

Report From Pakistan On The Verge Of A Political Showdown

Sunday 15 March 2009, by [JAN Ammar Ali](#) (Date first published: 15 March 2009).

Lahore,

I have been active in the lawyers movement since it started in March 2007 against the illegal sacking of the CJ. Initially, I was in the US completing my undergrad degree but since December 2007, I have been participating in the movement from Lahore.

I am a member of the Progressive Youth Front (PYF) as well as Student Action Committee (SAC). Through these platforms, we have been convincing youngsters to take part in this epic journey that can change the destination of Pakistan. Many have registered with us and we will be bringing many youngsters to the Long March on Monday March 16.

It is important to note that the student movement in Pakistan was crushed in the 1980s by the brutal military dictatorship of General Zia. The lawyers' movement has since revived the spirit of resistance amongst students as hundreds of students went on strike against the imposition of emergency by General Musharraf in November 2007. Since then, students have actively participated in the lawyer's movement, the first such participation by students on a national issue in over two decades.

Three LPP members from Karachi are staying over at my place tonight. They took part in the demonstrations in Karachi and were beaten up by the police. They managed to escape arrests and reach Lahore via train. They are in high spirits and are ready to take on the might of the government tomorrow. We all went to Lahore Press Club where the journalist community was protesting the closure of Geo Television channel.

More arrests of activists

Today, more LPP activists were arrested in Hyderabad and Faisalabad. This news had initially upset some comrades. However, one of our comrades reminded us that now we must increase our struggle for the Long March as owe it to our arrested comrades. This raised our morale and it will be evident in our demonstration tomorrow.

The city has been turned into a prison cell with police checkpoints almost everywhere. We decided to hold a meeting with comrades in other left parties in Lahore and chose the "Faiz Aman mela" for this purpose. This was an event held to pay tribute to Faiz Ahmad Faiz, a revolutionary poet who spent his entire life fighting for social justice. We used this "cultural" event to hold a small meeting in order to strategize about tomorrow.

We decided to approach the Lahore High Court (this is supposed to be the starting point for the Lahore leg of the Long March) in individual capacity without any processions on Monday. We decided to do this because the police will probably not allow any group of activists to move towards the High Court. Once we reach the High Court, we will gather our forces and come out on the streets with the lawyers.

The government has already announced that it will not allow the Long March to leave from Lahore

which will inevitably lead to clashes between the protestors and the police. We decided that we will resist the police suppression and prove to the government that the power of the state can be met by the power of the street.

However, if the entire mall road, on which the High Court is located, is blocked, then we will stage a sit-in wherever we are stopped and will be ready to face the consequences, including mass arrests.

Colonial law used against Long March

This high level of crackdown on opposition members simply means that the government is paranoid about the long march and wants to do everything in order to crush the movement. This in itself is a victory for the movement as only a few days ago, the Peoples Party of Pakistan (PPP) ministers were saying that the lawyer's movement will fail to bring people out on the streets.

Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code has been imposed by the government because it fears the might of the movement. This is a law from the colonial era which the British used to suppress any dissent amongst its Indian subjects.

As is the case with most post-colonial states, the elites that replaced the colonial masters used the same tyrannical apparatus to crush the aspirations of the people. This is exactly what has happened in Pakistan under almost all governments since independence. Today, Zardari and his gang is using this colonial law to suppress those demanding freedom and justice for their motherland.

We have no interest in the overthrow of the government simply to have it replaced by another government of elites. Even if this government is replaced by the opposition party of Nawaz Sharif, it won't change the lives of ordinary Pakistanis because Sharif's party is also extremely right-wing. Our purpose for going into this movement has been to ensure the independence of the judiciary and more importantly, building the confidence amongst ordinary people that popular participation in politics can yield results. This will help us in our struggles directly concerning the interests of the working class. We have also been able to attract a lot of youngsters towards the left because of this movement.

Danger of military takeover

The biggest loss for the movement will be if the Army Chief, General Kiyani decides to overthrow Zardari's government. Labour Party Pakistan has struggled against the military dictatorship of Pakistan and we believe that even the worst kind of democracy is better than dictatorship. When military generals overthrow elected governments, they inevitably increase the popularity of mainstream parties and hence the cycle continues. In order to break that cycle, we need a civilian set-up so that we can organize an alternative. Hence, the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) will never support a military takeover no matter how brutal this elected government becomes. We believe in change from below, not from above.

All the mainstream parties, as well as the army and religious fundamentalists offer no viable alternative to the masses. All these forces are in bed with US imperialism and big business. They have not spoken against the neo-liberal agenda that is being aggressively imposed on the people of Pakistan. This is the ideal time for the people on the left to unite and present an alternative to the present mess created by all these forces.

P.S.

* From ASAP website:

<http://www.asia-pacific-action.org/...>

* Ammar Ali Jan is Youth Secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan Lahore. He will be one of several international at the the World at a Crossroads conference in Sydney, Australia, April 10-12. For more information, or to book tickets, visit <http://www.worldatacrossroads.org>.