

Pakistan: Decision to rename Lahore landmark after Bhagat Singh on hold

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The decision to rename Lahore's Shadman Chowk after revolutionary freedom fighter Bhagat Singh has been delayed amid protests from some right-wing organisations, including the Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD).

The matter has been referred to a committee set up to look into all proposals to rename different roads of the city, and a decision is expected in the near future as the Punjab government is keen on seeing this through before the elections due next year.

Salima Hashmi, a member of the committee, was optimistic of the proposal being cleared as chairman Ijaz Anwar had been assertive in countering a bid to give Mall Road and Davis Road Islamic names. "He stressed the need to incorporate history in the project to revitalise Lahore," she said. And, Bhagat Singh is part of Lahore's history.

According to Ms. Hashmi, the officials decided to refer the issue of renaming roads to the committee in view of some protests over different proposals. "The officials thought it best to look at all the proposals in one go instead of adopting a piecemeal approach."

However, according a report in *The Express Tribune*, 13 people spoke against renaming Shadman Chowk after Bhagat Singh at a hearing to elicit public opinion, saying Pakistan was a Muslim country, and its major roads and squares should not bear non-Islamic names. Only six persons favoured the move.

A similar exercise undertaken by the Lahore Council to gauge public mood drew a very different response, said Farooq Tariq, convener of the Bhagat Singh Memorial Committee. A majority of the responses to an advertisement placed by the Lahore Council were in favour of renaming Shadman Chowk after Bhagat Singh. He did, however, point to a news report on the JuD objecting to the move on the premise that Lahore's roads could not bear non-Islamic names but maintained that the committee would mobilise opinion to ensure that the road was named after the revolutionary, who was hanged there by the British on March 23, 1931, for his role in the Lahore Conspiracy Case.

For theatre activist Madeeha Gauhar, the delay has not come as a surprise. "If the renaming is shelved, it will be one more case of a Pakistan government succumbing to this kind of a mindset. This is a sign of what is wrong with the thinking in this country. Bhagat Singh is as much a part of our history as... of India and we should celebrate it. This is very disturbing but I am not surprised."

The decision to return to Shadman Chowk's old name — Bhagat Singh Chowk — was announced by the District Coordination Officer on his 105th birth anniversary on September 29. Renaming the roundabout has been hanging fire since 2001 when civil society activists began demanding that Shadman Chowk's old name be restored. After Bhagat Singh was hanged there, the place bore his name till 1947 when it was named Shadman Chowk.

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P.S.

* From The Hindu:

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/decision-to-rename-lahore-landmark-after-bhagat-singh-on-hold/article4051818.ece>