvadorans and Guatemalans still in the country to reapply, but Libresco said discriminatory practices persist.

No competition

Advocates said they don't believe refugees, many of whom were professionals in their own countries, are competing for jobs with Americans being laid off because of the recession.

"These immigrants are taking whatever work they can get, at very low wages," Bogin said. "They are jobs that most Americans don't want or haven't wanted — bus boys, dishwashers, gardeners and laborers."

"I don't see immigrants hurting anybody or taking away jobs from people. America's (newly) unemployed might be desperate, but they're trying to stay in positions at least close to what they were doing before."

Parshotam Dodwani, a 25-year-old Pakistani being held at Santa Rita, said he and many other detainees are well-off financially and didn't come to the United States for economic reasons. He said he paid \$6,000 for his airline ticket and false documentation provided by an agent, and left behind 100 acres of land in Pakistan.

"I come here to save my life," Dodwani said. "If I don't have problem, why I leave my family? I like my family. I love my country. If political problem in Pakistan solved, I go back. Don't want stay here."

He said that when more than 3 million Afghan refugees fled to Pakistan in 1980, they were "welcomed" rather than jailed.

Area groups seek due process rights for all immigrants

Continued from Page A-1
tract.

Plummer said he will not attend the hearing because his views already are well-known: "I believe people who are here illegally should not be allowed to wander around while they are waiting for a court trial."

Plummer estimated the contract to hold INS and other federal prisoners brings \$14,000 a day to cash-strapped Alameda County.

"It's not like I'm a whore, just doing it for the money," he added. "I'm doing it because I believe in it, and if it makes money that's good too."

In Contra Costa County, the sheriff's department considered a similar contract, but decided not to hold INS prisoners after community members objected.

In San Rafael, the city council will decide whether to allow a crack-and-prostitution task force to notify the INS if illegal immigrants are arrested for using drugs or soliciting prostitutes in that city's Canal area. Police hope the threat of deportation will keep "johns" away.

Emily Goldfarb, director of Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services, says immigrants often are scapegoats during hard times.

"Our governor, Pete Wilson, more than any other official has repeatedly blamed immigrants for the state's financial problems," she said.

Advocates said many of the

immigrants detained at Santa Rita or the Oakland City Jail are Sikhs persecuted for their religious beliefs or Central Americans fleeing political violence. Many have applied for political asylum.

"When they come here, they come not to seek a better life in the sense of an economic life but because their life is in danger," said Gurmeet Singh of Hayward, a spokesman for the International Sikh Organization.

INS Regional Director David Ilchert, however, earlier said he believes most of the detainees came to the United States for economic reasons.

Ilchert said they would disappear before their amnesty hearings if they were not kept in jail.

Immigrant advocates say the INS should release illegal aliens without bail or with low bail because they have not violated criminal laws.

Attorney Jonathan Melrod, who represents several Sikh prisoners, said many fled from imprisonment and torture in their home countries, only to find themselves prisoners again in the United States.

Melrod said the INS had released about 200 aliens under a pilot project in 1990 and 1991. According to the test, almost 100 percent showed up for their hearings. If they were rejected for amnesty during the hearings, however, many disappeared or accepted resettlement to Canada.

Oak Tribune Mar 1, 1992

Rights groups protest detaining of immigrants

by Judy Ronningen
tribune staff writer

SAN FRANCISCO — Immigrant rights groups say increased cooperation between law enforcement and federal immigration officials — including a contract to hold illegal aliens at the Alameda County jail — is part of a disturbing wave of anti-immigrant sentiment.

The groups yesterday urged Alameda County Sheriff Charles Plummer to stop holding Immigration and Naturalization detainees at the Santa Rita Jail in Dublin. More than 80, many of them from India and Pakistan, currently are held there pending hearings.

The county Human Relations Commission will hold a public meeting on the INS contract March 12 at 6:30 p.m. at the county public works auditorium, 99 Elmhurst St., Hayward.

Neither the commission nor the board of supervisors, however, has any authority over the con-

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