

# **Pakistan - Raza Mehmood Khan: Activist 'Missing' After Anti-Extremism Meeting**

Sunday 22 April 2018, by [KUMAR V. Arun](#) (Date first published: 6 December 2017).

**According to his friends, Raza, a critical thinker, was a soft-spoken man who never feared to speak against injustices.**

A 37-year-old Pakistani activist, Raza Mahmood Khan is missing from Lahore since Saturday evening. Raza was last seen attending a debate meeting at Low-key Lokai, a progressive discussion space which he used to manage. The open meeting was called to discuss the recent Labaik sit-in and the rising religious extremist violence in Pakistan.

The Labaik sit-in was a massive demonstration organised by far-right Islamist political parties Tehreek-i-Khatm-i-Nabuwwat, Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY) and the Sunni Tehreek Pakistan (ST). The protest led by Khadim Hussain Rizvi, an anti- Ahmadiyya firebrand cleric called for a stricter blasphemy law [1].

The role of Pakistani military also came under severe criticism after helping the protesters negotiate with the government, leading to 'resignation' of the country's law minister. Many considered this as an increasing influence of religious extremists inside the military establishment.

Raza, whom his friends describe as a humble and soft-spoken person was a critical thinker working for the betterment of his country. He was active in many ground-level progressive movements in Pakistan. Apart from issues of gender and communal harmony, Raza was also involved in organising and unionising workers employed in informal sectors.

The Labaik protests and the rising anti-blasphemy violence in Pakistan have been criticised by many as giving away the country to religious fanatics. "Not only Raza, even shopkeepers and rikshawalas across the country are concerned about the increasing extremism and how it is destroying our Pakistan", said a friend of Raza (name withheld due to security concerns) speaking to Newsclick. "He spoke and stood against injustice, without any fear."

The online petition, #FindRaza, notes [2]:

*"He registered his organisation as "Hum Sab Aik Hain" in 2017 with his noble intention of bringing fellow citizens of all class and religions together by providing them with a public platform. He is also a proponent for peace in the South Asian region and always stressed on the importance of improving ties with SAARC countries in order to fight our common enemies of poverty, climate change and extremism."*

Raza was also the Pakistani convener of the peace initiative, Aghaz-e-Dosti aimed at bringing Indian and Pakistani students closer to create a conducive atmosphere in the region for peace and harmony.

The debate on Saturday evening was a heated one, which looked into the rising violence related to

blasphemy issue and the role of the state, according to sources. After the event, his friends and family members tried to reach him on his mobile, but it was switched off.

Though initially reluctant, the police later filed an FIR based on the complaint by his brother Hamid Nasir Mehmood.

This is not the first time that an activist has disappeared under suspicious circumstances. Asim Saeed was one of the five activists who was allegedly abducted by country's intelligence service and tortured in detention. Saeed managed Mochi, a Facebook page which was known for carrying posts critical of the military and political elites in Pakistan.

The other four included academic Salman Haider, bloggers Waqas Goraya and Ahmed Raza Naseer, and Samar Abbas, leading an anti-extremism activist group in Karachi [3].

Activists critical of the state and the rising extremism often face huge pressure from the state machinery, who blame these activists of being 'Indian agents' or 'posting blasphemous contents' in an attempt to silence them.

## **V. Arun Kumar**

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\* NewsClick, 06 Dec 2017:

<https://newsclick.in/pakistan-activist-missing-after-anti-extremism-meeting>

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### **Footnotes**

[1] <https://newsclick.in/law-minister-resigns-end-crisis-amidst-rising-anti-blasphemy-violence-pakistan>

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/atiqashahidkhan/posts/10215224775070636>

[3] <https://www.dawn.com/news/1366169>