

# November 2024 PTI protests

An HRCP fact-finding report



Human Rights Commission of Pakistan



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## Introduction

On 13 November 2024, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) announced it would hold a protest in Islamabad to demand the release of former prime minister and party founder Imran Khan and other PTI leaders as well as to oppose the passage of the 26<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment. The protest was to be held on 24 November. In response, Islamabad-based traders filed a petition in the Islamabad High Court, based on concerns about the potential disruption likely if the protest went ahead. The federal government also appeared to be nervous about the protest as a high-level delegation led by the Belarussian president was due to visit Islamabad during 24–27 November. On 21 November, the court ruled that the PTI’s call for protest was unlawful and directed the federal government to take all necessary measures to maintain law and order in Islamabad.<sup>1</sup>

By 26 November, however, several thousand PTI supporters and workers—the bulk of them from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, led by PTI leader and provincial chief minister Ali Amin Gandapur and Bushra Bibi, Khan’s wife—had gathered in the capital. In the ensuing crackdown by law enforcement agencies (LEAs), the protesters were driven out of the city after a four-day lockdown. A journalist covering the protest was also arrested in the parking lot of the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) along with a colleague and later booked on terrorism charges.

The PTI has made serious allegations that many of its protesters were killed and injured during the crackdown, most of them in D-Chowk—one of the main sites of the protest.<sup>2</sup> It has also alleged that thousands of PTI workers and leaders were arrested a couple of days before and after the protest in Islamabad and other cities (particularly in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) on what it terms ‘false charges’, while friends and relatives of those accused of violence were arrested outside the anti-terrorism court in Islamabad. The government has denied that any protesters were killed; it has blamed the PTI for the deaths of at least three Rangers personnel and one police constable and for injuring hundreds of LEA personnel during the protest. The government has also claimed that many PTI protesters were armed.

Given these contradicting claims, reports of fatalities, the ensuing government crackdown, and general absence of credible information due to internet shutdowns, ambiguity among the media and silence of hospital administrations, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) deemed it necessary to conduct a fact-finding mission in Islamabad. The mission comprised Munizae Jahangir (HRCP co-chairperson), Nasir Zaidi (HRCP Council member), Sadia Bokhari (HRCP Council member), Badar Alam (journalist), and Khushal Khan (HRCP staff member). To obtain legal advice, the mission members also held a meeting with former HRCP chairperson and lawyer Hina Jilani.

The mission held meetings with the police, federal ministers, lawyers, reporters who were covering the protest, PTI leaders and the families of victims associated with the PTI who were allegedly killed by LEA personnel during the protest. The team also sought, albeit unsuccessfully, to meet the administration of the two hospitals to which the dead and injured were reportedly brought. Some of these interviews were in person while others were held online and over the telephone.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1874036>

<sup>2</sup> A square located at the junction of Jinnah Avenue and Constitution Avenue in Islamabad, close to important government buildings such as the Presidency, the Prime Minister’s Secretariat, the Parliament and the Supreme Court.



The mission's field activities lasted from 5 to 18 December 2024. This report is based primarily on oral testimonies and is divided into sections that correspond to respondents' accounts.

### **Mission's terms of reference**

As far as possible, the mission was conducted in accordance with the following terms of reference:

- Develop an accurate and objective timeline of events.
- Assess if an operation to disperse protesters was conducted by the LEAs, what transpired during this and what kind of ammunition, if any (including tear gas), was used to disperse protesters.
- Ascertain if there was any credible data available on the number of confirmed deaths and injuries on both sides.
- Assess the scale and type of weapons carried by protesters, if any, and if these were used against LEA personnel and with what results.
- Ascertain the scale and type of LEAs deployed with a view to establishing necessity and proportionality.
- Assess the pressure on the mainstream media during the three days of protests, including the impact of suspended internet connectivity, and whether there was a crackdown on reporters trying to cover the protests.
- Obtain hospitals' point of view and ascertain if there was any pressure on their administrations to conceal facts pertaining to dead or injured protesters or other individuals onsite.
- Establish how many pre-emptive arrests of PTI workers and leaders were carried out before, during and after the protest.
- Present observations about the conduct of the government in handling the protest as well as the conduct of the protesters.

### **Fact-finding exercise**

#### *Visit to government hospitals*

The two main government hospitals where those reportedly killed or injured during the protest were said to have been brought were PIMS and the Federal Government Poly Clinic. Accordingly, HRCF wrote to their executive directors, requesting a meeting. The staff at both hospitals informed HRCF that their executive directors were busy with meetings in the Parliament with government officials and were not available to meet the mission. Nonetheless, the team visited both hospitals on 5 December to try and meet other administrative officials as well as those reportedly injured. The administrations at both hospitals informed the mission members that they were not authorized to speak to the team. Since the mission could not identify injured protesters on its own and received no assistance from the hospital administrations, it had to return without having spoken to any potential respondents.

#### *Meeting with senior police official*

The fact-finding team met a senior police official involved in managing the PTI protest in Islamabad, but only on the condition of anonymity, on 5 December. The police official informed the team at the outset that the police had not carried live ammunition and had been authorized to carry only batons and tear gas.



He recalled that when the convoys of protesters began arriving in the Blue Area on 26 November, the district administration and local authorities asked them not to proceed to D-Chowk. However, the protesters ignored these repeated warnings. On reaching D-Chowk, the protesters climbed on top of the containers placed there, posing a security threat to the Belarusian president and his delegation, who were visiting Pakistan at the time. The official said that the PTI was violating not only the Islamabad High Court's order prohibiting their protest in D-Chowk but also Section 144, which was in effect in Islamabad at the time.

He alleged that the protesters were armed and fired tear gas shells at the police. He claimed that several policemen were injured, some of whom sustained bullet wounds. When the team inquired about the PTI's claims regarding the killing of their workers by LEAs, he responded that no protesters had been killed. He stated that there were no reports of any deaths among protesters from PIMS or Poly Clinic.

He claimed that the police had arrested 35 Afghan nationals, presumably before the protest, along with other PTI protesters, most of whom were from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He asserted that the PTI was making false claims about not being involved in the killings of Rangers personnel and that they were using social media to spread misinformation about the deaths of their workers. The official noted that police raids conducted before and after the protest to apprehend PTI leaders and workers in Islamabad had now ceased.

In response to the team's inquiry about the arrests of relatives and friends of the protesters at Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) No. 1 in Islamabad, where the arrested protesters were being presented, the official confirmed the arrests. He explained that the police carried these out as part of their investigation into the connection between protesters and their families and friends. Among those arrested from the ATC were several PTI councillors from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The official asserted that if no evidence was found against those arrested, they would be released. Additionally, the police officer informed the team that more than 70 personnel from law enforcement agencies had been injured by the protesters in Islamabad. He noted that the protesters began to disperse and leave D-Chowk after a brawl broke out among themselves, attributing the chaos and infighting to a lack of leadership.

#### *Meeting with federal minister for law and justice and advisor to the ministry*

The fact-finding team met Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar at his office on 5 December. Aqeel Malik, a member of the National Assembly (MNA) and advisor to the Ministry of Law and Justice, was also present at the meeting. Mr Tarar informed the team that he was out of the country during the protest and returned on 29 November, after it had concluded. He stated that in today's world, it would be impossible to conceal such a large number of killings, asserting that the claims made by the PTI were controversial. Mr Tarar maintained the government's position that no protesters had been killed.

According to government reports, PTI protesters included armed individuals. He referenced an incident in which armed PTI protesters had allegedly fired on and injured several LEA personnel at Kati Pahari, located about 45 minutes from Islamabad on the M1. Mr Aqeel claimed to have seen footage of the attack but noted that it was not publicly available. He also claimed to have visited the injured LEA personnel in the hospital and observed their bullet wounds. However, neither the media nor the fact-finding team was permitted entry into the hospitals, leaving this claim unverified.

Mr Tarar stated that the PTI had been offered an opportunity to hold its sit-in at Sangjani and there had been an understanding with the PTI leadership that the protest would conclude there. Despite this agreement, the protest had continued towards D-Chowk. Mr Tarar expressed the



view that political tensions should be reduced and said that the government had made numerous overtures in the past, all of which PTI chief Imran Khan had rejected.

#### *Meeting with federal minister for information and broadcasting*

The fact-finding team held a Zoom meeting with the federal minister for information and broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar on 6 December. While acknowledging that peaceful protest was every citizen's right, the minister claimed that the PTI protesters were not peaceful and had been armed. He stated that approximately 35 Afghan nationals were arrested alongside several PTI protesters. He informed the team that security personnel were not permitted to use live ammunition as a matter of policy; in extreme cases, they were allowed to use rubber bullets.

While he admitted that the police had deployed tear gas against the protesters, Mr Tarar asserted that the protesters had also fired tear gas shells at the police, which he claimed were more sophisticated than what LEA personnel used. He maintained that there was no evidence of shooting by LEAs, contrary to the PTI's claims, and reiterated the government's assertion that no protesters were killed, noting that no reports of any deaths had been received from PIMS or Poly Clinic. He accused the PTI of using religious slogans such as 'Al-Jihad' to incite their supporters and alleged that aggressive protesters were carrying live ammunition, which they had used against LEA personnel, including hardened criminals among their ranks.

When the fact-finding team inquired who had ordered the electricity to be switched off in the Blue Area on the night of 26 November, he replied that it was the police and LEAs on the ground who had the authority to do so in order to disperse the protesters.

Echoing claims made by a senior police official, Mr Tarar stated that the protesters began to disperse from D-Chowk due to infighting, suggesting that it was possible for individuals to be hit by bullets fired by the protesters themselves. He also pointed to the absence of PTI leadership, which may have contributed to the chaos among the workers. He indicated that between 2,500 and 3,000 protesters remained at D-Chowk when the electricity was switched off.

The minister claimed that the PTI was offered Sangjani as an alternative location for its sit-in, but according to government reports, Imran Khan's wife, Bushra Bibi, had refused the offer and insisted on proceeding to D-Chowk. He expressed the government's concern for the safety of the Belarusian president and his delegation. Similar to MNA Aqeel Malik, he mentioned the alleged attack by PTI workers on LEAs in Kati Pahari.

The fact-finding mission raised concerns about the crackdown on journalists following the protest, including the arrest of senior journalist Matiullah Jan in Islamabad and the short-term enforced disappearance of journalist Shakir Awan in Lahore. In response, Mr Tarar merely stated that he was pleased that Mr Jan had been released and that the Punjab government might have details regarding what happened to Mr Awan.

#### *Meeting with representatives of Insaf Lawyers Forum*

On 6 December, the fact-finding mission met Saud Shah Roghani, the deputy focal person of the Insaf Lawyers Forum (ILF) Pakistan, and Ayesha Khalid, its information secretary. The ILF had been representing the PTI's arrested workers in court following the protest call on 24 November. Mr Roghani reported that the night before, the police had raided his home in Islamabad, accompanied by men in civilian clothing. Although he was not home at the time, his parents were present. The ILF representatives informed the team that Raja Haroon, a lawyer associated with the ILF, had been arrested in Islamabad on 2 December and charged under Section 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997, among other sections of the Pakistan Penal Code. They claimed that over 1,000 PTI workers had been arrested in Islamabad and a similar number in Rawalpindi, both



before and during the protest, with multiple first information reports (FIRs) filed to extend their detention. They were in the process of compiling lists of the arrested and missing individuals.

The ILF lawyers asserted that several protesters had been killed and that the party was working to verify their identities. They informed the mission that the PTI had planned a peaceful protest on 24 November, but the government's crackdown had created chaos. The ILF lawyers made a significant allegation: they claimed that officials in government hospitals were demanding signed affidavits from the relatives of deceased protesters, stating they would not pursue legal action, in exchange for the release of the bodies. The ILF representatives did not present copies of these affidavits or death certificates during the meeting. They also reported that relatives and friends of arrested workers had been detained at ATC hearings.

The ILF representatives explained that the ongoing crackdown against the PTI had created serious challenges for both lawyers and workers in Islamabad. Mr Roghani, who had participated in the protest on 26 November, expressed frustration with the PTI leadership, claiming that many were absent during the protest. He noted that the chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and PTI leader Ali Amin Gandapur was reluctant to proceed to D-Chowk, while Imran Khan's wife, Bushra Bibi, had insisted on moving forward. Mr Roghani also claimed to have seen snipers on rooftops along the main road in Blue Area, where the protest took place.

When the mission inquired about government allegations regarding an attack on LEAs by PTI protesters at Kati Pahari, the ILF team denied these claims. However, Mr Roghani recalled seeing a protester near Bushra Bibi's car carrying a weapon, who stated he would use it if necessary. Mr Roghani advised the protester against causing trouble for the party by displaying weapons.

#### *Meeting with PTI leadership*

The fact-finding team met the PTI leadership on 12 December in the chamber of the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly. The team spoke with the leader of the opposition, the PTI's former secretary-general Omar Ayub Khan, PTI chairman and MNA Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, former speaker of the National Assembly Asad Qaiser, and MNA Latif Khosa. Much of the information was provided by Omar Ayub Khan and Gohar Ali Khan, which is summarized below.

#### Interview with Omar Ayub Khan

Omar Ayub Khan informed the fact-finding team that the convoy he was leading to attend the PTI protest in Islamabad departed from Haripur on 24 November at 2 PM. On reaching Khanpur Road, they encountered Punjab Police personnel deployed at the border between Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He claimed that at around 4 PM, the Punjab Police crossed into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa without official permission to confront his convoy and began firing tear gas at them. Mr Khan reported that a female councillor from the PTI and her husband were injured and dragged away by the Punjab Police but managed to evade arrest and later reached D-Chowk.

Mr Khan stated that he contacted the chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and PTI leader Ali Amin Gandapur, who advised him to use the Hazara Motorway to reach Islamabad. Consequently, Mr Khan's convoy was redirected towards the Hazara Motorway. He reported that the convoy arrived at Burhan on the motorway between 9.30 and 10 PM on 24 November, where they were met by Punjab Police and Rangers personnel who commenced firing tear gas, rubber bullets and pellets at them. Mr Khan noted that the roads were obstructed by containers and alleged that the police set civilian vehicles on fire during this time. He recounted being struck by two tear gas shells fired directly at him, with confrontations continuing throughout the night and into the next day as his convoy persisted in moving forward despite the ongoing tear gas attacks.





Around 8 AM, Mr Gandapur's convoy successfully passed through Ghazi Barotha on the M1. Mr Khan's convoy continued to push through the barricades and crossed the Burhan interchange after 11 AM on 25 November, eventually reaching Pathargarh, where there was a significant police presence. He alleged that Rangers and possibly intelligence personnel had infiltrated the police ranks, making it difficult to distinguish between them due to the heavy tear gas shelling and the chaotic situation. Mr Khan claimed that some protesters in his convoy detained approximately 50 Punjab Police personnel, whom he later managed to have released.

In response to the government's claims regarding attacks by PTI protesters on LEAs during Mr Gandapur's convoy in the Kati Pahari area, Mr Khan asserted that these allegations were false, stating that PTI workers did not assault the police. He accused LEAs of using live ammunition and reported that they successfully entered Islamabad later that day, reaching Chungi No. 26 between 8 and 8.30 PM on 25 November. According to Mr Khan, the Rangers opened fire on PTI protesters at Chungi No. 26, using live ammunition, resulting in injuries to two protesters. He said that Mr Gandapur's chief security officer contacted the Islamabad Police at around 9.30 PM to request assistance in evacuating the injured individuals, but the police declined to help. Mr Khan clarified that, contrary to government claims, no police personnel were killed at Chungi No. 26. He also reported receiving information earlier that day, between 5 and 5.30 PM, about at least one PTI worker having been killed on the CPEC motorway during a confrontation with LEAs en route to Islamabad.

Mr Khan informed the fact-finding team that they continued their advance and reached the area in front of Centaurus Mall in Islamabad on 26 November between 1 and 1.30 PM. He stated that at this point, Mr Gandapur, Bushra Bibi and he addressed the protesters, urging them to proceed to D-Chowk while ensuring no one crossed into the Red Zone. He claimed that he and Mr Gandapur spoke with PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat and instructed him and MNA Shahid Khattak to relay the message to the protesters ahead, instructing them to stop at D-Chowk and not enter the Red Zone.

Mr Khan recounted that they moved toward Constitution Avenue and learned that protesters had been shot in D-Chowk before they arrived. He alleged that snipers were positioned on rooftops in the Blue Area. On reaching the area in front of Kulsoom Hospital around 4 PM, they discovered that casualties had reportedly occurred at D-Chowk. Some protesters with Mr Khan attempted to move the main container, designated as the stage for PTI leaders, towards D-Chowk, which was later set on fire. He stated that they began moving towards D-Chowk after 5.45 PM and arrived by 7.45 PM.

At around 8.30 PM, said Mr Khan, he exited his vehicle to survey the protest site, at which point the electricity supply was cut. He noted that some nearby trees had been set ablaze, alleging that LEAs had infiltrated the crowd to facilitate targeting by snipers. He alleged that indiscriminate firing commenced, claiming that it originated from elevated positions, with LEAs occupying surrounding buildings to position their snipers on rooftops. He reported that the protesters eventually evacuated D-Chowk after the gunfire began at around 8.30 PM. He detailed how he, Mr Gandapur, Bushra Bibi and others managed to retreat from D-Chowk despite multiple attacks, roadblocks and barriers, ultimately reaching Haripur before continuing to Mansehra.

Mr Khan asserted that the PTI protesters were unarmed and challenged the government to present medical reports and records if it claimed that any LEAs were injured by PTI workers. Regarding the deaths of Rangers officials, he stated that the driver responsible for running over them was under the influence of drugs and had no affiliation with the PTI. Mr Khan recounted his attempt to file an FIR on 7 December concerning the alleged attack on him in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, claiming that the then inspector general of police in the province had prevented the FIR from



being registered. He indicated that he was considering his legal options to pursue this matter further.

Additionally, Mr Khan alleged that intelligence agencies were pressuring the families of victims killed during the protest to remain silent and refrain from pursuing their cases. He claimed there were 2,200 security officials embedded within the PTI crowds during the protest, although he did not clarify how he obtained this specific figure. He also mentioned that Pashtuns and Afghans had faced racial profiling in Islamabad and were subjected to harassment following the protest.

Mr Khan claimed that 12 PTI workers had been killed, over 200 were missing and presumed dead until proven otherwise, and approximately 5,000 PTI workers had been arrested nationwide, primarily in Punjab. He further alleged that those injured in the protest were unable to seek treatment at PIMS or the Poly Clinic for fear of arrest. Mr Khan also expressed his views on the weapons and ammunition allegedly used by the LEAs against PTI protesters. He called for an investigation into the deaths of the Rangers officials and recommended the formation of a judicial commission to examine the excesses that occurred during the protest.

#### Interview with Barrister Gohar Ali Khan

PTI MNA and chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan informed the fact-finding team that the government had not established any authority or forum for the PTI to submit their evidence concerning the abuses they had allegedly experienced during the protest. He stated that there were no inconsistencies in the party's official positions regarding the number of PTI workers who were killed, injured or missing. According to him, 12 PTI workers were killed, 38 were injured, and 139 remained missing, with these figures verified as of 12 December. He noted that many others who were injured were afraid to seek treatment at government hospitals for fear of arrest, making it difficult to determine an exact number at this time.

Gohar Ali Khan expressed the view that responsibility for the events during the protest must be established; he emphasized the need for clear standards on how protests should be managed. He proposed the formation of an inquiry commission, a joint investigation team, a judicial commission, or another authority to investigate the protest and assign responsibility. He asserted that if any of their workers were found guilty of using slingshots or tear gas during the protest, the party would not support them, and anyone engaging in such actions should be punished according to the law. Additionally, he said that approximately 31 FIRs had been filed against the PTI, including against its MNAs and MPs. He also pointed out that the Islamabad High Court's ruling concerning the PTI protest was an interim order, and the government was supposed to form a committee to engage with the PTI, which had not occurred.

The PTI leaders present at the meeting claimed that some of those arrested were also being implicated in cases related to the 9 May riots.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Meetings with journalists*

On 5 December, the team held in-person meetings with two journalists who had reported on the protest. The mission held a second round of meetings with other journalists on 18 December. Below are their accounts as narrated to the team:

#### Journalist 1 (J1)

J1, who manages his own YouTube channel and reports on current political affairs, informed the team that he began covering the PTI protest at Chungi No. 26—the entry point to Islamabad from both the M1 and M2, as well as from the GT Road—when PTI convoys from Khyber

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<sup>3</sup> A series of PTI-led riots that occurred nationwide on 9 May 2023, following the arrest of PTI chief Imran Khan.





Pakhtunkhwa entered Islamabad during the night of 25–26 November. The convoys consisted of hundreds of vehicles, primarily large pickup vans and buses. While most protesters were unarmed, some carried tear gas shells. There was significant tear gas shelling near the bridge at Chungi No. 26, where he witnessed some protesters in bloodied clothes who stated they were victims of live fire.

J1 believed he was the only journalist present at Chungi No. 26 at around midnight that night. He learned about further clashes at Chungi No. 26 after returning home later that evening. The next day, 26 November, he discovered that the protesters had reached Sector G-11. By 2 PM, he encountered protesters who had made it to Zero Point, but he did not observe any tear gas shelling or armed individuals among them. By late afternoon, Ali Amin Gandapur and Bushra Bibi had moved on from Zero Point.

It seemed that PTI workers were driving the protest, urging the leadership to advance. At around 4 PM, he saw protesters fleeing from D-Chowk to Sector G-6 on Embassy Road while being pursued by the police and Rangers. He attempted to reach D-Chowk from the Poly Clinic side in the Blue Area, but the tear gas shelling was so intense that he was unable to do so. He then tried the Kulsoom Hospital side in the Blue Area, where he spotted Mr Gandapur's car in front of the hospital, surrounded by PTI workers demanding that he emerge and lead the protest.

He then positioned himself in front of the State Life Building next to the main road in the Blue Area, where heavy tear gas shelling continued. He saw protesters returning from D-Chowk, claiming they needed to offer prayers and find food—something they had been unable to do since the previous night when they attempted to reach D-Chowk.

J1 went to the Poly Clinic after some protesters informed him that Anees Shahzad Satti, a young PTI supporter, had been killed and that his body was inside. The Poly Clinic was also engulfed in tear gas at that time.

By 10 PM, the protesters had dispersed from in front of Kulsoom Hospital in the Blue Area. Some protesters returning from the Blue Area near Fresco Sweets in cars mentioned they would return to the Blue Area bridge and attempt to go back to D-Chowk the following morning. He also observed convoys of protesters in Sector G-8, appearing to head toward Srinagar Highway around midnight. He heard reports of firing at D-Chowk, which reportedly began after he had left the area at around 10.30 PM, coinciding with the start of the ‘operation’ against the protesters.

Electricity in the Blue Area had been shut off since 6 PM and remained out by the time he departed around 10 PM. When he returned to the area the next afternoon, it appeared completely clear, as though no protest or crackdown had occurred.

Some protesters he met claimed that snipers were positioned on top of buildings in the Blue Area, but he could not verify this himself. Building owners in the vicinity reported being pressured by authorities to turn over their properties to the law enforcement agencies.

### Journalist 2 (J2)

J2, a YouTuber, reported that two FIRs had been filed against him following the PTI protest due to his social media posts regarding the firing at the protest and the attack on the protesters. He was at D-Chowk on 26 November when he heard that a young man had been shot in the head at around 2.30 PM. This incident occurred near the Geo News office, towards the main D-Chowk side. Although he did not witness the shooting, he saw other protesters carrying the young man away from the spot where he fell after being shot. He also witnessed another man in his forties being shot in the face at around 3.30 PM. J2 spoke with a protester, who was a doctor and had been injured himself, and the latter said he had been providing first aid to other injured individuals.



The electricity in the D-Chowk area was shut off around 8.30 PM. While he saw many people injured during the protest, he did not see who was firing the shots. He could still hear gunshots after leaving the Blue Area and reaching his office in Sector F-6.

**Box: Testimony from journalist Matiullah Jan**

Journalist Matiullah Jan, who manages his own YouTube channel, reports on current political affairs and hosts a talk show on Neo News. He informed the fact-finding team that he covered the PTI protest after it reached the Blue Area. He began by discussing the reported incident involving the alleged killing of Rangers personnel on the Srinagar Highway when a car ran them over. The government attributed blame for the killings to the PTI, which denied the allegations.

According to Mr Jan, a civilian was also killed in this incident, but his identity was not revealed at the time and his death was initially concealed. Later, when the civilian's relatives attempted to collect his body from PIMS, they were required to sign an affidavit stating that the individual had died in a random road accident unrelated to the protest or the crackdown before they could receive the body. Mr Jan stated that he visited PIMS on the night of the operation against the protest (26 November) around 9 PM. He claimed to have seen government officials at the hospital early the next morning, which raised suspicions as it appeared that the hospital records had been tampered with.

He managed to interview someone who claimed to be the brother of one of the Rangers personnel killed in the incident, which Mr Jan then published on his YouTube channel. He said that he and journalist Saqib Bashir were together later that night at PIMS when they were detained by masked men, whom he believed were police officers, although he was not certain. They were taken to an unidentified building. Mr Jan reported that Mr Bashir was released after three hours, but shortly after, he learned that he himself had been arrested on terrorism and narcotics charges, which were widely criticized as 'bogus' and based on 'trumped-up charges.' He was released on bail on 30 November.<sup>4</sup>

Mr Jan then shared his observations regarding the protest. He noted that he did not believe the police had any weapons, although other LEAs involved in the operation against the protests may have been armed. He observed some protesters carrying tear gas shells and slingshots. He reported hearing gunfire around the protest area and noted significant tear gas shelling.

Mr Jan claimed that there had been about 12–13 confirmed deaths, including the Rangers personnel killed on the Srinagar Highway. He suggested that the government was deliberately delaying information related to the protest to later assert that the number of deaths was far fewer than what the PTI initially claimed, despite current government assertions of no deaths caused by LEAs. He indicated that the families of the deceased protesters were under considerable pressure. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of determining who gave the orders to disperse the protesters from D-Chowk and who executed those orders.

Journalist 3 (J3)

J3, a reporter for a major television news channel, informed the fact-finding team that his channel was instructed to shut down its office building, located next to D-Chowk, around 6 PM on the day of the protest. He learned this from colleagues who were ordered to vacate the premises. The power supply to the Blue Area, around D-Chowk, was cut off after 8 PM. He heard gunfire beginning at 11.45 PM on the night of 26 November. The police had been directed to clear the area at around 11.30 PM and to step aside before operations against the protesters commenced at approximately 11.45 PM. The police's role was to apprehend and arrest protesters fleeing once the operation began.

At around 3.32 AM on 26 November, J3 received a message about the bodies of Rangers officials being brought to PIMS. He arrived at the hospital by 3.45 AM and discovered that the morgue

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1875772>



contained the bodies of three Rangers officials, one former Frontier Corps official, and one civilian. He met one Safer Hussain at the hospital, who claimed to be the brother of one of the Rangers officials killed in the incident. Mr Hussain alleged that his brother was run over by the Rangers in their own vehicle. Earlier that evening, J3 had encountered Mr Hussain at Chungi No. 26 after the PTI's convoys entered Islamabad. At the hospital, Mr Hussain had faced threats from the police when he began discussing the killings of the Rangers officials. The driver responsible for running over the Rangers officials had been arrested; his name was Hashim Abbasi. Mr Abbasi was under the influence of drugs, likely ice, at the time of the incident and was being held in a jail in Jhelum. J3 also noted that he saw at least one protester carrying a gun.

#### Journalist 4 (J4)

J4, who works for a digital Urdu platform, informed the fact-finding team that she was covering the protest at China Chowk on 26 November. At around 3 PM, a police official instructed her and her colleague to vacate the area and move back due to gunfire from both sides. Although she could not see who was firing, she witnessed PTI protesters throwing tear gas shells at the police.

By 4.30 PM, she and her colleague were in the D-Chowk area when an army official in uniform ordered them to leave. The official attempted to seize her camera, but she refused to let go. After a brief standoff, the army official left them alone. During this time, she observed PTI protesters setting fire to police tents and other law enforcement equipment.

At D-Chowk, near Sindh Bank, she and her colleague faced harassment and physical assault from PTI protesters. An individual in plainclothes intervened, rescuing them from the protesters who were pushing and hitting them. The man introduced himself as an official of a civilian agency but did not provide any credentials to verify his identity. Law enforcement agencies continued to make announcements in Urdu and Pashto, urging protesters not to take the law into their own hands.

Around 5.30 PM, J4 heard gunfire in the D-Chowk area. The PTI protesters were checking the identification cards and credentials of those approaching. She also saw protesters armed with batons that had nails in them. At one point, individuals carrying these batons surrounded Ali Amin Gandapur's car. She mentioned a source (who remains unnamed) claiming to have seen a Rangers official firing a weapon at the protesters. She asserted that at least ten people had been killed during the protest.

#### Journalist 5 (J5)

J5, a reporter for a news channel covering the protest in the D-Chowk area on 26 November, informed the fact-finding team that PTI protesters were armed with slingshots, batons and tear gas shells. On reaching D-Chowk, the protesters climbed onto the containers and descended on the other side, then proceeded toward the iron gates at the Parade Ground behind D-Chowk. Rangers stationed in the area issued several announcements, warning the protesters to retreat. Following these warnings, gunfire erupted after 5 PM. J5 witnessed the police firing rubber bullets at protesters near the parking area of the Geo News building adjacent to D-Chowk.

Additionally, the protesters were checking the identities of those approaching the protest, including journalists. It appeared that the protesters aimed to breach the cordoned-off Red Zone, which was barricaded by containers at D-Chowk.

#### *Interviews with families of victims allegedly killed during the protest*

In response to the PTI's claim regarding the deaths of at least 12 of their workers during the protest, the fact-finding mission collected and analysed information from mainstream and digital



media sources about eight reported deaths.<sup>5</sup> However, the team managed to speak with the families of only seven individuals who were identified as victims by PTI workers. Of these seven alleged victims, only two families provided death certificates. The team was also provided a death certificate for a purported eighth victim from Mardan but was unable to contact his family, despite repeated attempts.

On 9 December, the fact-finding team spoke with the families of three alleged victims.

**Alleged victim 1.** The team spoke on the phone with the father of a young man in his early twenties who was reportedly killed during the protest. Originally from Murree, the family resides in Islamabad. The father informed the team that they had not yet received a post-mortem report and that no FIR had been registered regarding his son's killing. He expressed the family's intention to pursue the registration of an FIR. The fact-finding team was provided a death certificate for the victim.

**Alleged victim 2.** The team also spoke by phone with the brother of a second victim, a man between 35 and 40 years old who had seven children and was from Abbottabad. The brother reported that the victim was killed in Chungi No. 26 and that his body was handed over to the family in Haripur by unidentified protesters. The family attempted to call the victim's phone, but an unknown person answered and informed them that the victim had been shot. The brother stated that they were unable to retrieve the body due to blocked roads and could not obtain a post-mortem report or death certificate. He confirmed seeing bullet wounds on the victim's body before burial. He also said that the family was not pursuing an FIR against his brother's killing, as they did not know whom to hold accountable and had little hope of obtaining justice. He acknowledged uncertainty about the exact circumstances of his brother's death but noted that PTI leaders had offered their condolences to the family.

**Alleged victim 3.** Additionally, the team spoke with relatives of a third victim from Pishin, who claimed that the victim had gone to participate in the PTI protest in Islamabad, where he was killed. The family reported being harassed by local police and stated that an FIR had been filed against them in an effort to pressure them into not pursuing the killing of their loved one.

**Alleged victim 4.** On 16 December, the team contacted and spoke with the families of four more victims whose cases had come to light. They spoke by phone with the brother of a 45-year-old victim from D. G. Khan, who informed them that the family learned through social media on 27 November that the victim, a PTI supporter, had been injured during a protest. The family travelled to Islamabad but discovered en route that the victim had passed away.

The victim's brother stated that when the family arrived at the Poly Clinic, they were told there were no bodies there. He said they eventually collected the victim's body from the Civil Hospital (DHQ Hospital) in Rawalpindi but faced many difficulties in doing so. When the fact-finding team asked whether the relatives had to sign an affidavit to retrieve the body, the brother declined to comment. In response to whether the body had gunshot wounds, he suggested the team check social media for details. He mentioned that the family was not pursuing the registration of an FIR because they did not know whom to file it against. He also informed the team that the victim had two children.

**Alleged victim 5.** The team then spoke by phone to the brother of a fifth victim from Charsadda, who explained that the victim worked as a labourer in Islamabad. He had participated in the protest and was killed on 26 November, but the family did not learn of his death until 28 November. The brother claimed the victim was shot twice—in the head and in the chest. He explained that the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://voicepk.net/2024/11/conflicting-reports-of-fatalities-in-operation-against-pti-supporters/>



family retrieved the body from PIMS but encountered significant obstacles. They were made to wait for hours to speak with the police, who then required them to sign an affidavit before releasing the victim's body. The brother asserted that the affidavit stated the victim's death was accidental and unrelated to the PTI protest.

He further claimed that the family did not receive any medical reports regarding the victim, nor did they obtain a postmortem report or death certificate. He said the family had been desperate to recover the body, which is why they had signed the affidavit. He added that the family had not filed an FIR because the affidavit stipulated that they would not pursue one, and they did not have a copy of the document. The brother mentioned that local PTI leaders had offered their condolences and supported the victim's family. He expressed concern for the welfare of the victim's immediate family, particularly the latter's children.

**Alleged victim 6.** The fact-finding team contacted the uncle of a sixth alleged victim, who was 27 or 28 years old and originally from Charsadda. The case gained significant attention on social media, particularly because Bushra Bibi reportedly visited the family to offer her condolences. The uncle claimed that the victim had sustained two gunshot wounds to the left side of his chest but lacked details about the circumstances of his death. He mentioned that the victim's family retrieved the body from an unnamed hospital in Rawalpindi and claimed they were not provided with a postmortem report, as the hospital asserted that a postmortem was unnecessary.

The uncle further alleged that the family was required to leave their thumbprints on a document before the body was released to them, although he was uncertain if it was an affidavit. Like many other victim families, he indicated that they did not file an FIR because they were unsure against whom the FIR should be lodged. He noted that PTI leaders, including Bushra Bibi, visited to offer their condolences and that the family received a cheque for PKR 10 million, as announced by the PTI provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

**Alleged victim 7.** The fact-finding team also spoke by phone with the cousin of a seventh victim, who the family claims was killed in the same incident that resulted in the deaths of three Rangers officials when their vehicle was struck by a speeding car in the early hours of 26 November. The victim, who was 27 years old, hailed from Shangla. The cousin reported that the victim's body remained unclaimed at PIMS. When the family arrived to identify the body, the hospital administration delayed its release. He asserted that they were made to wait for hours until the police arrived and required them to sign an affidavit, of which they did not receive a copy. The cousin stated that the family had not filed an FIR because they felt unable to do so against the government, and the affidavit explicitly indicated that they would not pursue an FIR. He assured the team that the family was not under any pressure.

The cousin claimed that the victim was struck by police vehicles fleeing the area after PTI convoys advanced. He alleged that the incident occurred at Chungi No. 26, although media reports and the government indicate that the hit-and-run event involving Rangers personnel occurred on the Srinagar Highway at the G-10 traffic signal. The team concluded that the family, unfamiliar with Islamabad, may have confused the location of the incident. The team was also provided a death certificate for this victim.

## Key findings

The mission's key findings are listed below:

- The mission found it challenging to corroborate the accounts and testimonies of families, the government, the PTI, and journalists.





- Aside from two ministers, no other government officials, including police representatives, were willing to speak officially.
- Contrary to the federal government's claims, the mission holds that there was loss of life and injuries during the 26 November protest.
- Some protesters were observed carrying batons, slingshots, tear gas shells, and, in one or two instances, a weapon.
- No evidence or footage has emerged to support claims that several LEA personnel were injured by the protesters.
- Despite HRCP's requests, the administrations of Poly Clinic and PIMS refused to speak with the fact-finding team. Accounts from journalists and the families of alleged victims suggest that both hospitals may be concealing information.
- Of the seven families of alleged victims whom the team interviewed, at least four claimed to have signed documents (affidavits) for the release of the bodies. However, they said they did not possess copies of these affidavits. The families of at least two alleged victims stated they were coerced into signing affidavits that included a stipulation not to pursue legal action.
- The government is legally bound to file an FIR for any unnatural death. However, no FIRs have been filed because the government maintains that no protesters were killed.
- The testimonies collected indicate that the police used disproportionate force in the form of batons, tear gas shells, and rubber bullets to manage the protest. The fact-finding mission attempted to contact the interior minister to inquire about the use of live ammunition against protesters, but he was unavailable to meet the team.
- The mission notes a significant lack of coverage of the incident by mainstream media, alongside allegations that journalists were warned against reporting on it. This has significant implications for the right to information and freedom of expression in the country. There are also reports of individuals who threatened and attacked media outlets, including the National Press Club and Aik News.

## Conclusion

The 26 November incident raises several critical questions, with the truth being the first casualty. The PTI claimed that a large number of protesters were killed, while the government asserted that its security forces were unarmed and that no protesters died. The mission was, however, able to speak to the families of seven people who were allegedly killed during the protest. In addition, there were reported deaths of Rangers personnel.

While the right to peaceful assembly is constitutionally guaranteed, it must remain within the bounds of the law. Reports indicate that some protesters carried slingshots, tear gas shells and firearms spotted on occasion. The administration demonstrated a clear lack of proficiency in managing the protest and used force excessively and disproportionately.

The mission is deeply concerned by allegations that the hospital administrations and police withheld the bodies of victims until their families agreed not to pursue any legal action.

Additionally, the mission is alarmed by the mainstream media's blackout of the entire event, which may have resulted from state coercion or self-censorship. The media should have been allowed to assess the situation on the ground without hindrance and report the facts.





In light of the key findings above, specifically that there was loss of life and injuries during the 26 November protest, the mission urges the government to immediately announce an independent, impartial inquiry into these events, involving the families of the alleged victims, the PTI and other political stakeholders.