

Ahmadis' plight in the Punjab during Mian Shahbaz Sharif rule – a brief resumé

Lahore; June 2013- May 2018: Mian Shahbaz Sharif (PML-N) took over the Punjab once again as Chief Minister in June 2013 after the elections. His elder brother ruled the country from Islamabad. The next five years of Shahbaz's rule in the province were rough and gravelling for Ahmadis. It is appropriate to list briefly some important events of his tenure to draw some valid conclusions.

- Armed contingents of police were ordered to launch an unlawful, unwarranted, hideous raid on Ahmadiyya central offices in Rabwah on December 5, 2016. Such a raid was first ever against Ahmadiyya community; even General Zia did not undertake such atrocity during his rule.
- Authorities were told to raid the only book-shop in Rabwah where they arrested its octogenarian proprietor, booked him under anti-terrorism law, arranged a speedy trial for him and had him sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment. The decent old man is still in prison three years later.
- The provincial government banned more than 90 books and publications of the Ahmadiyya Community on the recommendations of a board of mullas. These include the entire written works of the founder of the community.
- Publication of all the Ahmadiyya periodicals, also the daily Al-Fazl was stopped. Even the children's and women's monthly magazines have been shutdown. Perhaps there is no country in the world where a democratic government has deprived a religious community of its periodical in such a ruthless manner. Apparently the Home Office had orders to implement whatever recommendations the Board of mullas made concerning Ahmadis.
- Ahmadiyya mosques were targeted specifically. A number of these were attacked, destroyed, damaged, handed over to others or sealed. The attacks on Ahmadiyya mosques in Dulmial, Chakwal, Jhelum, etc all happened in Shahbaz's tenure. The Assistant Commissioner, in whose jurisdiction Ahmadiyya mosque in Sialkot was almost destroyed in police presence, was awarded a cash prize by the Chief Minister, some days after the incident.
- Ahmadi-owned factory in Jhelum was destroyed in his watch. An anti-Ahmadi riot occurred also in Gujranwala where the police in uniform were among the spectators. There, three Ahmadi females including a 7-month old suckling were killed in arson attack. Eight homes and four shops were looted and gutted. All 125 Ahmadi residents of the neighborhood had to flee for safety.
- The Rawalpindi administration did not allow Ahmadis offer their Eid prayers in their own centre in the Satellite Town in 2013, because a mulla-type bully demanded that. The restriction has apparently become permanent, as, in the next five years Ahmadis could not assemble there even for weekly congregational prayers.
- Ahmadis also undertake *Qurbani* (sacrificial cattle on Eid ul Adha) as a religious rite, but mullas, supported by Lahore Police, made raids in some neighborhoods to deny Ahmadis

their religious practice. In fact, during these five years Ahmadi residents of this provincial capital felt perpetually vulnerable and at risk of their lives and well-being. Earlier when 85 Ahmadis were murdered here in their mosques in a terror attack, Mr Shahbaz Sharif the CM did not have the courtesy to make a condolence visit to Ahmadis living in his capital.

- A delegation of senior Ahmadi community officials requested time from Shahbaz to call on him and talk to him on problems faced by the community. Shahbaz refused to spare time for them and told Rana Sanaullah to receive the delegation. He did, but as expected, promised no relief.

Nevertheless Ahmadis have assurance of an open door and permission to call from a mighty being - Allah. So they turned to Him in prayers and surely enough:

- On July 25, 2018, the election day Mr Shahbaz Sharif lost majority in the provincial assembly, and on October 6, 2018, the daily Dawn reported in banner headline: NAB snares Shahbaz as grilling turns into arrest.
- Thereafter the daily Jang reported on September 25, 2018: Shahbaz Sharif's son-in-law Ali Imran Yusuf has fled abroad, he should be declared proclaimed offender: NAB prosecutor's request to Accountability Court
- Later on October 26, 2018, The Friday Times described Shahbaz's circumstances in a sympathetic report rendered in a light manner as follows:

The indignity of it

We've heard disturbing details of The Man of Steel's Talented Bro's (*Shahbaz's*) incarceration in the NABbers' slammer in Lahore. There are many in the Punjab (at least half of it, if the Election 2018 result is anything to go by) who feel that this sort of treatment is unwarranted. The former and successful chief executive of the province is kept in a cramped cell, with no windows and a barred padlocked door, which he has to rattle every time he needs to visit the washroom. This is particularly distressing at night, when a man who is a cancer survivor and battles with constant back pain, has to wait before his call can be answered. The indignity of it is something our current rulers should keep in mind, and alleviate. Talented Bro gets home cooked food, mercifully, and books to read. We hear he's made short shrift of Ibn-e-Khaldun's "Muqaddima", Hugo Chaves' autobiography, Dr Ayesha Jalal's account of the partition, and is currently reading Henry Kissinger. All this by the light of the single bulb which adorns his cell.

The above reminds one of Adolf Hitler's observation and his finale:
"I go the way that Providence dictates with the assurance of a sleep-walker."