



No relief for Ahmadis

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The Islamabad High Court (IHC) holds Parliament collectively responsible for the amendment to the oath of Khatam-e-Nabuwwat in the Election Act 2017. Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui effectively reprimanded each and every lawmaker who let the ‘clerical error’ regarding the finality of prophet-hood pass unnoticed. Reinforcing the judiciary’s position whereby the latter chose not to stand with an elected government in the face of a rapidly resurgent and violent religious right. This allowed the subsequent succumbing to political opportunism across the great divide.

And while this was exploited to add further ammunition to those gunning for the PMLN — the fallout extends far beyond those who may or may have not fallen from grace. Indeed, Pakistan’s Ahmadi community continues to bear the burden of this latest ruckus; which was not undertaken in their name but for which they are being burned at the stake. Figuratively speaking. For now.

The path ahead, as envisaged by Justice Siddiqui, appears akin to turning Pakistan into a surveillance state. Whereby Ahmadis are to be singled out due to their ‘special’ status as a minority group that cannot be easily distinguished from the majority when it comes to name and appearance. To redress this, Justice Siddiqui wants to see an end to this community’s use of Muslim names. He is, in addition, pushing for the introduction of affidavits to ‘amend’ declarations of faith.

To be clear, such recommendations are reminiscent of the yellow badges that the Nazis and Axis Powers forced Jews to wear during that darkest of periods: the Holocaust. This is not only a dangerous trajectory for this country to embark upon. It is a most unjust one. After all, Ahmadis have been suffering legitimised persecution for more than 40 years. And we at this newspaper had hoped that the record of fledgling democracy may have laid the foundations to at least considering a national dialogue on the question of state remit and the identification of religious faith. Resolving this, we firmly believe, is crucial to Pakistan’s progress as a truly modern and pluralistic nation. Instead, certain quarters appear to be rallying round the lowest common denominator.

The incoming set-up must keep a few things in mind. Namely, that policy over the next five years should not be driven with re-election in mind. But by the mature understanding that, regardless of constituencies, the job at hand is to serve the citizenry as a whole. That means all Pakistanis. No matter what. After all, this is the mandate of directly elected political leadership. As opposed to those at the helm recasting the most vulnerable as a man-made battleground for inter-party point scoring.

This is not our vision of a democratic Pakistan. It should not be anyone’s. *



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