

Taliban's attack on Ahmadi minority in Pakistan

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On May 28, 2010, Taliban extremist killed at least 80 Ahmadis and injured around 100 others in twin attacks on their mosques, called Dar-ul-Zakir, during Friday prayer services in Lahore, Pakistan's second biggest city. According to local police sources, more than 10 terrorists attacked worshippers. After an intense police operation two teenager attackers were arrested while others committed suicide by blowing themselves up.

Ahmadi minority community has been under attack since the 1950s. Although members of Ahmadi community and their worship places have been attacked by fanatic and militant individuals and groups on an almost regular basis in Pakistan, this is the bloodiest incident in recent memory.

Although Ahmadis called themselves Muslims, they have been declared non-Muslim due to the pressure from Islamic parties and some other quarters through a constitutional amendment that passed in 1974. Moreover, the late President General Zia-ul-Haq introduced many anti-Ahmadi laws in 1980's which make two million Ahmadis' lives more miserable.

Ironically, it is a common practice of a group of media (especially Urdu newspapers and TV channels) to instigate against Ahmadis and other religious and national minorities which make their lives and properties more insecure. Last year, a well-known TV anchors Amir Liaqat, whose doctorate degree is still disputed, of a popular private Pakistani TV channel incited hatred against Ahmadis through his TV program. In result of that, within a week few Ahmadis were killed by fanatics in different parts of the country. Despite protests by civil society organizations, his program is still broadcast. Furthermore, just days ago another TV anchor Hamid Mir, from the same TV channel, is reportedly used very irresponsible language against Ahmadis while talking to Taliban.

Many are of the view that there are many in Pakistani media who are sympathetic to Taliban and other terrorist outfits and unsympathetic to religious minorities. South Asian Partnership (SAP, Lahore) Executive Director Muhammad Tehseen said that the reporting of the incident by a certain section of the media reinforced the unfair claims that Ahmedis were not a part of the nation. Surprisingly, some Urdu newspapers were quick to say that RAW (Indian intelligence agency) was involved in that bloody incident. For many, it is a state of denial and a way to support militants. However, Punjab's Law Minister Rana Sana Ullah told media that the attackers came from North and South Waziristan, tribal area where Taliban have been running their self-styled government. In addition, according to some media reports, Punjab Taliban claimed the responsibility of these attacks. "The Punjab branch is composed mainly of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Jaish-e-Mohammad, which have joined forces with the Taliban," said an American newspaper *New York Times*.

Last year, Ahamdis, Shias and Christians in various parts of the country received threatening letter from the militants. Since then, Ahmadis had been requesting the government to provide them security but their request was not taken seriously either.

The independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported that at least five members of the Ahmadi community were murdered in targeted killings in 2009, raising to 100 the number of

murders since the introduction of anti-Ahmadi laws by the Zia-ul-Haq government in 1984.

About 220 people were killed last year in nine different terrorist attacks in Lahore, the capital of Punjab. The province is running by the former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif' Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), a right-wing political party, reportedly has some connection with militant organisations.

Recently, the chief minister of Punjab Mian Shahbaz Sharif (Nawaz Sharif's younger brother) publically requested Taliban not to attack in Punjab because they both have the same ideology. In the month of March, Punjab's Law Minister Rana Sana Ullah participated in a public rally with the leaders of another banned terrorist organisation in Jang City; many terrorists came from that city to attack Christians in Gujra in 2009.

In some cases, the police have arrested terrorists but surprisingly the courts are quick to release them. Many feel disappointed by courts' decisions. "The Supreme Court on May 25 upheld the Lahore High Court's decision to free Hafiz Saeed from house arrest by dismissing the appeals by the federal and Punjab governments. — Saeed is the notorious chief of a banned terrorist organisation, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), which is now working under the garb of a 'charity organisation' called the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD)," *Daily Times*, a Pakistani English-language newspaper, reported.

A question still remains unanswered, why the Punjab government did not take security measures to protect its minority communities while the federal interior ministry had warned the provincial government of possible terrorist attacks on minorities. Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer said that the attack on Ahmedis was due to links between PML-N's provincial governments with Taliban.

After this recent attack on Ahmadi community, other religious minorities of Punjab are also worried for their safety and security. Situation on the ground is very aloof to non-Muslims because a section of the media is free to propagate against them, provincial government of Punjab is still maintaining its close relationship with militants groups and the judiciary is releasing militants on various grounds especially lack of evidences.

"There is no getting away from the fact that the attacks in Lahore have been the work of groups based in Punjab, perhaps in the south. Just like the militants in the northwest they need to be tackled if the periodic violence we see in the city is to be stopped and further episodes of this kind averted," *The News*, an English language daily, says in its editorial.

Till the establishment does not ready to accept religious minorities as equal citizen of the state and media does not stop propagating hatred against them the minorities will remain under threat. END

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