

Another battle won: Peasants fight back at Military Farms Okara

Wednesday 21 May 2008, by [TARIQ Farooq](#) (Date first published: 20 May 2008).

Day One:

On 19 May, private gangsters with the protection of a large number of police tried to take over the land at Chack 28/2LR in Kulayan Estate Military Farms Okara. The peasants reoccupied the 200 acres of land in March 2008 after Pakistan Peoples Party government has come to power. This land belonged to them but in year 2002, some of former military top officers kicked the peasants out of land and occupied it without any reason.

The top military officers sent dozens of gangsters to the village with the most sophisticated weapons alongside with hundreds of police officers to take over the land. The local Anjuman Mozareen Punjab were not prepared for this onslaught but decided to fight back. Saleem Jakar peasant secretary Labour Party Pakistan Punjab chapter led them. The women came out in large numbers with their wooden sticks and told the attackers that they will die but will not leave the land. The police used baton charge but retreated after a pitch battle by the peasant's women and men.

Then they started firing at the village with most sophisticated weapons. It went on for hours. The peasant fired in defense but decided not to let them to occupy the land.

I called the Inspector general of Police in Punjab and asked him to order for stopping the firing on the village. We also informed the media about this firing. However, there was not much interest by the media. The firing injured three persons including one peasant leader Zahid but fortunately, there was no death.

Day Two:

On 20 May, it was decided to block the main Grand Trunk Road (GT Road) linking Lahore to Southern Punjab. Over 2000 managed to come on the main road and blocked it until the police stop firing and arrest those responsible for firing. That was what the local administration feared the most. They did not think that AMP will be able to bring the peasants to the main road because of the firing by these gangsters.

The gangsters were brought from different parts of Punjab to help in the occupation of the land. Most of them were known criminals and wanted by police. But what a tragedy, those wanted by police were firing under the guidance of police on innocent peasants.

Once the main road was blocked then the peasants had the upper hand. The traffic is always very heavy on this road. The blockade of few minutes always results long queue of trucks and other transport. This happened this time as well.

The top police officers of the district arrived at the scene and asked the peasant to vacate the main road. They refused. Then the offer of negotiations was made.

We agreed and lifted the blockade after two hours but told the police officers, we will not go away until the negotiations are over.

I had already informed the media in Lahore. The media interest was seen within minutes and the blockade was broadcasted all over Pakistan as breaking news. This went in our favour. The news brought back the memories of earlier struggle by the AMP. The peasants had refused to back down under general Musharaf most brutal treatment of the villages in the year 2002/2003.

The administration had to retreat. The police officers accepted to withdraw all forces from the area. They agree to arrest those gangsters responsible for indiscriminate firing on the village. They told the delegation that the police would not enter in the area.

After the successful acceptance of the main demands, the peasants women and men went back home. We do not know if the promises will be kept but at least for the time being, police has been forced to retreat and some normality of the situation.

Saleem Jakar, the main leader of this peasant uprising was elected as peasant secretary Labour Party Pakistan Punjab on 20 April 2008 at LPP congress.