

## British campaigners defend Asian journalist against prying police

Senior journalists and freedom of expression campaigners in Britain Monday protested a bid by British police to force an acclaimed Asian journalist to hand over his notes from interviews with a former Al Qaeda terrorist.

A British court this week is to hear the case against Greater Manchester Police, which is also trying to force four international media groups to hand over notes from interviews with journalist Shiv Malik.

Malik is the author of a forthcoming book about Hassan Butt, a former British Al Qaeda recruiter who renounced violence after the July 7, 2005, terror attacks in London, which left 52 innocent civilians dead.

Although Butt later became a vocal opponent of extremism, he was arrested 10 days ago under the Terrorism Act.

Meanwhile, Manchester Police forced Malik to hand over notes from his interviews with Butt.

As the story hit the national headlines, Malik was interviewed by a number of media organisation, and Manchester police are now trying to get hold of notes from these interviews as well.

Four media groups targeted by police - the British Broadcasting Corporation, the American television network CBS, Prospect magazine and The Sunday Times newspaper - are to be represented Wednesday at a court hearing where Malik will be fighting the police order against him.

In a letter to The Times newspaper Monday, leading British broadcaster David Dimbleby, civil rights leader Shami Chakrabarti and 15 other prominent British journalists and freedom of expression campaigners said the police action poses 'a serious risk to the future of investigative journalism.'

'Journalism like Malik's is only possible because people are willing to speak out to reporters privately and in confidence. We believe that the police's attempt to obtain Malik's materials threatens the future of all publications that seek to expose terrorist organisations to public scrutiny and that if requests like this become routine under counter-terrorism legislation, it would have major implications for media freedom in this country,' they said.

Butt, who left the Al Qaeda in January 2006, was said to have been working with some of his original recruits to wean young Muslims away from terror.

He met Home Office Minister Tony McNulty last July to discuss ideas about tackling radicalisation.

'It's not easy being hunted by jihadis who want to kill you, moderate Muslims who think you have betrayed Islam, and the Manchester police who might want to prosecute me,' Butt said.

( © IANS / India eNews)