

PAKISTAN: Pakistan arrests 1100 supporters of detained cleric

By Asim Tanveer

AP News (24.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2r8Ept2> – Police in an ongoing crackdown arrested some 1100 supporters of a detained radical Islamic cleric, who disrupted daily life with nationwide rallies following the acquittal of a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy, officials said Saturday.

Senior police officer Tahir Mahmood said that supporters of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik party were picked up in sweeps across the country, mainly in Punjab province, following the arrest of its leader, Khadim Hussain Rizvi. Mahmood said police teams raided Labbaik party seminaries, the homes of party leaders and supporters and hiding places to net them.

He said police also arrested scores of Rizvi's supporters as they took to streets to protest his overnight arrest. He said most of the arrested men were sent to prison for one month. He added that those charged with violence and arson in their protests over Asia Bibi's acquittal would be dealt with according to relevant laws.

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said the current crackdown on Labbaik party supporters has nothing to do with Asia Bibi's case. He said the arrests are being made to contain those exploiting the situation in the name of religion to gain

political strength.

Rizvi's supporters held violent rallies against the Supreme Court's Oct. 31 acquittal of Bibi. Rizvi has called for more protests on Sunday in the capital, Islamabad. Pre-empting the possible protest, police in the capital have set up security posts near a vital intersection that connects the capital with the garrison city of Rawalpindi. Rizvi and his supporters earlier this year blocked that intersection for 20 days protesting the change of a religious reference in a parliamentary document. That protest led to the resignation of the law minister of previous government.

Pakistan's hard-line Islamists have threatened to kill anyone who insults Islam or speaks out against the country's blasphemy laws.

Associated Press writer Zarar Khan in Islamabad contributed to this report.

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PAKISTAN: Protests break out following Asia Bibi's acquittal. Christian schools close indefinitely in Lahore

Police set up roadblocks on Punjab highways as radicals protest in the province and the capital Islamabad. The authorities are monitoring the situation from a central control centre, including "red zones" in sensitive areas.

By Kamran Chaudry

AsiaNews (31.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2PdYRrd> – This morning Pakistan's Supreme Court cleared Asia Bibi of all charges. The Christian woman spent nine years in prison for blasphemy is now free. Her acquittal has plunged the country into chaos and confusion.

Islamic radicals quickly reacted, organising demonstrations and roadblocks in the major cities. As a result, in Lahore, Church authorities ordered the indefinite closure of Christian schools and asked parents to come and take their children home. Likewise, "Schools will remain closed till further

notice,” said a sign at St Peter’s High School, which is run by the Diocese of Raiwind of the Church of Pakistan.

In view of the situation, the Province of Punjab invoked Section 144 of the Penal Code, which forbids public demonstrations with more than four people. The ordinance was not enough to stop extremists in the streets of the provincial capital Lahore.

Police barriers blocked Tehreek-e-Labbaik demonstrators from reaching the Provincial Assembly building. Rangers were deployed in Youhanabad, Lahore’s largest Christian enclave. The first arrests took place in the city of Multan.

After Punjab, Sindh too banned public gatherings under Section 144 over “possible terrorist activities”.

Local authorities set up a control room to “monitor the prevailing law and order situation” and liaise with various agencies: police, other law enforcement agencies, commissioners and their deputies.

Meanwhile, Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan blocked the Power House Chowrangi roundabout in Karachi pledging to stop the whole city.

In the federal capital Islamabad, Jamaat-i-Islami party called on Muslims to join the protests.

The Capital Territory's deputy commissioner, Muhammad Hamza Shafqaat, twitted that "Aabpara Chowk and Faizabad are blocked", but the "Bara Kahu, Tarnol and Kashmir Highway is still open."

For their part, police set up a "red zone" around Rawal Lake.

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INDIA: Christians in shock after pastor shot dead in

'safe' Punjab

World Watch Monitor (17.07.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2vvig8D> – The Christian community in Ludhiana, the largest city in India's north-western state of Punjab, is in shock after a pastor was shot dead outside his Pentecostal church on Saturday evening (15 July).

Sultan Masih, 47, who also ran a school for the poor, was gunned down by two people on a motorbike, who shot him at close range outside the Temple of God Church, where he was senior pastor. He suffered multiple wounds to his body and head.

Hundreds of Christians took to the streets on Sunday (16 July), blocking off a major national highway (the road to Jalandhar) for three hours, and only ceasing once they had received assurances from the police that the perpetrators would be brought to justice.

"Pastor Sultan Masih was my neighbour and my friend," fellow pastor Paul Tamizharasan told World Watch Monitor following the funeral today (17 July).

"Family members are grieving and we hope the government will catch the accused. We demand answers and have gone to the Punjab government, but they couldn't find who did this.

"The state of Punjab is very safe in India for Christians. There are Sikhs living here – they are also a religious minority in India. We are also a minority, but never before have we had any threats. But unfortunately this has happened and we are all shocked about how this is possible. Nobody knows how this can happen.

"Two people came by bike. Every Saturday, the pastor, after finishing his Sunday-service preparations, at 8.30pm he will come out. As usual, he had been talking with people outside,

very casually. Then at 8.45, two people came very near, about 2-3 feet, and they shot his leg, and his face and his chest.”

CCTV cameras recorded footage of the attack, but a police spokesman said it was too dark to make out the attackers’ faces.

Masih had been pastor of the church for 20 years and also ran a school for the poor from inside the church. He is survived by his wife, Sarabjit, and sons, Elisha, 26, and Hanok, 18.

According to The Tribune, the Punjab Chief Minister, Amarinder Singh, has promised 500,000 rupees (around \$8,000) for Masih’s widow and a guaranteed job with the police for one of Masih’s sons. He also promised that the killers would be brought to justice.

Some reports say that Masih had received threats before his death. The police denied this but refused to rule out “terror” as a possible motive. Meanwhile the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee said the attackers were trying to “disturb the peace” and called on the Christian community to “maintain the peace”.

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