

## **Attack, gross desecration and severe damage to Ahmadiyya mosque and a venerated site in Sialkot, Punjab**

The dreadful outrage was undertaken in Sialkot on 23/24 May night by a mob with active assistance of state functionaries. As a result an Ahmadiyya mosque was badly damaged and a revered historic residence destroyed.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani, the founder of Ahmadiyya denomination had stayed in this house and worshiped in this adjacent mosque. As such this complex is of great religious sentiment to Ahmadis, as a number of traditions and reports are associated with it.

Ahmadis had undertaken repairs and renovation of this house with permission from local authorities. Mullas came to know of it, and found it a useful tool to precipitate a riot and threaten law and order. Some sections of the civil society, a few bigots from the lawyers community, some careerist officials and a few self-serving politicians supported the mulla and demanded immediate action against Ahmadis for ‘outraging the religious feelings of Muslims.’ A few days earlier, the collaborating district administration proceeded to forbid Ahmadis further work, and sealed the house.

This effort to soothe the miscreants did not succeed, so the municipal authorities decided to join them to do what they demanded.

On May 23, at about 22:45 some officials arrived at the site and told Ahmadis of their intention to demolish the 19th century house for being ‘unlawful’. Their choice of time to carry out this operation is noteworthy. Ahmadis asked them to show ‘authorization’ papers; they had none. The police also arrived in the meantime and they took the line that though legal written orders were not available, the demolition would nevertheless be undertaken ‘as law and order is threatened’. Soon a mob, 600-700, arrived and all these joined in to demolish the house. Thereafter the miscreants attacked the adjacent mosque and demolished its minarets, domes, doors, etc.



Ahmadis in the interest of communal peace, decided not to respond to violence and not deter the miscreants with force, instead they left it to the authorities to handle the situation, who then used no means at their disposal and made no effort to disperse the vicious attackers.

It is obvious that after sealing the house earlier, it was under official custody, and the authorities were responsible for its security while awaiting judicial verdict; however in gross violation of this trust, the authorities not only initiated its destruction but also encouraged an unruly mob to participate in the heinous act.

These people were there till 03:00. Some of them came back at 04:30 and indulged in further vandalizing. This time the officials did not join them, and acted as mute spectators.

This entire incident happened with the collusion and participation of the administration and the police.

The police earlier booked two Ahmadis, the local Emir and the president on fabricated charge of ‘unlawful construction’. An FIR was belatedly registered over the attack but it has been sealed.

Ahmadis have made a writ petition to the Lahore High Court against the sealing and destruction of the house by the TMA and the Police.

Ahmadis all over the world are very grieved and feel greatly hurt over this sacrilege.

Approximately ten days before this attack, at the demand of anti-Ahmadi elements, the district administration stopped Ahmadis repair and renovation of the historic house.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani, the holy founder of the Ahmadiyya denomination, had stayed at this house on his visit to Sialkot. The house was still there, but its rundown structure needed repairs and renovation. The community undertook to restore it to its original form.

The mullas come to know of it, and as usual raised hue and cry. They alleged that a museum was under construction. The vernacular press gave boost to the propaganda. The mullas further alleged that the place would be used as a mosque. Ahmadis assured the administration that that was not the intention. The issue was agitated by opponents on the social media. A group of lawyers came out in support of bigotry and sectarian animosity.

In the run up to the riot, Mulla Khadim Hussain, the *Khatib* of the Lukabad Mosque harangued his followers on the issue and agitated them intensely to prepare them for action. He uttered very bad names for the holy founder of Ahmadiyyat and called him “the greatest enemy of humankind”, “an enemy of Islam”, abominable (*Beyghairat*), shameless (*Behaya*), of bad character (*Bad Kirdar*), disgraceful (*Bezamir*). He called his residence a filthy place (*Ghaliz Jagah*), a bad location (*Ghatya Jagah*), abode of rogues (*Bad mashi ka adda*). He bad-mouthed his fellow Muslims too who had sold the property to Ahmadis, calling the former as despicable (*Kameeney*), shameless (*Behaya*), low (*Ghatya*), traitors (*Ghadar*), abominable (*Beyghairat*) Muslims. He did not spare even their mothers, and said, “Their mothers’ character was corrupt.” All this garbage is available on videos. He told the authorities to undertake the demolition of the structure, otherwise “we ourselves will do that.” He took the official informers in confidence and told them to convey all that to the authorities. “We are law-abiding people, we’ll not take law in our own hands; I give you eight days to do that (demolition), after that we ourselves will



Municipal functionaries at desecration site

take the law (... ..),” he asked his audience to complete the sentence; and they did. “We’ll set the property on fire; I myself will do that,” the cleric thundered.

In this open hateful speech, the mulla repeatedly violated sections 153-A, 295-A, 298 of the Penal Code, for which he could be arrested and imprisoned for 5 years; but he was sure that the co-operative administration would not even require him to explain.

The mullas succeeded as they always do in the context of Ahmadis. The administration intervened and stopped the work. The daily *Ausaf* of May 13 splashed the headline triumphantly: “The birth place (*sic*) of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani sealed on order of Deputy Commissioner.”

The official sealing of the house did not calm down the mullas, because their object was heightened agitation and unrest, and assertion of their political clout. So they precipitated a riot.

The atrocity was so vicious and senseless that the news soon got viral on social media. Videos of vandalism and its perpetrators became available. According to Reuters, a social media video shows a crowd cheering a local cleric (Hamid Raza) who claims to have ransacked the mosque. “I want to thank the Sialkot administration, the DPO, the DC, the TMA from the bottom of my heart,” said the cleric from the majority *Sunni* community.

[www.reuters.com.world](http://www.reuters.com.world) news May 24, 2018

Mulla Hamid Raza is an activist of Imran Khan’s PTI and can be seen close to the party chief in photos on the Internet. In a video at the destruction site he is seen leading the demolition gang. After the outrage he delivered a hateful speech and threatened the administration that if they registered a criminal police case against any one of the activists, he will turn the whole city into ashes. In his address he named *Jamaat Ahle Sunnat, Sunni Tehrik, TLYR, Al-Ghalibun, Jamia Al-Alim, ATI* etc. as collaborators. These are all essentially *Sunni* groups.



Although after two days, the PTI distanced itself from this criminal attack, through a statement, it is to be seen if and what action it takes against the villain who led the charge.

The print media and the electronic media in Pakistan mostly kept the news of this attack confidential but most who matter came to know of this atrocity. The news spread abroad and there was a fairly strong general condemnation both in Pakistan and abroad. Bilawal Bhutto of PPP condemned the attack in plain words. Senator Qurat-ul-Ain Murree of PPP took up the issue in the Senate where it was passed to a human rights committee for follow-up. Intellectuals and op-ed writers Marvi Sarmad, Bina Sarwar, Jibran Nasir, Iram Azeem, Yassar Latif Hamadani, and many others came out in support of religious freedom. The daily Dawn reported the attack and made editorial comment.

The incident received its due condemnation from foreign HR and Freedom of Faith activists and organizations. There was a statement of strong condemnation from USCIRF. Mr Knox Thames of US State Department also expressed sympathy for the victimized community. A number of British MPs denounced the attack. In addition the Ahmadiyya

persecution was debated at length in the British House of Commons where MP Siobhain McDonagh led the debate, and Sialkot received due mention. Forum for Religious Freedom – Europe took note and issued a statement of concern. The High Commissioner of Canada in Islamabad issued the following statement:

“I am concerned at reports that a group of people damaged an Ahmadi place of worship in Sialkot last night. I trust that the relevant authorities will fully investigate these reports. All women and men have the right to freedom of religion or belief, including the right to worship in peace and security.”

Perry Calderwood, High Commissioner of Canada

Inside Pakistan, the mulla unabashedly owned up the sacrilege and gloated over his ‘great achievement’. He was seen on videos and social media doing that. Mulla Ashraf Jalali, a leader of TLYR expressed great satisfaction over the success of the riot and gave credit by name to Hafiz Hamid Raza, Hafiz Saghir Hussain Naqshbandi, Shoaib Dar and Hafiz Hasan Raza. Others who played a leading role in the attack were named as Amar Dar, Chaudhri Akhlaq and Tahir Hundli by sources. Hafiz Raza gave due credit to the district authorities, the DC and the DPO: “You have accomplished a great task (*Azeem kam*); bravo also to the team of the local Chairman (of the Council).”

The rulers from the PML-N chose to hold their peace and issued no statements. They were not guilty of hypocrisy. They had no sympathy for the victims, nor did they show any.

Ms. Irum Azeem, an MPA of Sindh Assembly complained that she lobbied to move a resolution of condemnation of the attack, but not a single legislator supported the idea.

As for the vernacular media, it made no mention of the incident as if it was not news worthy. The TV channels found it prudent to keep quiet. NEO TV channel raised the issue with a team of commentators, but they took the line that as they were not aware of the facts of the case, they were not in a position to comment. How meticulous and above board!

*Humsab*, an HR website was more frank and forthright to state: “The administration has refused to take the blame, and by destroying peaceful citizens’ property through submission to the Mulla it calls the monstrous action ‘legal’. It is posing as if it only demolished an illegal construction.”

[www.humsab.com.pak/13305/newsdesk-118](http://www.humsab.com.pak/13305/newsdesk-118)

The Daily Times posted an appropriate headline on May 24, 2018: “Mob led by PTI leader rains down misery on Ahmadi community, desecrates worship site in Sialkot.”

Following media houses also entered reports on this event: Reuters; channelnewsasia; BBC; VOA; Youtube; Times of India; Alaraby.co.uk; Pakistan Today; The Hindu; Anap.dw.com; and others.

The Sialkot administration mentioned above, in fact, means Mr Farrukh Naveed the Deputy Commissioner and Mr Asad Sarfraz Khan the District Police Officer. They, of course, followed the policy guidelines issued from Lahore by the then chief minister, Mr Shahbaz Sharif of PML-N.

The bureaucratic machine in the Punjab seems to be well lubricated and functioning as tasked. Thus it was only three days after this outrage that the local Assistant Commissioner Mr Shahid Abbas was awarded Commendation Certificate and a Rs 100,000 reward by the Chief Minister. Believe it or not!

In this Islamic Republic of the Pure, following has been achieved since the promulgation of the anti-Ahmadi Ordinance XX:

Number of Ahmadiyya mosques demolished

Number of Ahmadiyya mosques sealed by authorities	37
Number of Ahmadiyya mosques set on fire or damaged	24
Number of Ahmadiyya mosques forcibly occupied	17
Number of Ahmadiyya mosques construction of which was barred by the authorities	58

After this successful attack in Sialkot the mulla threatened further such attacks on Ahmadiyya places of worship.