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Pakistan

On the campaign trail for Baba Jan

- News from around the world -

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It was one of most fascinating days of Baba Jan's election campaign. We started from Gilgit to join the main rally that would start from Ali Abad, in Hunza valley. We were a handful of comrades when the rally started, however within half an hour, we were over 100 on motorbikes and few cars.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Baba_jan_campaign.jpg]

When we arrived at the meeting point to join the other rallies from different areas of the constituency, we saw hundreds of cars, tractors and motorcycles full of youth chanting slogans, "your life my life Baba Jan, Baba Jan, struggle to continue".

We turned into a very narrow lane along river Hunza. On one side mountains and on the other side deep down the river Hunza. The width was just enough for a car to pass through. It was very scary.

Baba Jan had called from jail to one of his comrade to say that I should be taken care of properly and not allowed to drive a car on these narrow lanes. A local comrade took over our car.

Several times, we have to get off the car to let it pass safely without any load on wooden bridges while crossing the river going to the opposite side. The wooden bridges were shaky, no support in the sides, and I was surprised how dangerously the villagers of this most scenic valley of Hunza are living .

There were fruit plants like cherries, very red, when we arrived in the first village Ihsan Abad. The whole village was outside welcoming us.

Cherries in Lahore are bloody expensive and not fresh at all. Here we could pick them fresh from the plants. We all loved it.

We were welcomed by the elders of the village. When they asked me to speak. Hundreds from the village were present on this small play ground of the local school. We were cheered with slogans. For the first time, some one from Lahore had come to this village to express solidarity with locals.

I spoke about the bankruptcy of PPP leaders and criticised them for charging Baba Jan with sedition. "Baba Jan is a symbol of struggle and sacrifice" no one can match his energy to change the society from capitalism to socialism" I said with youth jumping on their feet. I spoke from my heart.

This was repeated in next two villages where I was also asked to open the office of Baba Jan election campaign. Here in one meeting, over 2 hundred women participated and I said, without women's participation, we can never win this battle.

https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/women_Baba_Jan.jpg

After nearly two hours of driving on the narrow lanes, stopping for a few minutes here and there to speak to people, we came back to Qaraqram main road that leads to China.

Then we passed through Nasir Abad, Baba Jan's native village. We had no time to stop, but women queued up every

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where with children waving to the passing revolutionary caravan with red flags, caps and Baba Jan photos.

We had brought some 250 AWP caps from Lahore, also stickers, posters and flexes. Caps were snatched from us. Every one was asking for flags and caps which were no more.

When we arrived at Ali Abad, the town that was under people's control for few days when police killed the two, father and son, who were protesting for fare compensation for all Atta Abad Lake victims in 2010.

Baba Jan led the uprising. He has to pay a heavy price for that. Two life sentences were awarded to him and 11 others. For one, he has been acquitted but is still in jail until the hearing of his appeal against the life sentence. He is contesting this election from jail and we are all participating in his absence.

Ali Abad was on roads on the day. We had by this time some 350 cars and hundreds on motorcycles with tractors carrying youth as well. Local taxi drivers association had announced to bring all cars voluntarily. It was an unprecedented action by this association at the time when tourist season is in full swing. One remarked, "normally during election times you earn money from rich candidates, here you give money to participate."

It was also an unprecedented show of peoples' power. The whole area has never witnessed such a massive rally in history.

It was a far bigger rally than the PPP candidate's main leadership from Pakistan including Khurshid Shah, the opposition leader in parliament could mobilise a day earlier here in Ali Abad.

Where ever we looked, people were waving hands, on the roof tops, they were women and children.

We went to two more small towns before we gathered for the final rally around 6pm at Karim Abad, the home town of the PMLN candidate from this constituency. He is the son of the former rulers of the Hunza valley known as Mir of Hunza, a bloody rich.

A revolution was witnessed yesterday. Women who had never participated publicly were in hundreds sitting and waiting for us for hours in this Karim Abad hill top ground. Even tourists were waving to us.

A few of us spoke. I spoke as final speaker telling that because of Baba Jan, Gilgit Beltistan is known internationally.

In 23 countries, there are solidarity actions as a protest against Baba Jan and his comrades' imprisonment. Articles about him are translated in several languages. Baba Jan has become an international figure as well.

I said that PPP is going to be eliminated in this elections, do not waste your vote for a party whose leaders are most corrupt and who are responsible for putting Baba in jail. I said Imran Khan PTI slogans of change is fake. How could rich bring change in poor people's lives? I questioned.

"PMLN has not given Gilgit Beltistan its due role in the latest project of building a road from Gawader to China, a 147 billion dollar project.

Baba Jan is a real voice of people" I said. PMLN is responsible for the exploitation of national rights.

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I said that our weakness is that we have only one comrade standing in an assembly of 35. However, I promise that if Baba Jan wins, AWP will contest all 35 seats in the next elections. We will change the course of life over here. PAKISTAN SOCIALIST revolution could trigger from here up from the mountains starting from Baba Jan victory" I said to the cheering crowd of few thousands.

The public meeting was addressed by Akhtar Hussain, AWP senior Vice President who traveled all the way from Karachi. Also by Nazneen, younger sister of Baba Jan who spoke about women's participation in the campaign.

It was one of the most unique experience of my life. I have seldom seen so much love for a comrade as over here. I do not know if we win the elections, but we definitely won the hearts and soul of the people.

Winning an election in a society like Pakistan where money is the main basis for buying votes: how much chance has Baba Jan of a victory? We still have to see that on 8 June 2015. But Baba Jan has emerged from jail as one of the most Popular leader of working class in Gilgit Beltistan, thanks to all the support he had generated from within and outside Pakistan.