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Another blow to critically depleted freedom of religion of Ahmadis

Ahmadiyya mosque handed over to adversaries by DCO's executive order

At the orders of the District Co-ordination Officer (DCO) Chiniot, Punjab, an Ahmadiyya mosque in Ahmad Nagar (near Rabwah) was handed over to non-Ahmadis on January 14, 2010 at the superficial excuse of “*to pre-empt the extreme law and order disturbance*”.

The mosque had been sealed by the police in 2003 on a similar excuse, and Ahmadis have remained deprived of their place of worship for over six years. Ahmadis reported the matter to the Chief Justice Lahore High Court in August last year. While an action by the honorable court was awaited, the mullas approached the provincial and district administration, and bullied their way to obtain a favorable decision that seriously violates the legal and human rights of Ahmadis. It is a deliberate and gross infringement of Ahmadis' freedom of religion and worship.

This mosque was built by an Ahmadi, Mr. Wali Muhammad, at personal expense on his personal land, in 1982-1983. Its management was in Ahmadiyya hands for the next twenty years. Ahmadis routinely allow other Muslims the innocent use of their mosques; in fact they may allow worship to anyone therein who worships one God. As such, on occasions, a non-Ahmadi wayfarer or local also used this mosque for worship.

In 2003, Ahmadis undertook repairs to its depleted structure. When the repairs were nearing completion, an outsider mulla, Ghulam Mustafa, who lives in Muslim Colony (Chenab Nagar) 10 kilometers away, approached the police and claimed the mosque on the grounds that it had been used by Muslims. As is the wont with such religious bullies, he threatened violence. The police found it convenient to lock the mosque, with the promise to look into the rival claims subsequently.

The police were then presented by Ahmadis irrefutable evidence and documents of Mr. Wali Muhammad's ownership of the land and the structure. The police SHO therefore categorically wrote in his report, on December 18, 2003: "In my opinion it is clear and there is no doubt that this mosque was built 18 or 20 years ago by Wali Muhammad Qadiani on his own land in his personal capacity. Muslims had no claim or role in it."

Still the authorities did not restore the mosque back to Ahmadis. In June 2007, the District Police Officer asked a report from the DSP along with documentary evidence. This was provided by the official who concluded: ".....As for this mosque/Bait uz Zikr, Ahmad Nagar, it is a property of Jamaat Ahmadiyya as per evidence."

Despite the above conclusive finding the mosque was not unsealed. In 2009, the extremist religious elements initiated a drive threatening take over of the mosque by force if necessary. At this, Ahmadis complained to the Chief Justice LHC. His decision is awaited.

The mullas however decided not to wait for a judicial verdict. They issued threats to the administration, and have succeeded in obtaining a favorable decision through summary and unlawful methodology. It is a victory of blind religious extremism over fair and good governance.

The DCO's Order and the justification given therein are typical of bureaucratic wangling and circumvention. It is reasonable to assume that he had orders from Lahore to do the mulla's bid. He did not fail to send a copy of his Order direct to the (PS to) Chief Secretary in the provincial capital. In view of what happened in Gojra last year and to the Ahmadi school children of Layya, the Punjab Government's policy is no secret. The chief minister's statement, after the Gojra tragedy, is, however, worth quoting: "We do not have the right to rule if we cannot protect and provide justice to minorities". (*The Daily Times, Lahore; August 8, 2009*) In view of the DCO's Order and the chief minister's statement one is reminded of a statement by Dr Israr Ahmad, a well-known Pakistani cleric: "Pakistanis as people are the greatest hypocrites in the world." (*The daily Pakistan, Lahore; January 5, 2009*)

In case the government differs with our above assessment of the DCO's Order, it should allow an independent inquiry of the issue by an impartial NGO or a judicious panel.

The DCO quoted the anti-Ahmadiyya constitutional amendment and Ordinance XX to justify his unsupportable action. But if there is a bad law, a good government tries to dampen its harmful effect by its enlightened interpretation. In this case, the DCO used a bad law to commit further grotesque violation of fundamental human rights of a marginalized community. The high-level judicial inquiry of the Gojra incident proposed amending the anti-Ahmadiyya laws as well, among others.

This wrong must be put right, otherwise the encouraged mulla will push for further victories, as he did in Swat last year.