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Pakistanis condemn Rushdie honour

Thousands of Pakistanis have burned effigies of Queen Elizabeth and Salman Rushdie, with Shaukat Aziz, the prime minister, saying that Britain's decision to knight the author has defamed Muslims.

Demonstrators on Friday took to the streets in several cities amid growing anger at Britain's decision to honour the author of *The Satanic Verses*, which some Muslims consider blasphemous.

Britain has defended the knighthood, stressing the importance of free speech and saying it was part of a trend of honouring Muslims in the British community.

Under watch

A crowd of about 300 people in the capital Islamabad, watched over by riot police carrying batons and shields, chanted "Our struggle will continue until Salman Rushdie is killed!"

Fazlur Rehman, a pro-Taliban cleric and leader of the parliamentary opposition, told the protesters: "Britain must withdraw the knighthood and hand Rushdie to Pakistan to be punished under Islamic laws."

Later, Aziz lashed out at Britain in Pakistan's parliament.

"we condemn the decision to award a knighthood to Rushdie," he told the national assembly, or lower house.

"It has hurt the feelings of Muslims. Muslims will never tolerate derogatory remarks against the last Prophet Mohammed."

In Karachi more than 1,000 people chanting "Death to Rushdie, Death to Britain" gathered outside the city's main conservative Binori mosque after Friday prayers.

Bombings justified

The protesters chanted that they backed comments made in parliament on Monday by Ijaz-ul Haq, the religious affairs minister, that Rushdie's knighthood justified suicide bombings.

They also hit out at Benazir Bhutto, former prime minister, for calling for Haq's resignation.

In the central city of Multan there were several protests drawing more than 750 people. Members of the local paramedics association torched effigies of Rushdie and the Queen, a photographer said.

About 700 Muslim activists and members of cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan's party chanted "Curse



Salman Rushdie's knighthood has drawn protest in Pakistan in recent days [EPA]

Your Views

"It is up to the UK to decide who is deserving of knighthood for their country."

rezasantorini,
Chicago, US

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"Whoever kills him will be the hero of Muslims"

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Rushdie, Long Live Osama (Bin Laden)" in northwestern Peshawar.

Khwaja Saad Rafiq, opposition politician

Hundreds of protesters burned tyres, a Rushdie dummy and posters from a local cinema in the eastern town of Gujrat. They also blocked a main road for two hours.

Several hundred protesters also gathered in the eastern city of Lahore and in Quetta, a southwestern city near the Afghan border.

Medal returned

Arbab Ghulam Rahim, chief minister of Sindh province, said he was returning a medal given to his grandfather by Britain's King George VI in 1937 and a title awarded to his uncle by the British in 1945.

"I will now return these as no Muslim can accept any title from the Queen after she honoured Salman Rushdie," he said.

In Iran, a prominent cleric said that the fatwa issued by the late Iranian Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini in 1989 calling for Rushdie's death was "still alive".

"In the Islamic Iran that revolutionary fatwa of Imam [Khomeini] is still alive and cannot be changed," Ahmad Khatami said in comments during Friday prayers that were broadcast on state radio.

Source: Al Jazeera and agencies

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