

INCIDENT REPORT

DEMOLITION OF HISTORIC AHMADIYYA MOSQUE IN DASKA, PAKISTAN



Date: 16 January 2025

Location: Daska, District Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

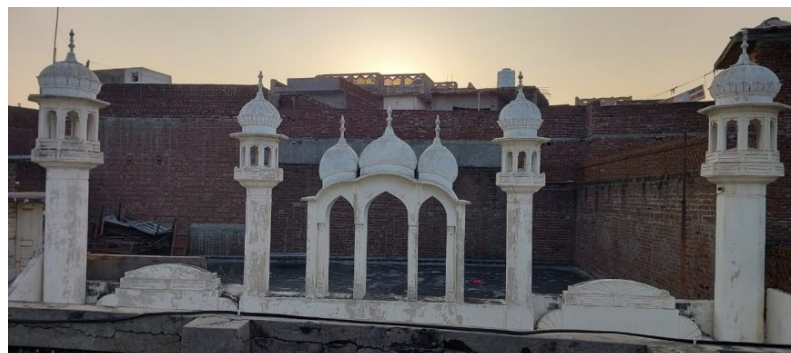
Overview

On 16 January 2025, local authorities in Daska, District Sialkot, demolished a historic Ahmadiyya mosque, citing an alleged encroachment as the justification. The mosque, constructed before Pakistan's independence in 1947, held significant historical and religious importance. It was originally built under the direction of Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, Pakistan's first Foreign Minister, for the religious practices of the local Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

The incident has amplified concerns regarding the systematic discrimination faced by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan, including the misuse of legal provisions to justify targeting their places of worship.

Historical Background

The mosque, located in the old city of Daska, was built prior to 1947 as a place of worship for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, a prominent figure in the Pakistan Movement and the country's first Foreign Minister, played a key role in the construction of this site, reflecting the community's long-standing presence in the region.



The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has been subject to legal and social discrimination since the constitutional amendment of 1974, which declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims. The 1984 anti-Ahmadi ordinances, introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq, prohibited the community from 'posing' as Muslim and criminalised their use of certain Islamic symbols and terminology.

Contrary to widespread perceptions, legal experts argue that the 1984 ordinances do not explicitly criminalise the construction of minarets by Ahmadis. Instead, the ordinances specifically prohibit Ahmadis from using Islamic religious terminology or presenting themselves as Muslims. This distinction has been frequently overlooked or misinterpreted, resulting in actions that target the community's architectural and cultural heritage, including minarets, even in cases where such structures predate these laws.

Developments Leading to the Demolition

Escalation of Tensions

In September 2024, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) alleged that the mosque violated the 1984 laws due its minarets and called for their demolition. Despite official assurances that the mosque's construction predated the laws and was therefore exempt, the TLP escalated its campaign, organising rallies in Daska.

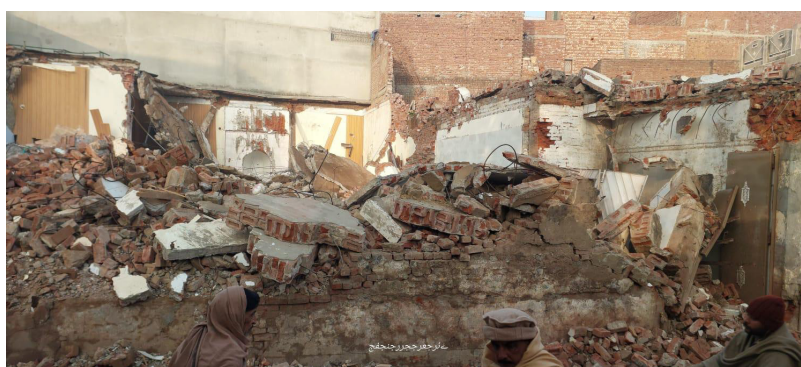
On 22 September 2024, the TLP held a large-scale protest demanding the removal of the minarets. Local authorities initially sought to mediate the matter, reportedly promising to address the issue by 12 Rabi-al-Awwal (the birth date of the Prophet of Islam). However, no immediate action was taken, leading to further unrest and mounting pressure on the administration.

Notice of Encroachment

In January 2025, the local administration issued a notice under the Punjab Local Government Act, alleging that the mosque's boundary wall encroached 13 feet onto a public road. The local Ahmadi community complied with the directive, removing the encroaching structure and reconstructing the wall by 15 January 2025.

Demolition Operation

Despite the community's adherence to the notice, an unannounced demolition operation was launched on 16 January 2025, under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner Maham Mushtaq. Police and municipal staff were present during the operation. Electricity to the mosque and surrounding areas was cut off, and access to the site was restricted. The operation, lasting from 7pm to 11pm, not only removed the alleged encroachment, but concluded with the complete demolition of the mosque.



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Pattern of Targeted Actions Against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

The demolition of the mosque in Daska is part of a broader pattern of actions targeting the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community across Pakistan. Reports indicate that at least 24 Ahmadiyya mosques were targeted across Pakistan in 2024.

Other instances of targeted actions include the vandalism of Ahmadi cemeteries across Pakistan, including in the local area where an Ahmadi cemetery in Bharoke Kalan village was vandalised and tombstones inscribed with Islamic phrases were destroyed.



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Statement from the Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

During his Friday sermon on 17 January, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, addressed the demolition of the mosque in Daska. He said:

"At times the cruelty of Pakistani authorities and the clerics reaches extreme levels. Often it seems as though the government have become puppets at the hands of the extremists...The mosque was built before the partition of India, and it is said that Sir Zafarullah Khan, one of the founding fathers of Pakistan and its first foreign minister, had it constructed...this is how far these people have exceeded the limits—only Allah Almighty can hold them to account."

Conclusion

The demolition of the mosque in Daska highlights an alarming disregard for religious freedoms and legal fairness. Despite the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's compliance with administrative directives to address the alleged encroachment, local authorities proceeded with the complete destruction of a site of considerable historical and religious significance. This act raises serious concerns about the impartiality and conduct of the officials involved.

The incident exemplifies the broader systemic challenges faced by religious minorities in Pakistan, where targeted actions and discriminatory practices undermine their ability to practice their faith freely. It is imperative for national and international human rights organisations and other stakeholders to address these issues and hold authorities accountable for upholding the principles of justice and equality. To preserve social cohesion and prevent further marginalisation, there must be a renewed commitment to fostering tolerance and ensuring the rights of all citizens are protected under the law.