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Pakistani court sentences Christian man to death for posting hateful content against Muslims

BY ASIM TANVEER

[AP News](#) (02.07.2024) - A court in Pakistan sentenced a Christian man to death for sharing what it said was hateful content against Muslims on social media after [one of the worst mob attacks on Christians](#) in the eastern Punjab province last year, his lawyer said Monday, adding he will appeal the verdict.

In August 2023, groups of [Muslim men burned dozens of homes and churches](#) in the city of Jaranwala after some residents claimed they saw two Christian men tearing out pages from Islam's holy book, the Quran, throwing them on the ground and writing insulting remarks on other pages, authorities said. The two men were later arrested.

No casualties were reported at the time as terrified Christians fled their homes to safer areas. Though the police arrested more than 100 suspects following the attacks, it remained unclear if any were convicted.

Ehsan Shan, though not party to the desecration, was accused of reposting the defaced pages of the Quran on his TikTok account, his lawyer Khurram Shahzad told The Associated Press on Monday. He also said he would appeal against the death sentence issued Saturday by a court in the city of Sahiwal in Punjab province.

Amir Farooq, a police officer who arrested Shan, said the man shared "the hateful content at a sensitive time when authorities were already struggling to contain the violence."

Naveed Kashif, a local priest at a church in Sahiwal, said while he didn't excuse what Shan posted, he wondered "why the court ordered such an extreme verdict when those linked to the attacks are yet to be punished."

Blasphemy accusations are common in Pakistan. Under the country's blasphemy laws, anyone found guilty of insulting Islam or Islamic religious figures can be sentenced to death. While authorities have yet to carry out a death sentence for blasphemy, often just the accusation can cause riots and incite mobs to violence, lynching and killings.

On June 3, [72-year-old Nazir Masih died](#) after he was attacked by an angry mob in May following accusations of blasphemy.

Threat to public safety, three Ahmadis detained ahead of Eidul Adha ritual

The three Ahmadis are current and former local community office bearers and have been held in the district jail for 30 days

[The Friday Times](#) (12.06.2024) - The district administration in Chakwal has decided to pre-emptively detain three members of the local Ahmadiyya Community ahead of Eidul Adha on the pretext that these individuals may indulge in "unlawful activities and acting in a manner prejudicial to the public safety or the maintenance of the public order."

The Chakwal Deputy Commissioner Quratulain Malik, on June 10, 2024, issued three notifications (Nos 2253-2255), approving the detention of three individuals under Section 3(1) of the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) Ordinance 1967. The three individuals are Tahir Ahmed, Malik Naveed Ahmed and Riaz Ahmed Malik.

All three are residents of the Dulmial in Tehsil Choa Saidan Shah.

In the notice, the Chakwal District Police Officer told Deputy Commissioner Malik that these men "may cause deterioration for law and order situation in the area" while describing the individuals as "miscreants."

The notification further said that the matter had been discussed in the district intelligence committee, which met on June 10, 2024, and unanimously recommended "that in order to prevent society from their (sic) activities, which are quite detrimental to public peace and tranquility, sectarian harmony, as well as law and order situation, it is very necessary that they (sic) may be detained under section 3(1) of the MPO, 1960."

"Considering the above-mentioned grounds given by the district police officer Chakwal and evidence of his conduct being prejudicial to public peace as depicted in the report of the district police officer, Chakwal, I am fully satisfied that in order to prevent the said person from acting in any manner prejudicial to public safety or the maintenance of public order, their detention is necessary and expedient in public interest."

The deputy commissioner subsequently approved their detention in the district jail for the next 30 days.

The move, however, was deplored by the Ahmadiyya community.

The community said that Malik Naveed Ahmad was the incumbent president of the Ahmadiyya Community in Chakwal, Malik Riaz Ahmad was the former president, and Malik Tahir Ahmad was the secretary general of affairs.

The community claimed that the DPO called these individuals in for a meeting with the relevant Station House Officer (SHO) and Assistant Commissioner for Choa Saidan Shah. The Ahmadiyya Community delegation was pressurised not to perform the ritual sacrifice (Qurbani) on Eidul Adha. The community further claimed that during the meeting, the complainants (opponents of the Ahmadiyya Community) were also present.

The Ahmadiyya delegation informed the officials that there exists no prohibition in law where Ahmadis are barred from performing the sacred rite of Qurbani. Moreover, the Ahmadiyya delegation quoted the recent judgement from the Supreme Court of Pakistan in the case of Tahir Naqash etc vs The State etc, and authored by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, where it is clearly stated that Ahmadis have the right to practice their faith within the confinement of four walls.

They further claimed that while the complainants were allowed to leave after presenting their case, the Ahmadiyya delegation was detained until the evening, and afterwards, the said three Ahmadis named were detained under section 3(1) of the MPO in Jhelum's jail.

"This year, the harassment of Ahmadis is visibly higher than last year," the community said in a statement, adding that members of their community are not only being forced not to perform the ritual sacrifice, but they are also being forced not to offer the Eidul Adha prayers.

Police to demolish minarets atop worship place

In a separate incident, officials at a police station in Lahore have indicated their intention to demolish minarets erected atop the local Ahmadiyya place of worship (Baitul Zikr) in the Jahman neighbourhood. This worship place was built in 1970 and thus cannot be subjected to the 1984 law against Ahmadis.

"This is a clear violation of Lahore High Court Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh's decision (Para 16) that protects the minarets of Ahmadiyya places of worship constructed before 1984."

This alleged proclamation from the police and complainants was against the spirit of Tassaduq Jilani's judgement, who, in his 2014 judgement, had called on the police to protect the places of worship of every religion, the community claimed.

"By ordering to demolish parts of Ahmadiyya places of worship, how is the police carrying out Justice Jilani's orders?"

USCIRF condemns violence against Christians

Nazir Gil Masih, lynched by a mob in Sargodha, died in the hospital. The situation is no longer tolerable, the American commission says.

By Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (11.06.2024) - Nazir (Lazar) Gil Masih didn't make it. The 74-year-old Christian escaped a mob's lynching attempt in Sargodha, Pakistan, on May 25 alive. But he passed away in the hospital on June 3. [As "Bitter Winter" reported](#), the mob's attack was a combination of sectarian bigotry and the jealousy of business competitors who fabricated the accusations of blasphemy and instigated the mob.

Elections are celebrated, governments change, but the persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan remains the same. On June 7, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom [reacted with a strong statement](#). The USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Its Commissioners are appointed by the President and by Congressional leaders of both political parties.

After offering a summary of the Sargodha tragedy, the USCIRF commented that, "The brutal killing of Lazar Masih is an alarming reminder of the dangers of merely being suspected or accused of blasphemy in Pakistan, The country's draconian blasphemy law signals to society that alleged blasphemers deserve severe punishment, which emboldens private individuals and groups to take matters into their own hands. Pakistani authorities must hold those responsible for his death accountable."

The USCIRF adds that, "This latest wave of mob violence comes nearly one year after the [Jaranwala attacks](#), where thousands of individuals attacked Christian homes and burned 24 churches following false accusations of blasphemy, prompting several Christian families to flee their homes. In addition to inciting violence towards religious minorities, blasphemy accusations often lead to lengthy prison sentences on death row or solitary confinement."

The reaction of Pakistani authorities has been an attempt to make blasphemy laws not better but worse. The USCIRF notes that, "In January 2023, Pakistan's National Assembly unanimously passed an amendment to the country's blasphemy law, expanding punishable offenses and offering harsher punishments for blasphemy. In August 2023, the Senate passed the bill. The bill still requires the president's signature before becoming law."

Predictably, the statement concludes, "There has been an increase in blasphemy cases in Pakistan and USCIRF is deeply concerned that the pending amendment to the country's blasphemy law may exacerbate current trends."

The American commission also mentions the anti-Ahmadi laws and the continuous persecution of the [Ahmadiyya Community](#).

Christian attacked by mob over blasphemy accusations dies from injuries

[**Nova Kruijning | Maastricht U. Faculty of Law, NL**](#)

[Jurist News](#) (04.06.2024) - A Pakistani Christian who was attacked by a mob last month after being accused of blasphemy has succumbed to his injuries, local media [reported](#) Monday. Nazir Masih, 72, sustained severe head injuries during the May 25 [attack](#) and underwent two surgeries before his death. He was buried in Sargodha, a city in Pakistan's Punjab province.

Masih was injured after more than 100 men [attacked](#) him and his son over allegations they desecrated pages of the Holy Qur'an, Islam's holy book. Pakistan's anti-blasphemy

laws, introduced in the country in the 1980s, prohibit the insulting of Islam. Anyone found guilty of violating these laws can be sentenced to death.

Local media [say](#) police have registered cases against 500 people for their attack on Masih, his son, and their home. The identities of the suspects have not yet been disclosed, but participants in the mob [reportedly](#) belong to Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a far-right party known for its radical extremist ideologies and violent protests against any change to the blasphemy law in Pakistan. The group previously [registered](#) a blasphemy case against Masih.

The incident exposes the plight of religious minorities in Pakistan, where 96.47 percent of the population identifies as Muslim and Christians make up only 1.27 percent of the country's population. Christian groups say the community is [routinely](#) subjected to religious persecution—including large-scale abductions, physical violence, and societal discrimination. In April, Christian [teenager](#) Ashbeel Baber Ghouri was arrested on charges of blasphemy after criticizing plural marriage and polygamy, which is permitted by certain interpretations of the Islamic faith, during a discussion with his Muslim friend.

In the wake of the attack and Masih's death, Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) Chairman Hafiz Ashrafi [expressed](#) his deep grief over the killing, calling the attack "unlawful" and "illegal" and demanding justice for Masih and his family. The Ulema Council is a Muslim organization whose members include Islamic clerics and legal scholars from a range of Islamic traditions. Commenting on Masih's death, Ashrafi said that Muslim citizens and the state have a duty to protect non-Muslims in Pakistan.

Additionally, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) released a fact-finding [report](#) discussing the May 25 mob violence incident. The HRCP found that it was "highly likely" that the May 25 attack was targeted against Nazir Masih's family, beginning as a personal dispute that was "given a religious color" to "exact maximum leverage:"

Despite the death of Nazir Masih, the Punjab government has attempted to downplay the incident by reportedly discouraging press coverage and failing to condemn the incident unequivocally. We have seen this pattern of violence before. We should not have to see it again and again.

Christians call for a National Day Against Abduction and Forced Conversion of Girls

Protestants and Catholics will unite on May 26 to ask for an end to the kidnapping, forced conversion to Islam, and forced marriage of young women from minority religions.

By Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (17.05.2024) - It is a plague denounced by religious minorities, by a few international media, including "[Bitter Winter](#)," and even [by the United Nations](#), in fact [two times](#). Girls from minority religions, primarily Hindu and Christian, are routinely kidnapped in Pakistan, forcibly converted to Islam, and forcibly married to their abductors, who in most cases have already raped them. Some shrines and mosques

managed by radical clerics have converted themselves into “factories” of false conversions. Many of the victims are minor girls, but their kidnappers claim that birth certificates in Pakistan are often incorrect, and their “biological age” is in fact 18 or older.

The police do act in some cases, but courts of law are extremely reluctant to declare conversions to Islam invalid. They rely on suspicious videos where the victims state that they converted and married out of their own will. Even in cases where girls unequivocally tell them that they were kidnapped and did not want to convert, as it happened with [Chandra Maharaj](#), the courts do not believe them and declare the marriages valid.

Now Christians have decided that enough is enough. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Pakistan, the Protestant National Council of Churches, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, and the Christian Awakening Movement have decided to join forces and to call for a national day of protest, May 26 next, against the abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage of Christian girls. All sermons in all Christian churches throughout Pakistan on Sunday May 26 will be devoted to the issue.

Christians are aware that the problem also affect other religious minorities, and that there are Muslims who condemn this obnoxious practice. They have asked all religious communities in Pakistan to join with them on May 26 and ask the government to act.

A good Supreme Court decision for the Ahmadiis—but what’s next?

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court ordered the release of a man who had distributed an Ahmadi commentary to the Holy Quran. A step in the right direction, but problems remain.

By Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (12.02.2024) - Reportedly, a poor miller who managed to win a case against the all-powerful 18th-century King of Prussia Frederick the Great commented “There is a judge in Berlin,” meaning a honest and impartial magistrate who would not be intimidated by the government. We often read that this quote was invented by playwright Bertolt Brecht, but it might have originated before him.

There is a judge in Islamabad, too. While the country was busy with the elections, Pakistan’s Supreme Court Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa issued on February 8 a positive, if circumspect, ruling about the right of the persecuted Ahmadiyya community of printing and disseminating the “Tafseer-e-Sagheer,” the shorter version of the 10-volume

"Tafseer-e-Kabeer," the commentary to the Holy Quran by Mirza Basheer-ud-Din Mahmood Ahmad, the son and successor of Ahmadiyya founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

A man called Mubarak Ahmed Sami had been arrested on January 7, 2023 for disseminating the "Tafseer-e-Sagheer," thus breaching a Punjab law of 2021 prohibiting the printing and distributing of "heterodox" editions and commentaries of the Holy Quran. The man claimed that he had distributed the book in 2019, when the law was not yet in force.

Chief Justice Isa ordered the defendant, who had remained in jail for thirteen months, immediately released against the posting of a symbolic bond of 5,000 rupees (\$18).

The Chief Justice may have based its decision only on the fact that penal law cannot be retroactive and asked the lower courts to consider whether the facts occurred in 2019 or 2022, but he went one step further.

He asked the courts of merit to meditate on religious liberty and on the Quranic teaching (2:256) "There is no compulsion in religion." As [reported by "Dawn,"](#) he said that "even Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was told by Almighty Allah that he was required to only convey the message and should not compel people to believe, as stipulated in verses from Surah Ar-Ra'd and Surah Yunus."

"Freedom of faith—the decision says—is one of the fundamental tenets of Islam. But sadly, in matters of religion tempers flare up and the Quranic mandate is forsaken...The Holy Quran requires that all matters of significance should be pondered over and reflected upon Surah An-Nahl (chapter 16), verse 44 and Surah Yunus (chapter 10), verse 24... They should also have considered verse 9 of Surah al-Hijr (chapter 15) where Allah says, 'We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and we will assuredly guard it.'"

Isa also observed that the principle "no compulsion in religion" inspires Clause (a) of Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan, stating that "every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion," Clause (b) of the same Article 20, which adds that "every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions," and Article 22's prescription that "no religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any educational institution maintained wholly by that community or denomination." "These fundamental rights cannot be derogated from, circumvented or diluted... The functionaries of the state [should have] heeded the Holy Quran, considered the Constitution and examined the law."

The defendant is not off the hook and his trial will continue. Isa, however, did not limit his examination of the case to the non-retroactivity of criminal laws. He affirmed a broader principle of religious liberty, including the right to transmit one's faith through appropriate means—and books.

Yet, Isa knows very well that there are laws in Pakistan explicitly targeting the Ahmadis and that the attitude of local police and courts is governed by politics rather than by law only. Isa's affirmation of freedom of religion is a step in the right direction, but more is

needed to align Pakistan with full-blown democracies where religious liberty is recognized to unpopular minorities as well.

Islamic studies no longer compulsory for Pakistan's non-Muslims

By *Kamran Chaudhry*

UCA News (24.01.2024) - The Pakistani government has decided that the study of Islam is no longer compulsory for non-Muslim students in [Pakistan](#). In a notification on Jan. 22, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training approved a new curriculum, which makes studying Islam non-compulsory for Christian, Bahai, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and Zoroastrian students in the Islamic nation.

The Religious Education Curriculum 2023 for Grades 1 to Grade 12 will be introduced from the next academic year in 2024-2025.

The Catholic Church has been urging the government to make provision for non-Muslim students to receive religious education in their faith instead of Islamiyat, which comprises courses on Islamic beliefs and practices.

Naeem Yousaf Gill, director of the National Commission of Justice and Peace, the rights body of the Pakistani bishops' council, welcomed the development.

"We appreciate the government for involving Catholic bishops in developing the syllabus of Christianity. However, its monitoring and implementation is another challenge. Policies for minorities often flop in our country," he told UCA News.

Pakistan has one of the lowest budgetary allocations for education in South Asia. The nation allotted 1.7 percent of its GDP for education in the fiscal year 2022-23 against 1.4 percent earlier.

"The long-term process will require training of teachers and a salary structure," Gill observed.

In 2020, the provincial Punjab government made it compulsory for Muslim students to study the Quran, and non-Muslim students were asked to study ethics in lieu of Islamiyat from Grade 3.

Jaipal Chhabria, president of the Pakistan Hindu Forum, rejected teaching religious studies in educational institutes.

"Civilized nations don't do it. It was never the vision of our founding father [Mohammed Ali Jinnah]," he said.

“You are free, you are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan,” Jinnah had said in a speech to the nation after independence from Britain.

“In an environment where the majority thinks its religion is superior, it is impossible for a Muslim teacher to teach Christianity or Hinduism,” said Chhabria.

In the last national census of 2017, Pakistan had 2.6 million Christians who made up 1.27 percent of a population of 207 million. Hindus were at 1.73 percent.