

Pakistan: 2015 Faiz Ahmad Faiz Festival - The Left against religious extremism

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Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984) was a prominent left-wing intellectual, revolutionary poet, and one of the most regarded poets of the Urdu language (he also wrote poetry in the Punjabi language). Marxist, he was member of the Progressive Writers' Movement (PWM).

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Faiz Mela — a call for curbing extremism

LAHORE: The 23rd Faiz Aman Mela held at Open Air Theatre, Bagh-i-Jinnah, (Lawrence Gardens) roped in thousands of fans of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, including, civil society folks, trade union activists, political workers and students here on Sunday.

The peace festival that has become a regular feature of the city's cultural calendar concluded with a lively, vigorous music and cultural evening, marking 104th birthday celebrations of the poet. It was organised by Faiz Aman Mela Committee which comprised officials of Awami Workers Party (AWP) and members of several Left-leaning groups. The Mela was dedicated to victims of Peshawar school attack.

The venue, festooned with illuminations, was almost packed to its capacity. There were a number of book stalls set up by different publishers, besides food stalls.

The music performances were so enthralling that many youngsters could help dancing, Bhangra being their favourite folk dance.

A theatrical performance 'Heer', directed by Huma Safdar, was impressive in all respects. Music was the core activity of the Mela as vocalists, including Jawad Ahmed, Adeel Burki, Anayat Abid and Lal Band enthralled the audience by singing Faiz's poetry and different songs and ghazals.

An entertainment starved audience living under persistent fear of terrorism enjoyed every moment of live music performances which were also free of cost.

Faiz's family members also graced the occasion. Saleema Hashmi, the eldest daughter of Faiz, while speaking on the occasion about Peshawar carnage got so overwhelmed she broke into tears. Ms Hashmi said Faiz's message was all about peace and love.

Faiz Amn Mela: 'Mobilise working people to curb religious extremism'

LAHORE: The idea that economic growth through attraction of foreign direct investment will help curb religious extremism is flawed. The country can be rid of extremism only by mobilising working people to guard their rights, academic and activist Taimur Rahman said on Saturday.

He was speaking at a seminar on the political thought and ideology of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and its relevance to religious extremism and class struggle in Pakistan. The seminar was held in connection with Faiz's 104th birthday celebrations at Al-hamra on the Mall.

He said the link between economic growth and democracy was based on a widespread misconception about the emergence of democratic governments in Western Europe. He said the emergence of democratic governments in the region had owed more to the political activism of industrial workers than the economic activities of merchants.

Singer Jawad Ahmed said the middle classes needed to unite on a single political platform in order to strengthen the movement for the rights of working people. He said this unified front could then educate the people and mobilise them on issues pertaining to workers' rights.

Women's rights activist Nighat Saeed Khan reminded the audience about the importance of women's participation in efforts aimed at expanding the rights of working people. She said one could refer to Faiz's personal life to underscore the importance of women's role in workers' movement. "Alys Faiz was a source of constant support for Faiz," she said.

Faiz's grandson Ali Hashmi raised the issue of Faiz's personal beliefs on religion. He referred to some of Faiz's poetry and highlighted his association with religion. "It would be wrong to say that Faiz was not religious.

Awami Workers' Party president Abid Hassan Minto, who was the chief guest, said Faiz's personal beliefs were not relevant to his political work. He said organisations like ISIL, Al Qaeda and Boko Haram claimed to represent Islam but they had nothing in common with Faiz. "Religion is open to many interpretations. It is everyone's personal business," he said. Celebrations for Faiz's birthday will continue tomorrow with a Faiz Aman Mela at the open air theatre in Lawerance Gardens.

Amel Ghani

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