

## **A hideous, unwarranted and unlawful raid on Ahmadiyya central Offices in Rabwah**

### **First ever such action; indicative of still more persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan**

*The PML-N government in the Punjab scored another 'first ever' by mounting an armed police raid in the name of counter-terrorism on the Ahmadiyya central offices in Pakistan. Nearly everyone who matters in the field of law and order knows very well that Ahmadis have remained strongly committed since their inception to oppose militancy in the name of religion. Still the CTD went ahead with nod from the top. The strong ties between the governing party and the mulla defy rational analysis. The raid brought little credit to the rulers; instead it manifested how unscrupulous authorities can commit great wrongs in the name of right.*

**Rabwah; December 2016:** Government of Punjab apparently deployed terrorism as an instrument of provincial policy against Ahmadis, in the garb of counter terrorism.

An armed police contingent of the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) carried out a raid on a Central Office (Publications Department of Tehrik Jadid) and Zia-ul-Islam Press here at mid-day on December 5, 2016. They acted brutally, severely beat up individuals unnecessarily, made unjustified arrests and took away office equipment and personal belongings. This sort of raid and attack had never been mounted in the past 42 years since the state adopted the agenda of acting hostile towards its Ahmadi citizens.

They came in three vehicles, approximately 25 of them, some in uniforms, and others in civvies. The armed personnel were wearing masks. They made forced entry in the office compound. Some of them proceeded directly to the first floor where Publications Directorate is located, while 5 or 6 men took up positions near the boundary wall. The latter made people lie down in the lawn. Those who entered the office ordered the staff to make no move. They told the octogenarian Director to stand up and accompany them. He asked them to show him the warrant, to which the intruders did not reply, but took possession of his lap-top and two mobile phones

The raiders beat up some of the office staff, checked their CNIC cards and arrested three officials, apparently only for their Rabwah addresses, as they took no action against one whose ID card was from District Gujranwala.

Apparently they were in search of the editorial staff of monthly Tehrik Jadid, who were not present at that time. The three arrested personnel are harmless, *Waqif Zindagi*, a cadre dedicated to the service of humanity in the field of religion. Why they arrested them and handcuffed them is not known. The raiders took away five office computers, a lap-top, a printer and a bag full of various books – this was more like loot, otherwise taking away a printer makes no sense.



At the time they came across a visiting peon in a corridor carrying some mail. They snatched the mail bag from him.

Thereafter they forced their way to the roof where the security office is located. They severely beat up the security guard, Rana Irfan Ahmad on duty, took the key of the locked almirah from him and took in custody arms found in the almirah, three guns and a pack of shots, all licensed and authorized. Acting as marauders rather than officials, they did not issue any receipt for the spoils.

The badly injured security guard Irfan Ahmad was driven immediately to the hospital by the Ahmadiyya administration. He was provided emergency aid followed by treatment; he recovered.

The visitors went to the Audit Office as well. They took their mobile phones and checked their CNICs. Later, they left behind the phones at the gate.

This phase of the raid lasted 25 minutes. After that they proceeded directly to the Zia ul Islam Press. It was about 1 P.M. They did not ring the bell but preferred to jump over the wall to enter the premises. They told the press operators to stop the press; they also beat them up for no reason. They asked them to hand them over the monthly 'Tehrik Jadid' and its plates. The pressmen told them that they had none at the moment, as they were busy printing the Ahmadiyya daily. The intruders asked them as to who was in charge after Mr. Tahir Mahdi Imtiaz (the squeaky clean printer who is in prison for almost two years in a case fabricated jointly by the police and mullas). Mr. Idrees Ahmad told them that he is the foreman. They handcuffed him and beat him up. They also took in possession 8 coloured plates, 4 black plates and printed sheets of the daily (it is published by permission, and for years now the authorities have found nothing objectionable in its texts).

This part of the brutish raid lasted half hour.

A police case was registered against 9 Ahmadis; 4 of those were arrested and others whose names are found in the monthly. They applied anti-Ahmadi sections PPC 298-B and 298-C, as also some sections of the Anti-terrorism Act.

The CTD is the same department that raided the only bookshop in Rabwah last year and succeeded in securing (5+3) eight years' imprisonment for its octogenarian proprietor, Mr. Abdul

Shakoor. It seems that the CTD Punjab is very meticulous and successful – in operations against very soft targets, decent individuals and peaceful communities.

The way they conducted the raid, it would be correct to assume that the raid was well planned over plenty of time and the prime-movers behind this are the leaders of politico-religious lobby in the Punjab.

It would be interesting for any research scholar to obtain one-year's issues of the 'Tehrik Jadid', the monthly in question and pinpoint even a hint that calls for the notice of the CTD and the anti-terrorism laws.

As the circumstances of the raid became clearer, it became obvious that the raid was unlawful and unwarranted. However, first we report the gruesome development.

It was learnt from reliable sources that those arrested were tortured by the police after they were whisked away from Rabwah. Why did they do that, we have no idea. As a peaceful and law-abiding community, there is little to gain from Ahmadi by the Counter Terrorism Department. Torture of innocent people by police can be monstrous. Sometimes back, the Punjab Police arrested an Ahmadi teacher who was president of a neighborhood community in Rabwah, and tortured him to death. The victim was innocent of any wrongdoing.

As for remand, custody and FIR, the raid on Ahmadiyya central offices is not even mentioned in the FIR. Three Ahmadi personnel arrested from Ahmadiyya central offices were shown to be arrested from other places, in the FIR. This FIR is fabrication. Such falsehood does not suit the CTD.

The police obtained physical remand of the 4 detained individuals from the court. Their names are: Mr. Amir Faheem; Mr. Sabah ul Zafar; Mr. Zahid Majeed Mahmud and Mr. Idrees Ahmad. Five other Ahmadi were also named in the FIR.

The registered FIR of this case states that the monthly Tehrik-e-Jadid and the daily Alfazl were under an official ban. However facts are different. These two Ahmadiyya periodicals were banned by the Home Department of the Punjab Government in 2014 on recommendation of the Mutahida Ulama Board. It was a wrongful order, so the Lahore High Court was approached against it through Writ Petitions No 16660-15 and 16634-15 and the Court provided relief in its Order on June 02, 2015: **"Notice. Subject to notice, until the next date of hearing, no coercive measures shall be adopted against the petitioner."** As such, the raid was unlawful and was made in a complete mockery of the LHC order.

As the three community officials arrested at the Ahmadiyya Office were at random and on no cognizable grounds, it is a precedent that puts the entire Ahmadi population at risk, as obviously, the police will think of the charges after the arrest. No one is safe under this *modus operandi*. The torture of the accused gives it a more horrendous dimension. Feeling of terror and fear prevails among Rabwah's law-abiding Ahmadi population, ironically not of terrorists but of the Counter Terrorism Department.

It is opined that Punjab CTD is inadequately active against Islamist terrorists reputed to infest in southern Punjab and those who hide behind the screen of Tahaffuz Khatme Nabuwwat, ASWJ and numerous other organizations with 'pious' names and fronts, so the careerist CTD seniors train and fill in the log book by operations against very soft targets among peace-loving, harmless, unpopular sections of society.

Unless the Punjab Government is firmly advised in its own interest to withdraw this spurious case, the innocent accused would remain incarcerated for years, like Mr. Abdul Shakoor the octogenarian book-seller of Rabwah and Mr. Tahir Mahdi Imtiaz, the printer of the Ahmadiyya publications. The Punjab Government brings no credit to itself and Pakistan by

violating Pakistan's commitments to international covenants on Human Rights, Freedom of Religion, and Torture.

It is not out of place to assert that Ahmadi community is, in fact, an ally of the state in its counter-terrorism campaign. Ideologically, Ahmadis have pursued the policy of **“No violence and coercion in matters of religion”** for the last 125 years. Its publications have reached over 206 countries in the world and no other country, not even the other three provinces in Pakistan, have found them to be objectionable to deserve a ban.

Other than the four arrested in the raid, five Ahmadis were named in the FIR; these include Mr. Ehsanullah Danish, Mr. Shahid Mahmud Ahmad, Mr. Rashid Mahmud Minhas, Mr. Nafees Ahmad Atiq and Mr. Abdus Sami Khan. These are all journalists and pressmen. It is noteworthy that while the rest of the country enjoys ‘freedom of press’ adequately, Ahmadi pressmen are deliberately discriminated and are subjected to tyranny and hardships for literally no reason.

The nine Ahmadis were charged under PPC 298-C, 298-B, 298-B(A) and 9-11W/ATA 1997 in FIR Nr. 70/16 on December 5, 2016 in Police Station: CTD, Faisalabad. The fact that the counter-terrorism police charged them under all sections of the anti-Ahmadiyya laws is indicative that the raid was primarily based on religious grounds – the anti-terrorism clause was added for facility of procedure, use of force and causing further hardship to the targeted individuals and the community.

Those arrested were Mr. Amir Faheem, Mr. Sabah-al-Zafar, Mr. Zahid Mahmud and Mr. Idrees Ahmad the pressman.

By the end of December the four arrested are behind bars on judicial remand while the other five have been granted temporary bails by a court. The situation will become clearer after the expiry of the dates of remand and the temporary bail.

Here we make a few comments on this raid in addition to those made above.

- It is certain that the raid was authorized at the highest level in the provincial capital. According to a press report (The Express Tribune of December 7) the CTD Punjab's Inspector General himself stated that he had acted after consultations with his legal team. As for above him, everyone knows who is the boss of this I.G. This situation makes one wonder why the day was chosen to be the same as that of naming the National Centre of Physics in an Islamabad University after Dr Salaam, the Ahmadi Nobel-prize winner.
- The accused individuals have been booked under Anti-terrorism Act. Have the members of the Ahmadiyya community ever been found involved in terrorist activities? The Ulama Board and mullas of Khatme Nabuwwat factions maliciously and most wrongfully accuse Ahmadis of such activities.
- The Home Secretary should point out just one line from the 12 previous issues of monthly Tehrik Jadid or the 365 issues of the daily Alfazl, that is even remotely ‘seditious’ or ‘treasonable’.
- The Punjab Government has also banned a book “Tazkarah” comprising dreams, visions, and revelations of the Ahmadiyya founder on the grounds that its contents are ‘seditious’ and ‘treasonable’; surely visions of 120 years ago could not be so, towards a state that was not even envisaged at that time.
- The Ulama Board has banned religious books of other denominations too. Yes – but they were written by ordinary mullas. Banning of Ahmadi Founder's works and Ahmadiyya translations of the Quran is altogether a different dimension and level. And it is *malafide*.

- Punjab Government, on the recommendations of the Ulama Board, has banned all Ahmadiyya periodicals, even their children's and women's monthlies – that makes little sense. Government letters issued this year banning Ahmadiyya publications and periodicals are reproduced in Annex IV to this report.
- The Ulama Board makes recommendations to the Punjab Government that clearly violate international covenants on Religious Freedom, which bring a bad name to both the Punjab and to Pakistan and their governments.

**Following information is also relevant to this case:**

- The Khatme Nabuwat (KN) leadership claimed that the raid was in consequence of their 'complaint' to the authorities. It is well-known that the KN is a sectarian organization and as such should be shunned by the authorities, under National Action Plan, rather than encouraged and supported.
- The raids at Ahmadiyya offices and the printing press lasted less than 30 minutes at each location. It was more like an armed robbery than an intervention by the state in the affairs of a community committed to and reputed for its peaceful character.
- The English language press gave fair coverage to this noteworthy event, while the Urdu press reported the raid in one column in inside pages, in space enough for a postage stamp. The daily Nation published an article by Mr. Usman Ahmad on December 9, 2016. It is reproduced as Annex VII. It is recommended reading.
- Opposition political parties decided to make no comment on this occasion. They are otherwise most outspoken and clamorous over the slightest disregard of their own rights.
- Numerous western foreign governments and NGOs took due notice of this act of tyranny.

The US State Department criticized this crackdown on the Ahmadiyya Community. The Asian Human Rights Commission issued an Urgent Appeal case Nr. 150-2016 giving all the essential details of the case narrative; also, the Commission indicated that a separate letter was being written to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Question of Freedom of Religion and Faith.

The US Commission on International Religion Freedom deserves compliments on reacting fast and adequately to express its concern forthrightly on December 9, 2016 in its Immediate Release. We produce below its text.

**PAKISTAN: USCIRF Condemns Egregious Treatment of Ahmadiis  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

December 9, 2016

WASHINGTON D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International religious Freedom (USCIRF) condemns the raid by Pakistan's Counter Terrorism department (CTD) on the publications and audit offices of the Ahmadiyya community in Punjab province. During this raid, which took place on December 5, police beat and arrested several Ahmadiis who later were charged under provisions in Pakistan's penal code and Anti-Terrorism Act.

"USCIRF condemns the brutal raid on the Ahmadiyya offices, the first such raid since Pakistan amended its constitution 42 years ago, declaring that Ahmadiis are 'non-Muslims', said USCIRF Chair Rev. Thomas J. Reese, S.J. "These actions flow out of Pakistan's constitution and penal code, both of which impede religious freedom as they prevent Ahmadiis from exercising their faith and even calling themselves Muslim. Pakistan's anti-terrorism law should not be applied to the peaceful Ahmadiyya community simply because they are Ahmadiis."

Pakistan's constitution declares Ahmadis to be 'non-Muslims'. Its penal code subjects Ahmadis to severe legal restrictions and officially-sanctioned discrimination, making it criminal for Ahmadis to call themselves Muslims, preach, propagate, or disseminate materials on their faith, or refer to their houses of worship as mosques. The government applies the anti-terrorism law as an unwarranted pretext to arrest members of the Ahmadiyya community. Ahmadis also continue to be murdered in religiously motivated attacks that take place with impunity.

Punjab province, the site of the raid and home to the greatest number of religious minorities, has a deeply troubling religious freedom record. Two-third of all blasphemy cases originate there, including that of Abdul Shakoor, an optician and book store owner. The CTD raided his book store and arrested him. In January 2016, Mr. Shakoor was sentenced to five years in prison on blasphemy charges and three years on terrorism charges, to be served concurrently, for propagating the Ahmadiyya faith by selling copies of the Qur'an and Ahmadiyya publications.

Since 2002, USCIRF has recommended to the State Department that Pakistan be named a 'country of particular concern' under the U.S. International Religious Freedom Act for its 'systematic, ongoing and egregious' violations of religious freedom. For more information on religious freedom conditions in Pakistan and for recommendations for U.S. Policy, please see the Pakistan chapter in USCIRF's 2016 Annual Report (in English and Urdu).

The 'deeply troubling religious freedom record' of the Punjab province deserves immediate attention of its rulers. The provincial government cannot go on running the province on the 'writ' of the Ulama Board, as eventually the mullas will be inclined to claim the throne itself rather than act as its mere vizirs. It is not too late for Lahore's authorities to withdraw the bogus charges against the nine accused and cancel all the absurd and senseless banning letters issued by the Home Department on recommendations of the Ulama Board.