

## Returning Ahmadi villagers face social boycott

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LAHORE: Members of the Ahmadiyya community who fled their village in the wake of the storming of their worship place and a subsequent clash on Dec 12 have started trickling back to their homes in Chakwal's Dulmail area. Upon their return, the Ahmadi villagers are facing a social boycott imposed by the locals.

Most of the shops in Dulmail are not willing to entertain Ahmadi customers. "The locals are not even ready to talk to us," one Ahmadi villager said.

The authorities imposed a curfew and mounted a crackdown after the Dec 12 attack during which one Ahmadi worshipper died of cardiac arrest, one protester was killed and another five were injured. The authorities later asked people to return to their homes and assured them that those without a link to the incident or the clash would not be arrested.

Soldiers left the village after spending 10 days in the locality. About 100 policemen were currently deployed in the area to ensure no damage was done to the minority group. The group's around 600 members form a tiny part of the total population of 11,624.

Jamaat Ahmadiyya's Chakwal district chief Malik Zahid Hameed told *The Express Tribune* that so far 128 Ahmadis, including women, children and old men had come back. "However, there is no young man among these people out of fears of a clash with the locals," he said. Hameed said the villagers had avoided having any relations with the minority group in the past. "But, now they are trying to make our lives harder," he said. "No shopkeeper is giving us grocery items and even milkmen are not giving milk to Ahmadis. They have to purchase daily commodities from Chakwal city," he said, adding that even schoolchildren from Ahmadi families are complaining of being avoided by their class fellows.



Another Ahmadi resident, who requested not to be named, said many Ahmadis and non-Ahmadis were relatives and had been living peacefully. “This event, however, has made us feel like we are not human beings,” he said. He said even their non-Ahmadi relatives were not ready to talk to them. He said it is not possible for them to leave this village, where their ancestral lands and houses are located. “Even if all Ahmadis offered to sell their houses, no one would be ready to give them a proper price,” he added.

He said there are more than 10 mosques for Muslims but only one place of worship for Ahmadis, which the locals were hell-bent to take control over. “Even though, according to the revenue record, some mosques are on lands owned by Ahmadis,” he added.

Chakwal’s Deputy Commissioner Javed Bhatti said the government could not do anything to stop this social boycott. “However, no one will be allowed to take the law into his hands,” he said.

Talking to *The Express Tribune*, Habibur Rehman – brother of Naeem Shafiq who died in the firing on Dec 12 – said police and all other law enforcing agencies were protecting Ahmadis.

He said it was correct that locals were angry with Ahmadis for killing his brother but no announcement was made in the village to boycott the minority group. “They can go to shops of Muslims and can buy goods,” he said.

SHO Malik Muhammad Nawaz told *The Express Tribune* that 100 policemen were performing their duties round the clock. “We are trying to create a peaceful atmosphere in the village so that everyone regardless of his religion can live his life peacefully,” he said.

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