

The successful women demonstration without many losses — More arrests and repression against journalist — The 18th Day in underground

Wednesday 21 November 2007, by [TARIQ Farooq](#) (Date first published: 21 November 2007).

The best thing that happened during the week was a defiant demonstration of women belonging to Labour Party Pakistan. [1] On 19th November, 14 brave women went to the busiest area of Lahore demanding an immediate end of martial law in Pakistan. They all were wearing black ribbons of their heads with slogans like no to Martial law, release political prisoners and solidarity with advocates and media.

One newspaper *Daily Express* Lahore reported on 20th November that LPP women waited for over 30 minutes for police but police did not turn up. The paper reported a disruption of the traffic on several roads because of the demonstration.

It was very well planned and every aspect went according to the planning. A demonstration in Lahore at any road means an immediate arrest and baton charge.

We had discussed the plan of this demonstration with a title “women against martial law”. It was decided that only those women should be at the demonstration that are ready to be arrested. They should not be arrested peacefully but a resistance will be offered to police. There will be no escape plan and no one should run away from the scene. The vehicles will only drop women at the place but will not be there to pick them up. This was to save the comrades who were driving them. No male comrade will accompany them. But we will make sure that the demonstration is well documented. It will be all women show.

It was also agreed that the demonstration will last for half an hour, if police arrive then there will be résistance till the arrests. But we will not wait for the police after half an hour and would disperse afterwards.

It was discussed and agreed that two comrades will contact the media and will only disclose the place half an hour before the demonstration. We will not send any written invitation to the media. In the media, there is a large infiltration of the intelligence agencies and we did not want to take a risk that police should be there before our arrival. To our utmost surprise, no one from the media informed the police and the media was there in large numbers even before the demonstrators arrived.

There was another demonstration of Tehreek Insaaf of Imran Khan at the same time not far from this place. The TI had informed the media about their demonstration. A large number of police was there and as they arrived at Regal Chouck on main Mall Road, six of them were immediately arrested. Police did not expect another demonstration on the same time and they had no clue. The result was that it took time for police to arrive the place.

I waited eagerly at a safe place with another comrade to hear the outcome of the demonstration away from the place of demonstration. I was called by a journalist after 10 minutes of the demonstration telling me of women bravery and that there are intelligence agencies persons here taking photographs of the demonstration, but there is no police yet. He was pleased that many people are stopping and are waving to the demonstrators in happiness. Another journalist told me later that they were looking like Palestinian women fighting a repressive regime with utmost bravery.

A comrade in guise of a press photographer told me later that another journalist told him that 30 minutes gone and the women are still chanting slogans. Are they waiting for police to be arrested? This comrade immediately realized the timing and pointed to the watch hinting to one leading comrade at the demonstration.

She then declared to the press and to the people gathered at the place that we are leaving now, but will be back with more force, we are here to stay and fight, and we will not tolerate the military regime. We are working class women fighting a military regime and we have not much to loose but our chains.

No one was arrested much to our pleasant surprise. It was making a point without many losses. The demonstration has left a very good moral on all the comrades. It has given an extraordinary courage to all our male comrades. They will be on the move and you will hear that too. It was the first show of defiance by a Left group in Lahore where the level of repression is much greater than other parts of the country. The women led the way.

The same evening we had a meeting of leading comrades to discuss the political developments, the regime tactics and the responses of other political parties and our future course of action.

Another action of honor is been taken by Awami Thereek, one component of our Left Alliance the Awami Jamhoori Tehreek AJT (Peoples Democratic Movement). [2] Till 21st November, over 300 activists of Awami Tehreek are been arrested in Sind province. They have a strategy of courting arrest at five district headquarters of Sind on the name of "fill the jails". Every day five activists of AT are presenting arrests against the imposition of martial law. I had been several times in contact with the leadership of AT to discuss the outcome of the movement.

AT is mainly a Sind based radical organization and is led by Rasul Bukhsh Paleejo. Once in 2005, General Musharaf was asked by a journalist about his favorite politician in Pakistan. He named Rasul Bukhsh Paleejo as his most favorite politician in Pakistan. Paleejo has spent seen years in jail under General Zia Ul Had dictatorship in the eighties. At the age of 79, he is still very active.

On 18th November, we also heard the news of the arrest of Akhtar Hussain the former president of Sind High Court and secretary general of National Workers Party, another component of AJT. He was picked up from his house in Karachi early in the morning. Comrade Nasir Mansoor lives nearby. He went to the police station where Akhtar Hussain was kept in custody and enquired about the situation and showed solidarity with him.

During the last four days, since I wrote "meeting Benazir Bhutto", I have been little more open than I did during the early 10 days of the martial law. But there is terrible feeling of being watched all the times. I always look behind, who is coming.

Yesterday morning, I had to fax an article to *Daily Waqt (Time)*, a rising new bourgeoisie paper in Urdu, who asked me to write about the movement of students in University of Punjab for its editorial pages, I went out to a shop to do this. While I was there faxing the seven pages, a police van came

and stopped outside. I was terrified inside. The police van had not come for me but they went for lunch to the restaurant next door. But sheer presence of police van made me very sensitive. A lot of thoughts, why they have come, why they are not coming inside to arrest me, who have informed them, where is the mistakes, is it the mobile I am using, is it the motorbike I am traveling and so on. I am becoming more of a psychological case. I am sometime up to my neck. Being in underground to hide myself is an easy option but that is what I am not supposed to do. I am in underground to play a role, to meet the comrades, contact them, talk to media if possible, motivate the contacts and party comrades, networking with all the friends inside and outside, replying to emails. Writing interviews, articles in Urdu and English etc for our Weekly *Mazdoor Jeddojuhd* (www.jeddojuhd.com) and other papers.

One of my foolish but lovely friends from Netherlands wrote me a mail in Dutch language and expected me to reply in the same language. I read and understood but the ability to write Dutch is no more. I had spent eight years in exile in Netherlands. I do not want to be in exile anymore.

The article on University of Punjab was printed today on 21st November, analyzing the recent revolt of students against the religious fundamentalist students who kidnapped Imran Khan and then handed over to police. I exposed the fascist nature of these religious fundamentalists and wrote about the future of the movement. The article is already very well read and the purpose served. *Daily Waqat* has over 40,000 circulations at present. It was to make contact with the new leadership of the student uprising and that was done today. I had been a student of this University in the seventies. It was marvelous to see over few thousand students demonstrating against the religious fundamentalist control of the University.

Today, I was invited for an interview with private channel AAJ (today). This was about the restriction on the media. Voice of America radio did an interview as well on telephone. I also gave an interview to Geo who is at present off air under the pressure of the military regime. Its transmission was aired from Dubai, but under the pressure of the military regime, the Dubai government asked GEO to close their transmission. Geo is the most popular private television channel in Pakistan. People are very angry and are speaking against the military regime.

The Punjab Union of Journalist (PUJ) invited me to a meeting this afternoon held at Lahore Press Club. This is the area where most of the demonstrations are taking place. A lot of police and intelligence agencies are always around the building. A journalist comrade imported me inside safely. I think no one noticed as I went in. The meeting was to discuss the yesterday beating and arrest of journalists at Karachi.

On 20th November, the police in Karachi arrested over 180 journalists who wanted to take out a protest. They were severely beaten up. A Karachi LPP leading comrade Sher Baz Khan along with several other comrades was with them. He was beaten up by police with the journalist and now has a broken hand; a fracture in hand will heal in weeks to come.

I refused initially to go to Lahore Press Club building for the meeting but then decided to take the risk. After two hours of meeting inside with food and tea, I had to climb a wall to leave the building from back doors. This escape rout from the Press Club was not known to me but known to most journalist and was known as "thief door".

While I was still inside the meeting, the news came from Faisalabad that over 20 journalists are arrested and six of them are seriously injured while they were inside the Press Club building. Police used tear gas and baton charge against the protesting journalist. After Karachi, same repressive tactics were used in Faisalabad. We condemned the act and spoke to some journalists at Faisalabad to express our solidarity.

While I was at my place of stay for the evening, I got a call to speak at a press conference with Hafeez Khan, Imran Khan cousin, at Imran Khan home. Imran Khan is on hunger strike for the last three day at Dera Ghazi Khan Jail, around 14 hours from Lahore. He has not taken any food since and is on very weak health. We offered our full solidarity and promised to raise it everywhere, but I told them that I can not come for security reasons. We also informed the press to attend the press conference.

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Footnotes

[1] See: [Women against Martial Law: LPP Women Protest demo in Lahore](#)

[2] See: [Women against Martial Law: LPP Women Protest demo in Lahore](#)