

Pakistan - Day Two Of Underground Life: Farooq Tariq

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We present below this first hand account from the leader of the Labour Party of Pakistan, on the morrow of the emergency proclaimed by Musharraf, that gives a sense of the situation on the ground.

Today is my second day in underground life. On 3rd November 2007, when General Musharraf declared an emergency and suspended the constitution, I was in Toba Tek Singh, a city around four hours from Lahore. This was to attend a meeting for the preparations of the Labour Party of Pakistan fourth national conference. The conference was scheduled to be held on 9,10,11 November in the city. Posters for the welcome of the delegates were printed and an invitation card to invite supporters for the open session of the conference was ready as well.

The meeting was nearly ending when I heard the news that emergency is been declared. I decided immediately to travel to Lahore. I was in contact with other party comrades on telephone and every one advised me not to go to my home. This was in the background of my three arrests in three months where I spent 23 days in jails and police stations. The Labour Party Pakistan has become a target for the military regime because of active participation in the advocate movement. Several comrades had been arrested during the movement.

As I arrived in Lahore, I heard that police has raided my house and are looking for me. My partner Shahnaz Iqbal told them that I am not home and will not be at home because I know that I will be arrested. This was around 11.30pm when police came to my home. It was good decision not to go home.

I was immediately given few Sims of mobile phone from different private telephone companies and was advised not to use my regular mobile number in any case. "I must use a new number to contact comrades every day to avoid being traced" was the advice. The telecommunication system is so advanced that when I call on my regular mobile, they can know where I am and can be immediately arrested.

All the private television channels were off the air. It was only the official television that was broadcasting the official propaganda. Even BBC and CNN were off the line as well. We were in dark and did not know what is coming up. The government was using its dictatorial measures to silence any oppositional voice being heard by people of Pakistan on the news media. It was an unprecedented act of censorship.

After midnight, General Musharraf came up on the official television to tell the reasons why he has imposed the emergency and that usual demagoguery of national interest and Pakistan First. He was trying to tell that he has removed the chief justice of Supreme Court of Pakistan because his decisions have promoted terrorism and suicidal attacks in Pakistan. This was all nonsense since. He had imposed the emergency rules to prolong his power period and was to avoid the Supreme Court

decision that might be against him. It was a dictatorial act by a dictator who had tried to convince the world that he is not a dictator. That, he is in a transition period from dictatorship to democracy.

I was awake till 3am trying to listen some international news from the radio.

The next day was Sunday and I went out to buy the newspapers. The area I was staying was where I never had been earlier and no one knew who I am and so on. But the newspapers were not there yet even at 8am. I went back home and in the meantime, I put on my regular mobile telephone forgetting that I am in underground. There was immediately call from a friend and I replied to him. This was a mistake.

I was told by my friend to change the venue immediately that is what I did. This was my second place in hiding during the last 12 hours. Here I read all the papers. Then I went to a park three kilometers away from my place of stay and spoke to some party comrades from my new telephone numbers and discussed the political situation. I called my family as well to check the moral. It was high as ever. My daughter and son asked me not to come home and that they are ok.

A meeting by Joint Action Committee for Peoples Rights was called at the office of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan to discuss and chart out the strategy to oppose the dictatorial measure. The chairperson of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan Asma Jahangir was already detained at her house. And her office called me to tell the comrades to come for the meeting. I told them I will not be there and if police see me they will immediately arrest me.

Khalid Malik, director Labour Education Foundation and Azra Shad chairperson Women Workers Help Line were among those who arrived in time for this meeting. So were around 70 others. Comrade Maqsood Mojahid, Khaliq Shah and Bushra Khaliq were little late for the meeting. As they arrived, they saw police everywhere around the HRCP office. They stopped and contacted inside via phones to tell them be ready for the arrests. This was may be the only time when being late has paid off. This laziness of three comrades saved them being arrested.

Police went inside and broke the doors. They asked women to leave and men to stay for arrests. The women refused. The women included Hina Jilani, Rubina Sahgal, Neelum Hussain, Syeda Deep and Azra Shad. They were all bundled to the nearest police station. This incident showed the intensity of the police brutality and the military regime to silence any opposition voice. It was first time since the establishment of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan office in 1986, that police entered the building. It was considered to be a safe place and that police will not dare to enter.

I heard within few minutes from Bushra, secretary Women Workers HelpLine of the arrests. She told me to be more careful. In the evening, I made another mistake to on my regular telephone. Bad habits die hard. So there was a call, I spoke to a journalist from a private tv channel against the arrests. I immediately realized the mistake and left that place to stay another one for the evening. As I arrived at the new place, I received a call around 11.30 pm that police has entered my home and checked me everywhere. My partner told me next morning that police came with some intelligence officers in plain clothes. They ordered her to open the door otherwise they will break in. When police entered my home, it was only my daughter (13) son (7) and my partner Shahnaz at home. The police opened every room, cupboards, bathroom, and went to the rooftop. They were desperate to arrest me.

I was upset after hearing the news but did not call home for security reasons. It was hard but I had to be patient, I was told by my friends. Today is Monday. We had decided to bring the weekly paper Workers Struggle in time and today was the last day of the paper production. It was decided that we would not work at the usual office of the paper; police might even come there. So we decided to

bring the equipments, computer, and printer and so on to a new place for working together. I also told the comrades I would come and write the main article for the paper.

We were five together to work on the paper. I wrote the article and was on new telephone line to hear about the whole scale arrests of the advocates all over the country. Over seven hundreds have been arrested. Police entered the Lahore High Court building for the first time in the history and arrested the advocates after they were severely beaten up. It was writing a new history of police atrocities under a military dictatorship.

Khalid Malik and Azra Shad along other were charged and sent to the same jail, Kot Lakhpat, where I had spent around ten days in June this year. Lucky they are, the weather is ok and not hot. We discussed some more measures for tomorrow. We decided to fight back the military regime and to organize the movement. It was agreed that I will not come up open but will be active in organizing the movement until my arrest on job. It was agreed that we will not accept the dictatorial measures and will organize the demonstrations and will ask comrades be ready for more arrests.

Here I am sitting in a net café at 6pm to write this and sent it from there. I had to travel over 20 kilometers to reach my place for this evening.

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P.S.

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