

The peasant movement decide not to pay anymore, once again

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Tufail Cheema was second in line who was killed by the state forces in year 2002 at Probanbad military farms in Depalpur area of Punjab. He was a local leader of Anjuman Mozareen Punjab (Tennants Association of Punjab, the peasant organisation fighting against the military farms adminstraion for land rights).

At the time, we went from Lahore to speak to a memorail meeting only a day after the killing. He was killed because he had refused to pay the share of crop or the contract amount to the military farms adminstration. This was a call by the AMP leadership not to pay and raise the slogan of death or ownership (Malki Yaa Mout). There were several hundreds attending the meeting. But the mood was a bit off.

During the following four years, many tennants started to pay the share and contract amount to the military administration apart from a handful of AMP leaders. These leaders were frequently harrassed, arrested and were subject to death threats.

In May 2006, the military farm adminstration got two leaders of AMP beaten up again by the police who had refused to hand over the crops to the adminstration. This sparked a new wave of rebellion.

Labour Party Pakistan was contacted by them for a demonstration in Lahore. That was organised in middle of May 2006 but not much press converage. Although the main leadership of AMP including the two elected mayers of union councils in Okara and Renalakhurd, Mehr Abdul Sattar and Nadeem Asharaf participated in Lahore demonstration.

We contacted Asma Jehangir, chairperson Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, and invited her to a public meeting to be held in Proban Abad on 5th June 2006. She agreed but later apologised as she has to appear in a supreme court case on the same day . We decided to goahead in any case for the demo and no cancellation. The poster were printed and flyposted in all the different villages around the area.

This brought a massive reaction from the local police. Here are some details of police harrasment to stop the public meeting.

- 1- all the tents shops in Depalpur, Pakpattan and Okara were asked not to supply any tents and chairs for the meeting.
- 2- asked the local leadership of AMP to cancel the public meeting or face the consequences
- 3- asked me not attend the meeting as cheif guest and that i will be stopped forcefully to enter the area
- 4- asked all the hotels not supply food stuff for the participants of the public meeting
- 5- several police camps established around the area where the meeting was going to take place

6- main roads leading to the area were closed

Despite all these suppressive tactics, the public meeting on 5th June was a massive success. We were able to reach the venue after we changed our route to the area and took a long route.

The peasants brought their charpais, over 150 of them for seating and all the villages were asked to provide any piece of curtain for the covering of the public meeting place. It was around 44 degrees at the time. So a very colourful scene of the public meeting.

Over 2000 peasants were able to make their way despite all the police tactics to stop them. Several tractor trollies were stopped anyhow and people sent back. Over 300 peasant women present in the public meeting were armed with chappas (the wooden stick that they use to clean the dirty cloths, some time they had used that to clean the dirty police in Okara district),

46 motor cycles with two or three on each of them, were able to reach the public meeting from Okara after they drove over 46 kilometers in the fields to avoid the arrests. They included Mehr Abdull Satar, the elected union council member of Okara military farms.

The public meeting went on for over 5 hours and there was not a single person who left his place and was not ready to listen to speeches from over a dozen speakers. The meeting endorsed the decision of the seven villages in the area, not to pay any share or contract amount anymore to the military farms administration. The peasant rebellion has spread in a more militant form. There are over 13000 acres of land with seven villages in this area that make up the military farms.

Another round of conflict has started, now in the same area where Tufail Cheema was killed by the police and rangers four years before and the movement had died down.

We all gave our support to the peasant movement and told the gathering that we are here to stay and will fight back.

Here is what I wrote before I went to attend this public meeting

Democracy under dictatorship, some of my personal experiences

It has been a very rare occasion that we wanted to organise some public event and there is no intimidations, threats or arrests during the last six years under General Pervez Musharraf.

It comes all the time. A police inspector, a deputy superintendent of police or a senior superintendent of police will call to our office or on my mobile. Some time, it is one of the intelligence services that call. The message is almost the same all the time. "Cancel your event, postpone it, there is section 144 imposed". They also try to say this firstly in a friendly manner, and then in a threatening manner. It depends how you react. We are always friendly on telephone but firm in our holding of demonstration or the planned event.

This is the beginning. Then comes the force itself. Some time, they will come to Labour Party Pakistan office to persuade us for cancellation. Whenever, we argue, this is our democratic right to organise, they smile and say normally, "what democracy, we are bound to act on the orders. Demonstrations

are not allowed, get the permission form the administration and you are allowed to hold the demo”.

The administration in Lahore is the local government. The Lahore mayer is responsible for the police. We normally send a letter informaing the local government that this event is taking place. But we never ask permission. In most cases, we do not get a reply. The reply we get in some cases is “not allowed”.

Some time, we are arrested, other times, police back down and in some cases we do not take out the planned route of a demonstration, but we never postponed any event under the threats.

Why I am writting this now, is another event, taking place tomorrow on 5th June.

Anjaman Mozareen Punjab AMP (the peasant organisation that is fighting for land rights at the military farms in Okara district) is organising the public meeting on 5th June at Probanabad Depalpur. This is a public meeting demanding the peasants rights of land that is been occupied by the military for over 100 years.

Asma Jehanghir, chairperson of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan promissed to be the cheif guest at the public meeting but she has to appear in Supreme Court tomorrow, so she is not coming. Instead I am asked to be the cheif guest. I was anyhow going there.

Since yestersay, the Depalpur plice have been calling to our office and mobile phones asking us not to come. I am not attending their phone since morning, so many calles I have not responded. But they were able to get hold of Afzal Soraya, secretary LPP in Punjab, who have been asked and threatened, “LPP must not come”.

I am going tomorrow to the public meeting , come what may. It is our democratic right to speak and attend a meeting. But the dsemocracy under military dictatorship is like that. We will not accept this democracy and will fight back and are fighting back, not in words but in practice.

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