

PAKISTAN - 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

<http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Pakistan2016.pdf>

By Umer Ali

The Nation (10.05.2016) - - "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-RaheemAshrafi, 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.