

Pakistan: More raids on LPP, left-wing leaders still in jail; day 10 underground

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Lahore police have been very busy raiding the homes of several LPP activists during the last three days.

The home of Afzal Soaraya, secretary Labour Party Punjab has been raided several times during the last three days. Maqsood Mujahid, member National Committee LPP's home in Lahore has also been the target of regular visits by the local police. They have also stopped the vehicle of Farooq Tariq several times while it was dropping his children to school.

Nisar Shah Advocate, chairperson Labour Party Pakistan has been charged under the Anti Terrorist Act and several others charges. He is at present in Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi along with other political prisoners.

Yousaf Masti Khan, senior vice president of National Workers' Party and member of the central committee of the Awami Jamhoori Tehreek, the left wing alliance of seven political parties and groups, along with Hasil Bazinjo, secretary of the National Party, and several other trade union leaders are kept in Karachi jail. They are facing treason charges. They all were arrested from Karachi Press Club after a demonstration of left-wing and trade union activists.

Asma Jahngir, chairperson Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, is still under house detention at her Lahore residence. I got a message from her "... Keep underground. No bail this time" . I had informed her about the arrest of Nisar Shah. She represented me as an advocate at Lahore Anti Terrorist Court on 28 September 2007 and got me released on bail. Now releasing on bail has become much more difficult.

It is estimated that more than 5,000 political activist and advocates are behind bars on 13 November, 10 days after the emergency was imposed. Lahore seems a deserted city and many ordinary people are totally against the actions of the military regime. I was told by some friends who were in the markets that there is very thin business activity and many shopkeepers were saying that it is time that Musharaf must die, "there is no other alternative to get rid of him", most were saying with complete seriousness.

I visited yesterday on 12 November, my home town, Toba Tek Singh. I was told that you find no one in sympathy with the military regime. It seems that everyone is against the military action. Many told me that they have complete respect for the judges who have not taken the oath. I could not walk freely but I met some friends and family members.

LPP is planning that I contest elections for the national parliament from this town. I feel that it is a useless activity to take part in elections under an emergency, which is in fact a martial law. The general elections were announced by General Musharaf on 11 November to pacify the international criticism of his dictatorial measures. It is a joke that general elections will take place while all the opposition's parties are underground or their activists are in jail. It is a joke to hold elections in the

presence of the judges who have taken an oath in faithfulness of the military regime.

General Musharaf has asked his crony Election Commission to prepare for an election before 8 January 2008. They want to hold general elections at a time with utmost repression going on. The plan is very simple, "Opposition behind bar and government candidate with full freedom for election campaign". This is a mockery of the whole democratic process.

Labour Party Pakistan has not yet taken a formal decision to boycott the proposed general elections but we are in consultation with other Left groups and parties to take a common position on the question. We are holding an emergency meeting of leading comrades in Lahore today on 13 November and in consultation with others on the telephone before we take a formal decision.

General Musharaf seems more isolated after an all-out attack by Benazir Bhutto while in Lahore yesterday. She has been put under house arrest as well in Lahore from yesterday. She went around the city to mobilise the party activists and was determined to hold a rally today on 13 November. But hundreds of policemen have been deployed around her residence, telephone lines cut off, and she refused to receive a detention order for eight days. The detention order has now been pasted on the wall of her home. They want to show the world that they act according to the procedures but what about thousands who have been arrested without showing any warrants or detention orders? There are still hundreds behind bars who have not yet been formally charged.

Benazir changing political position in favour of democratic forces is a welcome sign. I do not agree with Imran Khan, President of Tehreek Insaaf (justice movement), who is still doubtful of Benazir's intentions of opposing the military regime. He will ultimately come to the conclusion that the democratic forces have to unite on one platform to launch a more effective struggle against the military dictator.

Some trade union leaders have issued press releases opposing the emergency of General Musharaf. They include Khurshid Ahmad, president of the Pakistan Workers' Confederation; Yousaf Baluch, chairman of the National Trade Union Federation, Choudry Gulzar Ahmad, secretary of the All Pakistan Trade Union Federation, and so on. But workers from different sectors have not yet come out in demonstrations opposing the military regime. Although, there is great anger among the working class against the military regime in Pakistan .

I have learnt to some extent in the underground. I have not made any blunder that could give a chance to the state oppressive machinery to arrest me. I am not staying more than a night at any friend's house anymore. I am changing my positions now and then. I have taken a new name to speak to the comrades.

On 11 November night, I had a chance meeting with Lal Khan, the leader of Ted Grant/Alan Woods' group in Pakistan . We had worked together in exile and started our Struggle Group together in Netherlands during my exile period from 1978 to 1986. In 1991, we had departed our ways on the question of strategy of building a revolutionary party in Pakistan. His supporters were arguing to remain in the Pakistan People's Party and do entry work to build the group. I was in a minority and argued for a new independent political party to set up in Pakistan . It was an unpleasant split in our group that was very committed. But we had to face the realities. They are still part of PPP and we have started building Labour Party Pakistan.

I met him in person after 16 years. His hairs have grown grey and he was not in his usual youthfulness. We had a good but brief chat on the present political situation. He was of the view that the regime is very shaky and anything can happen. He recited one of my favorite poems that we used to hear from him during the exile period: Peshawar Qatloo Tum Sapahi Naheen / Of you the

soldiers, you are not professional soldiers but professional killers. He seemed happy to see me. And I was also, although we have a lot of differences of opinion on several questions. We had no moment to regret on the evening. One of my close friends had invited me for this evening at a safe place to share ideas with some friends.

On 12 November, I wrote an article for our Weekly paper Mazdoor Jeddojuhd (Workers' Struggle) and faxed them to the office. The paper is still being printed regularly with our ideas and reports. It has been closed by every successive military regime since it started printing in 1980, including the present Musharaf regime. The very young activists, mainly women, have taken the responsibility to prepare the paper in the regular office of the paper. Very brave actions by these young women activists.

After writing the article in early morning, I had to travel four hours from Lahore to go to my home town. It was my father's second death anniversary and the family was all together. I was not asked by my brothers and sisters to come but I decided to travel and saw all the family members. They are all supportive and helpful. I traveled back to Lahore last night to attend an important meeting today and share some ideas with some comrades. Staying in a small city is quite dangerous and many know me well personally in my home town, so I decided to leave the city as soon as possible.

Farooq Tariq

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