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Protestors attack Ahmadi mosque in Pakistan on Prophet Mohammad's birthday

Thousands of protestors stormed a mosque belonging to the minority Ahmadi sect in Pakistan's Punjab province on Monday, firing at worshipers and wounding several before police dispersed the attackers, police and an Ahmadi spokesman said.

WWRN (13.12.2016) - <http://wvrn.org/articles/46448/> - A procession of around two thousand Sunni Muslims marking the birthday of Islam's Prophet Mohammad entered the Ahmadi mosque despite resistance by police, hurling stones and bricks and firing weapons.

The Ahmadi minority holds that a prophet followed the Prophet Mohammed, who founded Islam. But that view runs counter to the Muslim religion's central belief that Mohammad was the last of God's messengers.

In 1974, a Pakistani law declared Ahmadis non-Muslims and in 1984, a new law made it possible to jail Ahmadis for "posing as a Muslim" or "offending a Muslim's feelings".

"Police tried its best to stop the attackers but failed because of slim deployment," Malik Nawaz, the police officer in charge of the Choa Saiden Shah area where the attack took place told Reuters.

"Later, high officials reached the spot with more troops and chased out the occupants."

He said police would register a case against the attackers after receiving a formal complaint from the Ahmadi community.

A spokesman for the Ahmadi sect said the mosque was built by the community in 1860 and has been in use since then.

The attackers likely attacked the mosque because they suspected the worshippers were breaking the law by commemorating the birthday of the prophet Mohammad.

"Today a mob attacked the worship place, threw stones and shot gunfire. Police could not stop them because of weak deployment," Saleemuddin, the Ahmadi community's Pakistan spokesman, told Reuters.

The attack comes just a week after Pakistan renamed a university centre for physicist Abdus Salam, its first Nobel laureate, after more than 30 years of all but disowning his achievements, as a member of the Ahmadi minority sect.

Salam, the first Muslim to win the prize for science, is buried in the Pakistani town of Rabwah, a major centre for Ahmadis, where his gravestone was defaced by local authorities who removed the word "Muslim" from an inscription that called him "the first Muslim Nobel laureate".

Ahmadis have repeatedly been targeted with violence by militant protesters and been taken to court on blasphemy charges.

Ahmadi mosque attacked by mob of protesters

CSW (13.12.2016) - An Ahmadi mosque in Chakwal district, 90 miles south of Islamabad, was attacked by a mob of approximately 1,000 people who attempted to seize the property on 12 December.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community refused to hand over control of its Baitul Zikr mosque in Dulmial, Chakwal district after recent demands from local clerics to do so.

In a letter to the Chakwal district administration on 5 December, the Ahmadiyya community requested additional security after religious leaders at a nearby Sunni mosque called on those gathered to incite violence against the Ahmadis during a procession to mark the birthday of Prophet Muhammad on 12 December. However, no protection was offered.

During the procession on 12 December, violence broke out when people began chanting anti-Ahmadiyya slogans and a group of men who were part of the rally started to throw stones and bricks at the mosque, with gunmen opening fire on Ahmadis in the vicinity. An estimated 40 worshippers inside the mosque locked themselves in the building, refusing entry to anyone until the arrival of police. One Ahmadi suffered a cardiac arrest while trapped inside the mosque.

The police managed to disperse the protestors with support from the Pakistani army, but only after the protestors had forced their way into the mosque and set its contents alight. The mosque has now been sealed by authorities.

The Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan faces persecution and discrimination by both state and non-state actors since the 1974 constitutional amendment which declared them as non-Muslims. After the introduction of Ordinance XX (20) in 1984, they were further criminalised with up to three years imprisonment and a fine for their practice of Islam or identifying themselves as Muslim.

Some clerics in Pakistan have criticised Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's recent decision to rename the National Centre for Physics at the Quaid-i-Azam University after Professor

Abdus Salam, an Ahmadi and Pakistan's first Nobel laureate. The attack on the mosque follows a raid on the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Rabwah on 5 December.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said "While we welcome the police and army intervention to help the innocent Ahmadis who were subject to this deplorable attack, the anti-Ahmadiyya laws within the constitution legitimise the violence perpetrated against this minority community and create an environment in which hate speech and sectarian violence are rife. We urge authorities to take steps to prosecute those responsible for this attack and to increase steps to provide adequate protection for the Ahmadiyya community. Until the government of Pakistan fully repeals the anti-Ahmadiyya legislation the community will continue to suffer state sponsored persecution."

A cross-party group of British parliamentarians presses for release of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan

APPG (09.12.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2gE6QaZ> - The APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group) for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, has urgently tabled questions to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to press the Pakistani Government to immediately release three Ahmadi Muslims arrested without any warrant on Monday 5 December 2016.

Sixteen masked and armed counter-terror police targeted the publications department and office of an internal magazine, Terikh-Jadeed, distributed overseas at the Ahmadiyya community in Rabwah, without any warrants. During the 30-minute raid, three Ahmadis were arrested – Malik Sabah ul Zafar, Amir Ahmad Faheem and Zahid Mehmood Majeed – one of which was beaten so severely that he required hospital treatment.

Police seized laptops, computers, mobile phones, and several books. After raiding the Zia-ul-Islam press, seizing Tehrik-Jadeed magazine printing plates and assaulting the foreman, the police forced entry into the security office of the compound and disabled the CCTV equipment.

This raid comes as the latest incident in the ongoing persecution of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan. The banning of Ahmadi literature continues to be used by hard-liners to target Ahmadis. The APPG is concerned about the potential use of anti-terror charges against the three men arrested, as preceded by the case of 81 year old Mr Abdul Shakoor who was sentenced under anti-terror laws to 8 years in January 2016 for possessing copies of the Holy Quran.

Fareed Ahmad, National Secretary External Affairs for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK said: "This is a baseless raid as there is no evidence of our community or any of its publications promoting hate, let alone terrorism. It reflects the Pakistan authorities' relentless targeting of our community simply on grounds of our faith."

The APPG urged the UK and Pakistani Governments to work together to end discriminatory laws and to take action against hate rallies and material, including overseas, which incites hate and violence against the Ahmadiyya community.

Jim Shannon MP, Chair of the APPG, has tabled these three written Parliamentary Questions:

- To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what information he holds on the raid of the publications office of the Ahmadi Muslim community headquarters in Rabwah, Pakistan on 5 December 2016.

- To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Pakistan on the detention of three Ahmadi Muslims arrested in Rabwah, Pakistan on 5 December 2016.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has raised the issue of freedom of religion for Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan with the Government of Pakistan and what assurances he has received on this matter.

There was a similar response from the **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** (USCIRF):

"USCIRF condemns the brutal raid on the Ahmadiyya offices, the first such raid since Pakistan amended its constitution 42 years ago, declaring that Ahmadis 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 Ahmadis 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 Ahmadis."

Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported:

Four Ahmadis were arrested on 5 December on charges of "hate speech" related to the publication of their community magazine, while five were charged under anti-Ahmadi laws and anti-terrorism laws, after the headquarters of the Ahmadiyya community in Rabwah, near Lahore, was raided by the Punjab Counter Terrorism Department.

During the 30-minute raid, up to 16 armed policemen and 12 plain clothed officers forced their way through the main entrance of the Ahmadiyya headquarters and into the office of the Directorate of Literature and Publications. Staff were ordered to sit down or lie on the ground and a laptop belonging to the Director of Publications was seized along with two mobile phones, five computers, a printer, another laptop and some books, despite the police not having a warrant

Three employees were arrested; Mr Malik Sabah ul Zafar and Mr Amir Faheem, who are missionaries, and Mr Zahid Majeed, a computer operator. The police disabled the CCTV system and assaulted a worker called Mr Rana Irfan Ahmad, who was taken to hospital for treatment. At Zia-ul-Islam press offices, employee Mr Idrees Ahmad was assaulted and arrested, while paper, ink, film and other materials were seized. The offices were then sealed.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has learned that the Ahmadiyya monthly magazine, Tehrek-e-Jadid, which is only distributed among the Ahmadiyya community, was banned in December 2014. The Lahore High Court had granted a stay order on June 2015.

The Ahmadiyya community is one of the most widely persecuted religious minority groups in Pakistan. The Ahmadis were declared as non-Muslims by an amendment to the constitution in 1974. In 1984, Ordinance XX (20) was introduced to the Pakistan Penal Code, which criminalises Ahmadi Muslims for practicing Islam or 'posing as a Muslim'.

On 5 December, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced that the National Centre for Physics at the Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad would be renamed after an Ahmadi, Professor Abdus Salam, who won the Nobel Prize for physics in 1979, in a rare acknowledgement of the contribution of the Ahmadiyya community to the nation.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "This shocking, violent raid on the Ahmadiyya headquarters highlights the extent of harassment that the Ahmadiyya community is subjected to at the hands of state

authorities. We note with concern that increasingly, anti-terrorism laws are being used in cases which have no links to terrorist activity. We urge the government of Pakistan to drop the charges against these men without condition or delay and we further call on for the repeal of anti-Ahmadiyya legislation and for Ahmadis to be granted their rights to fully practice and propagate their faith, as guaranteed in the constitution of Pakistan.”

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Survey of schools for Pakistan's Christian minority: 50% have no playground, 15% no notebooks

World Watch Monitor (25.11.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2fE94qi> - Anser Javed's father was a sanitary worker in Karachi; his mother was a sweeper. When his father then died in a work accident, the Pakistani Christian boy was sent to an orphanage as his mother was too poor to care for him. Nevertheless, with support and personal determination, he eventually became the Principal of a school which grew from 200 to 600 students in the eight years he led it. Now, he's Director of an education charity, Starfish Asia, which has commissioned a survey of Christian schools in Pakistan to highlight the needs of this impoverished minority community.

Pakistan's education sector generally is starved of resources. Government spending on it is just 2.5% of GDP compared with 4% in neighbouring India. It has the second largest number of children out of school behind Nigeria. It is estimated that 20% of children never attend school, and even if they start, the drop-out rate within primary school is a staggering 41%. Statistics abound to illustrate the plight of the young struggling to access education.

This shortfall in public-sector provision has had two consequences. Many parents choose to send their children to Islamic schools (madrassas). The education these provide is often extremely narrow, though the fact that many offer food and board has a strong appeal for a family struggling to provide for perhaps eight children. More broadly there has been a proliferation of low-fee private schools – and for many, even amongst the poor, these have become the schools of choice. For Christian children faced with discrimination in Government schools, they are especially attractive.

"In the Government school the teachers just ignore you," one boy told Starfish Pakistan.

"Sometimes they won't enter you for the exams," said another.

Government schools may simply not be available in the so-called "Christian colonies" of the cities or majority-Christian villages. And even when they are, the educational outcomes are often better in the low-fee private schools. Pakistan's Christian communities recognise that education is vital if they are to escape poverty, challenge discrimination and gain respect in society.

UK-based Starfish Asia supports around 35 Christian schools serving 7,500 children from some of the poorest Pakistani families. But it says it realised it was only scratching the surface and wanted to know how many schools existed that catered for the country's Christian minority.

The survey was conducted by ITA – which produces the Annual State of Education Report for Pakistan – in conjunction with Sanjha, a Christian organisation with a huge network of contacts across the country. Those contacts were trained to deliver a questionnaire to schools. They were paid for every school they surveyed, to give an incentive to find as many as they could. Photographic evidence and telephone follow-up was then used to verify the existence of the schools. In all, more than 700 schools were contacted across the province of Punjab and the cities of Karachi and Islamabad. (Other provinces were not included as the Christian population is much smaller and more disparate.)

School facilities, the survey found, are basic. There were no toilets for children in 13% of the schools; half of them had no playground; a quarter of primary and middle schools did not have safe drinking water. Learning resources were also scarce: 15% of students had no notebooks or writing implements and one in 10 high schools did not even have a blackboard in the classroom. Few had even a box of books as their 'library' and less than

a quarter of high schools had internet access. The survey found that almost half of students in Class 2 did not have footwear – just one indicator of the poverty of the communities these schools serve.

Teachers in these schools are often dedicated – the rate of teacher absenteeism is far less than in Government schools. But they are poorly paid and often lack qualifications. Salaries range from US\$20-70 a month, well below the national minimum wage (\$134) and mostly below the international poverty line (\$57). Fewer than 20% had a teaching qualification and a quarter were schooled to less than 'A'-level standard.

While all the head teachers were Christian (a condition of inclusion in the survey), 12% of students were drawn from Muslim or other communities and a similar proportion of teachers. Islam is an obligatory component of the national curriculum, but 95% of the schools surveyed also included Bible teaching. A third of the schools had a formal Church association.

These 'Christian' schools are run on a shoestring. A fifth of them charge less than a dollar a month and two thirds of the schools rely solely on fees, receiving no funding from Government, churches or NGOs. Each school, the report found, expects to collect just Rs 39,000 (\$372) a month in fees.

The schools provide places for children who might otherwise be excluded from education, equipping children with basic skills to offer them hope of work beyond sweeping streets or making bricks.

Nonetheless, the survey found schools are plagued by high student absenteeism and an alarming drop-out rate, perhaps due to family pressure on the children to work, parents' inability to find the fees, or perhaps a failure of the schools to deliver education that meets the children's needs.

Starfish Asia told World Watch Monitor it knows only too well the struggles these schools face, but that it has also seen remarkable success stories, and cites the example of Ruth.

When marriage took Ruth from the city to a small village, she started teaching literacy to a small class of adults. She soon had an enthusiastic following, who persuaded her to start a primary school. The school now has over 150 students. Her husband, a pastor and teacher drives the bus to help children from the surrounding villages get to school. Some have now progressed to the high school in the neighbouring town on scholarships for able students who want to pursue further studies or vocational training.

[Read full report](#)

Death sentence for killers of Christian couple burned alive in Pakistan

World Watch Monitor (24.11.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2f18zP1> - An Anti-Terrorism Court in Lahore, Pakistan yesterday (23 Nov.) sentenced five men to death for the murder of a Christian couple who were burned alive in November 2014 for setting fire to some pages from a Qur'an.

A mob of about 600 people beat to near-death Shahzad Masih, 26, and his five-months-pregnant wife Shama Bibi, 24, for their "blasphemous" act on 4 Nov. 2014, in a village 60 kilometres from Lahore, the capital of Pakistan's Punjab region. The couple were then thrown into the large kiln where they worked as bonded labourers.

National outrage over their deaths saw the case moved to the Anti-Terrorism Court and the State become the prosecution claimant.

Yesterday, Judge Chaudhry Muhammad Azam imposed a fine of Rs 200,000 (US\$2,000) to each of the five killers – Mehdi Khan, Riaz Kambo, Irfan Shakoor, Muhammad Hanif, and Hafiz Ishtiaq – who were convicted of inciting violence and of throwing the couple into the kiln.

Another eight men – Muhammad Hussain, Noorul Hasan, Muhammad Arsalan, Muhammad Haris, Muhammad Muneer, Muhammad Ramazan, Irfan and Hafiz Shahid – were jailed for two years and fined.

More than 50 people were originally charged under Pakistan’s Anti-Terrorism Act for “the use or threat of action ... to coerce and intimidate or overawe the Government or the public ... or create a sense of fear or insecurity in society”.

“Although several of the suspects were acquitted after statements by Shahzad’s brothers, still five have received the punishment of death, which is an extraordinary step by the court,” said Riaz Anjum from the Voice Society, which represented the murdered woman’s father, Mukhtar Masih, in court.

Timeline of events

On 2 Nov. 2014, the couple were accused of the “blasphemy” of burning some pages from a Qur’an. Parveen Bibi, the wife of Masih’s eldest brother, explained that Masih’s late father, Nazar, “used to do black magic” in which he used amulets and other documents that she said might have contained Qur’anic verses. That day, Shama Bibi had burned the pages and thrown the ashes onto a garbage heap outside their quarters.

Parveen Bibi told World Watch Monitor that her sister had never meant any disrespect to Islam, as she was illiterate and had no idea what the amulets contained. But some passers-by recognised the text on the partially burned pages and the situation quickly escalated.

Parveen Bibi said that Masih and his five brothers went to the kiln’s owner, Yousuf Gujjar, for whom they had worked for many years, to resolve the matter. She said that Gujjar had assured them that nothing would happen, but that because they owed him money, they could not leave the village.

Masih and Bibi were bonded labourers. This is a traditional method still used to enslave labourers across India and Pakistan, although officially illegal in Pakistan. The practice is recognised by the UN as a form of “modern slavery”. (See below)

Two days later, at around 6am, a mob beat the couple and threw them into the kiln. A few policemen were present at the scene, but failed to ward off the mob. In December 2014, Pakistan’s Supreme Court ordered action to be taken against them.

The post-mortem report submitted to the Supreme Court in December 2014 stated that the couple were still alive when they were thrown into the kiln. In April this year, Yousuf Gujjar was bailed. He has now been acquitted.

Meanwhile, the British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA) reports that “the surviving children and grandfather, Mukhtar Masih, who is guardian for Suleman, Sonia and Poonam [the couple’s children] have been receiving death threats and abuse. Mr. Masih has asked for the BPCA to relocate them somewhere safer”.

Eight-year-old Christian boy, mother released after blasphemy arrests

This is not the first time that a child was charged with a blasphemy offence and that this boy, according to Christian rights activists, 'may have never have even heard of the word blasphemy'

Times of Ahmed (26.10.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2eQeAYe> - An eight-year-old Christian boy and his mother have been freed after blasphemy charges were leveled against the pair in Quetta Pakistan.

The boy, Izhan and his mother, Shakil, a nurse, were both accused of burning pages of the Quran in the city of Quetta last week, according to news website Premier (premier.org.uk).

While jailed both Christian and Muslim politicians campaigned for their release, Premier further reported.

The matter was resolved one day later with the blasphemy accusations quashed.

This is not the first time that a child was charged with a blasphemy offence and that this boy, according to Christian rights activists, "may have never have even heard of the word blasphemy".

A boy aged 12 was charged for blasphemy in 1993, a crime it was later determined he had not committed. Similarly, in 2011, a 13-year-old Christian girl was accused of blasphemy by her Muslim teacher for misspelling.

"Unfortunately, this is the worst example of hatred and intolerance against Christians and treatment towards them in Pakistan," said a minority rights activist, Nasir Saeed, according to various press statements.

Pakistan bans 11 Christian TV channels in 'sweeping attack on religious freedom'

Pakistan has banned Christian television channels in the country, for the first time in 17 years.

India Today (13.10.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2ekmpZX> - Pakistan has banned 11 Christian television channels, after the country's TV regulatory body declared them illegal in September.

The move has left the country's 2.8 million Christian residents with no public media presence, according to a report in express.co.uk. have called the move a blow to religious freedom.

The Pakistani Media Regulatory Authority had in its order accused the stations of being "illegal" and "not having permission" to broadcast.

Local priests and various members of the local Christian community are calling the move an "act of intimidation" and an "attack to religious freedom". They have appealed to the government to revoke the measure.

"As citizens, Christians have the right to practice their religion, but if they block you, it means not all citizens are equal. When someone bans the expression of faith, which is a fundamental right, there is persecution," Father Morris Jalal, founder of Catholic TV, told the newspaper.

Catholic TV was broadcasted from Lahore, where 72 people -- including 30 children -- were killed in a suicide blast while celebrating Easter last March. Pro-Christian channels had been allowed to broadcast for 17 years until now.

Most pro-Christian channels in Pakistan, are based abroad since because PEMRA does not release licenses for religious broadcasting. It allows the airing of Christian messages only for Christmas and Easter.

Certain programmers, meanwhile, don't want to protest against the authorities' decision at all. One of them is Saleem Iqbal, director of Isaac TV which was the first Pakistani Christian satellite broadcaster.

"We look at it like it is, we do not have the license. We can only ask people to continue to watch us online. Many people are passionate about our channel, which is broadcast from Hong Kong. A ban on cable transmission will not stop us," he told AsiaNews.it.

The move comes on the heels of a 16-year-old Christian boy facing the death penalty under Pakistan's strict blasphemy laws. He was accused of insulting Islam in a Facebook post, which allegedly showed a photo of the Kaaba in Mecca with a pig's head on top.

It is unclear if the teenager posted the image, 'liked' it or was simply tagged in the post.

Asia Bibi's appeal delayed; 150 Islamic leaders call for her to hang, whatever the outcome

By Asif Aqeel

World Watch Monitor (13.10.2016) - After more than seven years in prison, the first Pakistani Christian woman to be sentenced to death for blasphemy has had her Supreme Court appeal delayed, amidst renewed Islamist calls for her to die.

Aasiya Noreen, commonly known as Asia Bibi, in prison since the summer of 2009, was arrested for allegedly insulting Islam's prophet when she offered water to a Muslim co-worker.

Two years ago, the Lahore High Court judges explained they had no choice but to reject her appeal on a technicality, given the way Pakistan's laws are written, and turned to lawmakers to craft legislation that would empower trial courts to apply a test that would make future blasphemy convictions much more difficult to achieve. That test was not in place when Bibi, now 51, was tried. Since then, attempts have been made in the Parliament to at least acknowledge there is an issue over the blasphemy law, but any change would need to be approved by Pakistan's Council of Ideology.

This is her final appeal – in Pakistan's highest court, the Supreme Court in Islamabad. Today, one judge, Iqbal Hameed-ur-Rehman, refused to be one of the three judges to decide on Bibi's appeal because he had previously heard all the details of the case against Mumtaz Qadri, who murdered the Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, in January 2011. He said he'd killed the Governor for daring to advocate for Asia Bibi to be freed; many in Pakistan thought he'd done the right thing. The governor had called Pakistan's

blasphemy statutes "black laws," calling for their reform and supporting a presidential pardon for Asia Bibi.

In February this year, the Supreme Court refused Qadri's appeal and he was hanged; this provoked violent demonstrations across the country.

The judge Rehman said that, as the two cases were linked, he could not but be biased in his hearing of Asia Bibi's case.

A new date and a new bench of three judges will now be set.

One lawyer and columnist, Asad Jamal, said Rehman did not have any legal grounds on which to refuse to hear Asia Bibi's case, citing the Code of Conduct for Judges of the Islamabad Supreme and High Courts of 2009.

Bibi herself was not in the packed court – for her own security – but her husband was, together with a large number of human activists and journalists. Outside were about 100 policemen.

Some of Bibi's supporters, though extremely disappointed at yet another legal delay, have nevertheless expressed some relief due to the febrile atmosphere.

About 150 top Muslim clerics (muftis) from the radical Islamist group Sunni Tehreek issued a statement which demanded that the government hang Asia Bibi and all other prisoners of blasphemy laws; and demanded a speedy trial of all cases still pending. They also issued a verbal decree that all those who might rescue those accused of blasphemy or who assist in trying to rescue them should be killed.

Bibi's case has attracted worldwide attention and led to much criticism of Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws.

In July last year, World Watch Monitor reported that Bibi had been allowed to take her appeal to the Supreme Court. Commentators praised the Supreme Court for its courage to hear the appeal in the face of strong public sentiment against anyone seen to denigrate Islam, with some calling it a "historic day for Pakistan".

In 2014, rumours began to surface that Bibi was suffering from ill health, but her lawyer, Saif-ul-Malook, told World Watch Monitor in October last year that she remained safe and well.

Bibi's husband, Ashiq Masih, said at the time he had seen "a glimmer of hope" on his wife's face.

Malook had previously served as the prosecution lawyer in the murder case of Punjab Governor Taseer. Because of death threats from hardliners, no lawyer would agree to represent Qadri's prosecution. After months of no representation, Malook took up the case. When the trial judge, Pervez Ali Shah, convicted Qadri and sentenced him to death in October 2011, the judge was threatened and finally went to Saudi Arabia for fear of his life.

However, in October 2015, a landmark Supreme Court decision upheld the judgement that Qadri had no legal justification to take the law into his own hands and reconfirmed his death sentence. This vindicated Malook's bold prosecution of the case. However, it was this verdict that provoked further backlash against Asia Bibi by extremists.

Despite having suffered so much for the cause of the Christian woman, Taseer's elder sister said through a Facebook message: "It is not enough for the sentence on Qadri to be carried out – Asia [Bibi] for whom my brother died has to be released."

Malook said last year that he remained "quite hopeful" she would be acquitted and released. He said there were insufficient legal grounds against her under either civil or Islamic law.

Pakistan's blasphemy law

The crime of blasphemy was enshrined into Pakistani law under British rule, but strengthened during the years of military dictator Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq.

However, in recent years Pakistan, which is 96 per cent Muslim, has seen a surge in accusations of insulting Islam, says Islamabad-based think-tank, the Center for Research and Security Studies.

Analysts say that accusations are frequently used to settle scores, or as a front for property grabs.

Charges are hard to fight because the law does not define blasphemy, so presenting the evidence can itself sometimes be considered a fresh infringement.

If found guilty, defendants can expect the death penalty, but those accused are often lynched or languish for years in jail without trial because lawyers are too afraid to defend them.

"Blasphemy accusations in Pakistan are often used to settle petty vendettas and persecute minority groups," said Kate Allen, UK Director of Amnesty International in December 2014, as part of a plea for the release of Mohammad Asghar, a 70-year-old British Muslim grandfather then also on death row. "Pakistan should get rid of these poisonous blasphemy laws. It's a complete disgrace that the courts are complicit in these vendettas".

However, the president of the British Pakistani Christian Association, Wilson Chowdhry, said any changes to the blasphemy law would, in reality, have little effect because of "local police authorities cowing under pressure from mobs led by local imams".

At least 150 Christians, 564 Muslims, 459 Ahmadis and 21 Hindus have been jailed under blasphemy charges since 1986. Chaudhry said that prior to 1986, only 14 cases pertaining to blasphemy were reported.

Supreme Court hearing for Asia Bibi

Agenzia Fides (07.10.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2dRfyF9> - The Supreme Court hearing for the case of Asia Bibi, the Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy is scheduled for next October 13. The judgement at first instance was upheld by the Court of Appeal and now the appeal has reached the Supreme Court, the third and final instance of judgment. This was confirmed to Fides by Joseph Nadeem, the woman's family guardian, adding that "this is a decisive moment in which the constant prayer of all Christians and all people of good will is required, so that Asia may be freed". The case will be presented by Muslim Lawyer Saiful Malook, Asia Bibi's legal officer, who "nurtures high hopes", noting "the flaws in the law and the evidence that demonstrate the innocence of the woman".

Asia Bibi is currently in the women's prison in Multan, in a single cell. The woman was arrested in June 2009 based on the well-known blasphemy law, after an argument with some women farmers. After being sentenced to death in 2009 and the confirmation of the verdict in 2014, on July 22, 2015, the Supreme Court suspended the sentence and ordered the review of the case.

Christian teacher's campaign against hate preaching in school leads demand that he converts to Islam or dies!

By Wilson Chowdhry

British Pakistani Christians (25.09.2016) - A Christian teacher was given a choice to convert to Islam or die after he infuriated Muslim teachers with his campaign to stop their hate preaching.

Musa Atique (43 years) was employed at Govt high school no.1, Kot Radaha Kishan which is in the district of Kasur. There he taught as a primary school teacher for over seven years. Subjects he taught were English, Urdu, Social studies, and Islamiyat a subject that is compulsory.

In recent weeks the government of Pakistan has proposed changes to the school syllabus, which now requires compulsory learning of the Quran and Islamic prayers. However some of the zealot teachers in the school began using the opportunity of these new learning directives to teach hatred towards minority children especially Christians.

Sheikh Inam Ullah and Malik Azeem began inciting hatred during the Quranic study and Islamic prayer morning assemblies. Mr Atique overheard them using terms such as "Kafir" (infidel) and stating that Christians are supporters of Jews and spies for America.

Mr Atique told the headteacher of the school and asked him to intervene and stop the hate speech. He described the worsening unrest and increased bullying the attacks were causing towards minority children. Sadly the headteacher totally ignored his concerns and the rogue teachers continued to inculcate Muslim school children with hate ideology.

Mr Atique tried to get other teachers to support his concerns but minority teachers were too scared to get involved and the Muslim teachers who seemed more liberal chose to ignore the fanatical preaching. On the 15th of March one teacher involved in the hate preaching Muhammed Akhbar came into his classroom and started beating him in front of other students, calling him a Christian 'Choor' (dirty sweeper). Mr Akhbar threatened to kill him if he continued to speak out against the 'holy act of preaching truth about evil Christians.' The violence stopped only when Mr Atique ran for safety to the Principal's office. However after this many of the students started harassing him and spat on the floor whenever he walked by them

During a discussion with another teacher Gulam Ghos on 18th March 2016 he was questioned about his faith and the bible. During the conversation Mr Ghos told Mr Atique that he should convert to Islam or face being killed. Mr Ghos and another teacher began to beat Mr Atique but he managed to escape their clutches by again running to the Principal who asked the two Muslim teachers to leave Mr Atique alone and took no further action. Sadly the repeated pattern of attempted conversion by force did not stop. It became apparent to Mr Atique that the Principal was in fact part of the problem and had no passion to resolve the issue, with no other option open to him he decided to inform local Police about all the problems at his school.

Musa registered a complaint of harassment and incitement towards hatred with local police. He explained to them that he had received a serious threat to his life and was being bullied because he was campaigning for a stop to the hate speech. Local police visited the school and started to investigate the alleged crime.

During police investigation the rogue Muslim teachers preaching hatred admitted that they had been sharing their extremist ideology with students. But the police took no action they simply asked the teachers to stop beating and harassing Mr Atique.

Unfortunately as soon as the Police left the teachers slapped Mr Atique's face several times and warned him not to call the police again or he would be killed. This attack was the most insidious as the attack happened before the Principal who offered no help to Atique. Unwilling to accept a life of harassment and torture Mr Atique wrote an application to the Executive District Officer (EDO), District Coordinating Officer (DCO) and the District Education Office (DEO) of the Education Department, He also sent a letter to the Chief Minister for Education in Punjab and The Governor of Punjab. The same letter was sent to campaign group 'Christians in Pakistan' who asked the BPCA to intervene on behalf of Mr Atique.

We sent our officer Naveed Aziz to meet with Mr Atique, who was elated that someone had noticed his plight. He described the situation to Naveed, saying:

"There is an environment of extreme religious bigotry. Every day during the morning assembly at Government High School insults were hurled at Christians and other non-Muslims, he states.

"I have had heated arguments with my fellow teachers over these issues several times." Ever since I was assaulted by Akbar, and again by Ghulam Ghos the school the school administration has taken no action.

"The Muslim teachers and the principal think it is fine to terrorize and bully Christian teachers and pupils. But I won't have it. I have recorded a Muslim teacher Muhammad Sarwar preaching hateful words about the Christian faith , "I have recorded his speech."

News of his efforts to stop the hate speech in his school reached the community he lived in. Suddenly he was Mr Atique started receiving hate mail through the post and by email. Often he found excrement in front of his door which looked human. The situation for his family worsened to an extent that the while community began shunning him after local people connected to the radical teachers spread rumour that he was a blasphemer.

Mr Atique, candidly shared his fears, he said:

"I had serious concerns regarding threats to my life and that of my family. People were brewing a plot to lay blasphemy charges against me. I was being shunned by my fellow teachers but some Christians warned me of the impending blasphemy charge.

I told the the Principal what was happening in a letter copied to various bodies to ensure he was committed to my safety. The school administration transferred me to the Deputy D.E.O.' office to ward off any violence but the same bullying has begun here as I am now labelled as a Christian campaigner."

Mr Atique approached 'Christians In Pakistan' a campaign group reporting on crimes against Pakistani Christians. Their officer Madeeha Baksh contacted the BPCA and asked us to offer help to the beleaguered and frightened family. Our officers Kanwal Amar and Naveed Aziz met with the family and next week will move them into a safe house. We are hoping to find Mr Atique new temporary employment as a private tutor and will then start

him in a full time role at our school for enslaved children which we hope to build by the end of the year.

Mr Atique, said:

"It hurts that my fellow teachers for so many years betrayed me and launched and disseminated propaganda against me. I found myself continuously standing up against their extremist outlook. Already so much hate has been incited against me and community tensions near our home were reaching a peak

"I anticipated a reprisal from the local extremists. If it was not for Christians in Pakistan and British Pakistani Christian Association I would most probably be dead by now, or sitting in a prison cell waiting to be hung and killed for a blasphemy I never committed."

Wilson Chowdhry, Chairman of the British Pakistani Christian Association, said:

"Life for Christians will reach an all time low, now that the Pakistani Government has directed schools to include Quranic studies in their school assemblies and hold Islamic prayers in all schools. The process is easy to abuse and permits fanatical religious zealots to inculcate vulnerable young minds with their evil ideology.

"Britain's foreign aid to Pakistan who are the largest recipient, is once again brought to question. £225 million is earmarked for holistic educational reform, yet the education system seem to be worsening under the current Pakistani government. By introducing religious prayers and teaching to schools in Pakistan they have made these schools no better than the notoriously brutal madrassahs. It seems Pakistan is entering a phase of religious zeal that will create severely neurotic communities by their own design."

Christian boy, 16, arrested for Kaaba 'blasphemy'

In another village, Christians attacked after Muslims' Friday prayers

World Watch Monitor (20.09.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2cjVztT> - A 16-year-old Christian boy has been accused of committing blasphemy by "liking" and sharing a post on Facebook which "defamed and disrespected" the Kaaba in Mecca, the building at the centre of Islam's most sacred mosque.

Most of the Christians in the boy's village have since fled their homes for fear of an angry backlash against them.

At around 3pm on Sunday (18 Sep.), several police vans raided Nabeel Masih's house in Dina Nath village – in the Kasur district of Punjab province, 30 miles southwest of Lahore. There are at least 300 Christian homes in the village.

The complainant, Akhtar Ali, filed this accusation at the nearby Phoolnagar Police Station: "On 18 September, I was with my friends Bakht Khan and Saddam ... We took our friend Waqar's mobile phone and started seeing pictures of his various friends on Facebook. But when we opened Nabeel Masih's profile, there was a picture posted in which the Kaaba is defamed and disrespected. Seeing that picture, our religious feelings were hurt."

Nabeel's cousin, Imran, 24, told World Watch Monitor that Nabeel had nothing against Muslims and meant no harm.

"It was only a mistake by him and he clearly stated that he did not intend to hurt but to condemn the post," Imran said. He added that Nabeel is illiterate and works as a labourer in a nearby ghee factory.

Pastor Samuel Masih, who was visiting his sisters in the village, said that, although everything seemed calm, "many of the Christians have left the area due to fear of security".

Phoolnagar Police Station head, Shahbaz Ahmed Dogar, reiterated that everything was under control and urged Christians to return.

"There was no announcement from mosque loudspeakers or any gathering of people," he said. "Those who have left the area have taken only precautionary measures and I would encourage them to return to their houses."

In several instances in the past, Christian neighbourhoods in Pakistan have been targeted following blasphemy allegations, resulting in the looting, ransacking and burning of Christian homes. In 2009, more than 100 Christian homes were ransacked and set on fire in Gojra, near Faisalabad, while in March 2013 another 150 Christian homes were set on fire in Lahore's Joseph Colony.

Christians attacked after Friday prayers

Meanwhile, a poor Christian neighbourhood in a remote village 20 miles south of Faisalabad came under attack after Muslim Friday prayers on 16 September.

Five people were hospitalised, including two women who also faced public humiliation after their clothes were torn, but police said the injuries were not sufficient for the formal registration of a case.

At least 20 men armed with sticks and firearms attacked the Christian neighbourhood – in the village of Chajwal, in the Samundri district. The incident took place only the day after the Punjab Minister for Human Rights and Minorities Affairs, Khalil Tahir Sandhu, told local media that "minorities in Pakistan are more secured (sic) than [in] other countries of the region".

Villager Razaq Masih, 55, lodged a formal complaint at the Samundri Saddar Police Station, in which he named six alleged attackers. He said that, at around 4pm on Friday, those six, alongside 30-35 others, came to the village, "yelling that today they would teach a lesson to these `chuhras`* ... [and] attacked the Christians".

Masih added that the assailants had stormed into the house of a Christian woman, Sharifan Bibi, "torn [her] clothes" and "while beating her, dragged her ... out of the house".

Parveen Bibi said she was also beaten as she tried to protect her two sons – Shahbaz, 25, and Zahid, 23.

"My sons are labourers and they had just returned from their work," she told World Watch Monitor from her hospital bed. "I [pleaded with the attackers] and tried to save my sons, after which they beat me with clubs and attacked us with bricks."

Arif Masih, 55, who also works as a labourer, was returning home from a wedding when he was beaten.

"I could not even understand why they were beating me," Masih told World Watch Monitor at the hospital.

Hundreds of Christians from the village gathered together on Sunday evening (18 Sep.) and resolved to seek justice. They told World Watch Monitor the attackers must have had

support from local politicians, which is why the police had refused to officially register the case, and said they were fearful of further attacks.

"About 300 to 400 Christian households are in Chajwal, whom the influential community of Gujjars [an agricultural caste] have been trying to suppress for a while," said Shahid Masih Paul, chairman of Christ Assemblies International, a Pentecostal group. "The Gujjars are influential in the area. Decades ago, these Christians were dependent ... on [these] landlords, but over time their number has decreased and most of them work as labourers in the city."

What sparked the attack?

Razaq Masih told World Watch Monitor that he had been sitting with a Muslim man in front of some Christian homes, when some Gujjars, as well as people from the Julaha (weavers) caste, arrived and wanted to beat up the man.

"They had a grudge against him because of a relationship he had a year ago with a young woman, who was also Muslim," Masih explained. "The Christians intervened and said that if the relationship had ended, then why should he be beaten? Within no time, about 30 men arrived, yelling that we will teach these 'chuhras' a lesson for raising their heads [to defend the Muslim]."

Chairman Paul said that the Gujjar and Julaha communities had long wanted to direct their sewerage water into the cesspit beside the Christian community, but that "Christians have been refusing because they think that the pond would then overflow and their houses would be inundated. That is the core issue. It is not bearable for the Gujjar and Julaha that these poor Christians, who have long been their tenants, have started to resist them."

Razaq Masih said all the Christians live on government land. "They have not been able to buy the land, but for decades they have been living there. If the [Gujjars] are allowed to channel their sewerage water there and it inundates the Christians' houses, they would then have to leave the village."

Rao Kashif, provincial parliamentarian for Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, told World Watch Monitor that he could not confirm whether or not the Christians were beaten up.

"I regularly come to my office but how can I know if none of them has come to me?" he said.

The Christians complained that since the incident no parliamentarian has yet raised their case. In the past, many incidents of violence against Christians have taken place, which have been seen as a precursor for later evicting them from the government land they live on.

Christians continue to be regarded as lower-class citizens and are often forced to live in the less desirable parts of an area, such as close to sewerage-filled ponds. This attitude towards them is reinforced from schooldays onwards.

A recent report by Pakistan's National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) says the government has failed to keep its promise to eradicate religious "hate material", including against minority Christians, from textbooks used in schools.

After the attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in Dec. 2014, the government introduced a 20-point National Action Plan to discourage religious extremism and to provide a counter-narrative to promote religious harmony, saying an "end to religious extremism and [the] protection of minorities will be ensured". However, the NCJP report, "Freedom from Suffocating Education", claims that no curriculum reforms have so far been adopted at the school level, aside from the production of a few booklets.

This backs up the findings of another recent report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, which concluded: "The trend toward a more biased curriculum towards religious minorities is accelerating. These grossly generalized and stereotypical portrayals of religious minority communities signal that they are untrustworthy, religiously inferior, and ideologically scheming and intolerant."

The NCJP report, which focused on textbooks used in the 2015-16 school year, noted that "hate material" previously identified had not been removed from the curriculum yet.

Thousands of Ahmadis fleeing persecution in Pakistan and seeking Asylum overseas

Rabwah Times (04.09.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2cAq5Sb> - More and more Ahmadis are leaving Pakistan and seeking asylum overseas as persecution in Pakistan increases. Sources within Pakistan and stats released by the U.S. indicate that Ahmadis are the largest asylum seeking group from Pakistan. Newly published statistics by Germany, U.K., and the US revealed that over 10,000 Pakistanis had sought asylum in these three countries over the past year.

Data from US Department of State which classified refugees by religion showed that most of the 376 Pakistanis who applied for refuge in 2016 were Ahmadis. Throughout the last five years, Ahmadis were the single largest group of Pakistanis seeking refuge in the US. Ahmadis accounted for over half of all Pakistani asylum applicants with 746 claimants. The data further revealed that 240 Christians and 66 Shias also sought refuge.

Meanwhile, Germany received the highest number of asylum application from Pakistanis. Data from the German interior ministry showed that 9,185 Pakistanis applied for asylum from January to July 2016. This was in contrast to just 2,546 applications in 2015. Sources within the Ahmadiyya community say, most of those applicants were Ahmadis.

Similarly, in the UK, 2,992 Pakistanis applied for asylum from June 2015 to June 2016, however only 16 percent of the applications were accepted.

Europe and U.S. are not the only destinations for Ahmadi asylum seekers. Many have even fled to South East Asia and remote parts of Africa. Countries with a significant Ahmadi refugee population include Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, Uganda and Ghana.

The Ahmadiyya sect of Islam is practically banned in Pakistan. Ahmadi Muslims are targets of extremist groups who consider them heretics and under the Pakistani law it is a crime for Ahmadis to label themselves Muslims.

Pakistan school textbooks riddled with religious 'hate material'

World Watch Monitor (25.08.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2bBtFcQ> - A report by Pakistan's National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) says the government has failed to keep its promise to eradicate religious "hate material" from textbooks used in schools.

When a Taliban attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in Dec. 2014 led to the loss of least 141 lives, including 132 students, it brought about a policy change in Pakistan. The government introduced a 20-point National Action Plan to discourage

religious extremism and to provide a counter-narrative to promote religious harmony in the country, saying an "end to religious extremism and [the] protection of minorities will be ensured". However, the NCJP report, "Freedom from Suffocating Education", claims that no curriculum reforms have been adopted at the school level, aside from the production of a few booklets.

This backs up the findings of another recent report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, which concluded: "The trend toward a more biased curriculum towards religious minorities is accelerating. These grossly generalized and stereotypical portrayals of religious minority communities signal that they are untrustworthy, religiously inferior, and ideologically scheming and intolerant."

The NCJP report, which focused on textbooks used in the 2015-16 school year, noted that "hate material" previously identified had not been removed from the curriculum. It also noted that Pakistan's Sindh Assembly had failed to keep its promise to include the complete text of "Father of the Nation" Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah's speech of 11 Aug. 1947, in which he said:

You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the State.

Only "a small portion of the speech" is included in textbooks, it noted.

On 14 Dec. 2014, two days before the Peshawar school tragedy, the Punjab home secretary briefed the Supreme Court of Pakistan about curriculum reforms. He said students would be taught that "we are all members of the one human race, with similar challenges, and we cannot confront these challenges without forging a common alliance ... The message of all faith is common and for benefit of the entire humanity."

"No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction ... other than his own," states Article 22(1) of Constitution of Pakistan. However, Cecil Shane Chaudhry, the general secretary of the NCJP, told World Watch Monitor: "Non-Muslim students opt to study Islam so that they are not stigmatised in the classroom."

Chaudhry added that good marks are easily obtainable in Islamic Studies, rather than the more general subject of "Ethics". "Ethics textbooks are not available in the market and, in schools, no teachers are available to teach this subject," he said. "Also, Ethics books are written from an Islamic viewpoint and the students who select Ethics are stigmatised by teachers and students."

The NCJP study also questioned policymakers on this subject, saying: "If Ethics can be a substitute for religious studies for non-Muslim students, then why can't it be equally beneficial for Muslim students?"

Meanwhile, in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the conservative Jamaat-e-Islami party has from primary school textbooks, such as pictures of unveiled females or any depictions of the Christian faith.

Report round-up

The NCJP study cited several passages from textbooks that teach falsehoods about other religions, or criticise or encourage animosity towards them:

- The Punjab Textbook Board's Class III (ages 7-8) book on Urdu teaches that Islam is "superior" to all other religions.

- The Sindh Textbook Board's Class VII (ages 11-12) book on Islamic Studies teaches: "Most of the [other] religions of the world claim equality, but they never act on it."
- The Punjab Board's Islamic Studies textbook for Class VIII (ages 12-13) reads: "Honesty for non-Muslims is merely a business strategy, while for Muslims it is a matter of faith."
- For Class VI (ages 10-11), the Punjab Board's Islamic Studies book says: "For the person who is not in financial need, is not governed by a tyrant and still does not perform [the pilgrimage to Mecca], it does not make a difference whether he dies as a Christian or a Jew."
- The Punjab Board's Class VI book on Islamic Studies says: "Though being a student, you cannot practically participate in jihad, but you may provide financial support for jihad."
- The Punjab Board Class V (ages 9-10) Social Studies book says: "Religion plays a very important role in promoting national harmony. If the entire population believes in one religion, then it encourages nationalism and promotes national harmony."
- "The better a Muslim we become, the better a citizen we prove to be," says the Punjab Board's Class IV (ages 8-9) book on Urdu.

Every textbook continues to use the Urdu word "Isai" (derived from "Isa", the Arabic word for "Jesus" used in the Qur'an) for "Christian". As World Watch Monitor has reported, the word now carries strong overtones – from colonial times – with the "unclean" demeaning occupations done by the lowest castes.

History

History is a subject of particular contention in the report. Pakistani textbooks refer to centuries of "Islamic rule" and "jihad" in the Indian subcontinent. However, Pakistani historian and author Dr. Mubarrak Ali told World Watch Monitor: "It is wrong to say 'Islamic rule' or 'Hindu rule'. The Indian wars were political conflicts and not religious conflicts. The political conflict in the Indian subcontinent is seen as a religious conflict, which is why history is described in a binary opposition. We want to see history in black and white, while multiple facts decide one incident."

Here are some of the other contentious or inflammatory passages cited in the report:

- The Pakistan Studies book from the Punjab Board for Class IX (ages 13-14) students says: "The free status of Islam and Muslims was hurt with the establishment of British rule. Muslims under non-Muslims remained enslaved and coerced."
- The Sindh Class VIII book on Social Studies says: "The influence of Christian priests increased greatly [during British rule]. Christian priests were able, with the help of their government, to openly preach their religion."
- The Class VII Baluchistan Textbook Board book on Urdu says: "The British ... feared the Muslims, being the true inheritors of the rule of India, could become a danger for them anytime."
- "Another book shows that the accusations against [Mughal Emperor of India] Aurangzeb of bias towards Hindus are purely a fabrication of the narrow-minded Hindus and treacherous British," says the Punjab Board's Urdu textbook for "matriculates" (ages 15-16).

- The Class V book on Islamic Studies by the Punjab Board states: "The Muslims ruled the Indian subcontinent for about thousand years with magnificence, but they did not forcibly convert a single Hindu. If they had willed, then today there wouldn't even be a trace of them in the subcontinent. But Muslims showed great tolerance and even raised Hindu to high positions."
 - The Punjab Board's Class VI History book reads: "Most of the population of Delhi consisted of Hindus who considered Muslims strangers. They ... were always busy in thinking about getting free from the rule of Muslims. Hindu landlords used various excuses to not pay land revenue and even sometimes descended into revolt. The Hindus were so much encouraged by [Emperor] Akbar's pro-Hindu policies that they started demolishing mosques and shrines and started building their temples in their place. Wherever Hindus were in majority, they brutalised Muslims."
 - The History textbook for Class VIII students, published by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board, reads: "Sikhs used to do many brutalities to Muslims and did not allow them religious freedom ... The British did not trust Muslims and the policy of injustice and brutality hurt economic and educational conditions of Muslims. And the discriminatory attitude of Hindu landlords further made their condition worse. Under the influence of Hindus, they adopted several heresies."
 - The Punjab Board's History textbook for Class VII states: "In those days, Sikhs ruled the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Sikhs had made the life of Muslims terribly difficult. Syed Ahmed Shaheed decided to wage jihad against Sikhs."
 - The Punjab Board Social Studies book for Class VII says that Bangladesh became its own independent nation in 1971 – no longer East Pakistan – due to a conspiracy of "enemy countries of Islam".
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Pakistan's senate committee to review misuse of blasphemy laws

By Aftab Alexander Mughal

(18 August 2016) - Pakistani Christians see it an encouraging development in which Pakistani legislatures have decided to check the misuse of blasphemy laws in the country. On 16 August, Senate's (upper house of the Parliament) Committee on Human Rights decided during a meeting in Islamabad to hold a series of meetings to discuss the issue with legal experts, religious scholars and other relevant bodies, including Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) to review the procedures in this regard. Christian rights organisations have been demanding that until the government cannot repeal these laws, the misuse of the laws should be ensured.

The meeting of the Senate committee was chaired by the committee chairperson Senator Nasreen Jaleel, who belongs to Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM, a progressive political party). She said that the meeting did not intend to seek amendments to the law, but the intention is to ensure fair implementation of the law as innocent people have suffered due to its misuse. MQM Senator Mohammad Ali Saif, said the blasphemy law had been misused more than any other law in the country. PPP Senator Sehar Kamran believed the former Governor Salman Taseer's murder was the prime example of misuse of these laws. It must be ensured that such heinous acts are never repeated. Pakistan Tehrik's Insaf (PTI) Senator Samina Abid claimed that because of misuse of these laws, innocent people were punished nearly in 80 per cent blasphemy-related cases.

National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) Justice (retired) Ali Nawaz Chohan submitted a report of the commission on the proposed amendments regarding procedural changes to check the misuse of the laws. He told the meeting that to ensure the effective implementation of section 156-A of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) investigation of blasphemy cases should be conducted by a Superintendent of Police-level official. Blasphemy cases be heard by a session's judge rather than additional session's judge only. The NCHR chairman said that complainant which registers fake blasphemy cases should be punished. Mr. Chohan also recommended that the law must be considerate towards a person who apologises for blaspheming or denies the charge. The Holy Prophet, he pointed out, had pardoned many. Therefore, the aspect of repentance should be kept in view. If someone denied having committed blasphemy, the element of apprehension should also be kept in mind, The News reported.

The prosecutorial discretion be exercised to ensure that only bona fide complaints of recognizable criminal conduct are registered and pursued, the chairman said. As a short-term, temporary measure, until wider reform of the blasphemy laws and measures to address the flaws in their implementation is accomplished, amend section 196 of the CrPC to ensure no court can take cognizance of any blasphemy-related offences, particularly under sections 295-B and 295-C of the PPC, without intervention from the provincial or federal governments.

Sections 295-B and C of Pakistan Penal Code of blasphemy laws prescribe harsh punishments for the desecration of the Holy Quran or insulting the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), have often been used as justification for mob justice, mainly against Christians and other religious minority communities.

The Secretary of the Ministry of Human Rights, Nadeem Ashraf, told the committee that there was an air of fear, and no lawyer was ready to defend an accused under the law and even judges feared on taking up such cases.

Majority of committee members supported the proposal of review the misuse of the laws, while Jamaat-i-Ulema Islam (JUI-F, a religious political party) Senator Mufti Sattarullah said that there was no need to amend the blasphemy law, and suggested to send this law to the CII. However, PPPP Farhatullah Babar said he had reservations over the CII and hence did not wish to have guidelines from this platform on the subject, which always added to temperature instead of showing a ray of light. According to the Pakistani media, the ruling PML-N's Senator Nisar Muhammad cautioned that blasphemy law was not an ordinary legislation and there was a need to deal with the matter with utmost care. He proposed having consultations with religious scholars as well as looking into such laws in other Islamic countries.

In its latest report, released on 10 August, on International Religious Freedom, the United States has criticized Pakistan's blasphemy laws. According to the report, more than 40 people remain on death row for blasphemy in Pakistan.

Aftab Alexander Mughal, Executive Director of Minority Concern of Pakistan

Christian man alleges his arms were chopped off for not converting to Islam

British Pakistani Christians (14.07.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2bBhEJs> - On June 24th Aqueel Masih a resident of Lahore LDA quarters was taken to hospital after his arms had been lopped off his body, he was unconscious on arrival at the hospital.

On July 12th alongside a local Christian elder Sam Bhatti a member of the Minorities Advisory Council of Punjab, Aqueel Masih registered a complaint at Ghalib Market Police Station, that three men had hacked off his arms with axes.

The report describes how Mr Masih who had been working at a petrol pump for over 4 years where he refuelled vehicles and conducted vehicle servicing and minor repairs, was approached by two Muslim men, who refueled their cars and asked him to go with them to their town for minor repairs on another vehicle. Then the men hacked off his arms during an ensuing argument. The Police First Information Report (FIR) does not include any reference to Mr Masih's arms being lopped off for not converting to Islam. An exclusion that has caused serious debate across the entire country. However BPCA have spoken with Sam Bhatti and Aqueel Masih, who have both explained that the local Police officer were not willing to include this in the original FIR. Through a fear of not being able to proceed with the crime registration or harsher treatment, they omitted this fact from the final submission.

Over the last two days BPCA officers have been talking to Aqueel Masih to ascertain the truth of this story. Conflicting stories have been put out in Pakistani media, especially media with a strong Islamic bias. These media groups have been suggesting that Mr Masih has fabricated the story and that the argument was over a drugs deal gone wrong. However we have interviewed Masih and his family and although he has dabbled in Cannabis smoking he has no serious drug abuse history and contends that there would be no reason for a drug baron to target him in this way.

Aqueel Masih has revealed to us that his father has converted to Islam and the two men had tried to forcibly convert him to the faith, arguing that due to his father's conversion he had no right to be a Christian. When he refused his arms were painfully removed with a less than sharp axe, in brutal fashion. There you have a motive but we believe this detail will fail to register with the majority of Muslim's in Pakistan, who adhere to a hard-line ideology. Mr Masih was lucid when they hacked off the first arm but slipped into unconsciousness rapidly and was unaware that the second arm had been moved till he awoke much later in hospital.

Mr Masih has also spoken of a brutal beating before his arms were severed off. His head was beaten and required 18 stitches and his whole body was bruised.

Kanwal Amar, our local Officer, said:

"There are so many cases of violence at the hands of extremists used against Christians who do not convert to Islam, However Aqueel's case is one of the worst and certainly very gruesome. Aqueel is frightened about his future and feels really helpless he wants justice and protection from statutory authorities, thus far the local police have been far from supportive."

In a bizarre twist local Police also seemed to obviate from the truth, an illustration of their self-protectionism. They immediately sent out a counter press release stating that they had concluded that [Aqueel's arms had been cut off during a train accident](#), believing him to be a heavy drug user and addict. This despite any report from the train authorities or any professional medical report. Mr Masih has confirmed that the only

medical analysis of his condition happened a few days ago, after the Police made their statement. Their stance has surprised many and the corruption exhibited highlights the difficulties Christians face when pursuing justice in a system that is stacked against them.

Three men have been arrested and are in custody while they are being investigated. However it is believed that justice will be hard to obtain, because Mr Masih is Christian and the majority of Muslims in Pakistan are oblivious to the extremism that has consumed the country. There is a prevailing belief that Christians make up these stories of persecution and that all Christians are drug and alcohol addicts.

BPCA have been asked to support Aqueel Masih with medical, legal and sustenance costs. The loss of two major limbs has destroyed his quality of life and hopes for a future. Pakistan does not have either a social or welfare model for disability. The nation simply has nothing to help severely disabled people adapt to life after severe disablement. If you would like to help us to make his life somewhat more palatable please [\(click here\)](#).

Christian family flees after WhatsApp blasphemy accusation

World Watch Monitor (13.07.2016) - <http://bit.ly/29Htz6I> - A Pakistani Christian and his family have fled their home in the religiously conservative city of Gujrat, after he was accused of committing blasphemy by sending an offensive message via mobile-phone text.

Nadeem James, 23, from the Yaqoobabad area of the city, and his family are on the run after a friend of the family, Yasir Bashir, 30, went to the police on Sunday (10 July), saying that James had sent him a blasphemous poem, which was against Islam and its prophet, using the WhatsApp texting service.

One of James's brothers, Faryad, told World Watch Monitor that police then "forcibly took away and beat" two of Nadeem's sisters-in-law, including one who has an 18-month-old son, in order to pressure them to provide information of James's whereabouts. However, the police told local newspapers that the two women were being kept in "protective custody" and would be released if any organisation took responsibility for their safety.

The women's detention has heightened tensions in the area. Several Christians, including all remaining members of the James family, have fled the area for the fear of their lives. Locals told World Watch Monitor that police from several other areas have been brought in to keep the situation under control. BBC Urdu reported that 200 policemen had been deployed.

Faryad James said two clerics – members of the Sunni Tehreek group, known for its rigid stance on blasphemy – went to the police station to lodge an official complaint and are now "demanding Nadeem's immediate arrest and threatening a backlash if the police fail to arrest him".

In a First Information Report submitted to police on 10 July, Yasir Bashir wrote: "On 4 July, I received text messages from a cell phone owned by Nadeem Masih*, son of James Masih, of the Christian caste. I saw these messages today, 10 July. The messages are insulting to the Prophet, the orthodox caliphs and other respectable personalities ... Take action against Nadeem Masih and end this social vice."

Parvaiz Masih, a resident of the nearby Father's Colony, founded by a local Catholic church, said "one person's irresponsible act has exposed the entire community to peril".

Faryad James expressed disbelief that a family friend had lodged an accusation against his brother.

"Yasir has been our friend for more than 15 years," he said. "He worked as a painter with my brother, Shahbaz, and we are unable to understand what exactly took place because we are unaware of the texted messages.

"On Sunday, I was home, but Nadeem had already fled when people started saying that he had sent blasphemous text messages to Yasir. I am unaware if any religious discussion took place between the two, before such messages were texted.

"In the evening, the police came and took our women into custody and beat them in order to pressure the family to reveal Nadeem's whereabouts. Since then they are in the police station, while we are totally unaware about Nadeem."

According to BBC Urdu, the police have said that the message shows that a religious argument had been going on between Bashir and James and that the allegedly offensive message was part of the conversation. The police added that they are investigating whether the alleged message was first sent to Nadeem James by someone else, before he passed it on.

In the past two months, there has been a spike in blasphemy cases against Christians. In May, a young Pakistani Christian woman was accused of blasphemy for allegedly using an advertising banner bearing the name of Prophet Muhammad as a floor covering. The accusation, which was later withdrawn, came just a few weeks after another Christian was accused of blasphemy in a village 100 kilometres away.

In June, 10 Christian families fled their village after a man from a Christian community was accused of sending a blasphemous message on Facebook Messenger. Also in June, a court jailed two Pakistani Christians (also from Gujrat) for six years for calling a Christian leader a "prophet". And in the district of Gujranwala, 50 kilometres from Gujrat, an anti-terrorism court sentenced a school principal to death for blasphemy. The man had initially sought police protection, after alleging he was the victim of blackmail and extortion. Instead, he was charged with blasphemy by the police, after the men he had accused levelled charges against him.

**"Masih," which stems from "Messiah", has been used for many years in Pakistan as a term to refer to whole Christian communities.*

BCPA Lawyer successfully wins petition for investigation into police corruption!

BCPA (05.07.2016) - BCPA funded lawyer Rana Hafeezhas succeeded in winning an investigation into Faisalabad police corruption, after 42 innocent Christians including women and children were arrested and detained under trumped up terrorism charges.

On 29th June 2016 Lahore High Court ordered registration of an FIR against Station House Officer (SHO) Waheed Shahid, of Gulberg Police Station and several other police officers under his supervision. The officers are to be investigated for exhibited unnecessary and unwarranted violence against Christians and unlawful arrest under anti-terrorism laws.

On May 19th, police from Gulberg Police Station had arrested ex-MPA Pastor Kamal

Chaughtai and 41 other Christians from Christian Life Ministries under what are being labelled as fabricated charges of terrorism.

The incident occurred after a lot of shouting was heard outside Christian Life Church, during a prayer service. Pastor Kamal rushed out to see what was causing the commotion. When he got outside Pastor Kamal was shocked to see Christian youth being brutally beaten by police officers. Pastor Kamal and other Christians tried to intervene and save the Christian youth from the violence - they allege they were non-violent through the process. Police officers arrested and detained 42 Christians under charges of terrorism. During incarceration Pastor Kamal and other male victims were brutally tortured. A large number of women and children were arrested and a complaint has been filed that women were arrested by men. Women in Pakistan should only be arrested by women police officers under Pakistani law, due to a large number of rape allegations against the notoriously brutal and corrupt national police force.

Justice Erum Sajjad dismissed SHO Waheed Shahid's petition for a stay order and SHO Waheed has been suspended from duty as an investigation into his conduct and that of several colleagues is investigated. SHO Waheed has stated that he led a raid against the Christians at Christian Life Ministries after hearing allegations of illegal alcohol production at the church. The police raid yielded no evidence of any alcohol making paraphernalia - a raid that has been described as simply an attempt to harass local Christians.

On May 26, at a session court hearing in Faisalabad, Christians file a petition for an FIR to be laid against SHO Waheed Shahid and other police personnel involved in the Christian Town rampage.

However Waheed Shahid filed a subsequent petition for a stay order in the Lahore High Court. A court hearing was fixed for June 29th 2016, however SHO Waheed and his counterparts failed to appear during court proceedings.

Justice Erum Sajjad expressed in the court that SHO Waheed had been warned that his petition would be dismissed in the case of his absence, explaining that due to the failure by the SHO to heed his warning he had no choice but to follow protocol and ordered an FIR and investigation into his conduct.

During police custody, Pastor Kamal Chaughtai underwent excruciating torture, which caused him to suffer from hypertension. On release he was admitted to hospital for two days for his recovery.

Pastor Kamal, said:

"The brutality of the Police towards us was disgraceful it would not happen in any other country. We were praying peacefully and reacted to a large commotion - we simply tried to stop two young men from being killed by police before us. They slapped and beat us for no reason and thought they would get away with this, but God will have our revenge."

Wilson Chowdhry Chairman of the British Pakistani Christian Association, said:

"It is rare for Christians to get justice in a country that views them as pariah's. However quite unusually, the blase approach to court procedure by police officers has led to them now having to undergo investigation into their corrupt practice. Evidence is stacked against the police whose excessive use of violence, failure to find any alcohol making paraphernalia and incarceration of women and children under terrorism laws has been condemned universally. However, they may still evade justice as a corrupt police force has little desire in investigating their own failings.

The cost of the legal cover may increase and BPCA would also like to support the family of Pervaiz Masih a victim still incarcerated. If you would like to donate please ([click here](#)).

Gujranwala: An anti-terrorism court acquits five Christians of blasphemy charges, sentences two to imprisonment

Christians in Pakistan (22.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/29daYjf> - An anti-terrorism court in Gujranwala has acquitted five Christians from the charges of blasphemy. During case hearing on June 20, Monday, the court pronounced them innocent and quashed the case against them. These Christians were charged of committing blasphemy in August last year.

However, two Christians were sentenced to six years of imprisonment, under charges of blasphemy and terrorism. Last year, on August 16, a case was registered against sixteen people including Christians and Muslims for publishing and displaying sacrilegious content. Afterwards 295-A and anti-terrorism act 11-W were added in the charge sheet against them.

The case was registered against Pastor Aftab Gill, from Biblical Church of God in Gujrat and other Christians after they posted posters for an ordination ceremony. The content of the pamphlets incited great indignation and reprisal from the Muslims as he used the word "Rasool" (meaning apostle) for his father Pastor Fazal Masih (late).

These posters caused much nuisance for Pastor Aftab and other Christians along with the Muslim publisher who had printed these pamphlets. In this case, Sub- Inspector of Civil Lines Police station Mukhtar Ahmad was the complainant.

Followed by much ado, a Christian advocacy group CLAAS intervened and filed bail petition on behalf of the respondents in Gujranwala's Anti-terrorist court. However, the Anti-terrorism court Judge Bushra Zaman only granted bail to the Muslim publisher Zulfiqar who had printed the posters, while she denied bail to all of the Christian respondents.

However, after few months CLAAS again filed bail petition in the ATC, this time ATC judge Bushra Zaman acquitted Shafqat Gill, Latif Masih, Younatan Fazal Gill, Mohsin Shoukat, and Zulfiqar, while Pastor Aftab Gill and Hajaj Bin Yousaf were handed down an imprisoned for six years.

Five Christians acquitted of blasphemy charges

CLAAS Press Release (21.06.2016) - Yesterday an anti-terrorist court acquitted five Christians of blasphemy charges, while two were jailed for six months under the blasphemy law and anti-terrorist act.

The case was registered on August 16 last year against sixteen people for displaying and publishing material which was considered threatening, abusive and insulting.

Later blasphemy law section 295-A and antiterrorism act 11-W was added for instigating sectarian hatred and hurting religious feelings and sentiments of the Muslims.

The charges were brought when Pastor Aftab Gill of the Biblical Church of God in Gujrat, published a post for the preparation of ordination ceremony and used the word "Rasool" for his late father Fazal Masih, who founded this church.

This offended local Muslims and a case was registered. The complainant was Mukhtar Ahmed, the Sub Inspector of Civil Lines Police station. .

Last year on 1st September 2015 CLAAS applied for bail in Gujranwala's Anti-terrorist court but Judge Bushra Zaman only granted it to the Muslim, Zulfiqar - who had actually printed the poster - and all of the Christians were denied bail.

After several months CLAAS again represented the case in the court of Bushra Zaman and five people Shafqat Gill, Latif Masih, Unitan Fazal Gill, Mohsin Shoukat, and Zulfiqar were freed from blasphemy charges. Pastor Aftab Gill and Hajaj Bin Yousaf were imprisoned for six years.

The misuse of the blasphemy law continues to rise against Christians in Pakistan. People use this law relentlessly to settle their personal scores and grudges over petty disputes. During the last month at least three Christians were accused of blasphemy - Imran Maish in Mandi Bahauddin for having an objectionable video on his phone; in Gujrat against a Christian seamstress, Sonia Gill, who was sitting on a banner bearing sacred Islamic names; and in Faisalabad against a Christian man, Usman Liaqat, for allegedly posting some comments on social media about eight months ago.

Christians are living under constant threat because of growing misuse of the blasphemy law and are continuously demanding changes or at least the introduction of safeguards to this law, to stop the misuse of this law. But it is all falling on the deaf ears of the Pakistani government despite calls from the international community.

Pakistan cop accused of beating Hindu man for not fasting

The Malay Mail Online (15.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1XWyi7u> - Pakistani police have arrested a fellow officer after he was accused of beating up an elderly Hindu man for not fasting during Ramadan, an incident that sparked a social media outcry.

The elderly man was pictured bloodied after the attack which reportedly took place in Ghotki district of Sindh province on Saturday just before sunset. The images were widely shared over the weekend.

Activists and outraged Pakistanis using the hashtag #JusticeforGokalDas called for the officer who allegedly attacked him to be arrested.

"Religion doesn't mean forced fasting & terrorising the weak. Shame on those who did this," tweeted one Pakistani user.

"Deplorable! Non-muslims should be allowed to eat food anytime they want. Stop terrorising them," said another.

Bilawal Bhutto, daughter of Pakistan's slain prime minister Benazir, later tweeted that the police officer had been taken into custody.

Local police confirmed the arrest and told AFP an inquiry was being conducted.

"Strict action will be taken against the police official and a senior police officer will go to meet the victim and seek an apology to give a better image of the police to the public," a statement said.

Eating or drinking in daylight hours during Ramadan is a crime for Muslims in Pakistan. They can be fined or even jailed for up to three months.

The restrictions do not apply to other religions.

Ramadan is the most sacred month of the Islamic calendar and Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset every day during the whole month.

Muslim villagers donate to build church for Christian neighbours

A Muslim community in Pakistan has donated money to build a church for Christians in the community.

By Hannah Tooley

Premier.org.uk (13.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1S56Zip> - The move shows religious solidarity six years after the Christian community was attacked in the area.

Villagers in Khaksabad are donating towards the building of a new mud chapel for the Christian community.

Funds are being given after their previous church was swept away by the monsoon rains, according to The Independent.

Dilawar Hussain, a Muslim shopkeeper, told Asia News: "I learnt about the project in a community meeting last month.

"A church is also a house of Allah; praying is what matters.

"We worship the same God."

People in the community are giving as much as they can spare, with donations ranging between £20 and £105.

Villager Ijaz Farooq told the BBC: "After local riots, we are trying to bring people together even more.

"We have increased our activity so we don't have to face something like that.

"By building this church, we want to show that we are united as a community."

Once the building is complete, Christians in the village will not have to rent or borrow a house to celebrate Christmas or Easter, or gather together anymore.

Pakistani parents press blasphemy charges to fix teacher who thrashed kids

Naradanews.com (05.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1WNoYSr> - An Arabic teacher in south western Pakistan has been sent to judicial custody on charges of blasphemy.

The teacher at a Government High School in Gurumani, in Muzafargarh was arrested in May following complaints from the parents of two students.

The school suspended the teacher after the parents complained that he had thrashed the two brothers for coming late to class.

The parents of the Class six students slapped blasphemy charges four days after the teacher was suspended.

What followed next was right out of an all too familiar script.

A murderous mob soon surrounded the school shouting slogans against the Arabic teacher.

Qazi Mohammed Ajmal, the head teacher of the school locked up the Arabic teacher in a class room.

He was later handed over to the police.

Ajmal said the parents had only cited that their children were thrashed and there was no mention of

blasphemy in the original complaint.

But he later said there were conflicting statements from students that the Arabic teacher had made blasphemous remarks now as well as in the past.

The police officer who made the arrest claimed that the accused seemed to be suffering from "psychological issues".

Pakistan's draconian blasphemy law which can be invoked on the statement of a lone witness has been widely misused to settle personal scores and business rivalries. Most of those who have been targeted have been the countries religious minorities like Christians, Sikhs, Hindus and Ahmadis.

While several other countries have laws to punish those whose expressions are deemed blasphemous, Pakistan leads the world in the invocation of this law.

Sections 295 and 298 of Pakistan Penal Code mandates death penalty, life imprisonment or fine for blasphemy.

At least a 100 are arrested every year on charges of "insulting Islam or Prophet Mohammed". The South Asian nation also has scores of undertrials languishing in its prisons, waiting for their case to come up for hearing. It also has the notorious record of having handed down dozens of life terms and death sentences under this controversial law.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) said in its 2016 report that it was aware of "40 individuals currently sentenced to death or serving life sentences for blasphemy in Pakistan".

A major international campaign is underway to seek clemency for Asia Bibi who was the first Pakistani woman to be sentenced to death in Pakistan for blasphemy. Pope Benedict had also sought pardon for the mother of five children in 2010. France, Italy and Spain had offered her and family asylum if she is released.

The poor farm hand who was living in a suburb of the eastern city of Lahore was accused of using a metal cup used by her Muslim co-workers to drink water. She was sentenced to the death in November 2010 after a neighbour complained that she had made blasphemous remarks against the Prophet.

It is said the complainant had a running feud with Asia and her family over property.

Even though dozens have been on death row, Pakistan has never executed any one for blasphemy. Those who have been acquitted live in the constant fear of being attacked by vigilante groups.

Several have been lynched by mobs as soon as the accusations were made. police say they often arrest the accused to save them from the mobs.

Rimsha Masih, a 14 year old Christian girl who was falsely accused by a cleric of burning the Holy Koran had to go into hiding for months after her acquittal.

Salman Taseer, the influential governor of eastern Punjab province who helped Bibi file a mercy petition and talked about the need for reforms to the harsh law, was assassinated by his security guard Mumtaz Qadri in January 2011 in Islamabad.

Two months after Taseer's killing, Shahbaz Bhatti who was Pakistan's minorities minister was gunned down by extremists in the country's capital.

The lone Christian in the Pakistani cabinet had called for amendments to the blasphemy law that has been widely misused to target religious minorities in the Muslim majority nation.

Its also in Lahore, the provincial capital of Punjab that Khatm-e-Nubuwwat Lawyer Forum or the Movement for the Finality of the Prophethood operates.

This sinister organisation was responsible for the spurt in the prosecutions of those accused of blasphemy in the country, Reuters said in a report in March.

Ghulam Mustafa Chaudhry who leads the organisation say they have lawyers across Pakistan who provide free legal assistance to those who file complaints against alleged blasphemers.

Defendants quoted by Reuters allege that Chaudhury and his lawyers, often accompanied by a band of clerics, intimidate them in court with threats and slogan shouting.

Chaudhury, who unsuccessfully pleaded Qadri's case say there are some 700 lawyers in their collective in Punjab province which has registered the maximum number of cases.

The largely feudal Punjab is also home to majority of the country's religious minorities.

Lahore Provincial Governments forced church land acquisition leads to legal battle over ownership of four of the oldest churches in Pakistan

British Pakistani Christian Association (03.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1XoY0AL> - The letter demanded sale of the Cathedral land quoting acquisition laws and was written as if no option was open to the owners of the land. The church leadership were advised that the land was to be used as a pumping station, as part of the introduction of Lahore Cities

new underground metro system, that would revolutionize local travel and help develop a new era for local people. Sadly for the cathedral this new plan for modernisation and expansion of the local economy meant the church had to be demolished to make way for the new underground rail system. On reading the ransom letter the Dean of the Cathedral Revd Shahid Mehraj in the presence of Bishop Irfan Jamil, along with the support of the Parish Council sent a letter refusing to sell on 15th March 2016. Revd Shahid Mehraj later discovered that three other churches had been affected by the Orange Lines proposal and after meeting Revd Hanooq Haq at St Andrews Church (est 1860), Revd Majeed Able at Nau Lakha Presbyterian Church (est 1860) and Revd Arshad Gill of St Paul's Church, it was agreed that Revd Shahid Mehraj would lead a campaign to end the demolition of the churches.

The Lahore Diocesan Council then submitted an application to the Lahore Development Authority (LDA) calling for their Urban Development Department to alter the plans for the route of the new Orange Lines Metro system in order to preserve some of Pakistan's oldest churches - properties deemed to be of high heritage value to the Christians of Pakistan. A similar letter was sent to Lahore Orange Lines Metro Train (LOLMT), calling for the same conditions.

Under the leadership of Revd Shahid Mehraj a protest was held in collaboration with the clergy and parishioners of all four churches on 23rd March 2016. Demonstrators demanded safety for all four church buildings and a review of the Orange Lines project in Lahore. The protest gained much publicity and in a resulting post-initiation consultation presided over by the Commissioner of Lahore (Chief Executive), Captain R Usman and attended by Church leaders they have verbally agreed terms for a suitable alternative to demolition of the churches. To ensure the LDA maintain their concession a writ petition was submitted to Lahore High Court on 2nd April 2016. A temporary stay order was placed on the LDA and LOLMT on 4th April 2016 with a final judgement expected today 6th June 2016. Affected Churches are calling for the global Christian church to pray for success with this legal action. Revd Shahid Mehraj, said:

"Christians in Lahore have suffered a huge onslaught in the last three years. Two bomb attacks have decimated and demoralized our community, the attack on St Josephs colony saw over 150 homes burned to the ground and two churches in 2013 and now this? It is clear the Government of Pakistan and its Muslim populace do not want Christians to remain in our country, but we will do all we can to do preserve our heritage, culture and faith. We have now done all we can and the decision is in God's hands, so we urge our Christian brothers across the world to pray for our situation and for a just decision through His divine intervention"

The new proposals if accepted will now circumvent the church buildings but will require the Cathedral to temporarily demolish a main school wall. However the 'cut and shut' process will involve the digging of deep trenches, installation of the framework for the tubelines and then the covering over of the network and reinstatement of the land. The churches had called for a relocation of the underground rail network so that the vibrations and noise of the orange lines network would not affect their church buildings or interrupt their services, however both the LDA and LOLMT were not willing to even reconsider a reroute. Initial LDA demands at the post-initiation consultation (itself a malpractice as consultation are legally required to be before any construction begins) began with an offer of 750,000 rupees per marla (30.25 sq yards) of land insisting the churches be demolished, a risible figure at only a fraction of the lands worth. However after a lot of wrangling and a threatened long term international media campaign the churches thwarted the destruction of these major Christian heritage sites.

Our Faisalabad Officer Kanwal Amar a former Tehsil Councillor and Lahore officer Naveed have been following the story diligently and providing assistance and advice. They spoke with Senator Kamran Michael who expressed his regret at the government proposal.

Kanwal Amar said:

"The routing of a rail system of this nature through a heavily Christian area can only be viewed as a deliberate attempt to undermine the community. Moreover the targeting of our oldest and largest churches is an attack of the lowest order which has totally demoralized Lahore based Christians. The lack of consultation by the LDA, LOLMT and the Traffic Engineering & Transport Planning Agency (TETPA) is in breach of planning laws - quite simply the planned construction should not be allowed to proceed."

Wilson Chowdhry Chairman of the BPCA, said:

"The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has stayed silent on this matter much as it did while ancient Christian monuments and buildings were eradicated from IS held zones in the middle-east. Their silence on the destruction in Iraq was maligned, despite a lack of any influence over IS. Their silence on this proposed destruction in Pakistan, a country where they are already funding protection of several Muslim heritage sites, reeks of a lack of impetus, fortitude, and desire. The removal of these church buildings is a clear attempt at annihilating Christianity from Pakistan and can only be viewed as one prong of a multifaceted approach to an ongoing genocide in Pakistan."

He added:

"To put things in perspective I remind people that these churches predate Pakistan by over a century and have served Christians well, so well that all these churches are still full to the brim with congregations in their thousands at the larger churches. Demolishing these building would be like destroying Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral, St Paul's Cathedral and St Pancras Church to make way for a London underground extension. Not only would the decision be assessed as absurd but the demand would also create great furore here in the UK - even from non-Christians, simply due to the loss of great heritage sites."

Annual Persecution of Ahmadis report: The state sanctioned apartheid continues...

According to the report, 1570 news items and more than 334 articles in Urdu papers spewed hatred against the Ahmadiyya community

By Umer Ali

The Nation (10.05.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1T9Gqji> - "We broke the necks of Ahmadis and buried them forever," exclaimed former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Raja Pervez Ashraf in a recent PPP gathering. Top leadership of PPP, including Bilawal Bhutto, was present but no one objected to his remarks.

This recent statement by a prominent PPP leader tells of the desperation with which the party has been trying to gain the long-last relevance. However, by playing the 'Ahmadiyya card', it might be repeating the mistakes that were committed by the party founder, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Being a socialist, with a non-religious persona, Bhutto was a populist leader who could go to any extreme to maintain his popularity and remain in power. Under the pressure from an alliance of religious parties, he was forced to discuss the Ahmadiyya issue in the

parliament, which ultimately resulted in them being constitutionally declared as non-Muslims.

The notorious 2nd Amendment was perfected by the dictator Zia, who under Ordinance XX slapped several bans on Ahmadis – a blatant violation of human rights. Under this draconian law, any person, who identifies himself as an Ahmadi would not be allowed to practice his religion, call his place of worship a mosque or even greet others with 'Assalam-o-alikum'. Anyone disobeying these laws would be imprisoned for 3 years and subjected to heavy fine.

Under this ordinance, an Ahmadi identifying himself as a Muslim or preaching his faith among others would also be considered breaching the law and subjected to imprisonment and fine.

With this horrendous persecution perpetrated by the state itself, Ahmadis face hatred and insults in their everyday life. There are groups working for decades against Ahmadis, spewing venom against their faith and narrowing around their lives.

In their annual 'Persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan' report, the Ahmadiyya community has highlighted discrimination faced by them.

The report opens with discussion about forced ban on Ahmadiyya literature – used mostly by Ahmadis – while anti-Ahmadi books like Tohfa Qadianiat by Maulana Yousaf Ludhianvi is available at every bookshop. In the book, Ludhianvi calls cleaning Ahmadis off the face of Earth. While under NAP, various mosques have been closed and literature nabbed, one wonders why such books, spreading vile hatred for Ahmadis, are still available.

On the contrary, Abdus Shakoor, an elderly shopkeeper in Rabwah was arrested and tried under ATA court and sentenced to 8 years imprisonment for selling Ahmadiyya literature. Government of Punjab, under the recommendation of Mutahiddah Ulama Board, has banned more than 90 Ahmadiyya books – including the works of the sect's founding fathers.

Ahmadis faced many attacks in 2015 with the one on an Ahmadi-owned factory in Jhelum being the most prominent one. The factory, which employed workers from all sects, was burnt to ashes over mere allegations of blasphemy.

An employee was accused of committing burning the pages of Quran in the furnace, which actually were the old copies of Ahmadiyya newspaper, Al-Fazl. Without any police investigation or solid evidence, the rumors was spread to the neighboring villages where masses were incited through loudspeakers – a clear violation of NAP. The mob gathered around the factory and employees, who lived at premises with their families, had to run through the forests and hills to save their lives.

Minarets of an Ahmadi 'place of worship' were razed to ground by the police because it was similar to the 'Muslims' mosque'.

Mutahiddah Ulama Board is headed by Maulana Fazl-ur-Raheem Ashrafi, who is the lead speaker at anti-Ahmadi conferences. Ahmadiyya community sent a letter to CM Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif to replace him with someone having a neutral stance about Ahmadis but to no avail.

According to the press release, 1570 news items and more than 334 articles in Urdu papers spewed hatred against the Ahmadiyya community.

This maddening hate and prejudice against a minority sect, which has essentially reduced itself to their homes and a closed community is unprecedented. From the state-

sponsored apartheid of this small group to innumerable religious organizations working on the one-point agenda of demonizing Ahmadis.

Partly due to the fears of being booked under the law and partly due to the risk of being violently attacked, Ahmadis have ceded all public space. They rarely identify themselves as belonging to Ahmadiyya sect – only to be isolated and frowned upon by the significant majority.

One wonders, what drives these zealots to hate a small community, which probably doesn't even make 1% of Pakistan's population?

Isn't it time for the government to amend the discriminatory laws against Ahmadis, allowing them to at least practice their religion freely – a right bestowed upon every human being at the time of their birth.

Bilawal Bhutto, after severe criticism on social media over Pervez Ashraf's statement tweeted, "Politicians have no right to comment or question people's faith. History has thought us politicization of faith has lethal consequences for all." In an apparent reference to his grandfather's mistake, he rightly stated that amalgamating religion with politics could have disastrous consequences.

As I write this, news of Sadiq Khan being elected as the mayor of London have been doing rounds. Many in Pakistan are celebrating as I wonder when we will elect an Ahmadi Chief Minister Punjab.

Pakistani activist who condemned religious extremism gunned down

By Holly Yan and Sophia Saifi

CNN (08.05.2016) - <http://cnn.it/1ZwH4pA> - Khurram Zaki spent years denouncing Islamic extremists in his homeland. He apparently paid for it with his life.

The Pakistani human rights activist was gunned down at a restaurant in Karachi on Saturday night, fellow activist and lawyer Jibran Nasir said.

The Hakimullah faction of the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for Zaki's death.

"Our four friends in Karachi riding on two motorcycles targeted Khurram Zaki successfully," faction spokesman Qari Saifullah said.

Zaki, 40, was an editor for "Let Us Build Pakistan" -- a blog aimed at supporting "a progressive, inclusive and democratic Pakistan." He was known for condemning radical militants such as the Pakistani Taliban.

"His death is the grim reminder that whoever raises voice against Taliban ... in Pakistan will not be spared," the blog stated Sunday. "And when they have to murder, they never fail."

'A principled and courageous stance'

One of Zaki's most notable acts came after the Pakistani Taliban killed at least 145 people, including 132 children, in the 2014 Peshawar school massacre.

Zaki stood up to radical cleric Maulana Abdul Aziz, who had refused to condemn the attack. The activist led a public campaign against the controversial imam, who revered Osama bin Laden.

"Khurram Zaki took a principled and courageous stance," Zaki's website stated after his death.

The blogger may have predicted his own killing. Zaki had told Nasir that he was getting threats from unknown sources due to his activism, Nasir said Sunday.

Parliamentarian Nafisa Shah mourned Zaki's death.

"Shocked and grieved to learn that a courageous rights activist #KhurramZaki has been killed in targeted attack in #Karachi," Shah tweeted. "Terrible news."

An international trend

Zaki's death in Pakistan comes after a spate of deadly attacks against Bangladeshi activists.

In the past two years, at least eight atheists and gay rights campaigners have been killed in Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi bloggers speak out despite danger

The situation in Pakistan has become more dangerous in recent years, Human Rights Watch said.

"Pakistani journalists and activists faced an increasingly hostile climate in 2015 due to harassment, threats, and violence from both state security forces and militant groups," the group said in its World Report 2016.

Pakistan Taliban faction claims park attack on Lahore Christians

A Taliban splinter group says it carried out a suicide attack on a park in Lahore, Pakistan, which killed more than 70 people, including children.

BBC (28.03.2016) - <http://bbc.in/1qarfJL> - Jamaat-ul-Ahrar said it had targeted Christians celebrating Easter, though police have said they are still investigating the claim.

There were scenes of carnage as parents searched for children amid the debris.

Pakistan's president condemned the attack, and the regional government has announced three days of mourning.

At least 300 people were injured, with officials saying they expected the death toll to rise.

All major hospitals in the area were put on an emergency footing after the blast, early on Sunday evening.

Analysis: M Ilyas Khan, BBC News, Islamabad

The bombing of the amusement park on Easter Sunday was the bloodiest attack on Christians in Pakistan since the 2013 Peshawar church bombing that killed more than 80 people.

But many believe there may be a wider context to the latest attack - 27 March was the deadline set by an alliance of more than 30 religious groups for the provincial government of Punjab to withdraw a new women's rights law they oppose.

And supporters of Mumtaz Qadri, a police guard executed last month for the 2011 killing of a provincial governor who advocated reform of the blasphemy laws, have also launched protests. They brought forward the customary 40th day mourning for Qadri by 13 days to coincide with 27 March and several thousand have now occupied a high-security zone in Islamabad to press demands which include the implementation of Sharia law.

Sunday's carnage in Lahore was claimed by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, an increasingly effective faction of the Pakistani Taliban which has carried out several attacks in the north-western Peshawar valley region during the last few months.

Soft target

Lahore is one of Pakistan's most liberal and wealthy cities. It is the political powerbase of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and has seen relatively few terror attacks in recent years.

A spokesman for Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, Ehsanullah Ehsan, said the group wanted to send a message to Mr Sharif that they "have entered Lahore", and threatened further attacks.

Jamaat-ul-Ahrar is a breakaway group from Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan. It has carried out several other attacks on Pakistani civilians and security forces in recent months.

Mr Sharif expressed "grief and sorrow over the sad demise of innocent lives". He has postponed a planned trip to the UK.

The explosion, believed to have been carried out by one suicide bomber, hit the main gate to the Gulshan-e-Iqbal park in the early evening, a short distance from the children's playground.

Officials said the device had been packed with ball bearings.

One man, who gave his name as Danish, said the park had been so full when he arrived he had not been able to enter.

"We went to a canteen to have something to eat, when there was suddenly a big blast," he told Reuters.

"Everyone went panic, running to all directions. Many of them were blocked at the gate of the park. Dead bodies can be found everywhere."

Hasan Imran, 30, a local resident, told Reuters: "When the blast occurred, the flames were so high they reached above the trees and I saw bodies flying in the air."

One man told Pakistan's Geo TV station he was heading towards a fairground ride with his wife and two children when he heard a huge bang and all four of them were thrown to the floor.

Another man, who did not give his name, told the Associated Press he had taken 20 children to hospital, saying: "I can't explain to you the tragic situation."

Police chief Haider Ashraf said the park had been a soft target for the militants, saying that while Pakistan is "in a warlike situation" there had been no specific alert issued for the park.

Shebaz Sharif, the chief minister of Punjab, later tweeted: "Words cannot describe agony we are in to see our children's blood spilled by cowards."

He said that those who target civilians "do not deserve to be called humans" and that Pakistan would "make sure that your terror infrastructure is dismantled completely".

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called the attack "appalling", saying the perpetrators should "be brought swiftly to justice".

Pakistan has suffered regular incidents of Taliban-related violence, sectarian strife and criminal gang activity.

Plight of Pakistani Christian asylum seekers in Thailand

Minority Concern of Pakistan (10.03.2016) - Due to relentless violence, discrimination, harassment and persecution, Pakistani Christians are migrating from their birthplace to an uncertain world for safety and security. They are leaving their homes, jobs, identity and family members behind to start a new life somewhere else as they feel that their motherland is not accepting them. Retired Bishop Alexander John Malik of the Church of Pakistan said that some 100,000 people left Pakistan in the recent past, as repeated persecution is worsening in Pakistan.

In 2009, two Christian localities were attacked in the Gojra district, in which Churches and Christian houses were burnt and seven Christians, including young children and women, were burned alive. Again, in 2013, Muslims accused an illiterate Christian man for blasphemy and an enraged mob attacked on Joseph Colony, a Christian locality in Lahore, Pakistan. After these violent attacks, under the fear of violence, thousands of Christians (men, women and children) left Pakistan. Few flee to developed countries, but the majority of them flee to nearby Asian countries, especially to Thailand to get refugee status through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They took flight to Thailand as it is easy to get a tourist visa and also the travel cost is not that high.

More than 11,000 Pakistani Christians are in Thailand now. However, life is still hard for them. Those who arrived in Thailand for resettlement, found themselves at the dead end because they are not recognised as refugee and have no rights over there. Asylum seekers have to wait up to 3 to 5 years for their case to be processed by the UNHCR (United Nations' refugee agency). Unfortunately, Thailand is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, so asylum seekers are not protected over there. At arrival, they don't get a long-term visa or refugee status. They only get a tourist visa for less than a month. Renewal of the visa is expensive and complicated. Delay in asylum cases causes visa expiration and because of that they are considered illegal immigrants. Therefore, time and again, hundreds of these asylum seekers have been arrested by the local police. They are chained and put in jail. The most tragic part is that there is no exception for women and children. In some cases, children are taken from their mothers when their mothers are sent to jail. Some asylum seekers are locked up in the cells with criminals. Money is needed to be paid to be granted a bail. The cost of the bail is usually about £900. However, since they are not allowed to work, they have no means of making money to pay for bail. There are cases in which some die in jail. After getting bail they put in a detention centre.

Despite having UNHCR documents, the UNHCR is unable to protect them from arrests. Due to not being allowed to work, it is hard to survive for years on their own resources during the waiting time of their asylum application. They live in overcrowded rooms and struggle to meet their daily needs. In those extreme difficult circumstances, they are vulnerable to violence, extortion and bribery.

According to the All Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief, UK, "These asylum seekers often live in a desperate state of poverty with little or no access of job opportunities, education and healthcare."

Locally, there are few charities, mainly church based organisations and individuals, who have been helping these helpless people, but the situation is grave and the need is huge. Though, Thailand is not the signatory of the refugee convention, it still has an obligation to treat these asylum seekers humanely as it is a signatory of other international laws, which provide protection to asylum seekers.

Christians are only 1.6 percent of the total population of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Pakistani lawyers' group behind spike in blasphemy cases

Reuters (06.03.2016) - <http://reut.rs/21gqxWE> - A little-known alliance of hundreds of lawyers in Pakistan is behind the rise in prosecutions for blasphemy, a crime punishable by death that goes to the heart of an ideological clash between reformers and religious conservatives.

The group, whose name translates as The Movement for the Finality of the Prophethood, offers free legal advice to complainants and has packed courtrooms with representatives, a tactic critics say is designed to help it gain convictions.

The stated mission of the Khatm-e-Nubuwwat Lawyers' Forum and its leader Ghulam Mustafa Chaudhry is uncompromising: to use its expertise and influence to ensure that anyone insulting Islam or the Prophet Mohammad is charged, tried and executed.

"Whoever does this (blasphemy), the punishment is only death. There is no alternative," Chaudhry told supporters crammed into his small office behind the towering red-brick High Court building in the eastern city of Lahore.

The campaign could complicate the government's tentative efforts to reform blasphemy legislation, a tough task in a country where support for the law is widespread.

Chaudhry was the defence lawyer for Mumtaz Qadri, executed on Monday for gunning down the popular governor of Punjab province in 2011 over his criticism of the blasphemy law.

Chaudhry argued, ultimately unsuccessfully, that the bodyguard was justified in killing Salman Taseer, because he committed blasphemy by publicly questioning the law.

In death, Qadri was a hero for many. Tens of thousands of people gathered in a park in the city of Rawalpindi for his funeral on Tuesday, showering his casket with flowers.

"He lives! Qadri lives!" supporters around the coffin cried. "From your blood, the revolution will come!"

Even discussing blasphemy is a challenge in Pakistan, and officials and activists say accusations can be used by complainants to settle personal scores and intimidate liberal journalists, lawyers and politicians.

At the same time, authorities are seeking to reduce room for abuse by insisting senior police officers are involved in cases and ruling that criticising the law does not constitute blasphemy itself.

Qadri's execution was seen as a sign itself that the government was determined to take firmer action, and it coincides with a nationwide crackdown by the powerful military on Islamist militants and their religious allies.

Jails filling up

Since Khatm-e-Nubuwwat was founded 15 years ago, the number of criminal blasphemy cases filed in Punjab, the group's home base and Pakistan's most populous province, had tripled to 336 by 2014, according to police figures.

It fell to 210 in 2015 as stricter provincial rules were applied, but critics said the number was still too high.

Chaudhry told Reuters he had personally been involved in more than 50 criminal blasphemy cases, and said his group had grown to 700 lawyers in Punjab, where the majority of blasphemy cases are heard.

"If they hear of a complaint, the lawyers will come to the person and offer to take the case for free," said a policeman, who asked not to be named to avoid reprisals.

"Sometimes they arrive with people and encourage them to make a complaint."

Chaudhry said his group represented almost every complainant in cases across Punjab province. Reuters could not independently confirm this.

Reuters was also unable to determine if the movement has funding or any other form of backing from a specific group or groups, but Chaudhry said its motivation was not financial.

"Everyone knows that we are the forum that does these cases voluntarily," he told Reuters. "So they contact us and tell us that there is a case to do."

He said member lawyers investigated cases to ensure they were genuine, although they had not found an unjustified blasphemy complaint yet.

The law dates back to colonial times, but was rarely implemented until about 20 years ago.

It states that anyone found to have defiled the name of Prophet Mohammad in writing or speech, including by "innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly", should be punished with life imprisonment or death.

In 1990, that was strengthened to "death and nothing else".

No one in Pakistan has been executed for blasphemy so far, but jails are filling up with those sentenced to death, and there have been sporadic assassinations of the accused and people involved in their defence.

At least 65 people, including lawyers, defendants and judges, have been murdered over blasphemy allegations since 1990, according to figures from a Center for Research and Security Studies report and local media.

Some recent blasphemy cases made headlines around the world, including that of Christian woman Asia Bibi, whose conviction drew international attention including from the Pope. Her case was prosecuted by the Khatm-e-Nubuwwat.

Reema Omer, legal adviser at the International Commission of Jurists, an advocacy group of lawyers and judges, said the rise in blasphemy cases was deepening fears of speaking out.

"After the launch of our report (into blasphemy legislation), we were told by hosts of TV talk shows that they have been cautioned against 'going too far' in their critique of the blasphemy law, especially after recent cases of blasphemy allegations against anchor persons and media houses," she said.

Crowds at court

Chaudhry and his colleagues sometimes arrive in court with dozens of lawyers and supporters, say defence attorneys.

"Their conduct in these cases is ... intimidatory, 100 percent," said defence lawyer Saif-ul-Malook, who said he had defended blasphemy cases in courtrooms full of supporters of the forum.

In one case, a crowd of lawyers left him barely any space to stand and shouted slogans when he spoke to the judge to present his case.

Chaudhry denied the accusations, saying that he was the victim of intimidation by human rights groups, though he did not elaborate.

"We have never had any complaints," he said.

Family members of some blasphemy defendants disagreed.

"From our side there would be one or two lawyers, but from their side there were eight or nine lawyers, 10 or 12 clerics," said Muhammed Aman Ullah Khan, whose wife is being prosecuted for blasphemy by a complainant whose team of lawyers is led by Chaudhry.

"They said it in exactly these words: 'If you want to be shot, then sit behind her [in court]. And if you don't want to be shot, then may you never be seen here again.'"

Chaudhry denied the accusation.

"This has never happened. We respect the families (of the accused)."

That case is being heard at the Lahore High Court.

Changes opposed

Last year, Punjab passed laws requiring blasphemy accusations to be investigated by a senior police officer.

But some police sources said some senior officers were reluctant to be drawn into cases, and many were still being handled by more junior staff.

"People become so emotional when blasphemy is mentioned that they want to take justice into their own hands," said Punjab law minister Rana Sanaullah Khan.

He said some blasphemy accusations were made for ulterior motives, including the theft of land from religious minorities in the overwhelmingly Muslim-majority country of 190 million.

"The matter is often exploited ... You cannot say that this (law) is exploited all the time, but it is very common," he told Reuters.

Also last year, the Supreme Court ruled that criticism of the law did not constitute blasphemy. In January, one of the country's most senior clerics told Reuters that he may be willing to review the law.

However, Khatm-e-Nubuwwat's leaders oppose change, saying it could encourage violence.

"If, God forbid, this law is finished," said forum secretary general Tahir Sultan Khokhar, "then obviously people have been given the right to decide with their own hands, to kill."

Pakistan's religious minorities demand new laws to guarantee civil rights

Christians, Sikhs, Hindus and Kalasha present joint study on personal / family laws and the effects of their absence in Pakistan. Minorities demand to be respected like the Islamic majority. In this way they would retain their identity in the broader socio-cultural context. Among the topics discussed, marriage, divorce, dowry, inheritance, adoption of children.

AsiaNews.it (05.03.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1R2ynUf> - the approval of some basic principles of law for religious minorities to ensure the civil rights of religious communities in Pakistan and keep their separate identity within the wider socio-political fabric. This is the what representatives of the various religious minorities in the country are seeking in a joint proposal presented March 1. The proposal is strongly supported by the National Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) of the Pakistani Bishops' Conference, which since 1985 has worked to protect marginalized communities from discrimination, ensure fair education and freedom of religion or belief.

The analysis presented at a press conference also includes a study on the situation of minorities in the absence of these laws. The CCJP has listened to the opinions of legal experts, scholars, religious leaders and has brought them together in a document entitled "Proposals for principles of family / personal law for religious minorities in Pakistan." These would regulate various aspects: the age at marriage; registration of the marriage and its dissolution; dowries; divorce and any right to maintenance; succession / inheritance; practices for adoption; custody of the children and their illegitimacy.

The conference was attended by leading members of minority groups. Among them, S. Cecil Chaudhry, Executive Director of CCJP; Arifa Shakeel, coordinator of the program for the CCJP; Sarah Quersh, manager of Faiz Foundation Trust; Amarnath Randhawa and Aroon Kumar, respectively president and secretary general of the Hindu SudharSabha Pakistan.

Chaudhry, in considering the condition of human rights of religious minorities - Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Kalasha - said: "We observe that the lack of laws has favored the

increase of stereotypes, lack of understanding, religious fundamentalism, intolerance against traditions and customs of the non-Islamic communities ".

The Catholic leader also stressed that the document in question not only has the basic principles, but also proposes amendments to existing laws. "The Christian Marriage Act of 1872 - he said -, the Anand Marriage Act of 1909 [for the Sikhs, ed] and the Hindu Marriage Bill 2014 require amendments, while the state should seriously consider the formulation of laws for the kalasha community. All the laws that I mentioned have never been changed since their approval. For this reason they do not respond to modern-day needs. "

Chaudhry added that "the Commission believes that this research could be used by the state to write a draft law for the minorities".

Finally, the participants expressed appreciation for the recent approval of the Federal Hindu Marriage Act 2015 [which allows the registration of marriages, ed] and for the various pronouncements of the Supreme Court in the protection and promotion of minorities. But they asked that the legislation to that effect be adopted at both the federal and provincial levels.

Pakistan hangs Mumtaz Qadri for murder of Salman Taseer

Mumtaz Qadri was executed for the 2011 killing of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, who sought to reform blasphemy laws.

Aljazeera (29.02.2016) - <http://bit.ly/24LkFsT> - Pakistan has hanged the assassin of a governor who sought to reform the country's controversial blasphemy laws, officials and supporters said

Mumtaz Qadri - feted as a hero by many supporters - was executed at a prison in Rawalpindi.

"I can confirm that Qadri was hanged in Adialia jail early Monday morning," police official Sajjid Gondal told the AFP news agency.

Qadri, a bodyguard of Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab province, shot him dead in the capital, Islamabad, in 2011.

Dozens of rangers and police in riot gear as well as ambulances were stationed outside Qadri's home in the city early on Monday.

During his trial, Qadri's legal defence was that Taseer opposed Pakistan's so-called blasphemy laws by supporting Christian woman Asia Bibi, who was charged with allegedly desecrating Islam's holy book, the Quran.

Qadri was convicted and sentenced in late 2011. But he is viewed as a hero by many people who thought Taseer was a blasphemer.

Blasphemy is a highly controversial issue in Pakistan, and angry mobs have killed many people accused of insulting Islam in the Muslim-majority country. The law does not define blasphemy but stipulates that the penalty is death.

Since 1990, dozens of people have been extrajudicially killed as a result of blasphemy cases.

The main road between Rawalpindi and the capital Islamabad was blocked by protesters within hours of the hanging.

"At this time, the sentiments of all Muslims have been injured, and our feelings have been badly hurt. For any Muslim believer - no matter what school of thought he belongs to - Ghazi Mumtaz Qadri is a hero of Islam," said Tahir Iqbal Chistie, president of Sunni Tehreek, Rawalpindi Chapter, during the protest.

"He sent to hell a person who showed disrespect for the holy Prophet. What he did was according to the orders of the Quran and the collected reports of what the Prophet Muhammad said and did during his lifetime," he added.

Police later dispersed the demonstrators and closed off the road to prevent more protests.

Qadri's lawyer, Ghulam Mustafa Chaudhry, predicted larger demonstrations coinciding with Qadri's funeral, which his legal group said would be held on Tuesday.

Some lawyers showered Qadri with rose petals when he first arrived in court days after the killing. The judge who first convicted him was forced to flee the country after death threats.

Pakistan hangs killer of Governor who challenged blasphemy law

World Watch Monitor (29.02.2016) - Pakistan has executed the murderer of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, who had justified the 2011 assassination upon Taseer's desire for reforms in the blasphemy law, and for his support of Asia Noreen, a Christian woman condemned to death for blasphemy.

Mumtaz Qadri was hanged early today (Monday, 29 Feb.), after his appeal to the President for mercy had been dismissed.

Pakistan's Christians have been on tenterhooks, waiting to see if the President would let Qadri off his death penalty, as Muslim religious and political parties threatened a backlash if Qadri was executed. Sporadic riots and protests broke out 29 Feb.; A highway was closed for a time, cars and buses set on fire and effigies of the Prime Minister burned.

In January after the appeal on behalf of Qadri went to the President Mamnoon Hussain, Hussain's family was confined to the Presidency, and Hussain's security was increased. Three days before Qadri's execution, two drivers from the President's convoy were arrested and moved to an undisclosed location for interrogation.

Supreme Court lawyer Saif-ul-Malook, the prosecutor in Qadri's trial, and who currently represents Asia Bibi's appeal to the Supreme Court, told World Watch Monitor that Qadri's execution shows Pakistan is committed to fight terrorism.

"It was very difficult to imagine if Pakistan would be able to follow the due course of justice, but the country has shown its will," he said. "The execution has strengthened the fight against extremism."

Taseer's son, Shaan Taseer, posted on Facebook: "A principle has been upheld. I commend the judiciary, the President and the police for staying the course and doing their duty. And I thank them for honouring his memory. Long live Pakistan".

Another son, Shahbaz Taseer, was abducted in Lahore in August 2011; his whereabouts are still unclear.

In May 2011, just months after Taseer was gunned down, Pakistan's Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, the cabinet's only Christian, was shot dead by gunmen who ambushed his car.

Mumtaz Qadri had been hailed across the country as a hero after he killed Salman Taseer in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, on 4 Jan., 2011. Twenty-six-year old Qadri was a member of the governor's security detail when he shot him 27 times - without being stopped by other police officers present. Then he threw down his AK-47 sub-machine gun and reportedly pleaded to be arrested so that he could explain his intentions - that, essentially, his religion compelled him to kill Taseer, a 'blasphemer'.

Noreen, widely known as Asia Bibi, had been arrested in the summer of 2009 for allegedly speaking ill against the Prophet of Islam, and sentenced to death in November 2010. After Pope Benedict XVI pleaded for her release, Taseer, a business tycoon and serving governor of the largest province in Pakistan, went to meet her in prison and had her sign an appeal for mercy to the President.

The religious right in Pakistan carried out massive protests, demanding that Noreen should not be pardoned for any reason. Taseer had also made headlines for demanding an amendment to Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Only four days before his murder, Taseer tweeted:

"I was under huge pressure sure 2 cow down b4 rightest pressure on blasphemy. Refused. Even if I'm the last man standing"

Taseer's body was flown from Islamabad to Lahore, his hometown, for his funeral but his family struggled to find a cleric, after more than 500 religious scholars issued an Islamic decree that it was unlawful to say funeral prayers for Taseer. The top official cleric too backed off at the last moment from offering prayers. Taseer's body was buried amid tight security, while, when Qadri was presented in the court, thousands showered him with rose petals and more than 2,000 lawyers were ready to represent him for free. The trial judge, Pervez Ali Shah, who convicted Qadri in October 2011, was sent to Saudi Arabia for fear of his life after he pronounced the death penalty.

The Supreme Court on 7 October 2015 upheld the decision of the trial court and the Islamabad High Court, and rejected the appeal against Qadri's death sentence. Qadri's defense counsels included renowned lawyers including former Lahore High Court (LHC) Chief Justice Khawaja Sharif and senior LHC Justice Mian Nazeer Akhtar. They had maintained that because the governor called the blasphemy laws "black law", Qadri had the right to kill Taseer.

On 6 Oct., Supreme Court Justice Asif Saeed Khosa, discussing the case, remarked that "criticizing blasphemy laws does not amount to committing blasphemy" and that Qadri had no legal justification to take the law into his own hands.

That Supreme Court decision was welcomed by liberal sections of Pakistan society as a bold step, and as justice taking its due course, but conservative sections saw it as an influence of the West over Pakistan; several of them held Qadri to be a living saint.

The assassin's prosecutor Malook, however, saw the judgment as insufficient without fully addressing the legal questions framed to be discussed in the Supreme Court. One of the five questions was:

Even if [Qadri] entertained an impression about commission of blasphemy by [Taseer] and even if [Qadri] was motivated by any religious sentiment in that regard, still could [Qadri] kill [Taseer] at a time when he was performing the duties of a guard, and was performing official functions, wearing an official uniform, using an official weapon and possessing officially supplied bullets?

The detailed Supreme Court judgment instead discussed the point that Qadri had acted on hearsay:

[Qadri] had never claimed that he had himself heard or read the Asia Bibi-related utterances attributed to Salman Taseer, he had never claimed that he had tried to get his information about commission of the offence of blasphemy by Mr. Salman Taseer verified in any manner whatsoever. He had acted ...on the basis of nothing but hearsay.

The judgment began with the following words:

"Almighty Allah has ordained in the Holy Qur'an that, upon receipt of a news or information, men of faith ought to ascertain correctness of such news or information before they may act upon the same, and that harm may be avoided if such news or information is investigated in the first place."

Commenting on the argument given to explain the judgment, Malook said "The gravity of the matter we can imagine by the fact that the apex court has not fully discussed the five questions it framed for consideration."

Noreen already has spent six years in prison. Her appeal in the Lahore High Court was rejected in October 2014, but the judges identified a technical loophole in the blasphemy law. In July 2015, Noreen was allowed to take her appeal against her death penalty to Pakistan's Supreme Court in Islamabad; her counsel Saif-ul-Malook said that this Court would soon begin hearing it. He sounded confident that the evidence against Noreen 'is not foolproof' and that he was hopeful he could 'bring her out of prison'.

Blasphemy: Some statistics

HRWF (10.02.2016) - According to the Justice and Peace Commission, in the period between 1987 and 2014 a total of 166 Christians have been accused of insulting the Koran or Muhammad and have paid with their lives for their alleged guilt.

In 2015 there were 25 cases. The charges affect not only Christians, but also Muslims, Ahmadis, Hindus and members of other confessions. Between 1986 and 2009 at least 964 people were indicted: among them 479 were Muslims; 119 Christians; 340 Ahmadis; 14 Hindu; 10 from other religions.

According to a recent research of the "International Commission of Jurists" said that in 15 cases out of 25 acquittals by the High Court, blasphemy trials, were "fabricated", while the acquittal in 9 cases was reached due to defects in the investigation and in 2 cases for reasons of insanity.

The anti-blasphemy legislation is mainly abused in poor, rural areas by people who want to settle personal scores. Those acquitted have often been lynched.

Police in Pakistan torture Christian to death, family says.

Morning Star News (16.01.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1Sd9oxd> - Pakistani police last week tortured a devout Catholic to death in Punjab Province after the victim's employer singled him out for a theft charge because of his faith, family members said.

Riasat Masih of Kalaskey village, Purana Kot in Gujranwala District, told Morning Star News that police killed his brother, 47-year-old Liaqat Masih, on Wednesday (Jan. 13) during interrogation in which he was hung upside down and beaten.

For more than a year Liaqat Masih had been employed as a driver for Raza Hameed, and several years previously for Hameed's father, influential Gujranwala politician S.A. Hameed. Both Raza Hameed and S.A. Hameed were present at the police jail during the torture of Liaqat Masih, his brother said, adding that none of the employer's Muslim employees were questioned about the theft last year of millions of rupees in cash and gold jewelry.

"Why was only my brother named and handed over to police custody, while the Muslim employees were not interrogated?" Riasat Masih said. "My brother had honestly served his employers for 15 years, but they did not even consider this fact before turning him in to police custody and asking them to torture him until he 'confessed' to the theft."

Gujranwala Cantt Police arrested Liaqat Masih in mid-November 2015 after Raza Hameed registered a case against him (First Information Report No. 570/15). Riasat Masih said police had failed to produce any evidence against him or extract a confession despite torturing him last week during interrogation.

Riasat Masih said that his brother, who is survived by four children ranging in age from 9 to 20, languished in jail until Jan. 10, when police came for him claiming they had fresh evidence they sought to question him about.

"The police had picked him up and moved him to a private torture cell, and we were unable to trace his location for nearly four days," he said. "Then someone told us that he had been moved to the Gujranwala Cantt police station, but that they would not show his formal arrest in official records until they had managed to extract a confession from him. We immediately hired a lawyer and filed a *habeas corpus* petition in court, which deputed a bailiff to raid the police station and produce Liaqat in court."

After the bailiff's raid and Liaqat Masih's subsequent appearance in court, police obtained a four-day physical custody of the accused. Police meantime also arrested his eldest son, Khurram Masih, who had been named as an accomplice in the theft case despite having almost no contact with his father at work, he said.

Attorneys had obtained interim bail for Khurram Masih to keep police from mistreating him as well, "but they still arrested him even though his protective bail was intact," Riasat Masih said.

"The police then tortured both father and son, beating them up mostly in front of each other," he said. "On the night of Jan. 13, Liaqat's frail body couldn't take any more beatings, and he succumbed to his internal injuries. Khurram, who was tortured so badly that he can barely stand now, has told us that the night his father died, the police had hung him [Liaqat Masih] upside down with a rope and beat him up indiscriminately."

Officers also denied water to Liaqat Masih, whose shoulder was dislocated, he said. The brutal violence last week was carried out on the orders of Raza Hameed and S.A. Hameed, a senior leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party in Gujranwala, who along

with Raza Hameed and another son, Ahsan Hameed, came to the police station to get the two Christian men tortured in their presence, Riasat Masih said.

Raza Hameed, S.A. Hameed and local police officials could not be reached for comment.

Police handed over Liaqat Masih's body to the family early Thursday morning (Jan. 14) but refused to give them a copy of the autopsy that had been carried out without the family's knowledge, Riasat Masih said. Accompanied by a large number of village Christians, the family then went out to the main highway carrying the body in protest.

"We were demanding a fair probe into the killing and for registration of a murder case against those responsible for his death," Riasat Masih said. "Rather than listening to our grievance, the police attacked us with batons and sticks and threatened to arrest and torture Christian youths if we did not stop demanding registration of a case against the police officials. Several women were also injured in the police baton attack, so we retreated to our homes with Liaqat's body and have now decided that we won't bury him until a case is registered against Inspector Sajid Suhal, Investigation Officer Amin Butt and the sons of S.A. Hameed, Raza and Ahsan, on whose orders the police were acting."

Nazir S. Bhatti, president of the Pakistan Christian Congress political party, in a statement released over the weekend demanded Punjab Province Chief Minister Mian Shehbaz Sharif arrest S.A. Hameed and the chief and investigator of the Gujranwala Cantt police station for the torture and killing of Liaqat Masih.

Family members identified marks of torture on the body, which was still lying at the family's house in Kalaskey village as area police pressured relatives to bury him with assurances that the officers responsible for the killing would be arrested. Family members and other area sources said the accused police officers, however, were moving freely in the area, indicating authorities had no intention of arresting them.

Catholics oppose Ulema's revision of blasphemy laws

The Council for the Islamic ideology has proposed to amend the blasphemy laws in order to bring them into line with the Koran and the Sunna. Catholics fear a further tightening of laws which have already led to violence. Between 1987 and 2014, 166 Christians sentenced to death for insulting Muhammad; another 25 cases in 2015.

AsiaNews.it (02.01.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1T7sNP5> - The Catholic Church of Pakistan and Christian activists condemn the proposed revision of the blasphemy laws by the Council for Islamic ideology. Catholics are concerned about the initiative which was proposed by the head of the ulema in recent days and finds that an amendment by the Islamic leaders can lead "to a further tightening of such laws", which have already caused hundreds of incidents of violence and death sentences handed down against Catholics and "heretics".

The Catholic Church in Pakistan swiftly rejected Muhammad Khan Sherani's proposal. The initiative of the head of the Council was reported by Reuters, according to whom the religious leader said the Council was willing "to reopen cases and examine if judgments were rigorous and the death penalty correctly imposed".

The Council for the Islamic ideology is a constitutional body in Pakistan, which is supposed to advise government regarding compliance of State laws to the dictates of the Koran and the Sunna. In this regard, Sherani said: "The government of Pakistan should defer the blasphemy law to the Islamic Council. On this issue there are different opinions

among the religious. That is why the Council can seriously address the matter and say whether it is necessary to confirm the law, tighten it or soften it".

Christian leaders fear, however, that a review by the ulema could lead to more restrictions against minorities. In Pakistan, many Catholics are tried for blasphemy, often without evidence. There are also numerous incidents of violence against religious groups considered "heretics".

Fr. Emmanuel Yousaf Mani, director of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Bishops' Conference of Pakistan, expresses deep concern about the proposal. "The ulema – he told *AsiaNews* – may even worsen the law. It is true that there are gaps that need to be addressed and also that sometimes there is an inappropriate use of the law, but we are concerned. These advisory bodies should not exist. The government should adopt their own procedures to change the blasphemy laws. "

Samson Salamat, director of the *Center for Human Rights Education*, believes that similar bodies "undermine the power of Parliament. If they change the law, nobody will have the chance to change the verdict. We have been asking for some time for the abolition of the current blasphemy laws, but this power cannot be left in the hands of just one body. This is unconstitutional and undemocratic".

He concludes: "We can only accept the opinion of Parliament, representing 182 million Pakistanis. Parliamentarians should discuss this topic and appoint legal experts who can provide critical analysis".

According to the Justice and Peace Commission, in the period between 1987 and 2014 a total of 166 Christians have been accused of insulting the Koran or Muhammad and have paid with their lives for their alleged guilt.

In 2015 there were 25 cases. The charges affect not only Christians, but also Muslims, Ahmadis, Hindus and members of other confessions. Between 1986 and 2009 at least 964 people were indicted: among them 479 were Muslims; 119 Christians; 340 Ahmadis; 14 Hindu; 10 from other religions.

USCIRF calls for the immediate release of Abdul Shakoor and the dropping of all charges

USCIRF (01.02.2016) - <http://1.usa.gov/1P5FSFL> - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) strongly condemns the arrest, detention, and sentencing of Abul Shakoor, an 80-year-old optician, for propagating the Ahmadiyya Muslim faith, which is banned in Pakistan.

On December 2, 2015, Mr. Shakoor was charged with propagating the Ahmadiyya Muslim faith, a crime under the Pakistani Penal Code, and stirring up "religious hatred" and "sectarianism," a crime under the 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act. Mr. Shakoor was arrested in his optical store after he was falsely accused of selling an Ahmadiyya commentary on the Holy Qur'an, among other publications, to an undercover police officer. On January 2, 2016, he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment under Penal Code Section 298C and three years under the Anti-Terrorism Act, with the sentences to run concurrently. His store manager Mazhar Sipra, a Shi'a, also was arrested and sentenced to five years under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

USCIRF Chairman Robert P. George said, "USCIRF calls on the Pakistani government to immediately release Mr. Shakoor and drop all charges against him. His arrest and sentencing are outrageous enough, but more egregious is the fact that Pakistani

constitutional and penal code provisions prevent Ahmadis from exercising their faith and even calling themselves Muslim, and that the country uses anti-terrorism laws as pretexts for denying peaceful citizens the fundamental human right to religious freedom.”

Ahmadis in Pakistan are subject to severe legal restrictions, both in the constitution and criminal code, and suffer from officially-sanctioned discrimination. Ahmadis also continue to be murdered in religiously-motivated attacks that take place with impunity. Pakistan’s constitution declares Ahmadis to be “non-Muslims,” and the penal code make it criminal for Ahmadis to refer to themselves as Muslims; preach, propagate, or disseminate materials on their faith; or refer to their houses of worship as mosques.

“The arrest and sentencing of Mr. Shakoor is another example of Pakistan’s systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief,” said Chairman George. “Both Mr. Shakoor and Mr. Sipra should be released immediately and all charges dropped. Furthermore, it is the duty of the Pakistani government to ensure the safety of both men. Members of Pakistan’s Ahmadiyya community, as well as Shi’a Muslims, Christians, Hindus and others, deserve to have their basic human right to religious freedom both respected and protected by their government.”

USCIRF since 2002 has recommended that Pakistan be named a “country of particular concern” (CPC) by the State Department 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 USCIRF’s 2015 Annual Report chapter on Pakistan [here](#).

Lahore church burnt in suspicious circumstances alleged to be arson attack

British Pakistani Christian Association (11.01.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1RljD27> - New Apostolic church in Bathth village, 80 km away from Lahore on the Multan road was burnt after a new year celebration on Wednesday 6th January. The incident has created great suspicion and fear amongst the local Christian community who believe it was a religious attack.

The local Pastor Yaqoob Saraoya described how he had shut the church at around 12:00am and received a call only an hour later that the building was ablaze. He arrived back at the church within minutes and with local Christian villagers was able to put out the fire within an hour, with no assistance from the local fire service.

Believing it was an act of arson in response to the exuberance of their worship and celebrations, Pastor Yaqoob called the local Manga Police Station. The Station Head Officer (SHO) Afzal Sindhu arrived with other officers within a few minutes and undertook a very short investigation. The Police suggested the fire was initiated by a short circuit rather than an arson attack and refused to lodge a First Incident Report for a crime, stating it must have been an accident. However, Kasur a nearby town was the location of the attack of Shama and Shahzad who were burnt alive by a mob of in excess of 3000 in November 2014 ([click here](#)), moreover a church had already been subjected to an arson attack in the nearby Victory Church of Kasur on the day of Epiphany on 6th January ([click here](#)).

Dildar Bhatti a local resident living next to the church building said:

"I showed police officials suspicious marks on the wall of the church that illustrated someone had climbed the church wall to gain entry to our church, but the Police officers just ignored my evidence and did not add the detail to their reports. Local police officials do not cooperate with villagers."

Karamat Masih, a local resident said:

"All the local Christians are now in great fear, the fire illustrates that Christians are not wanted in the local area."

Pastor Yaqoob is concerned about the loss of tents and other utensils that were hired for the celebration. The church has also lost much of their furniture and upholstery, including two sofas, chairs and carpets that was burnt. He has estimated that the church will face a bill of up to 100,000 rupees the equivalent of £654.67

Shamim Masih our lead reporter said:

"When I went there local residents had heaped the burnt items in a pile and many parishioners were praying there. They have re-painted the outside wall of the church, coming together as a community to restore their place of worship. There are more than 1000 Christians living in the village and in this particular colony there are more than fifty families. Most of the Christians are bonded labourers and earn their living through modern day slavery in different sectors including local brick kilns and carpet making factories. This recent attack has placed great fear into all the local Christians"

Wilson Chowdhry, Chairman of the BPCA, said:

"Despite promises of reform and change the situation for Christians living in Pakistan only worsens. Inculcation of hatred towards minorities in national Curriculum text books that demonise and caricature people outside of Islam, have only served to polarise society creating great schism. There are protections for minorities in both the constitution and legal frameworks yet these are often obviated by officials seeped in the same hatred. Failure by the west to improve this situation for minorities through accountable use of foreign aid budget, has only exacerbated the situation. This has culminated in the quality of life for Christians in Pakistan reaching a nadir."

Muslim man caught burning copies of Bible in Kasur Church

British Pakistani Christian Association (11.01.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1RljD27> - Parishioners of Victory Church in Kasur were horrified to see a young Muslim man burning their church bibles, when they arrived at their church to pray during the day of Epiphany on Wednesday 6th January.

Akba Azhar a 26 year old Muslim apparently had broken into their church and burnt their bibles and other Christian books including worship and Bible study material. Realising he had been discovered Mr Azhar tried to flee but was caught by young Christian men who brought him back to the church and held him there until local Policemen arrived, in response to their calls for assistance.

On arrival the Police took the man into custody, but later refused to file a First Incident Report (Police report) against the perpetrator, stating that Mr Azhar was deemed to be mentally unstable, therefore unfit for prosecution. However, Parishioners at the church have advised local Police that they believe the man is both lucid and mentally stable and

had been playing Cricket with some of the Christian men the night before the burglary and arson attack. They have demanded that Mr Azhar should be tried under the notorious blasphemy laws of Pakistan as the man has desecrated Christian scriptures, in the same fashion as the laws have been used against Christians.

Pastor Nasir, of Victory Church, said:

"The reticence of the local police constabulary to prosecute Mr Azhar illustrates their bias. Several mentally ill Christians have been arrested for blasphemy including 11 year old Rimsha Masih in 2012, who was visibly a minor with a severe condition. Local Police in Kasur have informed the church that due to Azhbar's mental condition he can not be held liable for his actions. This is very unfair" ([click here](#)).

Kasur is a city of nearly 250,000 people and approximately 60 km from Lahore, in Pakistan's Punjab province. In November 2014, the area was the scene of a brutal attack on a young Christian couple, parents of four children, who were burnt alive by a Muslim mob, incited by an imam after allegations of blasphemy were made against the victims. Only hours after this incident a church another church in Kasur was set on fire ([click here](#))

Despite protections within the Constitution and legal frameworks of Pakistan, Christians rarely receive justice. Article 36 of the Pakistani Constitution states:

36. Protection of minorities.-The State shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial services.

Wilson Chowdhry, Chairman of the BPCA, said:

"This latest attack and the ease within which the felon Mr Azhar was allowed to escape justice, underlines the low worth of Christians in Pakistan. Pakistan has a well documented, extremely poor human rights record especially towards minorities living there, yet still attain mass foreign aid from America and Britain. The ongoing pariah status of minorities in Pakistan is a concern big enough to warrant cessation of all US and UK funding. Their choice to continue is dangerous considering that festering hatred towards the West in Pakistan has led to the export of terrorism."
