

News about minority rights and religious freedom in Pakistan.

Minority CONCERN Pakistan

EDITOR: Aftab Alexander Mughal ISSUE NO: 107 - June 2020 E: minorityconcernpk@gmail.com W: minorityconcernpk.wixsite.com/mysite/



PRAYER SERVICES Outside Churches

During the month of May, because of the lockdown imposed as a preventive measure against the COVID-19, Christians throughout Pakistan performed the Sunday prayer services outside the church premises. Many churches conducted online prayer services or through local Christian TV channels.

Several Christian organisations have been providing food items to thousands of Christians and Muslims who are experiencing financial hardships because of the lockdown in Pakistan.

(IMAGE: During a Sunday service, Catholic worshippers attended a prayer service outside Sacred Heart Cathedral, Lahore, Pakistan - AFP/Dawn, 18 May 2020)

CONTROVERSY over National Minority Commission

Pakistani minorities, non-Muslim citizens of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and human rights organisations have refused the newly formed minority commission by the government of Pakistan, as it was constituted by an executive order rather an act of Parliament. Moreover, its membership is not transparent. Many Muslim members are included, while Ahmadi community is excluded because of the pressure from the right-wing groups.



By Aftab Alexander Mughal

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) was notified on 11 May by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (MRAIH). The cabinet approved it on 5 May, but opposed the inclusion of the Ahmaddiya community's representative. Pakistan's civil society organisations, lawyers and media persons across the country opposed the newly formed body, because it is established through the executive order than the act of Parliament. Executive Director of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), and Chairman People's Commission for Minority Rights (PCMR) Peter Jacob observed that government had tried to mislead public opinion by creating a toothless body for minorities through a cabinet decision. Jacob has been campaigning for instituting a statutory national commission for minorities' rights, which Pakistan has pledged to under international norms several times without delivering on it.

Human rights organisations ask the government to establish an independent commission through an adequate, fair and consultative process, where minorities are consulted. Furthermore, it should be done by the parliament rather as a body in a ministry.

Additionally, present commission's members' selection criteria was not transparent. There is no representation of Schedule Casts, who formed the biggest section of the Hindu community in the country. It should be an autonomous body as The National Commission on Human Rights, the National Commission on the Status of Women, and the Commission on the Rights of the Child, human rights activists demanded.

A Christian political leader Sarfraz Clement said, "The way the commission has formed will not resolve minorities' issues, such as cases under blasphemy laws and forced conversion of Christian and Hindu girls. Moreover, the issues like, church property disputes, and denationalisation of Christian schools."

Interestingly, two members of the commission are Muslim. The six official members are from various ministries, all Muslim, including

the chairman of the Islamic Council of Ideology (ICI), who is also Muslim. Minority leaders said if non-Muslim cannot be part of the Islamic Council of Ideology (ICI), a constitutional body, then why include Muslim members in the minority commission? They claimed that the inclusion of Muslims and bureaucrats will undermine the representation of minorities. The members of the commission belong to the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Parsi and Kalash communities. The three Christian members of the commission are: Roman Catholic Archbishop Sebastian Francis Shaw of Lahore, Prof. Dr. Sarah Safdar, and Mr. Albert David.

There is no representation of Ahmadis. A petition was filed at Islamabad High Court (IHC) by Shohda Foundation of Pakistan that the court should issue a direction for the inclusion of Ahmadis as non-Muslim in the NCM.

This is not the first minority commission. Since 1990, a couple of times the commission was constituted, but these commissions were never sustained because of the political involvements.

According to the national population census 2017, Muslims make up 96.47% of the total population, while minorities make up only 3.53%. Hindus are 1.73%, while Christians are 1.27%. Other minority communities are Ahmadis, Sikh, Kalash and Schedule Casts. Generally, minorities face discrimination and experience persecution because of their faith. (Full Article at: [South Asian Journal, 14 May 2020.](http://southasiajournal.net/controversy-over-newly-formed-national-minority-commission-in-pakistan/))

VIRUS PANDEMIC

SC Orders Opening Of All Shopping Malls

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan on 18 May set aside the federal government's decision to close shops, markets and businesses on Saturdays and Sundays, saying it reflected no justifiable rationale, *Dawn* reported.



CHRISTIAN DELEGATION

KARACHI: A delegation of Christian leaders along with Anthony Naveed, MPA Sindh, met with provincial minister Saeed Ghani in regard of lockdown.

Muslims, Christians And Sikhs Pray With The Pope For An End To The Pandemic



FAISALABAD: Pakistani Muslims, Christians and Sikhs met at the residence of the Catholic Bishop Indrias Rehmat of Faisalabad to pray and fast against the coronavirus along with Pope Francis. The initiative is a response to an appeal from

the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, supported by the pontiff, *Asia News* reported on 14 May 2020.

Food Aid In Exchange For Converting To Islam: Violence Against The Poor, In Times Of Pandemic

LAHORE Christians condemned the action of those Muslims who exploiting the lockdown due to coronavirus outbreak, and induce a religious conversion to Islam if Christians want food, they must become Muslim *Agenzia Fides* reported on 5 May 2020.

In Pakistan, a video went viral in which an Islamic religious leader expressed joy at the conversion to Islam of some non-Muslims who had asked for food aid due to the economic impact of the coronavirus emergency. The religious leader openly urges all Muslims committed to distributing food aid to ask beneficiaries to embrace Islam, adding that "we should not help non-Muslims".

Sanitary and Janitorial Workers At High Risk of Coronavirus.

By Kashif Nawab

News Lens Pakistan, - 4 May 2020



About 95% of the sanitary and janitors are from minorities here in Pakistan including Hindus and Christians both male and females who are at high risk to the dangerous outbreak of 'coronavirus' in the country. They are the one that collect contaminated garbage from the infectious quarantine wards at the hospitals and around the country. Beside several serious concerns were raised of the infectious contamination to the sanitary workers no proper measures have been carried out by the authorities. Thus the Supreme Court of Pakistan has also realized that 'the condition of sanitary staff is also not good and it is informed that they are exposed to all sorts of diseases, while they are working in hospitals and other places. No effective care is being provided to them and a request has been made that they may be provided with a requisite protection . . . ' on 13 April 2020. The rapid growing number of cases in the region should be enough to draw authorities' attention towards health hazards these sanitary workers are facing. These janitors and sanitary workers are responsible to maintain cleanliness, and disposal of the hazardous waste of all type almost always without any protective gear, especially those working in the hospitals exposed to the threat of contracting this virus then the doctors and other staff because they are not properly protected well enough against pandemic while they are performing their duties.....



PAKISTAN'S Dangerous Capitulation To The Religious Right on The Coronavirus

By Madiha Afzal, Washington Post, 1 May 2020

Perform your ablutions at home. Bring your own prayer mats, place them six feet apart. Wear masks. Use the provided hand sanitizer. No handshakes or hugs allowed. No talking in the mosque. No one over 50 years old can enter. No children allowed.

These guidelines are part of a list of 20 standard operating procedures that Pakistan's government issued on April 18, ostensibly in consultation with the country's religious clerics, for mosque congregations during Ramadan. In reality, the government caved in to the demands of clerics, who earlier that week said that they would refuse to limit Ramadan congregations, despite a growing number of covid-19 cases in the country.

In Pakistan, the religious right — an amalgam of Islamist political parties and the ulema, or religious clerics — has functioned as a potent pressure force on the country's government since its inception. It is doing so amid this covid-19 pandemic as well.

Anyone who has been inside a mosque in Pakistan knows these guidelines are impractical to follow. And enforcement is essentially impossible given the sheer number of mosques in the country, each holding prayers five times a day, in addition to extended Taraweeh prayers during Ramadan. Already, a report from a nongovernmental organization in Pakistan's Punjab province said 80 percent of the mosques it visited last week were violating guidelines. As of Friday, Pakistan reported 17,700 covid-19 cases, with more than 400 deaths.

The government's line was that it did not want to take unilateral action, that people would have gone to mosques anyway, and that a consensus or "middle ground" solution was necessary. Prime Minister Imran Khan has also said that because Pakistan is "an independent nation" — a democracy — it cannot force mosque closures. But these excuses only distract from the real story.

Pakistan's Islamist parties have an outsize influence on government, despite having little in the way of direct electoral seats, due to their street power — or ability to generate huge numbers of followers in the streets for protests — and coalition-building abilities in Parliament. These parties are also used opportunistically by opposition parties and the military as a spoiler against governments in power.

Some argue that Pakistani military dictator Gen. Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq gave the Islamists power in the 1980s in his bid to Islamize the country's institutions. In reality, Islamist parties have influenced Pakistan's trajectory from its founding. They pressured the writers of its first constitution to declare it an Islamic republic and add key Islamic provisions to the constitution. Islamists have compelled both military dictators (such as Ayub Khan in the 1960s) and personally secular politicians (Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in the 1970s) to give in to their demands. Religio-legal institutions such as the Council of Islamic Ideology constitutionally only have advisory powers to Parliament, but they typically step beyond their bounds and mandate.

Over the decades, Pakistan's population has grown more religious, led by the state's Islamic vision and actions. In a nationwide Pew poll in Pakistan in 2011, 84 percent of respondents said that they favored making sharia the official law of the land. Some mosque attendees say that prayer is even more necessary in a pandemic. But they also say that the government would have shut down mosques if the pandemic were a truly serious matter.

Pakistan's state constantly underestimates what it can ask its citizens to do and how it can keep Islamists at bay. Imran Khan, who has burnished his conservative image during his time in politics, has more credibility with Islamists than most. In 2018, this allowed him to take action against a fundamentalist movement that argues for even stricter implementation of Pakistan's harsh blasphemy laws. But he has had a tough year and a half in office, dealing with Pakistan's troubled economy and domestic political crises, with the army consistently encroaching on his power. A prominent Islamist led a huge protest against him last fall to try to oust his government. Khan does not want to take on a new fight....(Full story at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/05/01/pakistans-dangerous-capitulation-religious-right-coronavirus/>)

By Zia ur-Rehman &
Maria Abi-Habib,

The New York Times
4 May 2020

Sewer Cleaners Wanted in Pakistan: **ONLY CHRISTIANS NEED APPLY.**



In Pakistan, descendants of lower-caste Hindus who converted to Christianity centuries ago still find themselves marginalized, relegated to dirty jobs and grim fates.

KARACHI: Before Jamshed Eric plunges deep below Karachi's streets to clean out clogged sewers with his bare hands, he says a little prayer to Jesus to keep him safe. The work is gruelling, and he wears no mask or gloves to protect him from the stinking sludge and toxic plumes of gas that lurk deep underground.

..... A recent spate of deaths among Christian sewer cleaners in Pakistan underscores how the caste discrimination that once governed the Indian subcontinent's Hindus lingers, no matter the religion.

Like thousands of other lower-caste Hindus, Mr. Eric's ancestors converted to Christianity centuries ago, hoping to escape a cycle of discrimination that ruled over every aspect of their lives: what wells of water they could drink from, what jobs they could hold. Manual sewer cleaners, known as sweepers, are at the bottom of that hierarchy, the most untouchable of the untouchable Hindu castes.

But when the Indian subcontinent broke up in 1947 and Pakistan was formed as a homeland for the region's Muslims, a new, informal system of discrimination formed. In Pakistan, **Muslims sit at the top of the hierarchy.** And as one of Pakistan's small Christian minority, Mr. Eric has now been forced into the same work his Hindu ancestors had tried to avoid through religious conversion.

Although India has outlawed caste-based discrimination with mixed success, in **Pakistan it is almost encouraged by the state.** In July, the Pakistani military placed newspaper **advertisements for sewer sweepers**

with the caveat that **only Christians should apply.** After activists protested, the religious requirement was removed. But municipalities across Pakistan rely on Christian sweepers like Mr. Eric. In the sprawling port city of Karachi, sweepers keep the sewer system flowing, using their bare hands to unclog crumbling drainpipes of faces, plastic bags and hazardous hospital refuse, part of the 1,750



million liters of waste the city's 20 million residents produce daily. (Full story at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/world/asia/pakistan-christians-sweepers.html>.)



Pakistan Minister Calls for Beheading of 'Blasphemers'

Pakistan's minister of state for parliamentary affairs has called for the beheading of people who commit blasphemy. "Beheading is the only punishment," Ali Muhammad Khan tweeted in the Urdu language, *UCA News* reported on 1 May. Khan made the controversial comments in response to conflicting reports that Ahmadis had been given representation on a newly established National Minorities Council. (IMAGE: A rally in support of blasphemy laws in Pakistan, 2018 | Mohsin Raza / Reuters / scroll.in, 27 May 2020.)

Armed Men Attack Church

SHEIKHUPURA: A group of Muslims attacked the Trinity Pentecostal Church in Hakeem Pura, Sheikhupura district, a few dozen kilometres from Lahore, Punjab on 8 May. The building, built 22 years ago, was desecrated, a wall destroyed, a cross and other valuables broken, *Asia News* reported on 12 May. They entered the church around noon, taking advantage of the fact that the building was empty due to the coronavirus-related lockdown.

Shouting anti-Christian slogans and showing contempt for the place of worship, they attacked the walls and broke a cross, desecrating the building.

Pakistan's minority Christians have faced such attacks in the past. Last month, Pakistan's independent Human Rights Commission in its annual report gave the authorities a failing grade, saying too little was being done to protect the country's minorities and other vulnerable segments of the population, including women and children, according to the Associated Press on 11 May 2020.

Hindu Couple Brutally Attacked



Blood running down Gulab's face and his wife equally injured and her clothes torn, screamed and begged for help after being attacked in Pakistan allegedly because they come from a Hindu background. The shocking video has gone viral online, *Gulf News* reported on 13 May. The incident reportedly occurred in the rural areas of Rahim Yar Khan, in the province of Punjab. The man was identified as 'Gulab' and the name of his wife in unclear.

Quota For Minority Students

LAHORE: Christian, Hindu and Sikh and other religious minority students will be entitled to 2 per cent quota in Punjab universities as part of the Punjab Minorities Empowerment Package. In 2009, Pakistan's central government reserved a 5 per cent share in employment for minorities. (*Shafique Khokhar, Asia News, 19 May 2020*)

First Hindu Pilot



ISLAMABAD: For the first time in Pakistan's history, a Hindu has been selected as a pilot in the country's air force, according to *Siasat.com*.

The youth named "Rahul Dev" has been recruited as a General Duty pilot officer in the Pakistan Air Force, the website reported on 3 May.

Yet Another (CHRISTIAN) Girl In Pakistan Abducted, Forcibly Converted And Forcibly 'Married' To Her Abductor



Excerpts from Ewelina U. Ochab's article published in FORBES on 8 May 2020

At the end of April 2020, a 14 year old Christian girl, Myra Shehbaz, was reportedly abducted and forced to marry in Faisalabad, Punjab. According to the Movement for Solidarity and Peace (MSP), a human rights organization in the country, around 1,000 Christian and Hindu women and girls are kidnapped each year, forced to convert and marry Muslim men. The victims are usually between the ages of 12 and 25. Despite these shocking statistics, the number of victims may be even higher as many cases remain unreported, often due to the girls' families limited financial means.

The latest information in the case of Myra Shehbaz suggests that she was forcibly converted and married to her abductors. Although a National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) certificate has been produced confirming her age, a marriage certificate contradicts this, stating her age as 18. A typed statement was also produced, allegedly made by her, stating that she left her home and married willingly. The case is yet to proceed through the courts. However, this does not mean that **justice** will be served and the girl will be reunited with her family. Indeed, the reports suggest a variety of approaches to such cases concerning abducted, forced conversion and forced marriages.

In the case of **Nasira v Judicial Magistrate**, the Lahore High Court recognized that an underage girl lacks legal capacity to convert. Many such cases, of women and girls being abducted, forcibly converted, forcibly 'married' and abused by their abductors, continue to be neglected by the **police and the justice system**. This only allows further crimes to be committed. Every child deserves a normal childhood.

Every girl deserves to be a child and to be afforded the opportunity to flourish. Pakistan needs to step up its approach of dealing with such cases and ensure proper investigations and prosecutions of the perpetrators and reunification of the children with their parents. (Full story at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2020/05/08/yet-another-girl-in-pakistan-abducted-forcibly-converted-and-forcibly-married-to-her-abductor/#5ec2075c74da>.)

Forcibly Converted

On 15 May, a Hindu couple was forcibly converted to Islam at a mosque in the city of Nawabshah in the Sindh district of Pakistan, reported ANI.

Christian Girl Abducted



A deaf and mute minor girl, belonging to a Christian household, was abducted and sexually assaulted in Lahore, but authorities only took notice after her crying mother's video went viral online. The incident once again highlighted the atrocities minorities go through in the country and netizens are outraged, *Gulf News* reported on 12 May. (IMAGE: A video of the victim's crying mother was posted online.)

Influential Sikhs Woman

Pakistan's first Sikh woman



journalist, Manmeet Kaur, 25, has been named among 100 most influential Sikh personalities under 30 years of age in the world by a UK-based global Sikh organisation, *The Express Tribune* reported on 16 May.

Christians Reject Foreign Minister's Statement Regarding Safety of Minorities In Pakistan

Pakistani Christians rejected Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi's statement regarding the safety of Christians in Pakistan.

Taskeen Khan, a Christian rights activist, said, "I disagree with minister's claim in which he compares the situation of Pakistani minorities with India as constitutionally Indian minorities are equal citizens of the state, but it is contrary in Pakistan." He told *Minority Concern* that actions speak louder than words.

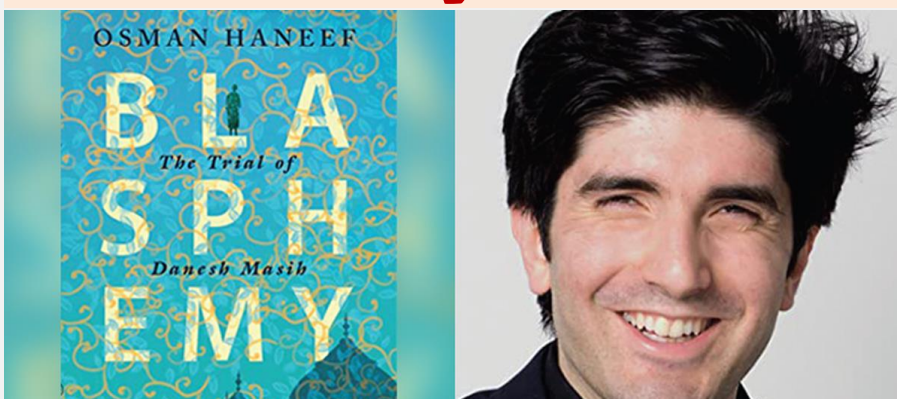
Foreign Minister told the media on 31 May in Multan that minorities in Pakistan were completely safe, with their worship places protected, *Daily Times* reported.



Vigil in Peshawar

Christians in Peshawar held a vigil in memory of those who lost their lives in Karachi plane crash on 22 May. (IMAGE: Daily Times)

Humanity On Trial



BLASPHEMY: THE TRIAL OF DANESH MASIH

Story of Danish Masih, a Christian boy, victim of blasphemy laws in Pakistan
Taha Kehar, The News on Sunday, 31 May 2020

Osman Haneef's *Blasphemy: The Trial of Danesh Masih* seems to owe an immense artistic debt to Harper Lee's magnum opus *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Buoyed by the stamina of a lawyer's struggle for justice in the face of racial prejudice, the novel bears echoes of the much-revered classic of modern American literature. The only difference is that Haneef's debut novel strikes a personal chord with Pakistani readers through its fresh literary take on the country's **blasphemy laws**. Set in 2007, *Blasphemy* is the story of Sikander Ghaznavi, a lawyer who has returned from the United States, and is passionately involved in a legal battle to secure acquittal for a Christian boy named Danesh Masih who has been falsely accused of blasphemy. In order to

achieve this, Ghaznavi seeks the assistance of his former lover, Sanah, an astute human rights lawyer who understands the machinations of a corrupt legal system better than he does. As the courtroom drama inches towards its spine-tingling denouement, the protagonist ponders the role of humanity in a country where justice is habitually put off and the truth is often undermined to facilitate the narrow interests of a few bigots.

In brisk, lucid prose, Haneef's debut novel presents an intricate narrative that carries implications beyond the fate of its characters, especially in Pakistan where **religious discrimination** stifles several minority groups. Though the novel never pulls its punches when it excoriates the controversial blasphemy laws, it skilfully avoids heavy polemics that can distract readers from the essence of the story.

Lengthy explanations are eschewed in favour of spellbinding passages that 'show' rather than 'tell'. An engaging plot, sprinkled with exciting twists and turns, offers a moving meditation of how controversial laws are used to exploit the marginalised sections of society. With its emphasis on depicting court battles that culminate in regular **miscarriages of justice**, *Blasphemy* paints an intimate portrait of the dark side of modern-day Pakistan. (Full review at:

[https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/664941-humanity-on-trial.](https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/664941-humanity-on-trial))

Pastor, His Family Attacked

RAHIM YAR KHAN: Pastor Haroon Sadiq Cheeda, his wife and young son were brutally beaten by armed extremist men, and forced to leave the area on 31 May, according to the *ANI News*.



History Versus Nationalism: Manufacturing The Heroes!

Excerpts from Mushtaq Soofi's article published in Dawn on 11 May 2020

Muslims, the second largest community in (colonial) India, dreamed of restoring the splendour of Caliphate and identified with invading Muslim kings and warriors with whom they shared little in terms of ethnicity, culture and language. In India's struggle against the British colonialism symbols of Hindu purity clashed with the symbols of Muslim glory making the things easier for the occupying force. The claims of Hindu purity and Muslim glory were in fact untenable and equally hollow. But they re-ignited the underlying animosities between the two largest communities of India.

Pakistani state promoted what it inherited; deification of medieval Muslim kings and invaders who are equated with the Muslim might and glory. History is deliberately distorted to paint Muhammad Bin Qasim, Mahmud Ghaznavi, Shahab Uddin Ghauri, Zaheer Uddin Babar, Nadir Shah and Ahmed Shah as godly men and holy warriors. The fact is officially hushed that these warriors acted with the motive of conquest and plunder which was nothing unusual in their times as all rulers irrespective of their faith followed this practice to expand their territories and increase their riches. The practice was driven by imperatives of power, not faith.

In Pakistan the state upholds and promotes a non-rooted, ultra-conservative and historically skewed national narrative which has nothing to do with the local people and their aspirations. Nationalists/culture activists of various hues across the country continue their resistance against the state's politically motivated cultural onslaught by invoking personages from local histories and setting up indigenous heroes as a countervailing force. In **Punjab** writers and culture activists started putting flesh on the bones of a folk legend known as Dullah Bhatti who was hanged in Lahore for his rebellion against Emperor Akbar. The other figures such as Ahmed Khan Kharal and Bhagat Singh as valiant heroes who resisted the might of British colonialism were popularised.

Similar process can be observed in **Sindh** but with far greater intensity. Rejection of Muslim Muhammad Bin Qasim as a holy warrior and glorification of Hindu Raja Dahir as a heroic son of soil by Sindhi nationalists has triggered endless arguing on both sides of the aisle. The state narrative is egregiously faulty having no roots in our historical reality and thus needs to be challenged for the good of all.

Now the question is; should those who are organic intellectuals and voice people's aspirations distort history as the ruling elite has done? Murdering history in reaction to the murder of history done one's opponent isn't a rational response. Dullah Bhatti is of course a hero but Emperor Akbar can't be rejected because his notion of separation of state and faith has contemporary relevance. Same is the case with Qasim-Dahir controversy. Qasim was an invader who plundered but Dahir wasn't saint either. There was neither the nation state nor the patriotism of current variety. Rulers invaded the territories of each other as a matter of routine. (Full article at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1556177/punjab-notes-history-versus-nationalism-manufacturing-the-heroes>.)

Food Inflation Under PTI

According to official data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was 4.2 percent and food inflation was one percent in May 2018 when the tenure of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government ended. Since then, the CPI has risen to 14.6 percent and food inflation peaked at 19.5 percent in urban and 23.8 percent in rural areas of Pakistan in January 2020. Such level of food inflation has not been experienced in a long time, except in 2008-09, when the global financial crisis led to a steep rise in commodity prices.

(Excerpts from Mohammad Ishaq Dar's, a former finance minister, article of Friday Times, 8 May 2020)



Exiled Pakistani Journalist Found Dead In Sweden

A Pakistani journalist living in exile in Sweden and who had been **missing since March** has been found dead in a river, *The Guardian* reported on 1 May 2020.

Sajid Hussain, who was granted political asylum in Sweden in 2019 after fleeing Pakistan, had been missing since 2 March. He was last seen boarding a train to Uppsala, a city 35 miles (56km) north of Stockholm.

"His body was found on 23 April in the Fyris river outside Uppsala," Jonas Eronen, a police spokesman, said.

Pakistan's Wheat and Sugar Scandal Leaves Imran Khan Exposed

Excerpts: Future Direction International, 27 May 2020

In May, the Pakistani Government released the findings of the sugar commission inquiry's report into a scandal that has implicated a number of political and business figures, including the leaders of two political parties, as well as close political allies of Imran Khan. The report found that a "cartel" of 88 sugar mills had exported sugar during a low yield year, underpaid growers, faked records and manipulated prices, which contributed to an ongoing crisis in sugar prices that began in late 2018. The increase in sugar prices generated up to 76 billion Pakistani rupees (\$720 million), more than half of which went to corrupt millers.....

A sharp rise in flour prices and flour shortages have also been a recent source of discontent in Pakistan this year.

Adding to the turmoil that a faltering economy and global pandemic have created in Pakistan, the government has also found itself mired in a corruption scandal that has tarnished the reputation of Imran Khan, the Prime Minister who once promised to rid the country of the rampant corruption that has existed since partition. Instead of stamping out corruption, Khan has been forced to acknowledge that he approved export and subsidy proposals that directly enriched several political allies, in a move he claims he thought would benefit farmers. The decisions instead led to alarming increases in the price of wheat and sugar, in a country where food insecurity is a reality for 60 per cent of the population, largely due to the affordability of diets and where wheat makes up half of calories consumed. All this leaves Imran Khan in a difficult position.....

Pakistan's wealthy sugar barons have links to a number of powerful political families and have influence over the country's rural voters, an important demographic during election time.

As Imran Khan decides how to handle the wheat and sugar scandal, he faces further difficulties as Pakistan's powerful military begins to have doubts about a Prime Minister it brought to power.

Already reportedly irritated with Khan's style of government, the coronavirus pandemic saw the military sideline the civilian government completely, after Khan opposed implementing lockdown measures. (Full article: [http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/pakistans-wheat-and-sugar-scandal-leaves-imran-khan-exposed/.](http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/pakistans-wheat-and-sugar-scandal-leaves-imran-khan-exposed/))

PTI Govt 'Allotted Plots' To Two SC Judges

ISLAMABAD: The PTI-led federal government has allotted plots to two apex court judges in Sector D-12 of the federal capital, the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) has revealed in its report submitted to the Federal Ombudsman, *The Express Tribune* reported on 24 May.

Justice Isa Raises Questions About PM's Aide

Justice Qazi Faez Isa has raised questions on the eligibility of Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Accountability Shahzad Akbar for holding a public office and his appointment as head of the Assets Recovery Unit (ARU), according to *Daily Times* on 30 May 2020.

USCIRF Condemns the Arrest Of An Ahmadiyya Woman

In a press release on 28 May, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) had condemned the arrest of a 55-year-old woman named Ramzan Bibi in Cheleki in Pakistan on the charges of blasphemy. Reportedly, the woman is an Ahmadiyya by Faith, who despite being Muslims are not considered as one in Pakistan.

Girls Shot Dead Over Mobile Video

Two teenage girls have been murdered in a so-called "honour killing" in north-west Pakistan following a video circulated on the internet, *BBC* reported on 17 May.

They are said to have been shot dead by a family member earlier this week in a village on the border of the North and South Waziristan tribal districts.

The killing occurred after a short mobile video of them with a young man surfaced on social media, police said. The incident is said to have taken place on 14 May afternoon at Shaam Plain Garyom, a border village of North and South Waziristan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according Dawn.



Sarwar Bari

Book Review

'Saraiki region – Roots of radicalisation'

If you want to learn about so-called Jihadi outfits – their origin, creators and midwives, their facilitators and handlers, and their rise and fall, you must read Nadeem Shah's recent book "'Saraiki Region – Roots of radicalisation'. He examines thoroughly almost all the underlying factors of radicalization whether they are political, economic, social or religious. Also, his book investigates how their support-base is being translated into their vote bank in various general elections, arguably with the help of their facilitators and handlers. For instance, he provides very interesting details of the rise of Barelvi and TLP vote bank in some regions including the Saraiki's in the 2018 general elections.

This book is also a depressing tale of the Saraiki people. Nadeem Shah ruthlessly exposes successive governments' discriminatory policies towards the region. For instance, he provides comparison of allocation of funds between Saraiki and central Punjab for education, how this perpetual discrimination resulted into extreme poverty, layers of inequalities and multiple deprivations including malnutrition. In order to substantiate his line of argument, he cites numerous and credible statistics, studies, official records and statements.

Through these statistics **Nadeem Shah** attempts to argue (which is also a dominant narrative) that radicalization took place in the country because of the mushrooming of religious seminaries. And this might not have happened should the state have provided quality education to all children in the Saraiki region. The phenomenon is too complex and therefore requires thorough investigation.

The tale of so-called Islamic radicalization and terrorism can't be understood fully without the examination of the role of the most secular and liberal states of the West in unleashing one of the most decadent and bigot forces globally and locally. In 1985, while meeting a delegation of Afghan Mujahideen President of the United States Ronald Reagan said - "They are our brothers, these freedom. They are the moral equal of our Founding Fathers."

Pakistan's permanent establishment had formed an alliance with religious forces after the collapse of Ayub Khan's government. In East Pakistan (Bangladesh) Jamaat-i-Islami actively supported the military operation, which ended in humiliating defeat. During Mr. Bhutto's government (1970-77) not only this alliance was weakened but also military was isolated from its socio-political base. The rigged elections of 1977 provided a great opportunity to mullahs and military to strike back. Bhutto was overthrown and hanged in 1977 and 79. In April 1978 Communists took over power in Afghanistan. This must have been a huge setback to mullah-military alliance in Pakistan. So as for the USA too. Credible sources reveal that the CIA had started its operation in Afghanistan well before the arrival of the USSR troops. In early 1979, Iranian revolution further damaged the USA's influence in the region. Two revolutionary regimes were now sitting on our western border. A former Foreign Secretary of the USA Hilary Clinton said: "Let's remember here... the people we are fighting today, we funded them twenty years ago." Global Research 1st June 2013. In Pakistan, Zia had adopted the same strategy to quell the rising momentum of democratic forces. He unleashes

Sipah-i-Sahaba – an anti Shia and anti democracy terrorist organisation, which later played a crucial role in the formation of Taliban both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Sindh he promoted narrow nationalist and fascist groups like MQM and Jia-i-Sindh.

By the time of his death in August 1988 he had helped establish thousands of madrasas all over Pakistan. He left behind a huge presence of bigots to every corner of the country but more densely in areas where poverty and inequality was profoundly present. Nadeem Shah very eloquently presents the proof of presence of violently radical groups by providing statistics of their vote-bank in various constituencies of Saraiki belt.

But there is a need to examine the electoral politics of mainstream parties and their opportunistic politicking too. For instance, after Zia's death, the military establishment continues helping the right-wing parties and extremist groups to form electoral alliance. The infamous case of ISI-IJI collaboration between 1988 and 1997 is a case in point. Therefore, it may be concluded that almost all mainstream parties and successive governments along with the permanent establishment have been helping the radical groups to sustain and expand their vote-bank. Nadeem Shah doesn't limit his book to understanding the root causes of religiously motivated radicalization and deprivations of the Saraiki people of their progress, he also proposes a way forward. I would like to add into his list - self-determination. Though Saraiki people have never taken an extremist position nor one should prescribe it. However, oppressed people's patience should never be tested. (Source: http://www.balochistantimes.pk/epaper/news.php?news_id=2581.)