

Rabwah as a safe haven!

Introduction: *On account of the prevailing institutionalized persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan, many victims tend to flee from their homeland and seek shelter elsewhere in the world. In some countries the authorities raise a simplistic but formal question: Why don't these Ahmadis shift to Rabwah rather than come that far to other countries? A special Mission, in fact came over to Pakistan to see the situation on the ground.*

Ahmadiyya 'assessment' of the situation at Rabwah, with particular reference to the Mission's task and its specific questions, was presented on October 9, 2006. It is reproduced below for its import and archival value.

The reality of internal flight alternative to Rabwah

An assessment

Rabwah is the centre of the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan. This community is facing state-sponsored and state-supported persecution in the country. On occasions and at places the persecution becomes unbearable to the extent that victims decide to flee. Very often they migrate to foreign lands. A question arises as to, would an Ahmadi fearing persecution outside of Rabwah gain protection by shifting to Rabwah, and also would it be unduly harsh to expect a person to relocate to Rabwah. A reply to these questions has to take into account the ground reality of Ahmadis' persecution in Pakistan, as that has a direct bearing on the situation of the victims, as also on the situation at Rabwah which needs examination of its potential to play host to the affected Ahmadis.

The national scene

Non-Muslim minority status was imposed on Ahmadis by a constitutional amendment in 1974 by Mr. Z.A. Bhutto. This was in response to the mullah's demand, and it suited Mr. Bhutto politically. The imposed new status conveyed to all that Ahmadis, from then on, were second class citizens of the state. It triggered corresponding response from other organs of the state; for example on November 10, 1981, the official Islamic Ideology Council advised the Federal Government that a Muslim joining the Ahmadiyya Community should suffer mandatory punishment of death for apostasy. This council in its 1983/84 Report also recommended that all those who renounce Islam (*and become Ahmadis*) should be forthwith dismissed from (*government*) service.

A few months later General Zia promulgated the notorious anti-Ahmadi Ordinance XX that incorporates sections 298B and 298C in the Penal Code. These severely curtailed religious freedom of Ahmadis. It was a green signal for anti-Ahmadiyya elements to open flood gates of tyranny with the help of the state. As a result, since 1984, scores of Ahmadis have been murdered for their faith, and not even 5% of the assassins have been prosecuted by the state. Ahmadiyya mosques have been specially targeted by the State and the Mullah. Eighteen mosques were demolished (the latest was destroyed in June this year, 2006), 25 sealed by authorities, 10 set on fire and 13 have been forcibly occupied since 1984. Thirty five dead

Ahmadis were disinterred from common graveyards causing severe emotional shock and grief to close relatives of the dead. Through discriminatory and devious rules Ahmadis have been denied participation in the democratic process. A ban, across the board, was put on Ahmadiyya publications.

Ahmadis remain excluded from human rights of freedom of assembly, freedom of worship, freedom of press etc. Yahanan Friedmann, a research scholar, in his book 'Prophecy Continuous' summed it up well: "*The Ordinance promulgated by the president on April 26, 1984 goes a long way in accepting the most extreme anti-Ahmadi demands and transforms much of the daily life of the Community into a Criminal Offence*" (University of California Press, 1989, p. 46) . As such, all over the country, three thousand, four hundred and ninety Ahmadis have faced criminal charges under the Ahmadi-specific laws and other religious laws. This is an ongoing process; two were recently booked at Rabwah in September. Hundreds have suffered incarceration; some of them are now in prison for life on frivolous accusations and malice of blasphemy.

In its Annual Reports on May 1, 2006, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom took note of the Ahmadis' situation in Pakistan, and recommended that the US government should, *inter alia*: *Urge the government of Pakistan to rescind the laws targeting Ahmadis, which effectively criminalize the public practice of their faith and violate their right to freedom of religion guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. The Commission recommended that Pakistan should also be added to the list of countries designated as Country of Particular Concern (CPC).

The Rabwah situation

Rabwah is located in the central Punjab. A railway line and an inter-district highway pass through it. Government offices like a police station, magistrate's court, security cell, local government etc are all well-staffed in this town. Numerous mullahs have been appointed here by their parent organizations, and their sole task is to indulge in anti-Ahmadiyya activities. The government provides them the needed support. The authorities usurped Ahmadi owned residential land in Rabwah and handed it over to clerics to establish a madrassah, a mosque and a so-called Muslim Colony. In short, Rabwah is well in the grip of the State and the Mullah. It continues to receive its share of Ahmadiyya persecution. Being the Ahmadiyya headquarters town, it is conspicuous, targeted and at the cross-wire of the anti-Ahmadiyya organizations. Graffiti on the wall of the Muslim Colony mosque sums up well the mullah's intentions: "**Wholesome security of Islam and the faith lies in total liquidation of Ahmadis.**" The mullah cannot be blamed for lack of effort. A brief description of Rabwah's ordeal would be in order.

When Mr. Bhutto's secret service men planned their major move against Ahmadis in 1974, they chose Rabwah as the site to trigger countrywide riots. The authorities made scores of arrests at Rabwah, and the town was in a state of occupation by the security forces. Normality was restored only after the Constitution had been amended to severely damage the status of Ahmadis as citizens of the state.

After the promulgation of Ahmadi-specific laws in 1984, Ahmadis of Rabwah have been exposed repeatedly to the evil of these laws; many have faced arrests and hundreds were pushed to criminal courts for trial under religious laws. This number, six hundred and one, is higher than any other city in Pakistan. The authorities went crazy to the extent that on December 15, 1989 they booked the entire Ahmadi population of Rabwah in FIR 367/89 under the Ahmadi-specific

clause PPC 298C. The FIR remains active to-date. It seems the government lost their conscience when dealing with Rabwah. They changed the name of Rabwah to Chenab Nagar in total disregard of the residents' wishes. The mullah who prevailed upon the government to undertake this enormity, Manzoor Chinioti, assumed the title of *Fateh Rabwah* (The Conqueror of Rabwah). He said that this blow to Qadianis was severer than the explosion of an atomic bomb. His office was located at nearby Chiniot.

The Mullah-State axis became so strong and overbearing that citizens of Rabwah were no longer safe in their own town. The community issued instructions to Ahmadis to avoid going to the riverside even for picnic; it was not safe. These instructions have remained operative ever since. The authorities continue to treat the Rabwah population with unabashed discrimination. They announced many years ago that nationalized educational institutions will be returned to original owners, but they have not returned them to Ahmadis who have met all the pre-conditions for their return. Their buildings have deteriorated for lack of maintenance, and education levels have fallen. Civic conditions in the town have plummeted. Even drinking water is not adequately provided to a number of Rabwah neighborhoods. Roads are in a poor state. The sewerage is non-existent. There is no traffic control. Rabwah has been in the grip of hepatitis and typhoid for months on epidemic scale, and the town is still not clear of it. All this is due to the fact that Ahmadi citizens of Rabwah have no representation in the town council. The government introduced Joint Electorate but then promulgated an exception for Ahmadis in the form of Chief Executive's Order No 15 of June 17, 2002. So the present council and the mayor (called *Nazim*) are not responsible to anybody. They can do what they like, and they have decided to do nothing.

Tyranny through prosecution

A little more on the subject of the criminal cases under religious laws would be appropriate here, as these are the primary means to persecute individuals and groups, and to land them in police stations and eventually prisons. These also show the involvement and commitment of the state, the clergy and Ahmadi-bashers in this sphere.

As described earlier, hundreds of Ahmadis from Rabwah have suffered and continue to suffer prosecution for their faith. More recently, early in the year 2003, Messrs Imtiaz Ahmad, Atiqur Rehman, Azmat, Rashid Javed were implicated in FIR Nr. 9/03, and Major Saadi, Qureshi Hameedullah and six unnamed Ahmadis were charged in FIR 18/03. Two months later, on March 12, 2003, the police and mullah Allah Yar Arshad team implicated Mr. Nazir Ahmad in FIR 50/03 for displaying a photo of the founder of the Ahmadiyya Community in front of his shop. When a delegation of 50 citizens called on the inspector of police, he could not justify his action under law. Later that year, seven more Ahmadis were booked at the Rabwah police station vide FIRs 150/03, 247/03, 248/03, 295/03 and 390/03. The charges ranged from writing Kalima on their house to availing of rest-room facility in the Muslim Colony by a mentally unstable Ahmadi. In 2004 again, Mr. Muhammad Ehsan another mentally unstable fellow was grabbed by non-Ahmadi and charged by the police. Although the police were shown his medical history sheet, they still arrested him and sent him to jail. In 2005 Mr. Rehman Hashmi was booked vide FIR No. 237/05.

Then in August 2005, fifteen Ahmadi editors and pressmen were charged vide FIR 352/05 at Rabwah police station on orders from the provincial capital. It was a dreadful attack against Ahmadiyya press. They sealed two presses and arrested Mr. Sultan A. Dogar the keeper of one of these printing presses. The daily Al-Fazl could not be published. Then, some sensible

man in higher circles told the persecutors the futility and stupidity of the whole exercise, and a few weeks later they withdrew the unsubstantiated charges.

Early this year at the frivolous complaint of a mullah Hamadi of Sanghar, a town 960 kilometers away from Rabwah, the police there booked the Supreme Head of the Ahmadiyya Community who resides in London and four pressmen of Rabwah including a woman Ms Amat ur Rashid. The clauses of the penal code applied were 295A, B and C and the Ahmadi-specific 298C. The penalties for these range between death and three years' imprisonment. So, no Ahmadi at Rabwah (or even at London) is safe from these long-range weapons of religious and anti-Ahmadi destruction. In January this year, the Rabwah police booked Mr. Latif Butt vide FIR 21/06 for preaching. No complainant came forward; the District Police Officer himself took the initiative and ordered that a case be registered.

Only last month, the Rabwah police booked two pressmen by name and 'others', unbelievably under the Anti-terrorism act, at the orders received from Lahore. Mr. Sultan Ahmad Dogar, 60, sick and under medication is in prison. His bail was not granted. He does not know exactly what wrong has he committed. He is under great stress and has visibly suffered nervous instability. Rabwah is not a safe location.

Protection at Rabwah

This brings us to the question of protection. The above description of event shows that Ahmadis cannot rely on police protection. In fact the police, indeed the state itself, remains committed to uphold its (bad) laws. The state is in the front line of assault on the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan. This is true for Rabwah as for elsewhere in the country. Rabwah provides no protection to victims of malicious prosecution. Rabwah itself is a victim, and is powerless against the might of the state. The community is equally unable to provide protection to Ahmadis elsewhere in Pakistan, for the same reason. At Rabwah, apart from the onslaught through the Penal Code, non-state elements have undertaken attacks. They exploded a bomb at the Mahdi mosque in 1994 that injured 14 worshippers including the local vice president who incurred permanent injury as a result. On April 14, 1999 they abducted the great-grand son of the Founder of Ahmadiyya community and murdered him at the bridge of the nearby river Chenab. The harmless young man was a computer scientist and a graduate of George Mason University, Virginia USA. He left behind a widow and four orphans. The state provides no protection to senior Ahmadi figures or mosques at Rabwah except a small symbolic presence at the central mosque at the time of Friday congregational prayers. The community itself exercises vigilance at mosques to provide some security, but it is admitted that it is not possible for volunteer citizens to guarantee security against a committed attacker.

The police apparently have no orders to protect the life and property of Ahmadis anywhere. This was shown once again very recently in June this year at Jhando Sahi in District Sialkot. A crowd indulged in physical attack on local Ahmadis, took to arson, looted Ahmadis' houses and destroyed the Ahmadiyya mosque - *in police presence*. The police took no action to stop them, although they were easily in a position to do so. The entire Ahmadi community of the village was forced to flee for safety.

It should be mentioned here that day-to-day security against civil threats and low-intensity forays from ill-wishers, is provided at Rabwah by the community itself. It is a heavy burden on our meager resources that are essentially based on charity contributions. But these are inescapable due to lack of commitment by the authorities to the security of Ahmadi persons and properties at Rabwah.

Rabwah, the headquarters, is in a position to provide temporary shelter and food to a limited number for a few days, or at the most a few weeks. Here there is a *Langar Khana* (community kitchen) where a stricken group can stay in dormitories and have food. Riot-stricken Ahmadis from Chak Sikandar and Nankana, in the past, came here for temporary relief, but had to go back a few weeks later. The Jhando Sahi community also stayed here for a month, and then went back. It is relevant to mention that no state functionary or political figure of any rank visited them to offer sympathy or relief. The authorities show no concern, because they are in cahoots with the mullah in violation of Ahmadis' human rights. Ahmadi communities remain hostage to the state-mullah team. In the present national environment, Ahmadis' peace is always at risk and subject to violation at the will and initiative of this duet.

Blasphemy law, and Ahmadis

As for the Blasphemy cases, a disproportionately large number of Ahmadis have been subject of this draconian law, 234 - to be exact. A Supreme Court decision given in 1993 makes this law even more cruel to Ahmadis. The apex court ruled: **“When an Ahmadi or Ahmadis display in public, on a placard, a badge, or a poster, or write on walls, or ceremonial gates or buntings, the *Kalima* (Islamic creed) or chant other *Shaare Islam*, it would amount to defiling the name of the Holy Prophet (Pbuh)”**. This verdict has extended the mischief of this law extensively to the great detriment of Ahmadis, and has facilitated Ahmadi-bashers to have a Blasphemy case registered against them for the most obscure and unsupportable reason. The case can be originated anywhere, by any body, against anyone, so long he has *prima facie* evidence, even if flimsy and fabricated. The government now wants a Superintendent of Police to give the nod for follow-up of the case. Ahmadis' experience is that this has made no difference to their vulnerability, as the nod is routinely given. How long the case takes to reach the court, is at the discretion of authorities. The period of pre-trial detention varies from case to case. It can vary from days to years. In one Blasphemy case, the innocent Ahmadis had to remain in lock-up for four years before they were released on bail. The trial judge then heard the case, acquitted them as Not Guilty and reprimanded the complainant for using a false religious excuse to settle personal vendetta. Residents of Rabwah are equally vulnerable to application of this law; four were charged in January this year. In all, 41 residents of Rabwah were exposed to the high risk under this law under which the penalty is death.

Impact of an FIR

As for the impact of an FIR on the accused, a detailed account has already been reportedly provided to the Mission. It may be added that an Ahmadi, against whom an FIR has been served, will find life even more difficult if he is dislocated or shifts to Rabwah, as he will have to present himself repeatedly to the police or the court at the location where his case is being followed-up. Residents at Rabwah, if charged elsewhere, have to go there to defend themselves. Some of these had to go as far as the interior of Sindh province and even Karachi, 1154 kilometers away, to appear in the court every month. The police take Ahmadi cases so casually that they have moved even against periodicals published in India and the United Kingdom. No Ahmadi is safe from their mischief.

Threatening rallies and conferences at Rabwah

A question is raised as to the holding of conferences, rallies etc in Rabwah by Ahmadis and non-Ahmadis. Although peaceful assembly and pursuit of religious activity is an internationally accepted human right of any group, it is denied blatantly to Ahmadis at Rabwah. Ahmadis, as a ritual, used to hold their annual peaceful conference at Rabwah, and governments, in early years of Pakistan, used to run special trains to transport participants. These conferences have not been permitted for the last 22 years. On the other hand, the mullah is permitted and facilitated to hold most provocative and slanderous anti-Ahmadi conferences at Rabwah. Almi Majlis Khatme Nabuwwat is based at Multan and Lahore, but they now hold their big annual meeting at Rabwah. Every year the authorities allow such three or four major events at Rabwah. Participants are often a serious threat to peace, and Ahmadis have to remain vigilant, during the days and nights of such rallies, against any attack or mischief against Ahmadi mosques, the holy graveyard etc that are at risk. The government disallows Ahmadis even sports tournaments and community celebrations. They issued such orders in 1989 at the occasion of the Ahmadiyya Centenary, but have made a practice of them ever since.

Ahmadi representatives, however, do meet here once a year for three days in a hall for consultations on community affairs. When they met in March this year, the mullah protested most viciously and had the following nonsense published in press:

By permitting Qadianis to hold their (annual) Enclave, a mutiny against the constitution has been committed. Majlis Tahaffuz Khatme Nabuwwat

All participant of the Conclave should be charged for treason against Pakistan and the Constitution.

...The conclave of Qadianis is aimed at promotion of terrorism and conspiracy against ideological and territorial integrity of the country. Chenab Nagar is another Israel in Pakistan. Qadiani community is purely Jewish in character and works for British interests. Qadianis are traitors to the country and the society, agents of imperialism, servants of the English and tools of Zionist power. They provide spy services to the US, the UK, India, Israel and other anti-Islam states.

The daily Pakistan; Lahore: March 29, 2006

On the other hand, Multan-based Ahrar were allowed by authorities in April 2006 to hold their provocative open-air conference and take out a threatening procession in Rabwah. The daily Pakistan, in its report on the occasion, wrote about the procession: *“When they marched past the Degree College in a formation style, peacefully reciting the Kalima and Drud, their chants and slogans produced a strange effect. Rabwah was resonating with sky-high slogans of ‘Death to Mirzaiah (Ahmadiyyat); Long live-End of Prophethood.’”* Last month, the authorities allowed two more similar conferences here. These have been mentioned in our monthly report for September 2006, and the proceedings have been reported therein from the national press, giving references. Mullahs who speak at these conferences not only make outrageous speeches, they have styled themselves as Conqueror of Rabwah etc. Qazi Hussain Ahmad, the President of MMA who is outspokenly making all efforts to replace General Musharraf at the President House, said at the Conference on September 22: *“Mirza Ghulam Ahmadi Qadiani conspired to destroy the unity of the Ummah and put an end to Jihad.... It is wrong for the US State Department to demand an end to the anti-Qadiani laws; in fact, Qadianis enjoy great concessions here, and they are never treated with discrimination. If the Qadiani leadership’s authority is broken, half the population of Chenab Nagar will curse Qadianism and become Muslims (The daily Jinnah, Lahore September 23, 2006). The daily Express of September 23 quoted the Qazi as, inter alia: “I*

assure you that I am with you at every step. The MMA and Majlis Khatme Nabuwwat have come into being only to mount a joint effort against evil.”

The daily Nawa-i-Waqt of September 23, 2006 reported the same event as: *“The passion and emotion of the moths of (the light of) End of Prophethood at the Conference was worth seeing”*. It also reported the Qazi as: *“strongly protested against General Musharraf’s visit to the US... and we shall continue our drive till the overthrow of the military government. Honour of the Prophet is a part of our faith; we will accept death; but will not submit to any Jew or their cronies, even the U.S.”* It will be seen that they indulge in a great deal of national and international politics at these conferences in the garb of religion.

Other factors

As for preaching, some Ahmadis do talk to people in the surrounding villages to remove their misunderstandings and misconceptions about Ahmadiyyat. The mullah and the vernacular press tell them all the time that Ahmadis are enemies of Islam and Pakistan. This is false and dangerous propaganda. Ahmadis have to strive to remove this perception; otherwise they shall be at great risk in Rabwah from the neighboring communities.

Outsiders do come to Rabwah; it is an open city. Some of the visitors may be very favorably inclined, while others not as favorably. The police and local officials treat them routinely. Ahmadis are generally very polite and hospitable to outsiders. Only at the occasion of major anti-Ahmadi conferences and rallies, the outside visitors tend to be hostile and pose a threat to the population. The police and state officials deal with them as directed by their superiors. The Ahmadi community, at such occasions, advises its women folk to remain indoors, and closes its junior schools to avoid any harm to children. If the opponents plan a procession, Ahmadis close down the bazaar to avoid a clash.

Rabwah’s capacity to receive dislocated Ahmadis

It is essential to discuss briefly the physical potential of Rabwah to accommodate dislocated Ahmadis. Rabwah proper is located on 1034 acres of land. It is now almost fully populated. Only 1-2% of residential plots may be vacant in some neighborhoods. A number of vacant plots are available in the so-called Muslim Colony but this Ahmadiyya-owned land has been usurped by the government. In a recent auction, the plots there were put up for sale but Ahmadis were barred from bidding. The rules of auction unabashedly had the clause that only those who believed in ‘the end of prophethood’ were eligible to bid. Funny, but that is the way authorities handle Rabwah. Almost all the houses are single story at Rabwah, with only a few exceptions. Apartments and flats do not exist except a few. As such it is difficult to find a house that one can rent. Cost of residential plots is high as compared to other provincial towns. Rents, if and when available are not high but most displaced and dislocated families would find them heavy. As for employment, the chances are close to nil. There is no industry here, as the term implies. Services sector is petty. The government jobs are the least available to Ahmadis. It is a government policy not to post Ahmadi personnel to Rabwah; exceptions to this policy are few. Ahmadi institutions like the community offices and the hospital are already fully staffed, so it is not possible to accommodate new-comers. As explained earlier, it is possible for Rabwah to temporarily provide the most rudimentary shelter and relief to a few affected families for a few weeks, but that is all. Eventually they also will have to leave to seek a living, and live a life of some semblance of normality.

The civic facilities in Rabwah are in a very poor shape. Even potable water is inadequate for the existing population. Obviously, if the town cannot provide the most essential need, drinking water, to any new comer, how can he relocate here? The town has no professional school or college. Even the so-called degree college building is getting dilapidated; experts have declared it dangerous. When they took it from Ahmadis, it was in good condition. Now, they neither repair it, nor hand it back to Ahmadis. A new-comer thus cannot have his children educated in Rabwah. In short, Rabwah is not an option for relocation. Some years ago Ahmadis started bringing their dead to Rabwah for burial when faced with burial problems in their own towns and villages. Unable to cope with it, the community had to advise its members not to bring coffins to Rabwah. If accommodating the dead is not possible here, accommodating the living is far more demanding and problematic. That is why the community has never advised its members to shift to Rabwah when in difficulty.

In conclusion

Prior to conclusion it would help to explain three phenomena that one could come across during a visit to Rabwah:

1. Ahmadis of Rabwah give an appearance of general contentment and even good humor. This is not because of their circumstances, it is *despite* their circumstances. Ahmadiyya teachings educate their adherents to resist despair and gloom, and bear up with hardships for the sake of God. They have faced severe opposition for almost a century, and have learnt to bear up with it to some extent. They tend to have faith in God and not complain - not carry it around on their faces, at least. They believe that eventually it will all turn out well, *inshallah*.
2. The authorities, the mullah and most non-Ahmadis will plainly deny any persecution of Ahmadis. The government routinely denies any accusation of violation of human rights of any group. It is a regular feature in Pakistan that every year when the US CIRF, the US State Department, Amnesty International and HRCP issue their annual reports, the government issues in response a plain denial and rebuttal. It is perhaps not the right way to respond; the government would gain much more by giving due weight to these reports and make an effort to improve the situation. Religious parties insist that Qadianis are undeservedly well treated here. In a way they are right, because in their opinion apostates should be killed; Qadianis should be grateful that they are spared their fate as per (*mullah's version of*) Sharia. As for the mulla, he has become clever, and is now conscious of the importance of human rights in the global village. So he says that it is the Ulema and the Muslim who face maltreatment at Rabwah, and deserve improvement in their human rights. A joke, but never mind; it immediately provides some relief to his untenable anti-Ahmadiyya position.
3. The apparent situation in Rabwah looks generally calm and gives no cause for concern to a visitor. It is true that Rabwah is not at boiling point all the time. It is the potential and uncertainty of risk to personal and community peace that is a fact. Rabwah was perfectly at peace on April 25, 1984, but the next day it entered a different world through the black hole of Ordinance XX; and four days later the town lost its crown when the Khalifa tul Masih IV departed never to return. At lower level, Mr. Sultan Ahmad Dogar was happy in his office and at home with his family on September 8, 2006, but having committed no wrong, the next day he was in a police lock-up charged under the grave anti-Terrorism law, exposed to seven years' term in

prison. His bail has been rejected. If the evil of this action takes its full course, considering his fragile health, he may not come out of the prison alive. So, it is the uncertainty, exposure to harm, and fear of the unknown that makes Rabwah a vulnerable town for its vulnerable residents.

In conclusion, the reality of an internal flight alternative to Rabwah does not really exist. However, if at national and international level an effort is made to enforce this alternative, the town will become really a ghetto or a concentration camp. Who would want that to happen - except the mullah of the End of Prophethood faction?

December 2006