

**Status of Minorities in Pakistan in 2009**  
**Annual Report**  
**SAHR**

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## Introduction

In a xenophobic atmosphere, created and promoted by conservative clerics and a section of the media religious minorities are viewed with suspicion and mistrust. They are seen as constantly conspiring against Islam, Muslims and Pakistan in cahoots with the infidel foreign powers, especially the West. An imaginary combine of Hunud-o-Yahud-o-Nasara (Hindus, Jews and Christians) is supposed to be conspiring against Pakistani Muslims all the time in collaboration with the local minorities. This world view propagated on a large scale, coupled with an unfavorable legal regime, has made life difficult for the non-Muslim citizens. They cannot freely practice their religion and present their point of view without risking their life, honor and property as is evident from attacks on them.

The year 2009 saw an increase in violent attacks on religious minorities while the government failed to take effective preventive measures. The growing intolerance of religious minorities' rights, increased frequency of vigilante actions against them and attacks on non-Muslims over allegations of blasphemy and desecration of religious scriptures caused serious hardships to them. As the Pakistan army and paramilitary forces conducted military operations against the Taliban networks in Swat and other tribal areas including South Waziristan, the militants struck with vengeance, in other parts of the country, at non-Muslim minorities, as well as the Muslim minority Shia sect.

The systematic manner in which the Christian colony in Gojra and the shops in Bolton Market in Karachi were burnt down indicated the involvement of organized and trained militants. It was widely believed that indigenous militant organizations (already banned) were behind these attacks. That these organizations had close connections with the Taliban militants and al-Qaeda was no secret. The role of main religio-political parties was mostly inimical to religious minorities. These parties did not condemn the violence against the minorities and often advanced conspiracy theories about foreign hands being behind violence against minorities. In some cases, the seminaries closely connected with religio-political parties were used to foment trouble against the minority communities. On the other hand, the government response, mostly in the form of belated announcements of financial compensation and some attempts at encouraging reconciliation at the local level, had usually been insufficient and reactive.

## Freedom of religion

### *Ahmedis*

As the most vulnerable community in Pakistan the Ahmadis continued to face discrimination and violence throughout the year. The blasphemy laws were widely used against them as five Ahmedi citizens were murdered in target killings in 2009, raising to 100 their casualties since the introduction of anti-Ahmadiya laws by the Ziaul Haq regime in 1984.

### *Christians*

As the militancy surged in the northwestern parts of the country, enforced migration and displacement of thousands of Christians from Swat valley, Peshawar, Mardan, Nowshera and FATA was reported following threats to them to convert to Islam or face death issued by the militants. Forced to take refuge with their relatives in Punjab and Sindh provinces, these families faced immense hardships as the government could not provide adequate succor. At the same time many Christian families victims of the blasphemy law were forced to live in hiding in attempts to save their lives. There was little change in their social ostracization.

### ***Hindus***

The lack of a law prevents the Pakistani Hindus from getting their marriages registered. About 80 per cent of the Hindu women did not possess national identity cards and therefore did not have the right to vote. Similarly, 65 per cent of the Hindu children could not access form B for registration because they had no proof of their parent's marriage. In Battagram, during June, the Taliban threatened the Hindus to either pay Jizya (a medieval tax for minorities) or accept Islam in order to save themselves from abduction and murder. In Battagram, there were around 15 Hindu families who had been living there for generations and had never had any enmity with anyone in the district. Their leader was threatened by militants as well as by the Taliban leader and asked to pay an amount of Rs. 6 million.

As the law and order situation in Balochistan remained quite serious, the minority community, especially Hindus, seemed to be the target of both the state and the militants. Hindu youth suffered because of shrinking employment opportunities, kidnappings for ransom and forced conversion of girls. More than 1,000 Hindus lived in the small town of Kalat. Most of them felt that they were treated as second class citizens. As violence spread, they did not feel safe in Kalat's exclusive locality, Hindu Mohallah. They needed additional space, perhaps in a new locality but they were afraid of shifting out of fear for their security. They complained that they could not go out of town even in daytime for reasons of security. A common complaint was 'We live in ghettos and celebrate our festivals in an atmosphere of fear.'

### ***Sikhs***

The country's small Sikh community had no representation in government and rarely figured in any of the government's support programmes. However, the government made special attempts to provide shelter in gurdwaras to the Sikhs displaced in militancy-ridden tribal areas. In some respects they were better treated than other minorities, as was evident from the arrangements made for Sikh pilgrims coming from India.

## ***Cases on religious grounds and blasphemy victims***

The blasphemy law proved to be a major contributor to the minorities' woes during the year as the Gojra carnage demonstrated. In 2009, a total of 41 complaints of blasphemy were registered by police. Some 37 Ahmedis were booked under blasphemy laws and 57 Ahmedis were charged under Ahmedi-specific laws. However, many cases were registered against Muslims as the rival sects of Islam increasingly used the blasphemy law against each other, as may be seen in the account given below:

**January 2:** The Sargodha police booked two men, Mushtaq Ahmed and Muhammad Ali, on the charges of erasing kalma from the wall of a village mosque.

**January 12:** Aman named Liaquat, was arrested by the police for allegedly burning the Quran in Panwan village near Manawala, Sheikhpura district.

**January 17:** Chichawatni police booked two men, Pir Syed Athar Shah Naqvi and Syed Ismail Shah, on the charge of committing blasphemy in their speeches on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Hazrat Ali. A cleric belonging to Sunni-Deobandi sect, Mufti Muhammad Usman, had filed a complaint against the two men belonging to the Sunni-Barelvi sect. Two days later, the workers of Jamaat Ahle Sunnat and the Anjuman Tajiran Chichawatni staged a protest demonstration outside the office of the district police officer in Sahiwal against wrongly implicating Pir Athar Shah. The session's judge at Khanewal dismissed the bail application of the accused and the police arrested one of them.

**January 19:** A petition was moved in the Lahore High Court against Qurban Ali, the principal of a private education trust in Lahore, for allegedly committing blasphemy by writing a book, titled 'Hero and Role Model' in which he listed his six top heroes of the world including Prophet Muhammad

(PBUH) and himself, Muhammad Younas, Khateeb at a mosque moved the police for the registration of a case. On 18 February, an additional sessions judge, ordered police to register a case against the accused on blasphemy charges.

**January 28:** Five Ahmedis, including four children, were charged with blasphemy under section 295-C in Chak 172-TDA, in Layyah district. However, the police foiled an attempt by the members of a banned organization to torch the houses of the people belonging to the Ahmediya community. The four children remained behind the bars for six months.

**January 30:** Businesses were closed down and protest demonstrations were staged in Mandi Bhauddin (Punjab) against the alleged defiling of the Quran a day earlier.

**January 31:** Ahsan Tahami, a librarian at the Quaid-e-Azam Library, Lahore, was booked for uttering blasphemous words in a discussion. He fled his home along with his family and went into hiding.

**February 5:** Muntazirul Haq Shahjehan, a police officer and station house officer (SHO) at Raja Jang police station, was booked on blasphemy charges on the complaint of a local journalist.

**February 6:** Several political and religious parties staged a demonstration in Quetta against alleged desecration of Holy Quran in Zhob and urged the government to probe the incident.

**February 9:** Muazaffarabad police registered a case against the sellers of a book allegedly containing blasphemy material. The accused got pre-arrest bail from a court.

**February 16:** The District and Sessions Judge, Jhelum, heard a case relating to blasphemy charges against one, Khalid Naqash, who had written a book titled, *Quran aur Hum..* It was alleged that the book contained blasphemous content about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Another man, Muhammad Afzal, who had written the preamble of the book, was also arrested along with the author.

**February 18:** Clerics in Raiwind called upon the government to register a case and punish those responsible for alleged desecration of Holy Quran in a private hospital at Syeda Waheeda Memorial Nursing College, Raiwind Road Lahore, run by Fatima Memorial Hospital Lahore. It was alleged that some Christian students had placed Quran in shoe boxes. As the clerics protest mounted, the college administration closed down the institution for fear of unrest and violence.

**March 1:** The Kasur police arrested two Christian men, Wilayat Masih and Mushtaq Masih, on blasphemy charges in Malloki village. The accused were charged that they had covered the grave of a Christian relative with a cloth inscribed with Quranic verses

**March 11:** Police booked 25 people on blasphemy charges and arrested four of them in Chak 33 in Kanganpur area, Kasur district. The accused belonged to Ahl-e-Hadith sect and the complainant to Sunni-Barelvi sect.

**March 12:** Police registered a case under section 295 and 295-A of the PPC against unidentified people for writing blasphemous words on street walls of Umerkot and Mirwah Gorchani on March 10. Hundreds of people protested against the alleged blasphemy, attacked petrol pumps and shops and blocked main highways.

**March 23:** Police booked four Muslim men for attacking a religious congregation of a different sect and allegedly uttering blasphemous words against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Pattoki, Kasur district. Two of the accused, Rana Naeem and Rana Zahoor, were arrested.

**March 27:** One Irfan was arrested by the police on the charge of burning a Quran in Mohallah Sabri Colony, Okara.

**April 4:** Anees Mallah, (25) who was facing blasphemy charges, was found dead in Sanghar jail. He had been moved there only a day earlier from Mirpur Khas, where he had spent almost a year in prison. Anees's lawyer said he was subjected to torture, shot and afterwards slaughtered brutally in the jail by some jail inmates. His elder brother, Ghulam Rasool Mallah, said Anees was wrongly implicated in a blasphemy case in March 2008 and murdered inside the jail. He said even medico legal officers were afraid to issue a report about the cause of the death. He said on March 21 2008, his brother's motorbike had crashed into a gate erected for a Milad function which angered the organisers and they implicated him in a blasphemy case.

**April 7:** Lahore High Court's Bahawalpur bench rejected a bail plea of Haider Zaman, accused of blasphemy, and sent him to prison. A mob of baton-wielding student's of local seminaries surrounded the court during the hearing and chanted slogans asking he court to award death sentence to the

accused. Afterwards, on 30 June, a three member bench of the Supreme Court also rejected his bail plea and ordered the Bahawalnagar trial court to complete the hearing within three months.

**April 8:** Police registered a case against a Muslim woman, Ameera Bibi, on blasphemy charges, under sections 290-A and 295-C of PPC, on the direction of a court in Chowk Azam, Layyah district for saying derogatory remarks against God and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). A local man, Shabbir Shah, was the complainant.

**April 10:** An additional district and session's judge at Kamalia (Punjab) ordered the city police to register a case against two Shia clerics, Imran Rizvi and Asif Raza Alvi, on blasphemy charges on the complaint of clerics from a rival Sunni sect.

**April 13:** Police booked and arrested Bilal Tahir Khawaja, owner of a football manufacturing factory, on blasphemy charge under section 295-A for printing holy Islamic names on footballs. No lawyer represented the accused in the court as Daska lawyers association assured the complainant clerics that the bar would not provide legal assistance to the accused.

**April 14:** Clerics belonging to Tehreek-e-Tahfuzz-e-Namoos-e-Risalat (Movement for the protection of sanctity of Prophet (PBUH)), moved Lahore High Court to get a blasphemy case registered against the owner of a textile mills in Faisalabad. The petitioners alleged the factory had printed the name of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on bed sheets and thus committed blasphemy.

**April 21:** The Supreme Court (Shariat Appellate Bench) rejected an appeal against a Federal Shariat Court (FSC) ruling that death is the only punishment that the Islamic law provides for blasphemy. The appeal had been filed by Bishop Daniel. Tasleem 18 years ago after the FSC gave the judgment in exercise of its powers to determine if the existing laws conformed to Sharia. The appellant could not pursue the petition as he had died.

**April 25:** Twelve Christian families in Chak 190/AL village of Sahiwal left their homes in a bid to save their lives on receiving life threats from other Christians and Muslims who alleged that these families had committed blasphemy by throwing ink on the Holy Quran. The village had a huge Christian population. Unidentified people had broken into Harappa Government Community Model Girls Primary School in the village. In the morning, students found on the ground a page of the Holy Quran smeared with black ink and gum. The words on the blackboard led to the assumption that a Christian was responsible for what had happened.

**May 9:** The Pasrur Police registered a case against a Shia cleric who was accused of saying something derogatory about the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) during a speech.

**May 30:** A mob staged a protest demonstration in Sukkur against a doctor belonging to Hindu faith. A medical representative, Asghar Channa, complained that assistant professor Pawan Kumar of Ghulam Muhammad Medical College had allegedly uttered blasphemous words against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The protesters dispersed after the police assured them that a case would be registered against the accused. Afterwards, the police registered a case on blasphemy charges against him. On 23 June, a Sukkur magistrate ordered the police to present the challaan against the accused.

**June 27:** Bashir Ahmed, imprisoned in Dera Ghazi Khan Jail and facing trial on the charges of saying disrespectful words against the companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was slaughtered by another prisoner with a sharp razor inside the jail.

**July 1:** A young man, Imran Masih, was captured by a mob and tortured on the charge of burning the Quran and Islamic books in Faisalabad. Police arrested the man and registered a case against him.

**July 9:** The Talagang police in Chakwal district registered a case on blasphemy charges, under sections 295-A and 295-C, against a man, Pir Muhammad Ishaq, who allegedly claimed to be God and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

**July 18:** FIA Karachi arrested a man, Murad, resident of Gizri, on the complaint of journalist Ansar Abbasi who allegedly received hate mails from him. The accused was also charged with publishing blasphemous material against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on a website.

**July 26:** Workers belonging to Sunni Tehreek staged a protest demonstration and blocked the main Sheikhpura highway in Khararianwala area in Faisalabad district to pressurise the local police for registering a case against 32 Ahmedis, of 194 RB village, on the charge of writing Quranic verses on the outer walls of their houses. The Police registered a case under sections 295-A and 295-C.

**July 27:** The Sambrial police registered a case under section 295-B, against a man named Maqsood Ahmed, on the charges of desecrating the Quran in Chak Ikhtiar near Sambrial in Sialkot district. The next day, a civil judge sent the accused on 14-day judicial remand.

**July 28:** Police arrested a man, Amir Haider, on the charge of sending a message allegedly derogatory against the companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

**August 5:** A mob surrounded the house of a middle aged woman, Akhtari Malkani, in a katchi abadi in Sanghar, Sindh on the charge that she had desecrated the Quran. Police took the woman into custody to save her from the mob and assured protesters that if evidence was found it would register a case against her. Angry protesters, demanding the custody of the woman, threw stones at the police station and burnt tyres on the road. Police shot in the air to disperse the crowd. Afterwards, the complainant, Siddique Arain, a shopkeeper, who had some monetary dispute with the accused, disappeared when the police contacted him to file a complaint against Ms Malkani. The woman told the police she had thrown an account book on the ground, not the Quran as the complainant initially accused her, provoking the protests. A 10 member committee headed by the Sanghar Taluka Nazim, absolved the woman of the blasphemy charge after initial investigation and interviews with the witnesses.

**September 4:** A couple was booked and arrested in Jamber village in Phoolnagar, Kasur district, on the charge of declaring their 10-month-old son Imam Mehdi. More than 500 villagers protested against Abdullah and his wife, Shazia, and blocked the main highway demanding a blasphemy case be registered under 295-C against them.

**September 11:** A mob torched a local Catholic church in Jaithikey-Sambrial, in Sambrial Tehsil of Daska district over alleged desecration of the Holy Quran in the village. A Christian young man, Robert Fanish Masih, 25, was accused of snatching a chapter of the Holy Quran from a local girl and throwing it into a drain. After the alleged incident, local Muslims armed with bricks, stones and sticks attacked the church. They set it ablaze by sprinkling petrol and kerosene oil on it. As no person was present in the church, no casualty took place. Meanwhile, the agitators led by local clerics took out rallies demanding immediate arrest of the accused persons. All the shops and markets remained closed in the village and its surrounding areas while thousands of scared villagers locked themselves up in their homes. The Christian community left the troubled area immediately to save their lives. One day later, the police arrested the accused who was found dead on 15 September in Sialkot Jail. When his family took his body for burial in the native village, a mob attacked the funeral procession, snatched the body and dragged it on the road. He was finally buried in Sialkot district.

**October 30:** Police registered a blasphemy case against Qaisar Ali Haideri, the author of a book, on the complaint of Mumtaz Ahmed Dar in Kotla Arab Ali, Gujrat district. On 11 November, hundreds of people brought out a procession against the police for not arresting the accused.

**November 1:** Police arrested a man, Sadiq Abbas, and registered a case against him on the charge of burning dozens of copies of Quran in a mosque in Chak 302 JB, Noorpur in Toba Tek Singh district.

**November 11:** Gojra Additional District and Sessions Judge handed down death sentence and fined Rs100,000 to a blasphemy accused, Muhammad Aslam of Shahabad Colony, on the charge of using blasphemous language publicly on Oct 5, 2008. The court allowed the convict to file an appeal against the sentence before the Lahore High Court within a week.

## ***Damages to and acquisition of places of worship***

In April, clashes between Christians and Pakhtuns in Taiser Town in Surjani area, Karachi, led to the killing of one Irfan Masih while three others were injured. The riot took place after the walls of church were found splashed with graffiti asking the Christians to embrace Islam or give *jizya*. A church wall carried pro-Taliban slogans. Three churches in Karachi were reportedly burnt down creating panic and terror amongst the Christian community.

During September, scores of Christian women and school children held a rally against the occupation by land grabbers of the land of Church of Scotland and the ground of Cathedral School in a Christian

town, Sialkot. The government did not take any step to redress the complaint as the land mafia allegedly produced fake revenue documents to acquire the land.

On September 24, some unidentified people damaged and destroyed decoration items, lighting arrangements, installed equipment and bathrooms of Gurdwara Kiyara Sahib in Nankana Sahib. A protest was held against the lack of protection and security for the gurdwara and slogans were chanted against the Evacuee Trust Property Board. On September 11, a mob protesting against the alleged desecration of the Holy Quran by some Christian youths set a church in a village near Sialkot on fire. The protestors were armed with bricks, stones and sticks and caused great damage to properties in the surrounding area. They also ransacked two houses adjacent to the church.

In October, the representative of the Sikh community requested an HRCP fact finding mission to help the Sikh community of Quetta to regain the possession of a Sikh worship place (gurdwara) where the government had set up a school. There were four Hindu temples in Quetta but their adjacent land was in the possession of the Evacuee Trust Board which the Hindu community wanted to be restored to these temples.

In June, an Ahmediya graveyard in Pir Mahal, Toba Tek Singh, was attacked and desecrated by rioters following which the authorities cancelled the land allotment order issued to the Ahmedis 20 years ago. During 2009, in Lahore, Ahmedi worship places in Model Town repeatedly received threats from the conservative religious groups and hate campaigns were conducted against the community through wall-chalking, posters and pamphlets.

## **Seats for minorities in parliament**

Despite Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani's promise made of five reserved seats for minorities in the Senate, religious minorities were not able to secure seats in the Senate in February 2009. The minorities feel that before the end of the term of the present government in 2012, there were very slim chances of their representation in the Senate. Moreover, all assemblies have 33 per cent representation of women which does not include women belonging to minority groups.

## **Employment opportunities**

The government had announced that it would reserve five per cent of the jobs in government departments for educated and skilled members of the minorities, but the notification was not issued. Estimates suggest that 80 per cent of the minority population falls below the poverty line and that it has usually been ignored during the various government support programmes. The marginalization and isolation of the minorities can be gauged from their extremely poor representation in the army, judiciary and the police.

Christians were facing problems in obtaining FATA domicile certificates despite the fact that they had been residing in Khyber Agency for many years. This deprived them of the possibility of acquiring jobs in the country.

# Violence against Minorities

## **Shias**

Despite the tight security provided by the government and private agencies, 2009 witnessed considerable sectarian violence. On 28th December 2009, the tenth day of the holy month of Muharram, at least 40 people were killed and 60 others injured in Karachi when a suicide bomber targeted the main Ashura procession. Afterwards, Interior Minister Rehman Malik said the investigations revealed that a sectarian organization was behind the attack. It was the third sectarian attack on the minority community in three days in Karachi in spite of police and security agencies' efforts at maintaining a massive vigil over the traditional procession route. Shia population in Parachinar also remained under attack from sectarian militants. The road link to Parachinar remained cut off.

## **Shia-Hazara under attack**

The situation was worse in Balochistan where Hazara-Shia community had been under attack from sectarian militants for six years. More than 260 people belonging to Hazara community in Quetta had been killed in target shooting and more than 1000 people suffered injuries since 2003. The Hazara community believed that security agencies and the government were protecting and patronizing the perpetrators of crimes against the Shia community. As an example, they presented the case of two convicted criminals, Usman Saifullah Kurd and Shafeeq Rind, belonging to the anti-Shia organization, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, who had mysteriously escaped from a well-guarded jail of Anti-Terrorist Force (ATF) in Quetta Cantonment where no one could enter without a pass, implying they were helped by some elements within the security agency.

A number of lawyers belonging to Shia Hazara community were killed in targeted shootings during the year 2009. Sectarian hit men were said to be responsible; they had declared in courts that on release they would again kill Shias. The Shia-Hazara community seemed to have lost trust in the provincial government's capability of bringing perpetrators of the crime to justice.

Following is the list of attacks on Shias in Balochistan during 2009:

**January 10:** Syed Saqlain Naqvi, a leader of Tehrik-e- Jafria, was sitting in his shop located on Chakar Khan Road, District Sibi along with his gunman Ghulam Ali, when three men riding a motorbike came and shot at them, killing both.

**January 13:** Hanif Ali Hazara, a resident of Muslim Ittehad Colony, Quetta, was shot and killed by armed persons on Kirani Road, Quetta.

**January 14:** Four police officials, namely Hassan Ali, Ghulam Muhammad, Muhammad Tariq, and Nasarullah, were gunned down by unknown motorcyclists on Sariab Road, Quetta.

**January 26:** Hussain Ali Yousafi, Chairman of Hazara Democratic Party (HDP), was assassinated by unidentified armed men riding motorbikes on Jinnah Road, Quetta.

**February 3:** The owner of a furniture workshop, Iqbal Zaidi, came under attack by unknown persons on Zarghoon Road when he was on way to his house in Shahbaz Town, Quetta.

**March 1:** Ghulam Sakhi and his son Ali Asghar were shot and killed at their shop on Zarghon Road, Quetta, by unidentified gunmen riding a motorbike.

**March 3:** Five men, belonging to the Hazara community, namely Haji Mukhtar, Liaquat Ali, Zahid Ali, Naseem Ali and Hayat Ullah, were killed by unknown armed men on the Eastern Bypass in Quetta.

**March 4:** Ali Ahmed was shot at by armed men on Arbab Karam Khan Road.

**June 23:** Talib Agha of Union Nazim Halqa 15, along with his guards, Jawad and Ali Ahmed, was shot and killed by unknown men on Fatima Jinnah Road, Quetta.

**August 21:** Allama Maqsood Domki, the President of Jafaria Alliance, Balochistan, survived an attempt on his life. His gunman shot dead one of the attackers while the other one escaped.

**September 8:** A well known trader, Ahmed Ali Hazara, was killed by armed men on Sirki Road, Quetta.

**October 2:** A noted lawyer and a PPP activist, Wilayat Hussain Shah, was gunned down by unidentified men in Quetta.

## ***Ahmedis***

**January 19:** An Ahmedi, Saeed Ahmad, was killed in Kotri (Sindh).

**February 20:** Mubashir Ahmed was shot dead in Karachi.

**February 25:** A murder attempt was made on Muhammad Iqbal Abid, an Ahmedi religious teacher in Vehari.

**March 14:** Shiraz Bajwa and his wife Noreen Bajwa, both doctors, were brutally murdered in Multan.

**April 1:** Bashir Ahmed, Advocate, President of the local Ahmadiyya community, Achini Payan, near Peshawar, was abducted and had not been recovered till Dec 31 2009.

**May 8:** A well known Ahmedi trader, Mian Laiq Ahmad, was attacked in Faisalabad by three armed men while sitting in his car. The armed men blocked the road to his house and shot him dead.

**May 9:** Rashid Karim, a well-known Ahmedi in Faisalabad, was abducted and released after five months on the payment of a heavy ransom.

**June 24:** Two Ahmedis, Khalid Rasheed and Zafar Iqbal, were shot dead in Quetta.

**July 6:** Rana Ata-ul-Karim was murdered in Multan.

**August 6:** An Ahmedi, Rana Ata-ul Karim, was shot dead after his wife was harassed by three Muslim extremists in Multan.

**August 7:** Two Ahmedis were assaulted for their faith in Nankana Sahab near Lahore.

**August 12:** Javed Ahmed escaped a murder attempt in Kunri (Sindh).

**September 11:** Zulfiqar Mansur was abducted in Quetta and a month later his dead body was found on the roadside on the city's outskirts.

**September 26:** Ahmed Farooqi was shot dead in Uch Sharif, Bahawalpur.

**November 25:** Dr Pervaiz Zareef of Bhati Gate, Lahore narrowly escaped an attempt on his life.

**November 26:** Rana Saleem Ahmad, the Deputy Amir of Jamaat Ahmediya Sanghar, was shot at and killed.

## ***Major incidents of violence against religious minorities***

### ***The Layyah incident***

On January 28, a case under Section 295-C of the Penal Code was registered against five men belonging to the Ahmediya community at Kot Sultan police station of Layyah district where around half a dozen Ahmediya families lived. Four of the accused were boys studying at matriculation level. They were accused of writing the name of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on the walls of a mosque's toilet in village 172/TDA. Although the accused denied the allegation made against them, they were arrested and detained. The fifth accused was a labourer.

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) fact-finding mission sent to Layyah on February 1, 2009, a few days prior to the lodging of the FIR, a resident of Chak 173/TDA named Muhammad Safdar saw the name of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) written on the mosque's toilet. He told the prayer leader, Qari Muhammad Saeed, about the writing. According to Masood Ahmed, representative of the Ahmadiyya community in Layyah, six Ahmadi families had been living in village 172/TDA for over 50 years and had had no dispute or enmity with any other community member. The nazim of the area was asked to probe the matter. It was learnt that four students from the

Ahmediya community, namely, Mohammad Irfan, Tahir Imran, Tahir Mehmood and Naseeb Ahmed, used to offer prayers in the mosque and also used its toilets. After the investigation, the Ahmedis were stopped from offering prayers in the mosque, and it was said the villagers believed that the Ahmedis, being the only non-Muslims coming to the mosque, must have committed the sacrilege.

After the registration of the case with the police, the Ahmediya community voluntarily handed over all those nominated in the FIR to the police. The students assured the authorities that they had not written the Prophet's name in the mosque's toilets nor had committed any other crime. The students told the authorities that their matriculation examination was due to begin on March 4 and requested to be released.

However, the accused were transferred from Kot Sultan police station, around 20 kilometers from the village, to Saddar police station in Layyah city. The HRCF team went to the police station and requested permission to talk to the accused, but the SHO turned down the request and said he was only responsible for the custody of the accused as it was not his police station's case. However, the police and villagers conceded that there was no witness or evidence of the Ahmadi involvement in the alleged blasphemy and as required by law, no investigation was carried out by the SP investigation prior to the arrest of the accused. The bail applications of the boys were rejected quite a few times and they had to take their examination while in confinement. Eventually, they were granted bail after six months of their arrest.

### ***The Kasur incident***

On June 30, the Christian community of village Bahminawala of District Kasur staged a protest demonstration to press their demand that the government and local administration took steps for the protection of their lives, property and their right to free movement after they had been attacked by some people who demolished their houses and damaged and looted their belongings.

Bahminawala village had a population of more than 800 families, 122 of them Christian. The HRCF fact-finding team saw broken or demolished houses, badly damaged vehicles bearing acid marks, broken electricity meters, pedestal and ceiling fans, water pumps and washing machines, burnt donkey carts belonging to Christian labourers. It also saw the Christians, men and women both, who had been tortured and injured by the raiders.

It was reported that on June 29 Sardar Masih of Bahminawala was driving his tractor back to the village. Finding his path blocked by a motorbike he asked Muhammad Riaz (a Muslim) to push his motorbike on one side so that his tractor could pass.

Chaudhry Riaz refused to do so, and this led to a brawl between the two. Later in the night after both had returned to their homes, Riaz's relations accompanied by eight or so other Muslims attacked the house of Sardar Masih. Both parties suffered some casualties.

The next day Shan Ali, an active member of a local organization named Uqaab announced that the Christians of the village had committed blasphemy, and asked the Muslims to gather near a mosque in the village. As similar announcements were made in surrounding villages, approximately a hundred men gathered and proceeded to attack the Christian houses.

After the attack on the Christians, a heavy contingent of the police was deployed in the village to maintain law and order. The Federal and Punjab Provincial Governments' ministers also visited the affected village and pledged monetary compensation to the victim families.

### ***The Gojra incident***

On August 1, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) received information of Muslim extremists attacking a Christian neighborhood of about 60 houses and more than 100 families in Gojra, a tehsil headquarter in Toba Tek Singh district in Punjab. The attackers looted Christians' houses, before setting them on fire. Seven persons were burnt alive and several others were killed otherwise, three churches and 47 houses were torched.

The Gojra attacks occurred two days after the incident of brutal attacks and torching of Christian houses on July 30, in Korianwala. There allegations of desecration of the Holy Quran were made against a Christian villager, leading to attacks on the Christian community.

According to investigations carried out by the HRCP, the wedding ceremony of Talib Masih's son was in progress on July 25 during which guests showered currency notes on the groom as a part of festivities.

The next morning, on July 26, Muhammad Ashraf, belonging to a nearby village, Chak 95/JB, alleged that he had found pieces of paper bearing Quranic verses outside Talib's house. He claimed that the papers were among the currency bills that were thrown at the groom, and that Talib had desecrated the Holy Quran. On July 30, Ashraf, a local landlord and over a dozen activists of religious parties, some of whom did not belong to that village, ordered Talib Masih to appear before their self-styled panchayat and explain his position regarding the allegations made by Ashraf. Talib appeared before the panchayat and denied defiling the Holy Quran, where upon members of the *panchayat* beat him up. Christians accused the panchayat members of blackmailing Talib for money, threatening him with registration of a case for alleged defiling of the Holy Quran if he did not pay them.

Soon afterwards, the religious parties' activists made an announcement on the mosque loudspeaker that the Quran had been desecrated and Muslims should teach the culprits a lesson. Most of the Christian population of Korianwala immediately fled the village to save their lives as scores of men from nearby villages attacked their houses within an hour of announcements from mosques. The attackers were carrying firearms, wooden sticks, iron rods and kerosene oil; they set fire to 57 Christian houses after looting or destroying valuables.

Although a police contingent reached the village that night, a Muslim mob resisted police attempts to disperse them and did not allow firefighters to extinguish the fires. The mob demanded suspension of the Sadar police SHO, expulsion of Christians ousted from Korianwala and Talib to be publicly hanged. The administration ordered the SHO.s immediate suspension to defuse the situation.

### ***The Muridke incident***

On August 4, a factory-owner Najib Zafar was wounded in a scuffle with some angry factory workers. Police arrived there and hid Najib in a store-room so as to protect him from violent workers. But the provoked villagers and the factory workers teamed up to storm the store-room, while the unarmed policemen looked the other way to save their own skin. The mob was left free to beat Najib to death. A labourer, Muzammil, also lost his life by coming in the way of a stray bullet.

In this incident, a factory clerk, Qasim Ali, exaggerated and exploited the falling to the floor of a calendar inscribed with Quranic verses. He described this as desecration of the Quran to instigate fellow factory workers against the owner. Soon after this, extremist elements in Muridke area made provocative announcements about the alleged desecration of the Quran from the mosques of nearby villages without confirming the facts. In this way they incited the common people to attack the factory owner.

## Religious understanding and tolerance in the education system

According to a survey-based HRCF study 'enhancing religious understanding and promoting tolerance in education' extracurricular activities in schools, such as annual functions, debates, literary competitions, plays, etc, were centered on both nationalistic and religious themes. The study was based on a survey of 80 public schools across the country and interviews with nearly 2,500 respondents including students, teachers, parents and community members. The survey led to the conclusion that schools in Pakistan generally did not promote religious intolerance as topics like Jihad, India-Pakistan relations, Kashmir dispute were hardly ever discussed in schools. The survey revealed that most of the public schools in Pakistan did not have libraries. In schools where libraries were found, most books were received either from private donors or from the government, hence school administration had little control over the choice of books which were mostly about Islam and Pakistani history.

Most schools displayed a combination of religious material (Quranic verses, sayings of the Holy Prophet that emphasized personal morals and the virtue of seeking knowledge) and symbols of Pakistani nationalism (pictures of national heroes and their sayings). Punjab (primarily Lahore and Bahawalpur districts) emerged as the province with the highest frequency of religious materials displayed in its schools.

It is significant to note that a number of schools mostly in the rural districts particularly in Quetta and Sibi, were without any kind of displays on school premises. Only a few schools displayed sayings or symbols which specifically addressed or promoted religious tolerance. In 12 per cent of the schools, the materials displayed called for encouragement of tolerance, peace and brotherhood but only in general terms and without reference to people of other faiths. The only two schools where the issues of religious tolerance and inter-faith harmony were addressed by making reference to people of other religions were in Tharparker district, where Hindus constitute a significant minority.

On the other hand, some schools were involved in actively promoting religious extremism. In around 18 per cent of the sampled schools, religious texts extolling jihad (sacrificing in the name of religion) and *shahadat* (martyrdom) were favoured.

Half of these schools were in the Punjab districts. Tharparker and Sibi were the only districts where no such placards were found in any of the schools.

Religious events were almost as common as national days or events in Pakistan's public schools. Around 73 per cent of the respondents (78 per cent teachers and 68 per cent students) were of the view that religious activities were always or often held in their schools. A majority of those who said that religious activities were rare or absent in their schools belonged to Tharparker (Sindh) and Battagram (NWFP) districts. The Punjab and Balochistan districts showed the highest frequency of religious events where 90 per cent of the students reported that religious activities were continuously or often held in their schools.

There were differences in views on promotion of religious tolerance and interfaith harmony through extra-curricular activities at school. 84 per cent of the teachers said that activities held at school promoted religious tolerance and 81 per cent claimed that the activities ensured inter-faith harmony. However, when students were asked the same question, around 59 per cent of them said they did not recall such activities being held at school while 9 per cent chose not to answer the question. Hence, cross-verification from students indicated that there were fewer tolerance-promoting activities than claimed by the teachers. It also appeared from the survey that girls schools and female teachers were more active promoters of religious tolerance than their counterparts in boys schools.

