

Pakistan: Growing calls for action against cops involved in farmer's 'killing'

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LAHORE: Calls for action against police grew louder a couple of days after a grower from Burewala was killed allegedly by law enforcers during the protest at Thokar Niaz Baig.

Insisting that one of their protesting colleagues had died due to torture and use of contaminated water by the police, farmers have demanded arrest of the police officer who had ordered the action.

"The government is wrongly claiming that Ashfaq Langrial had died of a heart attack. Rather, he expired due to police torture and inhaling fumes from chemical-mixed water used by the police water-cannon to disperse peaceful farmers seeking their rights at Thokar Niaz Baig late on Tuesday night," said Farooq Tariq, general secretary of the Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee, at a press conference here on Friday.

Referring to the video clip doing the rounds on social media in which an officer is ordering his subordinates to use water during action against the protesters, he demanded arrest of the SP for giving the 'unlawful' orders. He said Capital City Police Officer Umar Sheikh should also be removed.

Growers reject slight increase in wheat support price

"It's a war crime to throw chemical-mixed water on citizens...Now the police are using the war weapons against peaceful demonstrators," he regretted. He said the official stance on the death was totally false and misleading, while the government overreacted against the farmers using their constitutional right to protest.

A group of farmers belonging to various Punjab districts had assembled at southern entrance to the city on Tuesday for demanding fixing the support prices of wheat at Rs2,000 and of sugarcane at Rs300 per 40 kg, and introducing a flat rate of Rs5 per unit for farm tubewells. In a late night action, the police used teargas and water-cannons to disperse them and restore traffic on Multan Road.

Ashfaq fell after getting hurt in the baton charge and inhaling fumes of the chemical the police allegedly mixed in the water. He was shifted to the Jinnah Hospital the next day when his condition deteriorated where he breathed his last after a couple of hours.

Mr Tariq claimed that the police had registered FIR against 187 protesters, including 40 unidentified people, today (Friday) apparently to use it as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the farmers on the death of their colleague.

LAI D TO REST: The funeral prayers for the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) leader were offered in Burewala on Friday.

The funeral prayers for Ashfaq were offered at his native town, Chak 150/EB in Burewala. People

from all walks of life, especially farmers, attended the funeral prayers.

KPI President of Vehari district Zulfiqar Awan said the Lahore police and the Punjab government were responsible for the death of Ashfaq. He said that during the peaceful protest, the Lahore police started severe baton charge and shelling with chemically-mixed water on farmers and a dozen of farmers, including Malik Ashfaq, fell unconscious. They were admitted to the Jinnah Hospital where he died on Thursday.

Deceased's brothers Malik Ejaz and Malik Ishtiaq demanded a murder case against the police officials.

BAR COUNCILS: The bar councils and associations condemned the death of a farmers' leader due to the teargas shelling and chemical water sprinkling by the police.

"The whole legal fraternity stands by the farmers and equally shares their grief," said a joint statement issued by Pakistan Bar Council's vice chairman Abid Saqi, Punjab Bar Council's vice chairman Akram Khaksaar, Lahore High Court Bar Association's president Nasarullah Warraich and others leaders.

They said Prime Minister Imran Khan and Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar be booked for murdering Malik Ashfaq Langrial, who had fallen ill due to the chemical water the police sprinkled on the protesting farmers.

The bar's leaders announced support to the farmers in the legal fight against the government. They also demanded that the government immediately release all the arrested farmers and refrain from employing tactics of fascism on peaceful citizens.

Meanwhile, farmers have rejected the new wheat support price announced by the federal government on Friday saying it doesn't even meet their production cost.

Kissan Board Pakistan leaders Chaudhry Shaukat Chadhar and Amanullah Chattha claim that the production cost of wheat as per latest calculations of the Agriculture Department is Rs1,587 per 40kg against farmers own estimates of Rs1,690 per 40kg. They argue that the support price had been fixed at Rs1,300 in 2013 and adding to it Rs700 will not be a big deal, for farm input prices have gone up manifold during this period.

Mr Tariq regrets that the government is ready to consume precious foreign exchange for paying to Russian and Ukrainian farmers by importing the commodity at a rate of around Rs2,300 per 40kg but is not ready to pay Rs2,000 per 40kg to the local growers which can also help end rural poverty in the country.

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