

Thousands Join Lawyers' Long March In Pakistan

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Thousands of lawyers, political, trade unions and social movement activists have made their way to Islamabad. They are participating in the Long March called by the lawyer's movement. This is to push the Pakistan Peoples Party government to restore the top judges without any conditions.

June 11 report: The Long March started from Karachi on June 9 arrived in Sukhar at early hours of June 10. Here they were joined by the participants of different groups from Baluchistan. They arrived at Multan on June 10 late hours, where the deposed chief justice Iftikhar Choudary had arrived to welcome this rally. They are still at Multan at the time of writing this report on the morning of 11 June. They would leave for Lahore around 1pm.

At Lahore, thousands will go to Lahore airport at 5pm to receive the chief justice Iftikhar Choudary and other deposed judges. The caravan will come to Lahore High Court where Iftikhar Choudary will speak to a convention of lawyers. On June 12, the participants of the Long March will leave for Islamabad. The lawyer's leadership has not yet announced the plans for Islamabad. But it is understood that the activists will Gherao (picket) the parliament.

Labour Party Pakistan activists have joined the Long March from Karachi and on the way and they are joined by other LPP activists. They will be joined by another 50 LPP activists from Lahore. At Islamabad, the LPP is setting up camp to welcome the Long March participants.

The Long March was called after the newly elected parliament failed to restore the top judges as promised before the general elections. The Pakistan Peoples Party had promised to restore the judges within one month of coming to power but failed to do so. They want these judges restored through a constitutional package that include many conditions on the freedom of the judiciary. The lawyer's movement started on 9 March 2007 is entering its decisive phase. The Long March has caught up the imaginations of many workers and peasants and has started to join the movement.

June 12 update from Gojranwal: At Gojranwala, a city around 70 kilometer from Lahore, it was once again a scene we had witnessed all the way from Lahore: hundreds of youth raising slogans against Musharraf. It is 1 am and still hundreds of people on the road to welcome the Long March. All way long it was a jubilation and slogans and a lot abuses shouted against Musharraf. Maybe over 100,000 had waved hands to the 1000 or more vehicles in the Long March.

At one time, while I was doing an interview with KTN, a Sindhi TV channel, hundreds of youth surrounded our bus and raised popular slogans like "Go Musharraf go!" It was broadcast live through my telephone.

At Lahore, while we were stuck for half an hour, a comrade told us that Mian Nawaz Sharif, the former prime minister, was going to speak at a rally to welcome the Long March. We decided to have our own rally while all the traffic was stuck.

Over 100 of us with red flags started going to the place where Nawaz Sharif was going to speak. Many more hundreds followed us. We were raising slogans and waving our flags. While near the rally place, we were stopped by police, we pushed them to go further. Next were barricades to stop

people going near the platform. I was the first one to jump the barricades despite all the efforts of police to stop us. Then four women jumped the barricades.

The police were very rough and so were we! Police overpowered our comrades who were unable to jump. They asked us to go back. We refused point blank. The SP police threatened me of arrest, I became more vocal on this and started shouting at police. They had to retreat. We went ahead very close to platform, five of us: four women and myself with red flags.

We were cheered by some from the platform including Nawaz Sharif. Others were Aitezaz Ahsan, Saad Rafique, Iqbal Haider of HRCF.

Some TV channels showed live about our encounter and a lot of press photographers were seen taking photos. I was later called by Daily Dawn if I was manhandled, and I told the whole story. Thousands cheered our action and showed V signs while we were returning.

At Gojranwal city center, we got off our buses and raised slogans at 1.30am. Here, over 5000 had gathered and we were surrounded immediately by hundreds.

We have been offered and given food and drinks all way. A lot of rose petals showered on all the buses. Here one commented when I opened my window: Go and get rid of Musharraf and I am also coming to Islamabad.

June 12 update from Lahore: We are now ready to go to Islamabad at 3pm on 12 June. Original schedule of 9 am departure had to be changed as the address of the Chief Justice finished at 6am Lahore High Court.

Labour Party Pakistan set up a big camp in front of Dher Pindi, a village opposite Lahore Airport. The village land has been taken over by the land mafia of PMLQ. We had this campaign of land rights for the last two years. Over 500 participated, many women.

I had a brief chat with Iftikhar Choudry CJ while he stopped at our camp of all red flags. I explained him about the land mafia and requested to take a notice. He was smiling and may be happy to see hundreds of peasants with red flag and supporting him.

Our Karachi comrades arrived this morning at 6 am and we had arranged their residence at Caritas. We had to pay for the residence. They are 40 of them travelling since 9 June from Karachi.

We have booked three flying coaches from Lahore for Islamabad leg of the Long March. Now waiting for the mini buses to arrive. Around 60 from LPP Lahore will join the lawyers.

June 13 update: I am on a bus roof top for two hours. I cannot tell how many have started from Lahore for the Long March to Islamabad but everywhere there are heads and heads.

It is going beyond our expectations.

Our four vehicles are decorated with red flags and they are flying like anything.

The lawyers movement have caught up the imagination of hundreds of thousands. It took us two hours to travel few kilometers inside Lahore and still in Lahore.

There are thousands of people on both side of the roads waving us and happy to see the thousands of people in Long March.

Slogans are against military dictator Musharraf, American imperialism, and against price hike, for

restoration of top judges, and for a just society.

There are cheers and confidence on every face. Activists from Muslim League Nawaz, Tehrik Insaaf, Jamaat-i- Islami, Labour Party, Awami Tehreek and lawyers movement are in thousands on different buses, trucks, mini buses and cars.

Islamabad is around 400 kilometers and we are still in Lahore at 7.30pm. I think it could take whole night to arrive in Islamabad. We want to have a sit in at parliament.

Pakistan Peoples Party is nowhere to be seen. It is an all out opposition show. What a tragedy for PPP to bring so many in opposition within three months.

June 13, Rawalpindi Update: I could not write as regularly on the developments of the Long March as I had wished due to the stealing of my mobile that I was using to send reports on the way. Now I am at net cafe in Rawalpindi, as thousands are in the Long March and stuck at Liaquat Park. I took the opportunity to write on.

We arrived in Rawalpindi from Lahore in nearly 20 hours. So a distance of 300 kilometers was covered in 20 hours. The reason was that many thousands of people were waiting for the Long March and they were stopping them to speak to them. I have never seen such a sentiments against the military ruler General Musharraf as was witnessed on the route. Every single person was angry on General Musharraf. they wanted the judges to be restored.

At 4am, in Gujrat, over 4000 were waiting for us and there was a public meeting at the time. So was the case all along. The road were not deserted but full of people where ever there was some population. At Rawalpindi, it is see of heads all over. After long time, ordinary Pakistanis have joined the lawyers movement. Those who were saying where are the people, they can see today where are the people. They are all against the military rule and for restoration of the top judges.

There are stalls every where and the participants are offered water and some time some food as well. It is very hot and still the participant of this historic long march are fighting the heat by coming openly in the sun to raise slogans.

Around fifty women members of Labour Party Pakistan were raising slogans all the way. they were very energetic and participating in full capacity.

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