

A tragic death of a peasant leader: Shahbaz

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It was 2nd May 2005. Hundreds of peasants from Okara had blocked the main GT Road. The traffic was blocked and no transport was allowed to cross the picket of the peasants. The peasants from Anjaman Mozareen Punjab AMP (Association of Punjab Tennants) had organised this blockade. Earlier, the AMP had successfully led a movement of "ownership or death" of the lands at Okara Military Farms.

This blocked was to protest the arrest of a young leader Shahbaz. He was framed in a false murder charge. The local police had arrested him in the afternoon of 2nd May 2005 on murder charge. There were over 100 such false cases registered by the local Okara police against dozens of peasants leaders. Shahbaz (27) was one of them.

The AMP leadership immediatly decided to counter the arrest by blockading the main road between Okara and Sahiwal. That meant hundreds of busses and trucks on both side of the road. The demand was to release Shahbaz and withdraw the false cases. Police had no option but to release Shahbaz within hours of the blockade. This was another great success of the peasants.

Shahbaz died yesterday on 14th January 2007 alongside with his two and half year old daughter of his elder brother. He was ruthlessly crushed by a tracter trolly driver while Shahbaz was on his motorbike to go to Okara to attend a wedding ceremony. When Shahbaz saw a tracter driver driving very carelessly and fast, he stopped his motorcycle on one side to let the tracter pass. But the 15 year old driver without licence still hit him. The young girl died on the spot while Shahbaz died on the way to hospital.

Five of us from Lahore went today to Okara to console his uncle Choudry Jabar. He is one the main leader of the peasant movement. Abdul Sattar general secretary AMP who is also elected mayer of the local union council told us many stories of Shahbaz bravery. "he was the backbone of the movement, he took initiative to organise the movement and was a full timer without wages for the movement" Sattar told us while tears in his eyes. I had never seen Abdul Satar crying earlier, even at the height of the suppression by the military regime in the year 2002, 2003.

The tragic death of a peasant leader was mourned by thousands yesterday by attending his funeral. Still dozens were coming in while we were there.

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