

Pakistan: A Doctor arrested for blasphemy

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A doctor has been arrested for insulting the Prophet Mohammed in Pakistan, police said on Sunday, in a second high profile case throwing the spotlight on the country's controversial anti-blasphemy laws.

Naushad Valiyani was detained on Friday following a complaint by a medical representative who visited the doctor in the city of Hyderabad.

"The arrest was made after the complainant told the police that Valiyani threw his business card, which had his full name, Muhammad Faizan, in a dustbin during a visit to his clinic," regional police chief Mushtaq Shah told AFP.

"Faizan accused Valiyani of committing blasphemy and asked police to register a case against the doctor."

Shah said the issue had been resolved after Valiyani, a member of Pakistan's Ismaili community, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, apologised but local religious leaders intervened and pressed for action.

"Valiyani had assured Faizan that he did not mean to insult the Prophet Mohammed by throwing the visiting card in the dustbin," Shah said, adding that the police had registered a case under the Blasphemy Act.

A Pakistani court last month sentenced to death Aasia Bibi, a Christian mother-of-five found guilty of blasphemy.

Bibi was arrested in June 2009 after Muslim women claimed that she made derogatory remarks about the Prophet Mohammed. She was set upon by a mob, arrested by police and sentenced on November 8.

The government attempted to pardon Bibi after an international outcry over the case, but a Pakistani court prevented it from granting her a swift pardon.

She can be executed only if the Lahore high court upholds her sentence on appeal. No date has yet been set for the appeal hearing.

Most of those convicted of blasphemy in Pakistan have their sentences overturned or commuted on appeal through the courts.

The country has yet to execute anyone for blasphemy, but the case has highlighted a controversial law which rights activists say encourages Islamist extremism in a Muslim country on the front line of the US-led war on Al-Qaeda.

Only around three percent of Pakistan's population of 167 million are estimated to be non-Muslim.

