

OP-ED

Pakistan (Islamabad) and the Faizabad surrender - Capitulating to fanatics - The timeline, the demands

Saturday 9 December 2017, by [AHMAD Usman](#), [Daily Times \(Pakistan\)](#), [Dawn \(Pakistan\)](#), [Pakistan Today](#) (Date first published: 1 December 2017).

The ugly history of intertwining fanaticism with the mainstream means next time the extremists play their hand the consequences will be worse, the capitulation greater and the surrender more abject than the one we have just witnessed [see below the description of the events].

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The idea the *dharna* in Faizabad is over is a dangerous lie; and if we Pakistanis are to survive, this is something we will have to recognise. To do otherwise would be to dance in the gallows with our executioner. Perhaps the purpose of this entire charade has been to force us to question whether we deserve to endure. Because if we have reached such a desperate nadir that reconciliation with forces which openly challenge the writ of the state, bring anarchy to our social order and call for the murder of entire communities is presented as a happy denouement, then we do not deserve to survive and will likely not.

Instead, like the countless other tragedies that have afflicted Pakistan since its creation, Faizabad will never end. Some unhealed part of it will remain, haunting our darker impulses like a savage in the shadows.

This is how the lie takes hold — this is how it sets in. The scope of the latest deceit is matched only by the collective judgment that the outcome of it is somehow in the interest of Pakistan. In this analysis, the naked resentments which inspired the ringleaders of the Faizabad *dharna* can be easily ignored, embraced even, as long as it suits the myriad agendas competing for the soul of the country. For the time being it suits them all. No introspection is required and nor can it be undertaken when the knee of the nation is happily bent at the alter of a group of self-appointed clerics, whose strength rests on the abuse of their power.

What such a way of thinking overlooks is that totalitarians always arrive as your friends and promise to restore your glory. By feeding off the popular frustrations which gave them a platform, they are able to recast the old values. This process of distortion is characterised by a zealous dismantling of history that does away with complexity and fixes itself around a single sinister truth which, through

a process of gradual acceptance, welcomes in bigotry, fanaticism and zealotry as norms of everyday life.

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By adhering to this template, the Faizabad sit-in expressed a betrayal of Pakistan rather than its assertion. The worship of power in its most abhorrent form, the reduction of Pakistani identity to a paranoid hatred of others, the restless sense of religious grievance and the unbounded vulgarity that coursed through the chaos all scorned at the idea of what the country was originally meant to be.

That our lawmakers, military establishment and vast swathes of the general population have chosen to give into this reality is a crushing blow to the spirit. The hateful world of the fanatics is also now our own. The other great deception committed by those of an authoritarian mindset is the manner in which they convince their victims to become complicit in the crimes committed against them. In Pakistan, the complicity has been extracted with a sweeping totality, altering the very psychological state of the nation. Under the guise of serving the cause of Islam, we have allowed the extremists to overtake our sense of self-understanding. The dominant image we see of ourselves today is forever viewed through the prism of their narrow fundamentalism. How else can one explain the deal negotiated by the state and the Faizabad protesters which reads more like a willful surrender than a mutually agreed accord.

Some will say this account is a gross overreaction to what is happening in the country and that we have overcome similar crises before and will do so again. Is Faizabad any worse than anything experienced in the past? Have we not been here countless times before? But this form of denial is just another facet of the greater lie we tell ourselves. We have not overcome anything. The declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslims, the hardening of the blasphemy laws, alliances with militants were all once considered grievous departures from the central pillars of our society. Now they are so permanently entrenched that most people have ceased to register them. Normalisation of the repulsive has become a Pakistani way of life.

The long and ugly history of intertwining fanaticism with the mainstream means next time the extremists play their hand the consequences will be worse, the capitulation greater and the surrender more abject than the one we have just witnessed. This is nothing less than a tragedy for Pakistan. Eventually, there will be no more ground left to concede. The only way to combat this is to escape the falsehoods and self-deceptions that engulf us and see that at the heart of our society there is fear and hatred; fixed, immutable and uncompromising. It is the very form and substance on which the entire edifice is built. To pretend otherwise is to compromise on the future of Pakistan. If we are to survive at all we can ill-afford to keep on living through our lies.

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A timeline of Faizabad sit-in

Finally, Islamabad, the capital of the country, has started its journey towards normalcy following a three-week long sit-in by the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLYR). The sit-in ended after the government's explicit surrender to the demands of the agitators.

Pakistan Today here looks at the causes that led to the initiation of the sit-in and its subsequent culmination.

Daily life in the capital was paralysed for at least three weeks due to the protest of an alliance of religious parties, including the Tehreek-e-Khatm-e-Nabuwwat, Tehreek Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY) and Sunni Tehreek Pakistan (ST), calling for the sacking of Law Minister Zahid Hamid and strict action against those behind the amendment to the Khatam-e-Nabuwwat clause – which had earlier been deemed a “clerical error” and subsequently rectified.

The agitators believed that during the passage of Elections Act 2017, the Khatm-i-Nabuwwat oath was deliberately modified as part of a larger conspiracy.

The Islamabad High Court, the Supreme Court and the heads of various religious parties had repeatedly called on the protesters to disband or use the Democracy and Speech Corner at Islamabad's Parade Ground to register their protest. Eventually, the stubbornness of the protesters led to a day-long operation which ended in disaster, sparking countrywide protests by the religious parties.

October 02: It all started with the Elections Bill 2017 when a clause in the bill relating to a candidate's belief in the finality of the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) – the Khatm-e-Nabuwwat oath—was replaced with the words “I believe” in place of “I solemnly swear”.

October 04: Following the error, then law minister Zahid Hamid defended the bill, saying that it was not meant to repeal the Khatm-e-Nabuwwat laws.

The same day, National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq had, however, accepted that a “clerical error” was responsible for the change in the Khatm-e-Nabuwwat oath. The speaker met with parliamentary leaders, and all political parties agreed to revert to the original declaration.

October 05: The bill was amended to restore the oath to its original form.

October 30: Islamabad admin warned the Tehreek activist to move to the Parade Ground instead of protesting at the Jinnah Avenue.

The admin had said at the time that police were able to resolve the issue and that a few of the protesters had been rounded up and taken to various police stations for legal action.

November 5: TLYP and Sunni Tehreek were forbidden to hold a rally in the capital due to a ban on public gathering in the city.

November 6: Police in Islamabad sought a grant of over Rs70million to maintain peace ahead of the arrival of a rally by religious parties which began from Lahore on Monday and will converge in the capital.

November 8: Faizabad Interchange [\[1\]](#) was blocked by the protesters, along with Metro Bus Authority.

November 9: Blocked roads led to a death of an infant. Subsequently, an FIR was registered against chief of TLYP Khadim Hussain Rizvi under Section 322 of the Pakistan Penal Code, which deals with qatl-bis-sabab (unintentional murder).

November 10: Islamabad police booked Khadim Hussain Rizvi, Pir Aijaz Afzal and other leaders and participants of the sit-in.

November 11: The leaders of the sit-in hurled threats at the federal ministers, threatening with dire consequences if their demands were not met. The threats were made in the Friday sermon delivered by Almi Tanzeem Ahle Sunnat leader Pir Afzal Qadri.

November 12: Optimistic Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal showed resolve to persuade the agitators for evicting the interchange and moving to Parade Ground. Protesters remained defiant, ready to sacrifice their lives if they were met with force.

November 14: IHC Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui, while hearing a petition filed by a Tehreek-i-Khatm-i-Nabuwwat supporter, ordered the government to reverse in the Elections Act 2017 all amendments in sections pertaining to the Khatm-i-Nabuwwat oath. Security was beefed up following an assault on the police by the TLYR protesters.

November 15: Clerics let go of most of their demands, asked IHC to publicise findings of enquiry into amendment in legislation, release of the Raja Zafarul Haq report investigating who was responsible for the changes to the Khatm-i-Nabuwwat oath, and action against the culprits.

November 16: The IHC Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui directed the protesting clerics to immediately vacate the Faizabad Interchange and show respect for the law.

November 17: The IHC ordered the Islamabad administration to clear the intersection by “any means necessary”. Subsequently, the government issued a “last warning” asking protesters to peacefully vacate the venue by 10pm on Friday night, or face force.

The district administration, meanwhile, was ordered to take all necessary steps to clear the sit-in by the next morning. All hospitals in the city were ordered to cancel doctors and paramedical staff’s leaves and ask them to be present on duty till further instructions.

The first deadline to vacate the area lapsed without any action on the part of the protesters.

November 18: On Saturday morning, a heavy contingent of Islamabad Police, Frontier Corps and Rangers personnel – equipped with tear gas and shell guns – arrived at the Faizabad Interchange.

Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal asked the IHC for an extension in the deadline, in an attempt to placate the protesters.

Ruet-i-Hilal Committee chief Mufti Muneebur Rehman urged both the government and protesters to find a solution to the issue. However, the protesters refused to budge.

November 20: A meeting between representatives of the protesters and government ministers held at Punjab House was unable to make any breakthrough.

Islamabad police arrested a suspect allegedly carrying 2kg of explosive material near Faizabad Interchange.

November 21: The Supreme Court took *suo motu* notice of the sit-in.

November 22: The ISPR chief in a presser asked the government to resolve the issue through peaceful means, besides saying the military would abide by whatever decision the government would take.

November 23: Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal said the government machinery is capable of clearing Islamabad's Faizabad Interchange of religious protesters within three hours if assured against the propagation of the sensitive issue.

The government's offer to change the portfolio of the law minister, or send him on leave, was turned down by the sit-in's leaders.

November 24: The IHC issued a show-cause notice for contempt of court to Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal over his failure to end the sit-in.

Admin issued last warning issued to the protesters. Lights around the venue were turned off before the crackdown.

A final deadline issued to the protesters to disperse by 7 am on Saturday went ignored.

November 25: Law enforcement agencies launched a day-long operation, which, however, was suspended later in the day. During the operation, the army spokesperson tweeted that the army chief asked the prime minister to "handle the Islamabad dharna peacefully" as violence was not in "national interest".

As many as eight to 10 people were killed and hundreds wounded during the operation, but it failed to clear protesters from the Faizabad Interchange.

The botched operation sparked countrywide protests. The protesters chanted anti-government slogans and blocked major roads. In many areas, protesters attacked LEAs and damaged public property.

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) put a ban on live coverage of various TV channels and blocked Facebook, Twitter and other social media websites.

Security forces backed off as protesters regained their ground. Subsequently, the administration requested army deployment in the capital to cope with the agitators.

November 26: No sign of the army in the capital till morning; however, the army had 'agreed' to the request, but demanded the government to address some of their reservations prior to the deployment of troops.

Dawn reported, "A high-level meeting was held in which Chief of Army Staff Gen Qamar Bajwa told Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi that he opposed the army's use of force against its own people since the population's trust in the institution of the army "can't be compromised for little gains".

The federal government then called in the Punjab Rangers to lead civilian law-enforcement agencies handling the sit-in.

November 27: The government caved in to the demands of the protesting clerics as Zahid Hamid resigned. The agreement signed between protesters and government credited the army chief and his representative team for their "special efforts".

Khadim Hussain Rizvi directed his followers across the country to pack up and leave; however, the

protesters in Lahore did not pay heed to his directives as they remained pitched in hoping Rana Sanaullah, Punjab law minister, would resign under pressure.

The protesters at Faizabad started packing up their belongings and police started removing containers placed around the protest site around 8 am.

IHC judge lambasted government and military, saying who gave the military the right to act as a mediator.

NEWS DESK

* *Pakistan Today*, National, NOVEMBER 28, 2017:

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/11/28/a-timeline-of-faizabad-sit-in/>

Capitulation

IT is a surrender so abject that the mind is numb and the heart sinks.

The deal negotiated between the state, both civilian and military facets of it, and the Faizabad protesters is a devastating blow to the legitimacy and moral standing of the government and all state institutions.

In one brief page and six gut-wrenching points, the state of Pakistan has surrendered its authority to a mob that threatened to engulf the country in flames. The federal law minister has been sacked — in return for a promise by the protesters to not issue a fatwa against him.

Whether a decision made out of desperation or fear, the upshot is that the state has accepted that mobs and zealots have a right to issue religious edicts that can endanger lives and upend public order.

Read: List of demands put forward by TLY and accepted by govt for ending the Faizabad protest

The decision to compensate the protesters and use public funds to pay for the damage to property caused by the protesters turns on its head the fundamental responsibility of the state to ensure law and order. The pledge to prosecute whoever has been held responsible by a government inquiry committee for abortive legislative changes is to invite further protests and violence.

Something profound changed in the country yesterday and the reverberations will be felt for a long time. How has such catastrophe befallen the nation? Devastating incompetence and craven leadership by three sets of actors appear to be the reason.

The PML-N government helped create the crisis and then managed to exacerbate it at every step. Until the very end, when the government used the veneer of a court order to try and forcibly evict the protesters from Faizabad, there were gargantuan failures of planning and shockingly poor tactics. The political opposition also played a miserable role, fanning a crisis for the most myopic of political reasons and searching for a pyrrhic victory.

Finally, the military leadership appears to have to let rancour towards the government in an ongoing

power struggle affect its role in bringing this phase of the crisis to an end.

The government has been humiliated and the military leadership has further improved its standing with sections of the public for helping end the protests — but at what cost to the country and its people? A menacing precedent has been set by the protesters that will surely embolden others and invite copycats. It is no exaggeration to suggest that no one is safe.

Zealots had already demonstrated the power of mob violence and the strength of the politics of intolerance and hate. Now, a blueprint has been created for holding state and society hostage. Despair is not an option for a nation state, but neither can there be a pretence that a significant setback has not occurred. Is there anyone, in state or society, to help repair the damage?

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<https://www.dawn.com/news/1373445/the-long-road-to-recovery>

The long road to recovery

Picking up the pieces after a devastating shock to the system is not easy.

Pakistan is not the country it was until mere days ago. Yet, failure is not an option and it is time to ask searing questions.

Has extremism truly gone mainstream? Or was capitulation by each and every institution of the state to a violent mob a last-gasp attempt at salvaging a modicum of stability in order to allow the state an opportunity to regain its composure before it can press ahead with its counter-extremism project?

Surely, decisions made in desperate, fearful moments cannot mean that for all time and for all intents and purposes the country has surrendered to extremism. Pakistan has had to contend with several such inflection points in its recent history.

The decisions made in the aftermath of 9/11 and the US-led war in Afghanistan; the events leading up to and after the Lal Masjid operation; the assassination of Benazir Bhutto; the military operation in Swat; the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad by US special forces; Operation Zarb-i-Azb in North Waziristan Agency; the Army Public School attack in Peshawar — each of those, and several other episodes have underlined both the fragility and resilience of this country.

What ought to be clear is that business as usual is absolutely no longer an option. The National Action Plan was Pakistan's halting, uncertain attempt at devising a counter-extremism strategy, but it has gone nowhere. While there may have been several good ideas in NAP, none of them have been implemented to any degree that any sensible or rational analysis can deem satisfactory.

The significant strides made in the fight against anti-Pakistan militants who have taken up arms against the state and society have masked the broader failures in the fight against extremism.

There is simply no measure, no analysis and no assessment that can suggest that Pakistan is a country less threatened by extremism of any and every stripe than it was threatened by a decade ago. More desperately, there is a real sense that the state's capacity to even understand the scale and scope of the problem has been undermined by its head-in-the-sand approach to extremist challenges.

If there is to be a solution — and it is not clear that there is an obvious solution — it may have to start with a simple premise: no more, no longer and never again. A zero-tolerance approach to bigots, zealots and mobs.

This country has the greatest of men, the most remarkable of leaders in the 20th century, as its founding father. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the best of all statesmen, who knew not hate or bigotry or violence, is the reason this country exists. To his ideals we must return, to his vision we must re-commit ourselves.

Acknowledge extremism; defeat extremism; and let Jinnah's Pakistan prevail.

Editorial, *Dawn*

* Published in Dawn, November 29th, 2017:

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1373445/the-long-road-to-recovery>

List of demands put forward by TLY and accepted by govt for ending the Faizabad protest

The government on Monday gave in to the demands of Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY) in order to end the Faizabad sit-in.

The agreement document — bearing signatures of Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal, TLY chief Khadim Hussain Rizvi, and Maj Gen Faiz Hameed, among others — lists the following demands put forward by TLY:

1. Remove Federal Law Minister Zahid Hamid from his position immediately. "Tehreek-i-Labaik will issue no fatwa [religious decree] of any kind against him."
2. The report prepared by Raja Zafarul Haq-led committee will be made public within 30 days and whoever is named in the report for being responsible for the change in the election oath will be acted against under the law.
3. All protesters arrested between November 6 until the end of the sit-in from across the country will be released within one to three days according to legal requirements. The cases registered against them and the house arrests imposed on them will be ended.
4. An inquiry board will be established to probe and decide what action to take against the government and administration officials over the operation conducted by security forces against protesters on Saturday, November 25. The inquiry should be completed within 30 days and action will be taken against those found responsible.

5. The federal and provincial governments will determine and compensate for the loss of government and private assets incurred from November 6 until the end of the sit-in.
6. The points already agreed to concerning the Government of Punjab will be fully implemented.

The document ends by crediting Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and his representative team for their “special efforts” that led to the agreement being signed.

“We are thankful to him [Gen Bajwa] for saving the nation from a big catastrophe,” the document concludes.

The agreement was also produced before the Islamabad High Court on Monday. Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui, raising a number of “alarming objections”, asked the government to satisfy the court on the “role of armed forces as an arbitrator” in the agreement with the protesters.

‘More demands have been accepted’

According to Rizvi, in addition to the demands mentioned on the document, the following conditions of TLY have also been accepted by the government:

1. TLY leader Khadim Rizvi announcing the end of the Faizabad sit-in on Monday.—White Star
2. TLY leader Khadim Rizvi announcing the end of the Faizabad sit-in on Monday.—White Star
3. A board of clerics led by Pir Muhammad Afzal Qadri will be set up to probe remarks made by Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah against the persecution of Ahmedis. Sanaullah will have to accept the decision made by the board.
4. No difficulty will be faced in registering cases under clause 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code (blasphemy law).
5. No leniency will be given to those convicted by courts for blasphemy.
6. No ban will be imposed on the use of loudspeakers.
7. The foreign and interior ministries will take steps for the release of Dr Aafia Siddiqui after taking her mother and sister in confidence.
8. The holiday of Iqbal Day on November 9 will be revived.
9. Two representatives of Tehreek-i-Labaik will be included in the panel assigned to decide changes in the textbook board. The officials will push for inclusion of translation of the Holy Quran and chapters about Seerat-un-Nabi (PBUH) and Muslim leaders.
10. The chehlum of martyrs will be held on January 4 at Rawalpindi’s Liaquat Bagh.
11. Every year, November 25 will be observed as “Martyrs of Prophet’s honour day”.

There has been no official confirmation or denial of agreeing to these demands from the government’s side as yet.

Dawn.com

* Updated November 28, 2017:

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1373197/list-of-demands-put-forward-by-tly-and-accepted-by-govt-for-ending-the-faizabad-protest>

Footnotes

[1] Faizabad Interchange is the main gateway between the twin Pakistani cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad,