

Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority and Ahmadis

It would not be wrong to say that so far Ahmadis are concerned the government (at least in the Punjab) has handed over its writ to the extreme right - be it mullas, TV anchors, op-ed writers, pressmen, whatever. The two incidents described below prove it beyond doubt. This happened despite the fact that a National Action Plan is claimed to be operative and a so-called 'war on terror' goes on. The foot-soldiers on both sides are falling, but the terror leaders are not only safe and sound, they indulge in their acts of extremism, and promote the violence-prone ideology blatantly and aggressively - and they win.

(i) Ahmadiyya and their persecution disallowed to be discussed on TV

Although it is difficult to say if a TV discussion on Ahmadis and their plight in Pakistan would be of any help to the beleaguered community, it is a policy with their bashers to discourage even a mention of Ahmadis on any forum. Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) has found it convenient to be of the same opinion. The daily Dawn published the following story in its issue of June 18, 2016 (extracts):

Banning a programme is against freedom of expression

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Pemra) has barred actor Hamza Ali Abbasi and Shabbir Abu Talib from hosting Ramazan shows on Aaj TV and News One respectively, for promoting controversial and sectarian views.

The governing body banned the Aaj News programme Ramazan Hamara Imam, hosted by Mr. Abbasi. In one of his recent episodes, Mr. Abbasi discussed the oppression of the Ahmadi community, asking his guest whether the state could declare a community non-Muslim. During the same episode, he said he would discuss the Ahmadi community as well as the blasphemy law during the last days of Ramazan.

During the episode, Mr. Abbasi said: "The community is being suppressed, but if you talk about it, people say you are from that community. I'm not Ahmadi, I'm a Sunni Muslim.

It appears his show caught the attention of Pemra, which banned the programme on Friday.

According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) Chairperson Zohra Yusuf, Pemra has recently taken a number of decisions which seemed to be against freedom of expression.

... In a statement, Pemra said it has received 1,133 complaints through Whatsapp, Twitter and over the phone, for promoting sectarianism and violence.

The notification said any programme featuring Mr. Abbasi, Mr. Talib or the religious figure Maulana Kokab Noorani discussing this particular controversial issue or any other such topic on any other channel will also be banned.

... Several complaints have been received by the authority over the said programme, and they have been given a chance to clarify their position, the spokesperson added.

This incident will soon end up in dustbin of history, however it did expose a number of people who influence opinions in Pakistan, good or bad. Here, their brief mention will place them on record.

Those who supported Hamza Ali Abbasi's attempt to broach the subject

Dr Mehdi Hasan: Pakistan of today is not that of Jinnah; it is that of Ziaul Haq. Religious extremism reigns supreme here. All decisions are made here to placate those who promote their politics in the name of religion. The present government is doing the same. *BBC Urdu. Com*

Jibran Nasir: Thank you Hamza Ali Abbasi, for raising this important question and starting discourse on this topic which is violating fundamental rights of hundreds of thousands of Pakistani Ahmadis.

video

Asif Nawaz: He (Abbasi) went on to highlight the abuse faced by the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan, questioned why they weren't guaranteed their rights and also lamented on how people label the person standing up for Ahmadis' rights as an Ahmadi too. Sounds vaguely relevant to many of us, but Hamza took it to another level altogether.

Published on June 14, 2016 blogs.tribune.com.pk

Shamila Hayat: While commenting on mulla Kaukab Noorani Okarvi remark on TV that anyone who talked about Ahmadis or the blasphemy laws 'should be shot dead on the spot', posed the question about the mulla: Is he a scholar or a don or a goon? A religious goon....It really is the time we took our country back from these Mullahs and made it Jinnah's Pakistan the way it was intended to be.

Those who opposed Hamza Abbasi's line of thought

Maulvi Tahir Ashrafi, the chairman of the Pakistan Ulama Council said on social media that Aaj TV's admin should close the program in favour of Qadianis... .

Jamaat Islami: Mian Maqsud Ahmad, Amir JI Punjab said, "... If PEMRA takes no notice, the JI will take it up to the Supreme Court against the program."

The daily Ummat, 15.6.2016

JUP (Noorani)'s president Dr Abul Khair Zubair said that Hamza Ali Abbasi should be arrested forthwith.

The daily Ummat, 15.6.2016

A.K. Dogar, Ahsan Ali Khan, Imran Shahid Advocate and Z.A Malik all demanded that the anchor (Hamza Abbasi) should be arrested and prosecuted.... Ahsan Ali Khan said that such a person should have his tongue plucked, thereafter he should be lashed (*Tiktiki par*).

The daily Ummat 15.6.16

Mufti Abid Mubarak of Darul Ulum... In 1953, more than 10,000 Muslims were martyred merely because they believed that their Prophet had a right upon them.... (*Note: This statement on TV was a lie because the number of dead counted and mentioned by the authoritative Judicial inquiry in 1953 Punjab riots put the level of deaths in the entire Punjab in two figures.*)

Also, when Abbasi proposed to him to have a discussion on the TV program with an Ahmadi so that he could present arguments in favour of his belief, the Mufti immediately retorted:

"No. No. He (the Ahmadi) does not have the right to preach."

Jamil Rathore said on Abbasi's program: In an interview, Maulana Shah Ahmad Noorani had once said that apart from Sunni and Shia sects, all other sects in the sub-continent were founded by the British.

Agha Alam Rizvi (a Shia scholar, participant of the Abbasi program) said that he fully agreed with Mufti Mubarak and Jamil Rathore.

Note: It is learnt that fatwas calling for the revival of Abbasi's Nikah have also been issued, as also those declaring him to be 'deserving of being killed.'

Madeeha Hanif who on social media has posted her picture in veil and claims to be ‘Social Worker at Islami Jamiat Talibat Pakistan (Official), the female student wing of Jamaat Islami, put the following post in vernacular:

- Where exactly lives this Hamza Ali Abbasi?
- Are there nearby any lovers of my Prophet? Why don't they make life unbearable for this person?
- Does no moth of the Prophet's light live on his route, who could defile him the way he defiles the (Islamic) Faith? To which school his children go?
- Would someone lovingly inform them of the defiling undertaken by their shameless father, like the grandson of Ayub Khan who shouted a slogan in favour of the Prophet before the wretched man? Would someone insult him; become a Moses in the home of Pharaoh?
- Any relative of his? Anyone who would socially boycott him for faith and stop eating at his table?
- Any friend with a sense of shame, who would tell him that he could not be his if he was not of his Prophet?
- Would someone declare to be unfriendly to him and boycott his program from today?
- Are there people who would knock at the door of Aaj TV office?
- Only those who are unnecessarily harassing poor Junaid Jamshed?
- Are there any who could en-masse start blowing their horns in front of TV's offices?
- Someone should refuse to guard the shameless Zuberi family whose billions have not sufficed to put a stop to their lust for wealth and rating and lack of scruples?
- Let some lawyer rise and in thirst for the Holy Water (*Jam Kausar*) move a court against Hamza!

Jamaat Islami's ability to generate such hate, rage, and intrigue in its youth is indeed amazing – and that too in the fair name of Islam and its Prophet (pbuh).

(ii) PEMRA wimps out of its notices to TV channels on Ahmadiyya issue

Only a few weeks after PEMRA barred Hamza Abbasi from discussion of the Ahmadiyya issue on TV, two anti-Ahmadi TV programs were broadcast on September 7, 2016. The reaction of PEMRA and its eventual conclusion provide an interesting but woeful study of the function and writ of the state in this field.

Very briefly, TV channel 92 News aired a program Subah Noor, in which Mr. Nazir Ahmad Ghazi acted as the host while Mufti Farooq Al-Qadri, Mr. Khalid Mateen and Dr. Hameed Tanoli participated. This team grossly violated PEMRA's code of ethics issued on August 19, 2015, and indulged in provocative sectarian discourse and undertook false propaganda against the founder of the Ahmadi community.

Similarly TV Channel Neo News team, Jamil Farooqi the host and Orya Maqbool Jan the guest indulged in blatantly hurting the feelings of a great number of Ahmadis who are patriotic Pakistanis. This duo called the Ahmadi community a ‘Mischief’ (*fitna*) and attributed fabricated claims to the founder of the community.

Ahmadiyya central office sent a formal complaint to the Chairperson of PEMRA's Council of Complaints with copies to the Federal Ministers of Interior and Information, for violation of Pemra rules and the National Action Plan.

The daily Dawn reported the incident initially in its issue of September 16, 2016 as follows:

“LAHORE: The Pakistan Electronic Media Regularity Authority (Pemra) took notice of complaints against two television channels for airing 'provocative' content against the Ahmadi community.

“Anjuman Ahmedia Pakistan president registered a complaint with the media watchdog against Neo TV and Channel 92 alongside "a large number of complaints from the general public" against content aired by Neo TV's 'Harf-e-Raz' and Channel 92's 'Subha-e-Noor' shows, a Pemra statement said.

“The complaints termed the content aired in the shows as "provocative against a minority whose members are already threatened, harassed and have suffered a number of terrorist attacks in the past".

"The complainants have also mentioned that such programming serves no national interest and is rather incitement to violence against minorities which is in violations of National Action Plan and Pemra laws."

“Pemra forwarded the complaint to the Council of Complaints in Lahore for further action, adding that complainants had requested the regulator to take action against content "promoting disharmony among people".

“The regulatory body made it clear that according to Pemra laws, both the channels and complainants will be provided with opportunities for hearing before a decision is recommended.”

The regulatory body issued notices to all concerned. The accused apparently decided to confront the PEMRA, all guns blazing.

The Khatme Nabuwwat organisations' mullas made hue and cry over the PEMRA notices to the two TV channels. Some reports from the vernacular dailies are reproduced below:

The PEMRA notice to private channels is deplorable: Majlis Ahrar (Islam)

The daily Islam; Lahore, September 18, 2016

The notice issued to TV channels for the programme on Khatme Nabuwwat and rebuttal of Qadianiat is condemnable: Abdul Lateef (Tehrik Khatme Nabuwwat Rabita Committee)

The daily Ausaf; Lahore, September 19, 2016

PEMRA's decision is entirely pro-Qadianiat: Majlis Tahaffuze Khatme Nabuwwat

The daily Dunya; Faisalabad, September 21, 2016

The programme on rebuttal of Qadianiat: the notice to the channels should be withdrawn – a letter to Pemra

The programme was in accord with the Quran, Hadith and the decision of the parliament: Member Rabita Committee Khatme Nabuwwat

The daily Islam; Lahore, September 23, 2016

PEMRA should apologize for sending notices to the channels: Majlis Tahaffuze Khatme Nabuwwat

The daily Islam; Lahore, September 26, 2016

The daily Dawn eventually reported the end result in its issue of September 30, 2016:

“LAHORE: The Council of Complaints of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regularity Authority (Pemra) dismissed on Thursday the complaints of the minority Ahmadi community against two private TV channels as 'non-maintainable'.

“The decision was made after a mob entered the Pemra office in the Cantonment area, asking the authority to quash the complaints and raising slogans against the Ahmadi community.

“Acting on complaints, Pemra had called the hosts of Neo TV’s talk show ‘Harf-i-Raz’ and Channel 92’s ‘Subh-i-Noor’ to explain their position over allegations of ‘provoking’ people to resort to violence against the minority community.

“The representatives of the community were also present there when a good number of people, including clerics, entered the Pemra office, asking the authority to quash the complaints.

“A Pemra official told Dawn that the authority had to call police to control the situation. “Police rescued representatives of the Ahmadi community who could not record their statements before the council,” he said.

“Jamaat-i-Ahmadiyya spokesman Saleemuddin said the council had issued the verdict “under pressure” and without hearing the complainants instead of taking action against those involved in putting lives of the minority community members in danger.

“The complainants in their applications to Pemra had alleged that the content aired in the two shows contained “provocative” remarks against a minority community whose members were already threatened, harassed and had suffered terrorist attacks in the past.

“The content fostered disharmony among people and incited them to violence against minorities which was in violation of the National Action Plan and Pemra laws, they said.

“Pemra said in a statement that in response to a public announcement made on Facebook by Orya Maqbool Jaan, the anchor of Neo TV, over 100 lawyers and other people, led by Mr Jaan, entered the conference room of the authority’s office and raised slogans.

“However, it said, after considering the content of the complaints and hearing the respondents, the council unanimously recommended that the complaints were not maintainable.”

It is worth mentioning that when Ahmadiyya delegation reached there, they saw a few mullas and lawyers already present there. Hassan Muaviya (brother of Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi – Chairman of Pakistan Ulama Council) was also there. This mulla is very active on anti-Ahmadiyya front and serves as ever-ready complainant in most of the anti-Ahmadiyya cases in Lahore. The Ahmadiyya delegation waited for two hours for their turn to state their case but were not invited to do so. Eventually the PEMRA called the police, but the two departments jointly decided to yield to the threatening bigots. The police were asked to provide safe return to the Ahmadi delegation who protested against non-hearing of their plea.

After the hateful programs, the Daily Times published an article titled **Neo’s hate speech and PEMRA’s inaction** on September 12, 2016; its opening paragraphs mentioned:

“Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) is completely silent on Neo channel’s abusive hate speech against the Ahmadi community. Hamza Ali Abbasi’s show during Ramzan was promptly banned because Abbasi dared to speak out about the fundamental human rights of a peaceful community that has been repeatedly wronged by Pakistan since September 7, 1974. Now Orya Maqbool Jan’s abuse against the Ahmadis has been allowed without check by PEMRA. These are double standards, and all I can say at this point is shame. On all of us.

“That it was hate speech is unquestionable. Ahmadis and their sect’s founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, were painted as British plants by Neo and Jan. Ironic to say the least! Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was for the longest time seen by the Muslim community as a valiant ideological warrior against the onslaught of Christian missionaries on the faith. This was before his more controversial claims were aired. To accuse him of being

a British lackey is a travesty of justice and fair-mindedness. You can have a theological disagreement with his claims, but to try and retrofit British perfidy on to him cannot be sustained in the eyes of historical evidence.”

The daily The Express Tribune published the following story as well on October 3, 2016 under the title, “**When custodians of law turn into an unruly mob,**” (extract):

“A group of lawyers, under the leadership of Lahore High Court Bar Association President Rana Zia Abdur Rehman and LHCBA Secretary Anas Ghazi, and enraged clerics from different seminaries barged in the office of Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), Lahore, where its Council of Complaints was holding a meeting on the complaint of Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya, who had accused two TV channels of airing programmes aimed at spreading hatred regarding them.

“The lawyers would have not done so had the former judge of LHC, and father of LHCBA secretary, Nazir Ghazi, not been among those against whom Pemra had initiated proceedings.

“Nazir was the host of the show, aired on September 7, in which the members of Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya said remarks were made against them.

“The enraged lawyers and clerics also hindered the Council of Complaints to an extent that it could not continue the proceedings.

“A Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya representative, who was at the Pemra office, had to hide in the premises to save themselves. However, the council had to carry out the proceedings under the influence of the protesting lawyers and clerics, because of which the application filed by representatives of Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya was disposed of without the complainant being heard.

“So the rule of “no one can be condemned unheard” was compromised. No action was taken or even demanded by Pemra, under Section 186 (obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions) of Pakistan Penal Code.”

The above led to the claim: “The rejection of Qadiani application against TV channels is our triumph: Khatme Nabuwwat Rabita Committee”

The daily Islam; Lahore, September 30, 2016

Khaled Ahmad, a renowned columnist has recently written a book: **Sleep Walking to Surrender; dealing with terrorism in Pakistan.** It was briefly reviewed in The Friday Times of September 30, 2016. Following extract of that review appears relevant to this case, in particular the mention of ‘deep state’:

“Non-state actors, and the extremist terror outfits they control, pursue extortion, kidnapping and murder to fund their activities, and receive ideological, financial and logistical support from the deep state. The army continues to use them in its India-centric agenda. Civilian institutions are intimidated and individuals who speak out against the terror outfits become targets of their retribution. Violence, not law, increasingly commands human conduct, and the state’s willingness to enter into ‘peace talks’ with the Taliban is viewed as a form of surrender to extremism.

“Khaled Ahmed is Pakistan’s most respected columnist, and his formidable expertise on the ideologies of extremism is internationally acknowledged. In Sleepwalking to Surrender, he analyses the terrible toll terrorism has taken on Pakistan and appraises the portents for the future.”

The extremists' comment on the PEMRA decision on the Ahmadiyya complaint

The incident was a clear victory for the bigots of the right wing, and a demonstration of 'wakeful surrender' of the state authority. The victors celebrated it in op-ed columns of vernacular newspapers. We produce below extracts from one such op-ed published in the daily Islam of October 3, 2016. It is titled: **Qadianis' defeat in PEMRA.**

"...We were informed on the evening of September 28 that there will be a hearing of the Notices at 2 p.m. on September 29, issued by PEMRA to the two TV channels. On Thursday 29 September 2016 at 2 p.m. when Mr. Nazir Ahmad Ghazi (Channel 92) and Mr. Orya Maqbool Jan (New News) turned up at the court (office) of Dr. Mehdi Hasan and other members of PEMRA Lahore Council, (they found that) a large number of leaders and workers of Majlis Ahrar Islam, Aalami Majlis Khatme Nabuwwat, JUP and all other denominations, and lawyers, students and representatives of other groups were present at the location.

"On commencement of the hearing, Mr. Muhammad Matin Khalid, Mr. Nazir Ahmad Ghazi, Mr. Orya Maqbool Jan and Mr. Azhar Siddique advocate high court, drunk with the love of the Prophet (PBUH) defended the programs of the TV channels and explained the Qadianis' status in constitution and law. Dr Mehdi Hasan and other members of the PEMRA Lahore Council gave their decision in favour of the programs of the TV channels. At this, there were deafening shouts of slogans of Allah o Akbar, Taj-o-Takht (crown and throne) Khatme Nabuwwat - Long live. Mr. Orya Maqbool Jan addressed all those assembled there, and thus Qadianis came to disgrace."

The follow-up was interesting and deserves a place in records. The same evening chairperson of the complaints council Dr. Mehdi Hassan spoke to Voice of America and denied dismissing the complaint and said:

"If something else has been published in the press release then whoever wrote that did it due to the pressure of the 100 orso people who raised slogans.

"I implored the crowd that we have not yet made a decision on whether the complaint of the Ahmadiyya community is maintainable or not and due to the atmosphere that has been created in the conference hall, we cannot objectively make a decision. Yet they continued to raise slogans and alleged that I am not authorized to make the decision on the complaint since they have doubts about my faith."