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Pakistan

Left-wing political parties key to counter society's militarisation: AWP

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KARACHI: As political parties associated with the government or the opposition here are right-wing in their thoughts and practice, left-leaning political parties are essential in an environment of growing religious fundamentalism and militarisation of society, said general secretary of the Awami Workers Party (AWP) Farooq Tariq on Saturday.

He expressed these views in his welcome address at the second federal congress of the party held at the Arts Council.

Speaking to workers, he highlighted the need for a "counter narrative" to the right-wing narrative of both the government and the opposition. According to him, the only hurdle is that "we are not taken seriously amid a growing perception among the people that there will be no political change in the country".

Earlier as part of an "Anti-War Train March", around 300 AWP workers from across the country travelled to Karachi by Awami Express. Most of the workers belonged to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Rahim Yar Khan, Quetta and parts of Sindh. The AWP general secretary said the purpose of the train march was to highlight issues such as finding a peaceful solution to the ongoing conflict with India and asking military and media not to promote or tolerate warmongering.

"Religious parties are usually the happiest whenever relations between India and Pakistan go for a toss. We should not tolerate warmongering at any cost," said Mr Tariq.

AWP President Abid Hassan Minto with general secretary Farooq Tariq and chairman Fanoos Gujjar presided over the two-day congress of the party being held at the Arts Council. The first congress of the party was organised in September 2014 in which its leaders discussed and finalised its constitution.

The party was formed with the merger of three parties "Labour Party Pakistan, Workers Party Pakistan and Awami Party Pakistan" in November 2012, said Mr Tariq. Presenting a two-year report of the party, Mr Tariq said the AWP had its presidents in 56 districts of Pakistan apart from Gilgit-Baltistan, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Kashmir. He then spoke about some issues the party raised in recent years including protests against the privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and repression of peasants at the Okara Military Farms by the Pakistan Army.

While welcoming the workers, veteran union leader of railway workers Manzoor Razi said: "The railway trade union is still alive; the movement is still alive. The number of people you see here is testament to our presence in the country."

A.R. Saraba, party's UK chapter organiser, said the AWP did not believe in hereditary politics of existing political parties in Pakistan. "To ensure that it doesn't happen, we should focus more towards balancing the internal democracy of our party," he added.

Kaneez Fatima, secretary general of Pakistan Trade Union Federation, recalled her struggle for labour unions in

Karachi. Slightly criticising those at the helm, she said: "The left leaning parties need to strengthen its core if they want to revive it [...] people need to come together if they want to see results." Senior AWP vice president Akhter Hussain presented the party manifesto with necessary corrections. The party has a federal congress, federal committee, federal executive committee and similar structures in provinces and districts. It was decided that like-minded individuals would be included in party's additional group whose expertise would be sought on political, economic and social issues. At the same time, it was decided that a member, whether on a federal, provincial or district level would not be eligible to hold office for more than two terms. However, Mr Hussain said this was being done in some sectors due to lack of office-bearers in some divisions. He said although Tariq was aware that the party's revival or left-wing politics in general "does not hold an immediate chance; yet we have decided to be consistent and practice what we preach."