

## SAEED AHMAD CHOUDHARY

### *Ex-Imam of the Berlin Lahore Ahmadiyya Mission*

Mr. Saeed Ahmad Choudhary took charge of the Berlin Mission in October 1987 along with Mr. Abdul Aziz, who was to assist him. Mr. A. S. Abdul Santoe, Co-ordinator of the Central Ahmadiyya Anjuman (Lahore) in Europe came from Rotterdam, Holland to facilitate the take over.

The new *Imam* assessed the financial and organisational aspects of the Mission, especially the repairs that the Mosque and the Mission House required. His first priority was to generate funds for these urgent repairs. In this connection, he undertook an extensive tour of Jama'ats in Holland and made vigorous efforts to collect funds. The response was very encouraging. Brothers A. S. Santoe and Shams-ud-Din Elahi Bakhsh of The Hague not only helped him in collecting financial support, but even provided volunteers who went to Berlin with material to do the urgent repairs manually.

Imam Saeed Ahmad was born at Gujrat, Pakistan on 23 September 1925. He had his education in Aircraft Engineering at the Aircraft Technical School, Sikandarabad and Gindi Engineering College, Madras, India. He worked as Assistant Engineer at the Thal Development Authority and also as Agriculture Engineer at the Commonwealth Livestock Farm at various centres in the District of Mianwali, Pakistan, from 1951 to 1958. In 1958, he joined the Engineering Department of Pakistan International Airlines and retired as Engineering Officer in 1958. During this period, he worked mostly in Peshawar, but also served at Karachi and Dhaka (now in Bangladesh) stations.

During his tenure of 16 years (1987-2003), his main thrust had been to encourage people of all faiths to visit the beautiful historic Mosque in Berlin, Germany. According to the records maintained by the *Imam* during his tenure, about ten thousand visitors came to the Mosque. This included students from schools and universities, tourists, teachers, police and nursing staff and groups from various churches. Fifty-three men and women from various nationalities entered the fold of Islam.

At one point, he was able to elicit the cooperation of four Germans to start a quarterly magazine, *Islam Heute*, meaning *Islam Today*. Bro. Ibrahim Schadow and Dr. Franzen from Celle were mainly responsible for editing, printing and distributing this magazine. However, due to financial difficulties, it had to be discontinued after some time.

In 1991, an international Ahmadiyya Convention was held at the Mosque and this was attended by representatives from Pakistan, Holland, England, Surinam, USA and Canada, and also present were prominent members of the Local Government and local parishes. The main object was to highlight the activities of the Mission and to launch a worldwide appeal for funds for the repairs of the Mosque and the Mission House. It was decided to declare the year 1996 as the year of the Berlin Mosque so as to give a boost to the campaign for collecting funds.

In 1997, seventy years after the building of the Mosque, an elaborate programme was made to celebrate this auspicious occasion. A special function arranged at the Mosque was attended by local German Muslims and prominent people from all walks of life. It was presided over by the Mayor of Wilmersdorf. Dr. Ahmed Mokrani, an Algerian engineer, spoke about the positive missionary work being done by the Berlin Mission.

The *Imam* on this occasion made a special appeal to the Mayor to help the Mission in restoring the original beauty of the Mosque and the Mission House which were damaged during the World War II. Afterwards a formal application was made to the local authority to include the Mosque and the Mission House building in the list of National Monuments. The request was accepted.

The Monument Department prepared an estimate of the urgent repairs required, especially with regard to the renovation of the two minarets. After mutual consultation in which Mrs. Samina Malik, President of the USA Ahmadiyya *Jama'at* played a pivotal role, the plan and estimate were agreed upon. As a result, 50,000 DM were contributed by the Central Ahmadiyya Anjuman, Lahore, 70,000 DM by the USA *Jama'at*, and 800,000 DM were paid by the Monument Department of Berlin, Germany. These funds were utilised under the supervision of the Monument Department to completely renovate the two minarets and to do urgent repairs to the Mission House and the Mosque. Some major repairs to the dome and ceiling of the Mosque still remain to be done.

Imam Saeed Ahmad Choudhary, due to health reasons, finally relinquished the charge of the Mission towards the end of January 2004. Mr. Riaz Ahmad Choudhary, a Law graduate from the University of the Punjab, is the new *Imam* of the Berlin Mosque.