



Pakistan's Monthly Extremism Watch

Compiled by National Initiative against Organised Crime (NIOC)

April 2021

April remained very eventful in reporting on the issues of extremism having national and global significance. Eleven articles/news items published relevant to extremism in Pakistan are included in this Monthly Extremism Watch. Three news items contained details of criminal cases registered against participants of Aurat March on the alleged use of 'unethical' language by the participants: for allegedly 'dishonouring' Priest King at Mohenjo Daro and against two nurses in Faisalabad, for committing blasphemy. The articles, like Hostage to Extremism; The Conversation We Never Had and News Item Suggestions on Islamic teachings in uniform curriculum rejected; Body formed to review legal aspects of TLP's plea present a picture of our inability to come out of quagmire of extremism we are facing. The article titled 'The fear of Man' puts extremism in Pakistan in a perspective by highlighting that extremism is widespread and many a times is used for personal gains. The EU Parliament's resolution to review GSP+ status of Pakistan may be having long lasting economic and diplomatic impact on Pakistan. But most alarming and futuristic at grand scale is US intelligence report on the impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic on the current

international world order, predicting a scenario of a more contested world with communities increasingly fractured on economic, political, ethnic and religious lines. The report asserts, that the Pandemic has already stirred extremism. And the situation might turn serious as again the region stands at the crossroads in the wake of US withdrawing forces from Afghanistan and new coalitions emerging in the Indo-pacific Region.

- **HRCP condemns use of 'unethical' language for Aurat March participants by daily Ummat**
- **Extremism will not be tolerated in Sindh: Bilawal**
- **The fear of man**
- **Blasphemy case registered against two nurses in Faisalabad**
- **Pandemic has stirred extremism, hit poverty fight, tells US report**
- **Hostage to extremism**
- **FIR lodged for 'dishonoring' Priest King at Mohenjo Daro**
- **The conversation we never had**
- **Suggestions on Islamic teachings in uniform curriculum rejected**
- **Blasphemy law: EU Parliament's decision to review GSP+ status irks Pakistan**
- **Body formed to review legal aspects of TLP's plea**

HRCP condemns use of 'unethical' language for Aurat March participants by daily Ummat



Activists of the Aurat March carry placards as they march during a rally to mark International Women's Day in Islamabad on March 8. — AFP/File

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has called out the daily Ummat newspaper for using "unethical and inappropriate language" against participants of the Aurat March, demanding that it publish an apology.

In its April 5 issue, Urdu-language daily Ummat published a front-page story, the headline of which stated that sexual violence was committed the most against women in 14 countries.

The shoulder of the story mentioned that these 14 countries included the US, Japan, Sweden, South Africa, India, Bangladesh and other African countries.

The following line read: "The sluts (randiyan) of Aurat March don't notice these non-Muslim countries."

The offensive line, which was apparently intended to highlight that Pakistan was not among the countries where rape and violence against women is most rife, was criticised by women's rights activists, journalists and social media users.

"HRCP condemns the use of unethical and inappropriate language against women in the daily #Ummat. The newspaper must publish an unconditional apology and refrain from using such language in future," a tweet by the commission said on Monday.

It said Ummat was also "orchestrating a vilification campaign against leading elderly writer Amar Jaleel. Such practices bring a bad name to the profession of journalism. The APNS and CPNE must take notice."

Aurat March has become an annual feature since 2018 and every year faces backlash from certain religio-political groups, who have been opposing the event.

The marches are organised in major cities to highlight issues faced by women and condemning incidents of violence against them as well as gender discrimination, economic exploitation and misogyny.

Following this year's march on International Women's Day, heated debates were once again seen on social media for and against the march.

Last month, a video from the demonstration held in Karachi was doctored to falsely show participants raising blasphemous slogans and widely shared online.

The orga-ni-sers of Aurat March clarified that the participants of the march did not raise such slogans and their video was edited to defame their struggle.

People also mistook flags of the Women Democratic Front (WDF) at the Islamabad March for the French Tricolour after which the organisers issued a clarification.

After protests in the capital calling for registration of FIRs against organisers and participants of the Aurat March, Minister for Religious Affairs Noorul Haq Qadri had said that "controversial material" shared on social media concerning the march was being investigated.

Late in March, two local courts in Peshawar and Karachi ordered the registration of first information reports against Aurat March organisers.

Source: Published in the dawn, April 06, 2021

Extremism won't be tolerated in Sindh: Bilawal



KARACHI/HYDERABAD: A delegation of human rights activists, journalists and intellectuals of Sindh urged Pakistan Peoples Party Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to approach the Federal Investigation Agency's Cyber Crime Cell and join efforts to curb extremists statements on social media.

Meeting Bilawal at Bilawal House here, the delegation voiced concern over rising incidents of extremism and intolerance in the name of religion, emphasising particularly on the threats being given to renowned writer Amar Jalil.

Dangerous allegations

The Sindhi writer, intellectual and political analyst has recently been accused of blasphemy with some critics demanding the registration of an FIR against the elderly literary figure. A man from Umerkot district, Pir Sarhindi, even put head money of Rs5 million on Jalil.

The move drew severe rebuke and protests were held even in Umerkot to condemn Sarhindi. Since the blasphemy charges surfaced late last month, social media has been brimming with support for Jalil and solidarity with him.

Three years ago at Karachi Literature Festival Jalil had argued that human beings cannot know or understand their creator because it was beyond their intellect. Some religious circles, which are

belatedly reacting to the video, now contend that his assertion amounted to denying belief in the Almighty according to Quranic teachings.

The 84-year-old Kazi Abdul Jaleel, who is popularly known by his pen-name Amar Jaleel, has written hundreds of short stories in Sindhi besides regularly contributing articles in newspapers. He also hosts a show on a Sindhi news channel.

The delegation, which included Noorul Hadi Shah, Jami Chandio, Amar Sindhu, Dr Ayub Sheikh, Dr Arfanah Mallah and others, also brought up other issues facing progressive writers, poets and intellectuals in Sindh.

‘Land of religious tolerance’

Hearing their concerns, Bilawal said that no extremism would be tolerated in the country, and especially not in Sindh. No citizen would be permitted to take the law in their hands, he claimed.

He said that the Sindh government would continue its process of holding dialogues with administrative bodies of different sects and would also take on board the provincial religious affairs ministry to promote a healthy dialogue with the Ulema and other religious scholars.

Sindh is a land of religious tolerance and Sufi traditions and the message of peace from Sindh must be spread across the world.

Source: Published in The Express Tribune, April 07, 2021

The fear of man

By Salaar Khan

In April of 2017, Indonesian artist, Adrian Syaf was fired from his job at Marvel Comics for slipping the numbers 5:51 and 212 into issue #1 of 'X-Men Gold'. The first was a reference to verse 51 of Surah Al-Maidah, the second a reference to the related Indonesian protests of 2.12.2016.

The protests began when Jakarta's governor, Basuki 'Ahok' Purnama, decided to run for re-election in late 2016. With a history of efficiency, expansion of public services, and a strident stance against corruption, public opinion seemed favourable. With months to go, Ahok – a 'double minority' Chinese-Christian in the world's largest Muslim-majority country – was ahead in the polls. That is, before he was charged with blasphemy.

The verse – 5:51 of the Quran – commands believers not to "take the Jews and the Christians as awliya". While many interpret awliya as 'leaders', others take it to mean 'allies'. Naturally, the first interpretation suited Ahok's political opponents. While on the campaign trail, Ahok warned the audience that this preference was being used to 'deceive' people into voting against him.

Between that statement, and a video of the speech being uploaded to the internet, it passed through the computer of one Buni Yani. Yani, a professor at a private university, manipulated the subtitles to make it seem like Ahok had said the verse, itself, was deceiving people. Egged on by Ahok's political opponents, hundreds of thousands seethed into the streets. By May, Ahok was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to three years in prison.

Yani, too, was later sentenced to a year and half for the creative liberties he took with the video. But this changed nothing for Ahok, whose appeal was dismissed. The protesters wanted nothing less than a blasphemy conviction. As often happens with these things, they got just that.

At the time, a poll by Saiful Manjani Research and Consulting showed that while over 45 percent of Indonesians believed Ahok's statement to be blasphemous, 88 percent of that number said they weren't sure what he had actually said.

Indonesia may long have flaunted its quasi-secular pluralism (it recognizes six 'official religions'), but Ahok was no one-off. In a private conversation in August of 2018, a Buddhist woman complained about the volume of the loudspeaker at a mosque near her home. She was sentenced to 18 months in prison. Her appeal, too, was rejected. Rioters turned over a dozen temples to ash. In March, the year after, Aisyah Tusalamah was sentenced to five months' in prison for believing herself to be the reincarnation of the mythical Queen of the Jellyfish Kingdom.

In recent times, talk of the 'weaponization' of Indonesia's blasphemy law for personal gain has come up fairly frequently – even as nothing has changed. It has been criticised for being ambiguous, arbitrary and discriminatory in its application.

But, if Indonesia's blasphemy laws are used as a weapon, then against Pakistan's they're about as useful as a butter knife. Ranked for severity in a USCIRF Report, Indonesia's blasphemy laws sit below those of twenty other countries. The maximum sentence for blasphemy in Indonesia is five years. The punishment under the frequent choice in Pakistan's much wider arsenal – Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code – is death.

From across the witness box, consider the following: Yani got only a year and a half compared to Ahok's three years, but that is still three times as much as the maximum sentence you can get for falsely accusing someone of blasphemy in Pakistan. In fact, Pakistan doesn't have a separate offence for false accusations of blasphemy. The only law on point is the law against giving false information to a public servant. It comes with a maximum punishment of six months and a fine of a whopping Rs1000.

Sure, Indonesia doesn't have a separate law for false blasphemy allegations, either. Yani was convicted under Indonesia's cyber laws for inciting 'hatred' among groups of peoples and unlawfully editing a video owned by another party. But, in Indonesia, a blasphemy conviction won't stow you away in a casket. Nonetheless, ultimately, Yani did end up behind bars.

A month ago, a fairly obviously doctored video of Aurat March protesters was shared widely by journalists, clerics, and – much like Ahok's opponents – those who disagree with the March's politics. As retweets competed with death threats, statement upon statement was issued by participants and organizers: the blasphemous subtitles were a later addition. Having fanned the flames, some eventually issued a begrudging mea culpa. Others wandered off as if nothing had happened. While organizers continue to face very real threats to their lives, our Buni Yani roams freely.

For a country that takes such a hard stance against blasphemy, Pakistan seems to commit a disproportionately high amount of blasphemy. According to another USCIRF report from 2018, between 2014 and 2019, 674 cases of blasphemy were formally pursued across 41 countries. Over one-fourth of all reported cases came from one country: Pakistan. Home to fifty million more people than even Pakistan, Indonesia reported only a fifth of that number.

Of course, you could argue that Pakistanis are just better at catching blasphemy. But the numbers wouldn't agree with you. As the International Commission of Jurists finds, over 80 percent of convictions are overturned on appeal for failure to make out a case. So, then, it's either too easy to point the finger or the Islamic Republic of Pakistan commits more blasphemy than any other nation on the planet.

For the sake of argument (and to avoid existential disintegration) let's assume it's the former. If so, the leak may be at two ends. It may be the case that there aren't enough procedural checks when an allegation is made, or it may be that it's too easy to get away with a false allegation, once made. In Pakistan, it's both.

This is why, in 2016, the Council of Islamic Ideology proposed the death penalty for those who falsely accused others of blasphemy. This is why Sherry Rehman tabled a private bill in 2010 seeking to introduce procedural safeguards against indiscriminate registration of FIRs.

Why, then, is it that any time something like this happens, we do little more than bump up the numbers and microwave the same statistics and recommendations? Well, because the Council of Islamic Ideology withdrew its proposal days later, just as Sherry Rehman withdrew her private bill. Just as Nawaz Sharif's government never filed a review of the Federal Shariat Court's decision on clemency in cases of blasphemy. Just as Imran Khan has said he won't touch the laws.

The real issue, of course, is fear. Our laws may be a product of the British, and then the 1980s, but to touch these aspects in Pakistan is, itself, to commit blasphemy. But the fight for procedural safeguards has not, yet, been lost.

In fact, much of the silent tinkering has been done not by parliament, but by the appellate courts. It was Justice Chohan in Muhammad Mahboob v The State, recommending that blasphemy allegations be investigated by "a scholar of known reputation and integrity". It was Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui who – even as he called for even stricter punishments for blasphemy while deciding Mumtaz Qadri v The State – called for the death penalty for false accusations of blasphemy. It was Justice Khosa who – hearing the same case in appeal – wrote "a false allegation regarding commission of such an offence is equally detestable besides being culpable." Two years later, writing as the chief justice in Aasia Bibi's case, he wrote, "mixing truth with falsehood in the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was also not short of being blasphemous." None of the Justices disowned their words.

When it comes to penalizing fake blasphemy allegations, you're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem in more ways than one. Because the thing with people like Buni Yani is they don't just falsely accuse someone of blasphemy. In seeking to set up Ahok, Yani – himself – typed out those blasphemous words.

If that is an acceptable outcome, then Pakistan is going to have to accept something about that fear. The fear that holds us back isn't fear of God. It is fear of man. And it cowers behind His name.

Source: Published in the news, April 10, 2021

Blasphemy case registered against two nurses in Faisalabad

Saleem Mubarak



Police have registered a case against two nurses of the District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital on the charge of committing blasphemy. — AP/File

FAISALABAD: Police have registered a case against two nurses of the District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital on the charge of committing blasphemy.

Scores of hospital employees staged a protest demonstration on Friday against the two nurses while alleging that both committed blasphemy by removing a sticker with sacred inscription from a cupboard.

Some of the unruly agitators attacked the police van parked inside the hospital to get custody of one of the nurses but the police locked her inside the van to keep her safe from the the protesters.

A police officer said it had been reported that two nurses committed blasphemy on Thursday by removing a sticker in a ward where psychiatric patients are being treated.

Deputy Medical Superintendent Dr Mohammad Ali submitted an application to the Civil Lines police claiming that the allegation of blasphemy had been proved by the hospital committee. He said the head nurse had taken the removed sticker into her custody and she apprised him of the issue on Friday.

The hospital administration called police who immediately took the nurse into protective custody so that she could be moved to a safer place. Scores of people tried to get hold of her but police kept her inside the van.

Anti-riot police and Elite Force tackled the situation and a team led by Civil Lines DSP Rana Attaur Rehman after hectic struggle succeeded to move her from the hospital premises.

Among the protesters were clerics who demanded action against the prime suspect.

Police booked both nurses under section 295-B of the PPC.

Source: Published in Dawn, April 10th, 2021

Pandemic has stirred extremism, hit poverty fight, says US report

Anwar Iqbal



US intelligence analysts believe that the pandemic has not only reminded the world of its fragility but also has demonstrated the inherent risks of high levels of interdependence. — AFP/File

WASHINGTON: The Covid-19 pandemic has encouraged negative trends across the globe — stirring nationalist sentiments and skepticism while stalling progress in poverty reduction and gender inequality, warns a US intelligence report.

“Covid-19 has shaken long-held assumptions about resilience and adaptation and created new uncertainties about the economy, governance, geopolitics, and technology,” says “The Global Trends: 2040” report released earlier this week.

The report argues that in a post-pandemic world, “no single state is likely ... to dominate across all regions or domains (but) the United States and China will have the greatest influence on global dynamics.”

This will be “forcing starker choices on other actors, increasing jockeying over global norms, rules, and institutions, and heightening the risk of interstate conflict,” the report adds.

US intelligence analysts believe that the pandemic has not only reminded the world of its fragility but also has demonstrated the inherent risks of high levels of interdependence.

“In coming years and decades, the world will face more intense and cascading global challenges ranging from disease to climate change to the disruptions from new technologies and financial crises,” the report warns. “These challenges will repeatedly test the resilience and adaptability of communities, states, and the international system, often exceeding the capacity of existing systems and models.”

The Global Trends reports are issued every four years by the US National Intelligence Council (NIC) — alerting policymakers about challenges the world may face in both immediate and distant futures.

The 156-page document notes that the pandemic has worsened disparities between nations and within societies, reminding all that they are now entering a more contested world where communities will be increasingly fractured on economic, political, ethnic and religious lines.

They will seek to form like-minded groups based on established and newly prominent identities. In this world, states of all types and in all regions will struggle to meet the needs and expectations of more connected, more urban, and more empowered populations, the report adds.

The US intelligence community believes that in the post-pandemic world, international systems will be more competitive – shaped in part by challenges from a rising China. The world will be at a greater risk of conflict as states and nonstate actors exploit new sources of power. The new challenges will erode long standing norms and institutions that have provided some stability in past decades.

The report, however, notes that these dynamics are not fixed in perpetuity and underlines a variety of plausible scenarios for the world of 2040 — from a democratic renaissance to a transformation in global cooperation.

Source: Published in Dawn, April 12th, 2021

Hostage to extremism

Zahid Hussain

IT is not for the first time that a religiously motivated group has disrupted civic life but what happened this week is extremely serious. The state seemed to have disappeared as the followers of a radical cleric blocked highways and train tracks connecting the country's main cities. Violent mobs held sway in many parts of the country. Most disturbing are the videos circulating on social media of some security personnel approvingly responding to the crowd.

It all started with the protest against the detention of Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan chief Saad Hussain Rizvi, a day after he threatened to storm Islamabad in pursuance of his group's demand for the expulsion of the French ambassador over blasphemous images and the French president's controversial remarks. The young cleric who took over the group's command after his father's death wanted the government to implement the agreement the TLP claimed the ruling set-up had reached with it late last year.

The shameful surrender has come back to haunt the government. It had apparently conceded to all the demands presented by the group during a protest march in Islamabad last November. The demands included parliamentary approval for severing diplomatic ties with France within three months. Such a move could have been disastrous. How can the government allow a group to dictate to it on a sensitive foreign policy matter?

That sense of victory gave further stridency to the TLP. Not surprisingly, the protesters led by Khadim Hussain Rizvi, the founder of the group, had gone home triumphant. A few days later, the cleric died reportedly of Covid-19. Hundreds of thousands of people attended his funeral in Lahore. Saad Hussain Rizvi seems to be trying to emulate his father's vitriolic oratory. The latest call for a long march to Islamabad was seen as an attempt by the young cleric to continue his father's legacy of extremism. His speeches being live-streamed on social media are no less provocative. It is the same kind of toxic narrative in the name of faith that has been witnessed all along. Where is the law when it comes to those who spew such vitriol and who hold the nation hostage?

It was the sit-in in Islamabad in 2017 that announced the arrival of the TLP on the scene as a major sectarian force representing Barelvi militancy. The group's protest centred on a clause in the Election Act relating to the finality of prophethood. Religious sentiments were whipped up and the matter soon turned into a political controversy. The stand-off continued for weeks before the security agencies intervened to broker the deal. The civilian government was made to sign on the dotted line and concede to the demands of the group.

Apparently, a senior intelligence officer was also a signatory to the deal along with the then interior minister. As I wrote in this space at the time: "It is hard to recall another instance of an intelligence official involved in brokering a deal between the government and extremists

challenging the writ of the state.” The footage that was telecast of the Punjab Rangers chief distributing cash to the protesters was simply appalling.

I had also mentioned the fact that the protesters were being rewarded for targeting the civilian law enforcers and vandalising public property. “The authority of the state has seldom been so compromised. It was not just appeasement but abject submission to the lawbreakers and the non-state actors that has undermined the legitimacy of the civil administration.” It is no surprise that this episode ended up empowering the extremists. The TLP emerged as a major political force in the 2018 election. The group might not have won a National Assembly seat, but it was the third largest group in terms of votes in Punjab.

It was the same policy of appeasement that led the PTI government to concede to the TLP’s demands in November 2020. Indeed, the deal ended the protest but by giving in to the irrational demands of the religious group the government and the state have further weakened their own authority. The administration, it is clear, has not learned any lessons from its mistakes or the cost of delayed action. While the agreement empowered the radical group, the government only managed to postpone the crisis. What has been happening now was inevitable. The way the administration has collapsed in the face of mob violence is alarming to say the least, and underscores how we are failing to deal with rising religious extremism. How can a particular group become so emboldened as to paralyse the entire country? Once again, the TLP has succeeded in bringing the administration to its knees. The inaction of successive governments and the policy of appeasement has created a veritable monster.

The PTI government’s overdose of religiosity has given impunity to extremist religious groups. Now the government faces a more violent form of zealotry. The spectacle of the mob beating police officers and making them hostage has exposed the false claims of the rule of law. In Punjab, which has been the centre of the violence, a few thousand zealots were able to paralyse the whole administration. The violence could have easily been stopped with timely action against the rioters. Instead, the inaction has further emboldened the rampaging mob. What message was being sent to all those who have suffered the consequences of the blockade and violence?

The latest episode is a manifestation of a serious problem related to the rise of a more radical Barelvi sectarian movement that publicly espouses violence in the name of a narrow view of religion. But it is the government’s responsibility to uphold the rule of law.

The challenge of extremism overall must also be looked at as a significant concern. Religion and its nexus with politics have fuelled bigotry. A joint effort is needed by all stakeholders to deal with this rising menace.

Source: Published in Dawn, April 14th, 2021

FIR lodged for 'dishonouring' Priest King at Mohenjo Daro

Hafeez Tunio



Three visitors can be seen 'dishonouring' King Priest at a site of Mohenjo Daro. PHOTO: EXPRESS

KARACHI: Police on Sunday lodged a first information report (FIR) against unknown persons who tried to dishonour the statue of Priest King at a site of Mohenjo Daro – one of the largest settlements of ancient Indus Valley Civilisation.

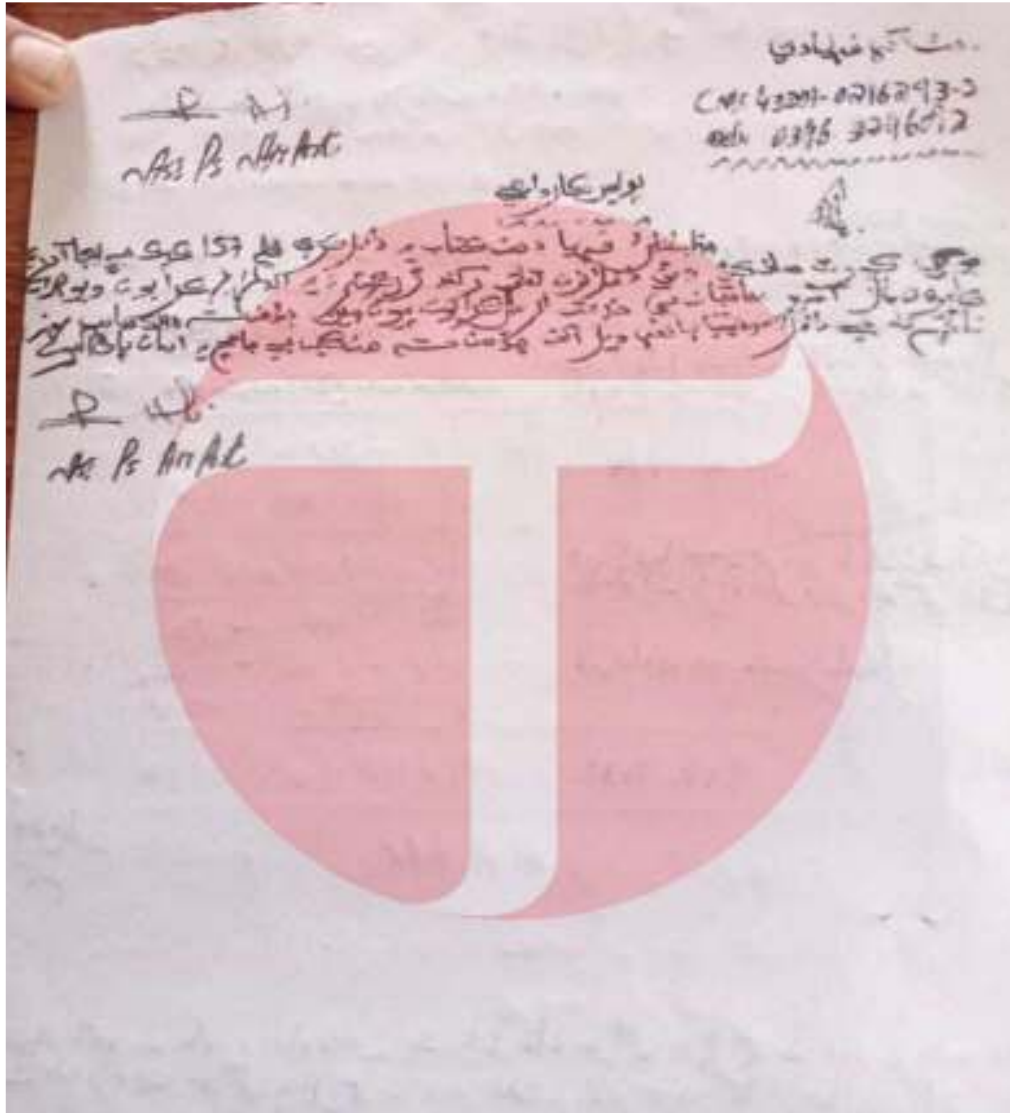
The case was registered by Airport Police Station in Mohenjo Daro on the complaint of the watchman of the archaeological site.

"The case has been registered under Section 295-A which deals with deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs," a duty officer at the police station said.

The case was registered following a photo that went viral on social media in which three visitors were spotted dishonouring the statue of Priest King, an iconic representation of Indus civilisation that is placed at the entrance of the site.

"We are tracing the people who are involved in this cheap act and have disgraced the statue," the duty officer said.

There was an outcry on social media including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and people belonging to different walks of life condemned the act demanding action against the culprits.



Soon after the incident, many people in Sindh replaced their profile pictures on Facebook and Twitter with Mohenjo Daro or Priest King's photo for showing sympathy.

Source: Published in the Express Tribune, April 18, 2021

The conversation we never had

Farrukh Khan Pitafi

As a powerful blast rocked Quetta's beautifully built Serena hotel, and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility, one was reminded of our commitment to fight extremism and terrorism by all means necessary. It seems only yesterday that the vandals from the same terrorist organisation had butchered our children in APS Peshawar and the country had for once come out of its denial and vowed to defeat the menace of terrorism. A 20-point National Action Plan (NAP) that emerged out of top-level deliberations as a consensus document had committed to combating both the hardware and the software of terrorism including the underlying extremist tendencies. Two men, the then army chief and the PPP's co-chairman, Asif Ali Zardari, reportedly played an important role in the consensus-building exercise. The kinetic operations that followed need no elaboration. Operation Zarb-e-Azb and later Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad went a long way in degrading and uprooting terrorist infrastructure. While the armed forces and the intelligence agencies played their part, the civilian side's performance was a mixed bag.

Why is this discussion important today? Because once again the region stands at the crossroads. The Biden administration has announced that it will withdraw troops from Afghanistan on September 11, with or without a lasting solution to the country's myriad problems. Pakistan has already presented a detailed dossier to the UN and various influential actors documenting India's constant sponsorship of terrorism and export of destabilising ideologies to Pakistan. Some of the details like a Punjab National Bank receipt of a wire transfer to anti-Pakistan miscreants based in Afghanistan have been independently corroborated by the FinCen leaks. There are reports of the TTP factions regrouping on the other side of the border. In such a situation constant vigilance and implementation of the NAP seem the need of the hour. You may not be able to control what happens within the boundaries of other nations but you can certainly do something about what happens at home. This piece tries to address the software side of the problem.

More than one clause of NAP focuses on the issues pertaining to the narrative against terrorism and extremism. Clause 5, for instance, speaks of strict action against the literature, newspapers and magazines promoting hatred, extremism, sectarianism, and intolerance. Clause 11 declares a ban on the glorification of terrorists and terrorist organisations through print and electronic media. Clause 14 vows to take measures against the dissemination of terrorist and extremist propaganda on the internet and social media. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks and the unanimous adoption of the action plan, these clauses were quite visibly being adhered to. The TTP's spokesman, for example, stopped or was made to stop making phone calls to live television transmissions and talk shows. Similarly, anchors who were using endism and eschatology to sympathise with the terrorists suddenly started talking about something else. But what happened next was quite intriguing. When they absolutely had to mention the kinetic operations against terrorism the otherwise chirpy anchors would transform into these boring automatons and in a soporific voice parrot only one line before losing interest: "Operation Zarb-e-Azb

kamyabi se jari hai (operation Zarb-e-Azb is progressing successfully)”. When they had to talk of terrorism, they would churn out word salads that inevitably ended up decrying the murder of citizens by the proscribed organisation but economic terrorism. What is economic terrorism, you ask? Well, using obscure conspiracy theory devices like John Perkins' Confessions of an Economic Hit Man, they would make everything about corruption and about the politicians they did not like. Make no mistake. I am all for fighting corruption. Only that a scourge that has killed over 80,000 citizens and ruined the lives of countless deserves your undivided attention. Attempts to undermine the counter-terrorist, counter-extremist campaign by hijacking the key terms can mean only one of two things. Either you lack the sense of perspective, the sight of the bigger picture, or have sympathies for the guilty party and therefore deliberately misdirecting the conversation. Whatever the reason, this called for a strong counter-narrative against terrorism and extremism. And given the quality of education in this country, many of us emphasised the need for one.

Following these calls succeeding governments have tried to come up with something. But before this, you have to understand the key mistakes that drove a wedge between the state and its people. When General Musharraf received the fateful call after 9/11, the conditions he faced meant he had very little wiggle room. Consequently, he could not engage in the dialogue necessary to convince an unnerved nation that what the country was doing was not against Islam and was for the country's greater good. Because he had absolute power there was little the country's powerful clergy could do openly about it. But it certainly felt abandoned and slighted. Meanwhile, the absence of an elected parliament meant that people's representatives were not there to be taken into confidence which in turn could have had convinced people that there was no threat to their faith. A low-level intellectual insurgency ensued which moulded the electronic media which was soon to be free. Instead of confronting the trend Gen Musharraf's political successor just gave in to the trend. General Raheel Sharif's tenure marked a concerted effort but the media effectively steered the conversation away to Karachi and elsewhere where the definition of miscreants did not offend the religious sensibilities of the media pundits.

If you want to know how easy it is to deconstruct the extremist narrative there is a simple example. It took Pakistani clergy over a decade to reach a crucial point: that since suicide was haram in Islam, suicide bombing could not be halal. The simple point. But to arrive here what you needed was the commitment of the political brass. Imagine how many lives could have been saved if this consensus had arrived in time. The state of Pakistan, while working with the clergy came up with Paigham-e-Pakistan (Message of Pakistan), a thin volume building consensus on the rebuttal of terrorism. But here is the problem. In case you have not noticed the forces of chaos have left no stone unturned to create more problems for the Pakistani state. This means that with every passing day another latent national fault line will be weaponised and will erupt. A piece of paper, a single document, will be insufficient to fight these challenges. You need a fully empowered, highly well-informed, and liberally funded civilian and transparent think tank or a research body to chart out the future course, build consensus, and combat propaganda with better arguments. Why should a country which has over 50 news channels have to worry that

nobody sees its position? Why should a state with a 96% Muslim population have to fear that its position on the majority religion would be misinterpreted? The media and state religion should be the country's assets, not deficits. And people's civil liberties ought not to come under pressure because of any of this. Before floodgates of extremism reopen in the region, the state has to build this dam. Sadly, it is a conversation we haven't even started yet.

Source: Published in the express tribune, April 24, 2021

Suggestions on Islamic teachings in uniform curriculum rejected

LAHORE: Political leaders, including government allies, have rejected the report of the one-member minority commission that recommended exclusion of Islamic teachings and history from textbooks other than Islamiyat.

Former top cop Dr Shoaib Suddle as a one-man minority commission last week suggested a uniform curriculum across the country and, for the purpose, omitting write-ups on Islamic teachings and Islamic history from textbooks except in Islamiyat.

Governor Chaudhry Sarwar and Punjab Assembly Speaker Chaudhry Parvez Elahi expressed concern and said the recommendations would not go down well with the majority of the population. A press release quoted them as expressing these views during a meeting held at Governor House here on Sunday. Special Representative to the PM on Interfaith Harmony Hafiz Tahir Ashrafi, also the chairman of Muttahida Ulema Board, told a press conference that the board meeting had rejected the commission's recommendations and demanded the Punjab chief minister initiate action against those who forwarded these suggestions.

He said neither do the contents of the curriculum pose any threat to the minorities nor is there anything that desecrates religious beliefs of any minority. In fact, minority students are not bound to study and sit exams on Islamic teachings, he added.

Flanked by Allama Hussain Akbar, Dr Raghieb Naeemi and other members of the board, Hafiz Ashrafi said neither the Supreme Court had issued any directive on the basis of the commission's report nor was the opinion of the Council of Islamic Ideology, ulema board and other scholars sought on the recommendations which, he claimed, were against the very foundations of the country and its constitution.

He feared that if implemented, the report could lead to chaos and unrest in the country and hurt its image in the world. He said the report had been rejected even by the National Commission on Minorities. Religious scholars would also approach the apex court, which had formed the Dr Suddle commission, to apprise it of the "ground realities", he claimed.

Separately, Jamaat-i-Islami Emir Sirajul Haq warned that "westernisation and liberalism" in the name of a uniform curriculum will not be accepted. In a statement issued here, he said his party would resist if a new curriculum likely to be introduced in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab was found to be against Islamic teachings.

He demanded that ideologues and clerics should be consulted for the design of the new curriculum. He also appealed to the Supreme Court to take care of the emotions of the Muslims while making a decision on the curriculum.

Source: Published in Dawn, April 26th, 2021

Blasphemy law: EU Parliament's decision to review GSP+ status irks Pakistan



PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad on Friday expressed its disappointment over a resolution adopted on Pakistan's blasphemy laws by the European Parliament, which also called for a review of GSP (Generalised Scheme of Preferences) plus status of the country.

The resolution, adopted on Thursday, demanded of Pakistan to allow space for religious freedom and urged the EU authorities to review the country's GSP+ status amid "alarming" number of blasphemy cases.

It said that there has been an alarming increase in accusations of blasphemy online and offline in Pakistan over the past year. "Many of these accusations target human rights defenders, journalists, artists and the most marginalised people in society," it added.

It said that Pakistan's blasphemy laws are increasingly used for personal or political score-settling in violation of the rights to freedom of religion and belief and of opinion and expression.

Responding to media queries today, Pakistan's Foreign Office Spokesperson Zahid Chaudhri said, "The discourse in the European Parliament reflects a lack of understanding in the context of blasphemy laws and associated religious sensitivities in Pakistan – and in the wider Muslim world."

"The unwarranted commentary about Pakistan's judicial system and domestic laws are regrettable," he added.

The spokesperson said Pakistan being a parliamentary democracy with a vibrant civil society, free media and independent judiciary, remained fully committed to the promotion and protection of human rights for all its citizens without discrimination. "We are proud of our minorities, who enjoy equal rights and complete protection of fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the Constitution. Judicial and administrative mechanisms and remedies are in place to guard against any human rights violations," he added.

The spokesperson mentioned that Pakistan had played an active role in promoting freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and inter-faith harmony.

At a time of rising Islamophobia and populism, the international community must exhibit a common resolve to fight xenophobia, intolerance and incitement to violence based on religion or belief, and work together to strengthen peaceful co-existence, he stressed.

The spokesperson further said Pakistan and the European Union had multiple mechanisms in place to discuss entire spectrum of bilateral relations, including a dedicated Dialogue on Democracy, Rule of Law, Governance and Human Rights. "We would continue to remain positively engaged with the EU on all issues of mutual interest," he maintained.

According to the resolution, the judicial procedures in blasphemy cases in Pakistan are "highly flawed" where low standards of evidence are required for a conviction and judicial authorities often uncritically accept allegations. "The accused are often presumed guilty and have to prove their innocence rather than vice versa."

It expressed concern regarding the case of couple Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel, who were sentenced to death on blasphemy charges in 2014. These charges emanated from the alleged sending of text messages disrespectful of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from a phone number registered to Kausar to the person accusing the couple of blasphemy, it added.

The resolution called on the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to immediately review Pakistan's eligibility for GSP+ status in the light of current events and whether "there is sufficient reason to initiate a procedure for the temporary withdrawal of this status and the benefits that come with it."

European Parliament called on the EEAS to use all the tools at their disposal, including those provided for by the EU guidelines for the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief, to assist religious communities and pressurise the Pakistani government to do more to protect religious minorities.

It said that Pakistan has benefited from trade preferences under the GSP+ programme since 2014 whereas the economic benefits from this unilateral trade agreement for the country are considerable. "GSP+ status comes with the obligation to ratify and implement 27 international

conventions including commitments to guarantee human rights and religious freedom," the text reads.

The resolution said that in its latest GSP+ assessment of Pakistan of 10 February 2020, the commission expressed a variety of serious concerns on the human rights situation in the country, notably the lack of progress in limiting the scope and implementation of the death penalty.

It called on the government of Pakistan to unequivocally condemn incitement to violence and discrimination against religious minorities in the country and to put in place effective, procedural and institutional safeguards at the investigative, prosecutorial and judicial levels to prevent the abuse of the blasphemy laws pending their abolition.

The EU Parliament deplored the continuing discrimination against and violence towards religious minorities in Pakistan, including Christians, Ahmadi community, Shias and Hindus.

"The situation in Pakistan continued to deteriorate in 2020 as the government systematically enforced blasphemy laws and failed to protect religious minorities from abuses by non-state actors, with a sharp rise in targeted killings, blasphemy cases, forced conversions, and hate speech against religious minorities including Ahmadis, Shia Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Sikhs; whereas abduction, forced conversion to Islam, rape and forced marriage remained an imminent threat for religious minority women and children in 2020, particularly those from the Hindu and Christian faiths."

The resolution expressed concern at the increasing online and offline attacks on journalists, academics and civil society organisations, particularly those against women and minorities and urged the government of Pakistan to take immediate steps to ensure the safety of journalists, human rights defenders and faith-based organisations and to carry out prompt and effective investigations in order to uphold the rule of law and bring the perpetrators to justice.

It urged the EEAS and the member states to continue to support Pakistan with judicial reform and capacity-building to ensure that lower courts are equipped to promptly hold trials for those detained and to dismiss blasphemy cases that are not supported by sufficient reliable evidence.

The resolution also welcomed the interreligious dialogues taking place in Pakistan and urges the EEAS and the EU delegation to continue to support the Pakistan National Peace Council for Interfaith Harmony in organising such regular initiatives with religious leaders, including from religious minorities, supported by faith-based organisations, civil society organisations, human rights and legal professionals and academics.

Meanwhile, Member of European Parliament Charlie Weimers of Sweden, who co-authored the resolution, tweeted: "Success! EU Parliament wants to use trade policy to pressure Pakistan: 'review Pakistan's eligibility for GSP+ status in the light of current events!'"

Source: Published in the Express Tribune April 30, 2021

Body formed to review legal aspects of TLP's plea

Rizwan Shehzad

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid on Friday formed a three-member committee to examine the legal aspects of an application filed by the proscribed Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) against the federal government's decision to declare it a banned organisation.

Sources told The Express Tribune that the interior minister chaired a meeting called after the TLP filed a review application under section 11C (Right of Review) and 11EE (Proscription of Person) of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), 1997.

The minister formed a committee under section 11CC of the ATA.

It states that the federal government shall "constitute a Proscription Review Committee comprising three government officers, including a representative of the law ministry, with the chairman of the committee being a person not below the rank of a joint secretary, to decide review applications within 30 days.

The federal government has failed to file a reference in the Supreme Court seeking the dissolution of the TLP.

On April 15 when the TLP was notified as a banned outfit, the interior minister had announced that a separate summary would be moved in the federal cabinet on April 16 and after its approval in the next two to three days, a reference would be filed in the top court for the group's dissolution.

However, that never happened and it seems the interior minister's announcement was made without realising that it could not be done without adopting the legal course of action.

"As per the ATA, the TLP can file review before interior ministry within 30 days," Federal Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said in response to a query.

The information minister added that the TLP had exercised its right and the interior ministry would now deal with the matter, not the cabinet.

The apparent shift in the government's approach towards the hardline group came when it announced that the negotiations with the TLP were successful.

It was also evident when the government had to call a session of the National Assembly at the 11th hour to present a TLP-dictated resolution seeking debate on the expulsion of French ambassador from Pakistan over the publication of blasphemous caricatures in his country.

All this had happened amid statements from key government ministers, saying the government would not be blackmailed and strict action would be taken against the violators.

The government's stance became stronger, especially, when clashes broke out between law enforcement agencies and the protesting TLP activists in Lahore.

However, soon after negotiations, the government has been releasing TLP activists and supporters arrested under the Maintenance of Public Order.

"The government's assessment about the TLP's reaction turned out to be incorrect. It quickly lost its nerves and retreated," the president of the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development And Transparency (PILDAT) Ahmed Bilal Mehboob said.

"The government appeared weak and those running the show were the weakest because they couldn't do what they had said," he added.

Apparently, the PILDAT president said, it was decided during negotiations that the government would not proceed with approaching the apex court for the dissolution.

It was also seemingly decided that the government would quickly take up the review application.

Mehboob, however, warned that any decision in haste would create further problems for the government at the international level, just like the EU parliament has urged to review Pakistan's GSP plus status over the alleged abuse of blasphemy laws in the country.

"The government is incompetent and it is not dealing effectively with sensitive matters," Mehboob said.

"This is why it is facing backlash both from within the country and the EU."

Source: Published in the Express Tribune April 30, 2021

About NIOC:

National Initiative against Organized Crime (NIOC) is the first-ever initiative against Organized Crime in Pakistan, which was launched in November 2019. It is led by a group of committed professionals and experts with law enforcement, media and other public service backgrounds. Through developing an empirical evidence-base and conducting hands-on consultations, NIOC aims to build community resilience and influence public policy to combat organized crime including terror financing, drug trafficking, human trafficking and cybercrime. With a complex governance structure having multiple layers of stakeholders, the criminal justice system and law enforcement apparatus require better coordination and capacity building. NIOC tries to identify the gaps and suggest improvements in the Criminal Justice System (CJS).



**NATIONAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME
PAKISTAN**



www.nioc.pk



[niocpk](https://www.facebook.com/niocpk)



[niocpk](https://twitter.com/niocpk)



[niocpk](https://www.linkedin.com/company/niocpk)