NIOC DIGEST

CGR
CENTRE for GOVERNANCE RESEARCH
PAKISTAN

Vol: 29 | March 2022

In This Issue

CENTRE for GOVERNANCE RESEARCH
PAKISTAN

www.cgr.com.pk
CgrPakistan
CgrPakistan

Islamabad office:
#38-W, Khalid Plaza, 1st. Floor. Jinnah Ave. Blue Area. Islamabad Phones 051-2870852 & 2870853.

Lahore office:
22, Tipu Block, New Garden Town, Lahore
Phone: 042-35831352

About the Centre for Governance Research (CGR)

CGR is a forum for studies and debate on strategic and tactical issues related with good governance and the rule of law. It is a non-governmental civil society advocacy centre dedicated to reforms in the justice and governance sectors.

As an independent think tank, CGR sets its own agenda, publishing and disseminating its findings regularly for national and global audience. Using an interdisciplinary approach, CGR brings together rule of law, justice and governance experts, researchers and internationally renowned professionals to animate its debate and research activities.

It aims to stand out as one of the rare Pakistani think tanks to position itself at the very heart of the debate on governance and justice issues.

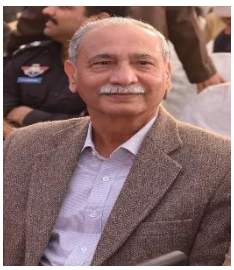
CGR focuses on advocacy, research and studies in the following areas:

- Governance and Rule of Law
- Public policy
- Policing and Justice Sectors
- Serious and Organized Crimes
- Counterterrorism and Counter Extremism (CT and CE)

Meanwhile, the National Initiative against Organized Crime (NIOC) launched in November 2019 continues as a Project from the platform of the Centre for Governance Research (CGR). 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 in Pakistan.

Since inception, NIOC has produced eight major research studies and policy briefs on the critical topics of terror financing, drug trafficking, terrorism in Pakistan during COVID-19, migrant smuggling and human trafficking, cybercrimes and countering extremism etc.

Foreword by Director



March 2022 was a busy month for CGR-NIOC. Our team completed an important study on crisis management in Pakistan. We examined both natural and man-made disasters. Hopefully, this baseline study will lead to a meaningful engagement with both national and international stakeholders for coming up with better policies and plans to deal with the crisis situations.

Pakistan's review of the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) is currently under progress. CGR-NIOC have embarked upon a pilot project to support the national Focal Person Dr Ehsan Sadiq during the review process and ensure meaningful contribution of the CSOs and NGOs as part of the partnership with the community. We will interact with the civil society, experts and lawyers to review the implementation of the process.

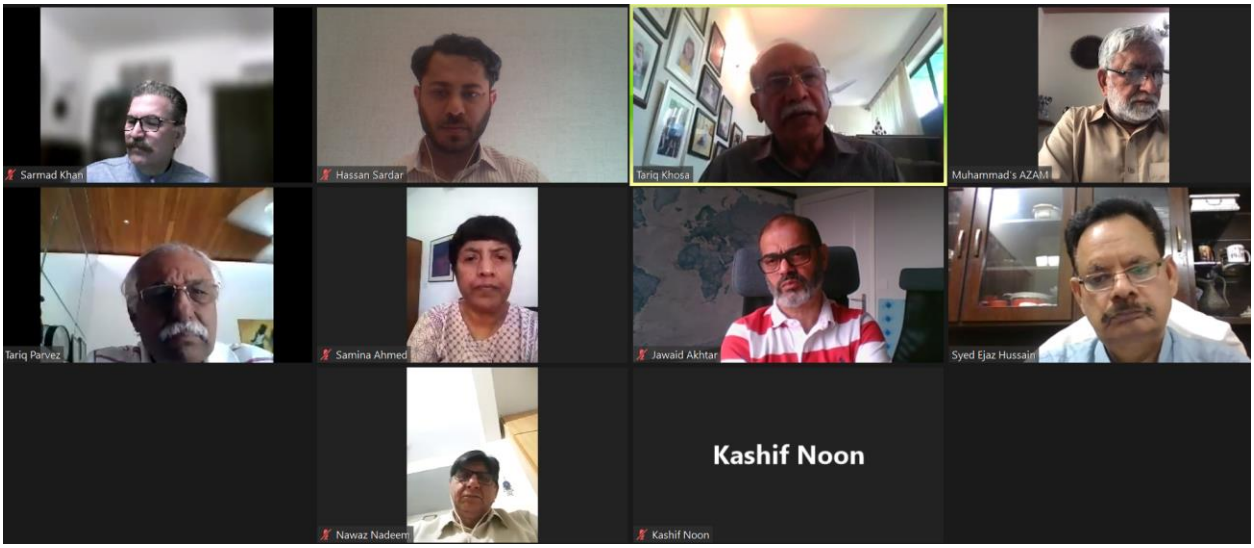
UNODC is currently engaging with international stakeholders in putting together a long-term terrorism prevention programme with member states and independent CSOs; the emphasis on CVE and building community resilience will be under greater focus. CGR-NIOC will try to engage with the UNODC in this regard.

The UN has constituted an Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes. The Geneva-based Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC) has constituted a Task Force on Cybercrime. It is a great honour for me to be associated as a Member of the Task Force. We have reached out to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad for any further assistance that the Government of Pakistan may require to prepare their position papers for the UN Ad Hoc Committee on the proposed convention against Cybercrime.

T. Khosa

Tariq Khosa

NIOC's 29th Advisory Board Meeting



The 29th Advisory Board Meeting of NIOC was held virtually on Monday 28 March at 2 pm. The following AB Members participated: Tariq Parvez, Samina Ahmed and Jawaid Akhtar. Zahid Hussain and Zubair Habib could not attend due to other pressing commitments.

The following represented NIOC Directorate: Tariq Khosa, Ejaz Hussain, Sarmad Saeed, Kashif Noon, Azam Khan, Nawaz Nadeem and Hassan Sardar. Saroop Ijaz, Ali Nekokara, Ammar Jaffri and Vaqas Ali could not attend due to other commitments.

The following agenda items were discussed:

1) CGR-NIOC completed the Crisis Management Study during February-March 2022.

2) Pakistan UNTOC Review is under way. NIOC is supporting National Focal Person Dr Ehsan Sadiq in this process. NIOC will write an independent paper on the implementation of the review process and engage with CSOs, Experts and Lawyers. It was also proposed that Saroop Ijaz and Azam Khan will be the lead writers while Sarmad Saeed and Kashif Noon will assist them in writing the report as per Concept Note by CGR-NIOC on UNTOC Review Support to the GOP.

3) UNODC held a brainstorming roundtable on terrorism prevention programming. NIOC was represented by Tariq Khosa. A follow-up dinner meeting was held with Jeremy Milsom, UNODC Country Representative in which further avenues of collaboration in

the areas of terrorism prevention and cybercrime were deliberated. UNODC Country Programme 2021-25 contains seven strands and NIOC is uniquely well-placed to assist the UN in achieving certain programme objectives. However, this matter is work in progress.

4) NIOC welcomes Sarmad Saeed as the Coordinator for various projects and programme of activities being undertaken by CGR-NIOC.

World Bank calls for more reforms to improve legal equality for women in Pakistan

AMIN AHMED

A new World Bank report, published ahead of International Women's Day (March 8), has suggested that Pakistan should bring more reforms to improve legal equality for women in the country.

While presenting an index covering 190 economies and structured around the life cycle of working women, the report, "Women, Business and the Law 2022" put the score for Pakistan at 55.6 out of 100, which was lower than the regional average observed across South Asia.

Within the South Asian region, the maximum score observed in Nepal was 80.6 out of 100. The Women, Business and the Law (WBL) index measures explicit discrimination in the law, legal rights, and the provision of certain benefits — areas in which reforms can bolster women's labour force participation.

Pointing out areas for improvement, the report said when it came to constraints on freedom of movement, laws affecting women's pay, constraints related to marriage, laws affecting women's work after having children, constraints on women starting and running a business, gender differences in property and inheritance, and laws affecting the size of a women's pension, Pakistan could consider reforms to improve legal equality for women.

Citing an example, the report said one of the lowest scores for Pakistan was on the indicator measuring laws affecting women's work after having children. To improve the parenthood indicator, Pakistan may wish to consider making the government administer 100 per cent of maternity leave benefits, making paid leave available to fathers, making paid parental leave available and prohibiting the dismissal of pregnant workers.

The report also pointed out that Pakistan did not allow women to register a business in the same way as men.

On a positive note, the report said when it came to laws affecting women's decisions to work, Pakistan got a perfect score of 100. Mentioning recent reforms, the report said during the past year, from October 2020 to October 2021, Pakistan lifted restrictions on women's ability to work at night.

The World Bank estimated that globally, differences between men's and women's total expected lifetime earnings were $172.3 trillion, equivalent to twice the world GDP. As such, adopting laws that strengthened women's rights and opportunities was an essential first step towards a more resilient and inclusive world.

The report revealed that around 2.4 billion women of working age were not afforded an equal economic opportunity and 178 countries maintained legal barriers that prevented their full economic participation. In 86 countries, women faced some form of job restriction and 95 countries did not guarantee equal pay for equal work.

Globally, women still had only three-quarters of the legal rights afforded to men — an aggregate score of 76.5 out of a possible 100, which denotes complete legal parity. However, despite the disproportionate effect on women's lives and livelihood from the global pandemic, 23 countries reformed their laws in 2021 to take much-needed steps towards advancing women's economic inclusion, according to the report.

The Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa regions showed the largest improvements in the WBL Index in 2021, though they continued to lag behind other parts of the world overall.

Globally, the highest number of reforms was made in the Parenthood, Pay, and Workplace indicators. Many reforms focused on protecting against sexual harassment in employment, prohibiting gender discrimination, increasing paid leave for new parents and removing job restrictions for women.

The Pay and Parenthood indicators had the lowest average scores in the index, but they increased in the last year, rising 0.9 and 0.7 points, respectively, with average scores of 68.7 and 55.6. The gains in the Parenthood indicator were largely around paternity leave and shared parental leave, but the low score highlighted the need to accelerate reforms in this area.

Across the world, 118 economies guaranteed 14 weeks of paid leave for mothers. More than half (114) of the economies measured mandated paid leave for fathers, but the median duration was just one week.

SOURCE: DAWN, 3 MARCH 2022.

Pakistan remains on the 'grey list' as UAE also joins the club

A view of the plenary meeting of the Financial Action Task Force on March 1.

With just two unmet targets out of 34 action points, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has retained Pakistan on its terrorism financing "grey list" and asked the country to address the remaining deficiencies in its financial system as soon as possible.However, at the concluding session of its hybrid plenary meeting on Friday, the Paris-based global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog also appreciated Pakistan's robust progress on its global commitments to fight financial crimes.

The FATF added the United Arab Emirates to its increased monitoring list, also known as the grey list, of countries with inadequate controls over terrorism financing. The watchdog also decided to appoint T. Raja Kumar of Singapore as its next president for a fixed two-year term.

Pakistan was placed on the list in 2018, which made foreign firms more cautious about investing in the country.

The Friday plenary noted that Pakistan had completed 26 of the 27 action items in its 2018 action plan of the FATF and of the seven action items of the 2021 action plan of the watchdog's Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG) ahead of the deadlines.

It was noted that since June 2018 — when Pakistan made a high-level political commitment to work with the FATF and APG to strengthen its anti-money laundering/combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) regime and to address its strategic counter-terrorist financing-related deficiencies — the country's continued political commitment had led to significant progress across a comprehensive CFT action plan.

The FATF encouraged Pakistan to continue making progress to address, as soon as possible, the one remaining item by continuing to demonstrate that terror financing investigations and prosecutions target senior leaders and commanders of UN-designated terrorist groups.

In response to additional deficiencies later identified in Pakistan's 2019 APG Mutual Evaluation Report in June 2021, Pakistan provided further high-level commitment to address these strategic deficiencies pursuant to a new action plan that primarily focuses on combating money laundering.

"Since June 2021, Pakistan has taken swift steps towards improving its AML/CFT regime and completed six of the seven action items ahead of any relevant deadlines expiring, including by demonstrating that it is enhancing the impact of sanctions by nominating individuals and entities for UN designation and restraining and confiscating proceeds of crime in line with Pakistan's risk profile," the FATF said.

"Pakistan should continue to work to address the one remaining item in its 2021 action plan by demonstrating a positive and sustained trend of pursuing complex [money laundering] investigations and prosecutions," it said.

Officials said Pakistan now aimed to fully comply with the 2021 action plan on anti-money laundering and combating terror financing by the end of January 2023.

The country had two concurrent action plans with a total of 34 action points, of which 30 had either been fully or largely addressed to curb money laundering and terror financing. The most recent action plan of 2021 on money laundering from the APG had largely focused on money laundering. The completion of APG's action plan for the effectiveness of AML/CFT is also a structural benchmark of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for end-March.

Recently, the IMF asked Pakistan to complete the last remaining item in the 2018 AML/CFT action plan on the effectiveness of terror financing investigations and prosecutions of senior leaders of UN-designated terrorist groups, and promptly address the deficiencies identified in the APG's Mutual Evaluation Report under the 2021 action plan.

SOURCE: DAWN, 5 MARCH 2022

Brutal police tactics

ISLAMABAD High Court Chief Justice Athar Minallah has written in an order that suppressing voices of dissent or discouraging raising of grievances against the state amounted to sedition. These emphatic words are contained in the order issued after the hearing of a petition on a case regarding police action against protesting students in Islamabad. The students had gathered in Islamabad recently against the alleged enforced disappearance of their fellow student Hafeez Baloch. The police used violence against these peaceful protesters and also registered criminal cases against them. The IHC chief justice has done the right thing by chastising the local police and administration officials and reminding them that their constitutional duty is to protect the rights of citizens. Unfortunately, such harsh ways of dealing with citizens has become the norm for the police and administration officials. This attitude is a hangover from the colonial times that the bureaucracy refuses to discard despite knowing that the relationship between the state and the citizen has changed since those times. Such abhorrent behaviour becomes all the more troublesome when it is employed against people who are already nursing grievances against the state. These students from Balochistan were raising genuine questions about enforced disappearances that have become a festering wound in the province. Instead of unleashing violence on them, the police and administration should have taken extra care to address their concerns to the best of their abilities. By using force, they have reinforced the perception that the state willingly persecutes those considered weaker.

The IHC chief justice must be commended for admonishing these state functionaries and providing justice to the victims of police brutality. However, such incidents will continue unless there is a genuine change in how the state treats its own citizens. Reforming the bureaucracy is a goal that remains unfulfilled despite claims by all governments, including the present one. Police reform is also an issue that has quietly been buried. The result is a continuation of a culture that perpetuates the role of the state as a predator and not a protector. The courts are doing well to balance this state high-handedness by enforcing the rights of citizens. This in itself acts as a deterrent and ensures that the state is held to account for such excesses. A long-term solution is however required if we want the state to shed its mediaeval approach and transition into a modern one.

SOURCE: DAWN, 6 MARCH 2022

7 terrorists killed in intelligence-based operation in Turbat

Seven terrorists were killed during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Turbat's Gorchop area in Balochistan, the military's media affairs wing said.

In a statement, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that security forces conducted an operation to apprehend "externally sponsored enemies of peace in Balochistan" after receiving information about a terrorists' hideout in "general area Gorchop".

"Once the troops started [the] clearance operation in the area, terrorists tried to escape from their camp and opened indiscriminate fire onto security forces," the statement said.

The ISPR said that seven terrorists, including commanders Hasil Doda and Washdil, were killed during the exchange of fire. "These terrorists were involved in recent firing and attacks on security forces in Makran Division," the military said.

In addition, a significant cache of arms and ammunition was recovered which was "intended to be used in terrorist activities".

"Operations to eliminate such perpetrators of terrorist acts in Pakistan will continue and they will not be allowed to sabotage peace, stability and progress of Balochistan," the ISPR statement concluded.

On February 26, security forces killed a terrorist during an IBO in the Spinwam area of North Waziristan. According to the ISPR, the miscreant was involved in terrorist activities against security forces.

SOURCE: DAWN, 8 MARCH 2022

At least five security personnel martyred, 19 injured in Sibi blast

Law enforcement personnel are seen in a hospital where the injured are being treated.

At least five security personnel were martyred and 19 people injured in a blast near Thandi Sarak in district Sibi of Balochistan, officials said.

Medical Superintendent Civil Hospital Dr Sarwar Hashmi told Dawn.com that 16 of the 19 injured were security personnel.

He had earlier said that among the injured who were initially brought to the hospital, five were in critical condition and shifted to Quetta.

Meanwhile, a senior official of the Counter-Terrorism Department Sibi, Hafeez Rind, said the blast appeared to be a suicide attack; however, the investigation was underway.

The blast occurred near an open area where the annual Sibi Mela was being held.

"The blast took place 30 minutes after President Arif Alvi attended the festival in Sibi," Rind said.

Meanwhile, Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo strongly condemned the blast and directed authorities to provide the best possible medical treatment to those injured in the blast.

Bizenjo said the blast was an attempt to sabotage the annual festival and overall peace in the province.

He vowed to thwart "all conspiracies against the province".

The chief minister directed the police to beef up security in Sibi and arrest those involved in the incident.

Last week, a suicide bomber had struck inside a Shia Mosque in Peshawar's Kocha Risaldar area during Friday prayers, killing at least 56 worshippers and wounding 190 others.

SOURCE: DAWN 8 MARCH 2022

Scourge of trafficking

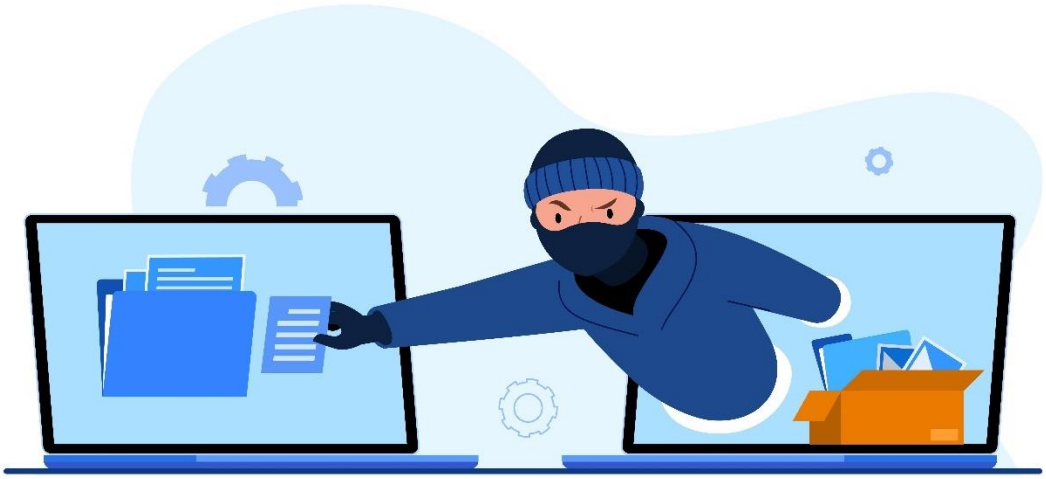
A RECENTLY published HRCP report has shed light on the alarming practice of human trafficking in the country. The report titled Modern slavery: Trafficking in Women and Girls in Pakistan describes Pakistan as a "source, transit and destination country for trafficking". However, the real issue, according to the findings, pertains to internal trafficking "especially forced or bonded labour". Although human trafficking gangs have existed in the country for decades, running forced begging rings, providing adults and children as fodder for bonded labour, and forcing women and girls into prostitution, there is little reliable data about this disturbing trend. Because of this, the report says, it is difficult to assess the true magnitude of trafficking. Considering that 151 girls have been recovered from Sargodha only since Jan 5 this year by the Punjab police, and 3,571 girls and women remain missing across the province, as reported by this paper last month, one can make an intelligent guess at the extent of this menace.

What is also unfortunate is the apathy of the law enforcers. Most cases of missing women and girls are registered as abductions or kidnappings or simply categorised as 'elopement' by police officials. As we have noted in this space before, in many cases the police do not even register a complaint when women and girls from poor families go missing. This indifference stems in large part from what the report describes as the lack of "capacity and understanding of human trafficking" in police ranks. Meanwhile, the challenges of intra-agency communication involving the provincial and federal law-enforcement agencies remain a big hurdle, with the institutional confusion showing up in the non-implementation of the recommendations of a national action plan to curb trafficking. This grim picture is not likely to improve unless the authorities develop the capabilities of the police and provide them with the needed resources, as well as devise a detailed policy on identifying and reporting cases of human trafficking. Additionally, the rehabilitation of victimised women and girls must be given due attention.

SOURCE: DAWN, 12 MARCH 2022

Pandemic effect: Cybercrime on the rise

BY AYAZ HUSSAIN ABBASI



Between February and May 2020, more than half a million people throughout the world were affected by data breaches in which video conferencing users' personal information was stolen and sold on the dark web. More individuals are imprisoned at home as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic and the subsequent lockdown; they are increasingly reliant on the Internet. As businesses adapt to a new operating paradigm in which working from home has become the "new normal," the coronavirus pandemic has presented new obstacles.

Businesses are speeding up their digital transformations, and cyber security has become a big worry. If cyber security concerns are ignored, the consequences for reputation, operations, legality, and compliance could be severe. The COVID-19 epidemic and the ensuing lockdown resulted in many more individuals being trapped at home, with many more hours to spend online each day and a growing reliance on the Internet to receive services that they would normally obtain offline.

The dangers of cybercrime have existed for many years, but the rise in the percentage of the population connected to the Internet and the amount of time spent online, combined with the sense of detainment and anxiety and fear generated by the lockdown, has provided more opportunities for cybercriminals to profit or cause disruption. It's crucial to remember that some of the population's most vulnerable groups, such as children, require more time online for services like schooling. This sea change in how we live and utilise the Internet has resulted in an increase in e-crime.

The use of common cybercrime methods like phishing has increased. Phishing is the deceptive tactic of tricking people into giving up personal information like passwords and credit card numbers by using bogus websites or emails. New information obtained by Google and evaluated by Atlas VPN, a virtual private network (VPN) service provider, sheds more light on the scale of the problem. According to the data, Google recorded 149,900 active phishing websites in January. That number nearly doubled to 293,000 in February. However, in March, that number had risen to 522000, a 350% increase over January. Government limitations in reaction to the coronavirus pandemic have pushed employees to work from home or even "stay at home." As a result, technology has grown in importance in both our professional and personal lives.

Despite the increased demand for technology, many companies still do not provide a "cyber-safe" remote-working environment. Whereas most business meetings used to be held in person, they are now mostly held online. The COVID-19 outbreak in Pakistan has exacerbated crucial economic constraints as well as governance and internal security concerns. The outbreak has also ushered in a slew of changes involving organised crime and non-state actors, necessitating increased vigilance in tracking these trends. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) had granted Pakistan a three-month extension to submit its compliance report due to the pandemic's massive impact on the country's economy. The revised deadline, set for September of last year, was set to give the administration more time to focus on the economy and implement meaningful anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist funding measures.

Pakistan seemed to have taken advantage of the situation and taken steps to meet FATF regulations more quickly. Following a brief COVID-19 closure, the interior ministry began work on one of the FATF's top priorities: creating a database to combat money laundering and terror funding.

Two new anti-terrorism courts opened in April, bringing the total number of anti-terrorism courts to four since the first two began in December 2019. These tribunals are meant to devote judicial capacity to prosecutions involving terror financing. In the meantime, Prime Minister Imran Khan had launched a tax amnesty programme that will allow people to invest their dirty money in the construction sector. Economists were concerned that it would generate problems with the FATF, which had previously warned that criminals could use the pandemic to commit financial fraud and exploit scams.

A large number of people's names were also removed from Pakistan's national counter-terrorism authority's watch list. The list was created with the intention of assisting financial institutions in avoiding doing business with terrorism suspects. According to a Pakistani official from the interior ministry, it was revised since it had become "bloated with many inaccuracies." As a result of these developments, the FATF may face new challenges in the future. COVID-19 has also resulted in an increase in online traffic, which has heightened the predicted threat of cybercrime, including new web-based exploitation tactics, bogus charity fundraising, and numerous medical scams.

In response, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has warned against using public Wi-Fi networks, while the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) and financial institutions have started a social-media awareness campaign.

A major data breach affecting 115 million mobile users was found in April. Senator Rehman Malik responded by directing the FIA and PTA to investigate and report on the darknet data sales. There has also been an increase in parental concerns about minors being targeted for personal information, photos, and financial information. As a result, the FIA's Cyber-Crime Wing (CCW) issued new cautions, suggesting that internet connections be closely monitored. Six Nigerian gangs were recently apprehended for defrauding Pakistani citizens, with a particular focus on rural residents. Scammers targeted Americans using a variety of social media platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Tinder, and promised millions of dollars in return. Twenty people were detained.

Despite a 40% rise in internet usage since the COVID-19 outbreak and the increased danger of criminality, the FIA claims that cybercrime has reduced. The CCW said in a statement that this was due to the agency's "successful actions." Many business owners, however, have disputed this notion, claiming that their own anti-fraud tactics, such as having separate bank accounts, are to blame for decreased cybercrime rates.

Six Nigerian gangs were recently apprehended for defrauding Pakistani citizens, with a particular focus on rural residents. Scammers targeted Americans using a variety of social media platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Tinder, and promised millions of dollars in return.

Twenty people were detained. Despite a 40% rise in internet usage since the COVID-19 outbreak and the increased danger of criminality, the FIA claims that cybercrime has been reduced. The CCW said in a statement that this was due to the agency's "successful actions." Many business owners, however, have disputed this notion, claiming that their own anti-fraud tactics, such as having separate bank accounts, are to blame for decreased cybercrime rates. The full impact of the COVID-19 epidemic has yet to be determined, but it is apparent that it has already confronted Pakistan with numerous new obstacles.

The state's capacity to focus efforts on people's health and safety while also seeking to stabilise Pakistan's economy is being harmed by an apparent increase in drug trafficking and other risks.

Despite encouraging results like narcotics seizures and a purported decrease in cybercrime, caution must be exercised to prevent criminals from profiting from these difficult times. Although the FATF deadline extension has relieved some pressure, recent government actions represent a red flag that must be closely monitored.

The website of the Federal Board of Revenue was hacked a few weeks ago, exposing the most sensitive information. In June of last year, the music streaming website "Patari" was also hacked, with hackers releasing the personal information of 257,000 members on the dark web.

This cybercrime analysis is based on the Cyber Crime Wing of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) of Pakistan's guidebook:

According to this guidebook, the FIA's Cyber Crime wing received 84,764 complaints of various types in 2020, as shown in the chart below.

Serial No.	*Type*	*Number complaints*
1.	Financial Fraud	20,218
2.	Hacking	7,966
3.	Fake Profiles/Identity Theft	4,456
4.	Cyber Harassment/ Threats	6,023
5.	Defamation 6,004	6,004
6.	Cyber Blackmailing	3,447
7.	Hate Speech	892

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan, major cyber offences and the number of complaints, inquiries, and cases are as shown below:

Serial No	*Category of crime*	*Complaint*	*Enquiry*	*Case*
1.	Electronic Financial Fraud	32,324	3706	154
2.	Cyber Harassment	6,023	2694	79
3.	Cyber Defamation	6,009	Nil	Nil
4.	Cyber Blackmailing	3,447	1826	222
5.	Hate Speech	892	51	54
6.	Sale & Provision of Illegal Sims	195	174	29
7.	Child Pornography	83	173	24
8.	Identity Theft	4,456	174	29
9.	Cyber Terrorism	26	04	Nil
10.	Misuse of Crypto-currency	20	Nil	Nil

What can we do to improve cyber-security while working from home?

Employees who work from home on their personal computers (or even those who use a company-owned device) should follow basic cyber hygiene guidelines. These are some of them:

• Antivirus protection software Antivirus and malware software licences should be offered to employees for usage on their own computers. While this does not give failsafe protection, it does stop a lot of low-level threats.

• Cyber security awareness is critical. Best practises and procedures for regulating the sending of emails or other content to private email addresses and/or cloud storage should be presented to employees.

• Be cautious of phishing scams. When receiving emails, employees should be cautious and double-check the sender's address for validity.

• At-home network security Employees should make sure that their home Wi-Fi is password protected.

• Use a virtual private network (VPN). Virtual private networks (VPNs) provide an additional layer of security for internet use at home. They cannot be relied on to prevent cyber-attacks on their own, but they can serve as an effective deterrent. Businesses can use a few basic cyber security tactics.

• Look for flaws in your system. Every information technology system has flaws. Companies should conduct testing to discover vulnerabilities and repair the most serious ones as quickly as possible. Vulnerability scanning or various types of penetration testing exercises are examples of this. Hardening of technological infrastructure components should also be carried out.

• Regular evaluations. Companies should assess their cyber security risk exposure on a regular basis and determine whether their present measures are adequate. Any new types of attacks that have lately surfaced should be taken into account during these reviews.

• Refresh business continuity and disaster recovery plans. Lines of business Managers must keep their company continuity strategies up-to-date and take cyber-attack situations into consideration.

• Using new technology and tools are examples of more sophisticated actions that can be done. To enhance the security of remote working, companies can utilise advanced technologies like host checking (a programme that checks the security posture of an endpoint before approving access to corporate information systems).

• Intelligence-gathering methods. Businesses should encourage the proactive use of cyber threat information to identify and address important indications of attacks (IOC).

• Contingency planning. For better risk management, businesses can use governance, risk, and compliance (GRC) systems. GRC solutions give you a clear picture of your company's risk

exposure and help you connect the dots between different risk disciplines (e.g., cyber security, operational risks, business continuity).

• Be ready for an attack. Companies are recommended to conduct frequent cyber crisis simulation exercises to prepare for a cyber-attack in these high-risk times.

• There is no such thing as trust. CISOs and CIOs should think about creating a zero-trust cyber security strategy. Only authenticated and authorised users and devices are allowed access to apps and data in this security paradigm. It calls into question the notion of "access allowed by default."

Most executive committee meetings include a discussion on cyber security, but given the rising threats during the pandemic, it may be given special focus. In the midst of the coronavirus's second wave, and concerns about a potential third wave, businesses should be proactive in addressing risks, planning measures to prevent successful cyber-attacks rather than reacting when they do. Although prevention measures are crucial, cyber-attack detection, response, and recovery skills are also required.

This pandemic has taught us that the key to properly managing the hazards associated with cyber-attacks is to plan ahead. The capacity to react swiftly to unexpected occurrences can help to mitigate the damage of a cyber-attack. Businesses that have already benefited from secure remote working capabilities will be better prepared to deal with the ongoing rise in cyber threats. Companies that were caught off guard will need to review their cyber threat exposure swiftly and prioritise activities to close cyber security weaknesses in accordance with best practises.

Furthermore, for firms enabling remote access to confidential and sensitive data, corporate-owned devices should be the standard. When accessing company data from a personal device is permissible, cyber risks should be considered and steps made to prevent cyber threat exposure. The reality is that businesses must shift their focus from "if" to "when," and acknowledge that data breaches and ransom ware may be financially disastrous. It's also worth remembering that money gain isn't the main reason for hacks. A new menace is "hacktivism," which aims to harm business reputations. There are steps that may be taken to reduce the chance and severity of a cyber-attack, but they require concentrated activity and planning. Companies must improve their development and deployment of security measures to make remote working practises more resilient to cyber-attacks.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, 13 MARCH 2022

Gutting CPLC

THERE is a dark cloud over the future of policing in Pakistan's largest city. A one-of-its-kind initiative born out of a close partnership between the public and private sectors, Karachi's Citizen-Police Liaison Committee has, for 33 years since its inception, been instrumental in helping the province's police force greatly improve its services. Its contributions towards controlling kidnapping and other serious crimes, in a megalopolis that has suffered from extended bouts of violence and festers with organised crime, are no mean feat. A new plan seeking to place the CPLC under the administrative control of the Sindh government threatens to undo it all.

One of the main reasons for CPLC's consistent efficacy over the years has been its ability to function independently under the stewardship of a small group of civic-minded citizens, insulated from interference thanks to their oversight by the politically neutral Governor House. These stewards, drawn mostly from Karachi's business community, have used their clout to ensure that citizens are facilitated properly and their complaints redressed if police are being difficult. They have also marshalled material resources to help improve police services, especially by introducing technology to maintain crime databases that have greatly helped in fine-tuning policing strategies. The plan to subserve this set-up to an 'Executive Council' operating under the Sindh Home Department's thumb comes as a rapid increase in cases of mobile snatching, armed robbery and auto theft becomes a nuisance for the PPP government. It is feared that one of CPLC's core strengths — compiling crime statistics and analysing data — may actually be gutted as it has the potential to cast a poor light on the provincial government's performance and its control of the police force. This likely heralds the end of an era when the people of Karachi had a proactive role to play in the security of their city. By throttling a shining example of what citizens and state can do by working together, the Sindh government is doing a favour to no one but itself.

SOURCE: DAWN, 16 MARCH 2022

Why Pakistan?

MUHAMMAD ALI SIDDIQI

MEDIA comments after every act of terror — like the Peshawar Mosque carnage — criticise the security agencies and their purported bonhomie with extremist groups, and blame the powerful body of ulema for its muted criticism of religiously motivated terrorists. While all these factors may have helped terrorists in their business of killing, a major phenomenon conducive to violent extremism is the gullibility of a large section of Pakistani Muslims who respond with enthusiasm to any group that pretends to act in the name of religion, even if its modus operandi is barbaric.

This phenomenon is practically unique to our people. In contrast, we notice the absence of such gullibility in most other Muslim countries. In recent years, few Muslim countries, from the sprawling archipelago that is Indonesia to tiny Morocco in North Africa, have been victims of wholescale massacres like the massive Peshawar blast earlier this month. Unfortunately, terrorist attacks are again on the increase in Pakistan and are being carried out by militant groups such as the so-called Islamic State's Khorasan chapter and the TTP.

The post-2003 wave of murderous bomb blasts in Iraq is over, and even though acts of terror still do hit Syria occasionally, mass killings there are absent. Exceptions include Taliban-ruled Afghanistan — where it will take time for things to settle — and the rump state of Somalia. In Egypt, bomb attacks on Coptic churches and tourists have decreased. As for the huge land mass inhabited by the Turkic people of Central Asia, the threat of religiously motivated acts of terrorism is seen as much lower there than in this country. The same holds good for the Caucasus, Turkey, Iran and the sheikhdoms.

Uzbekistan, ruled by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, needs special mention. Under Islam Karimov, political dissidents were reportedly dipped in boiling liquid. Shocked beyond belief, one traumatised mother, whose son died after he was allegedly subjected to this barbarism, wrote to the British ambassador, who informed his government and the issue went viral. Uzbek 'mujahids' may have realised that their own country was hardly the place which could serve as a base for launching a world revolution, as the first victims would be their own people. The only country that came to their minds was their neighbouring state.

Initially, Afghan Taliban fighting the Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani cliques welcomed Uzbek warriors for their fighting prowess, but the latter forgot that Afghans fight for their country and jealously guard it against potential rivals. They slaughtered the British in the 19th century, humiliated the Russians in the 20th and made the US flee in the 21st after two decades of a costly and futile war.

To their Uzbek comrades the Afghan Taliban made clear that they would not be given any territory to operate and the overall command and control would be the Afghan Taliban's.

Disappointed, many Uzbek fighters came to a country whose hospitality and notions of pan-Islamic fraternity amazed them. Its mountainous northwest provided safety, besides freedom of movement because until recently Pakistani laws didn't operate there. Down below in the plains, the madressahs are reported to have given their Uzbek guests free board and lodging because their talk of fighting for Islamic causes fascinated their hosts. The Uzbeks then decided to pay their hosts for their gracious hospitality by blowing up Karachi airport in 2014.

Proudly did the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) display on its website the photos of its "martyrs" and declare that its "martyrdom ope-ration" was rev-e-nge for "the late--st full-scale bom-bardment and night atta-cks" by the Pak-istani military.

Listening and succumbing to controversial narratives in the name of religion is in our genes. In a scholarly article by Sikandar Hayat in A History of Pakistan, compiled by Robert D. Long, the writer dwells on the tragedy that followed a fatwa. According to the latter, after the end of Mughal rule, India was no more Darul Islam (abode of Islam or peace); it had become Darul Harb (abode of war) and it was incumbent upon Muslims to leave the country. Many among the believers obeyed this religious edict, sold their homes at throwaway prices and headed towards Afghanistan. As was to be expected of a foreign country, they were denied entry. Many of the hapless died while others returned home as paupers.

This gullibility is a societal problem and cannot be scratched out by security agencies or by the state: society alone can reform itself. The basic drawback is lack of enlightenment — which can only be achieved through universal education free from retrogressive control.

SOURCE: DAWN, 16 MARCH 2022

Curbs on freedom of peaceful assembly: HRCP

There exists a massive disconnect between domestic law and international human rights standards related to freedom of assembly, despite Pakistan's binding legal obligation to bridge these gaps after ratifying the international covenant on civil and political rights and international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has, in partnership with the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), released a study titled "Freedom of peaceful assembly in Pakistan: A legislative review," which points out the dichotomy.

The study identifies the laws and procedures that are used to restrict the constitutional right to freedom of peaceful assembly, either directly or indirectly. These include provisions in the Pakistan Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance, the Police Order, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act and other ancillary laws.

The study maps the range of situations and provinces/areas in which these laws and procedures have been used to restrict this right between 2010 and 2020. Of the 858 assemblies that took place during this period, the study notes at least 392 instances in which curbs on the right to freedom of assembly were disproportionate and unwarranted, involving excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests or detentions, registration of criminal and terrorism charges against participants, imposition of wholesale bans, and other attempts to obstruct assemblies.

About the media, the report notes that generally, media outlets and journalists enjoyed unrestricted access to all manners of assemblies. In rare cases, however, it became apparent that the media had been specifically directed not to cover certain events.

From 2018 till 2020, the PTM staged numerous rallies, demonstrations, political gatherings and protests all over the country. It raised several issues, including but not limited to racial profiling and marginalisation of Pashtun citizens in ex-FATA, extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances at the hands of security forces, and the continued presence of landmines in certain tribal districts.

Shockingly, virtually none of their activities was covered by electronic media, leading to the impression that unidentifiable actors, most likely from within the state machinery, had imposed an unspoken and unannounced ban on media coverage of the PTM.

The report recommends reassessing the current legislative framework, which is still deeply rooted in colonial-era policing strategies; creating and enforcing better protocols for law-enforcement agencies that involve training in human rights and crowd-management practices, with emphasis on minimal use of force; allowing unrestricted media and digital access to assemblies; and facilitating free speech and movement for all assemblies rather than imposing content-based restrictions or blocking routes. The deployment of armed forces or paramilitary groups to police assemblies should be avoided at all costs and must be kept as a measure of last resort. Where they are requisitioned to contain crowds, they should be subservient to civilian authorities and the state must ensure that they have adequate knowledge of crowd control and management.

SOURCE: DAWN, 18 MARCH 2022

Religion-Fueled Mobs on the Rise Again in Pakistan

The mosque in central Pakistan from which Muhammad Mushtaq was dragged and killed.

Last month, a man named Muhammad Mushtaq was accused of burning pages of the Quran inside a mosque in central Pakistan. A mob armed with sticks, bricks and axes gathered at the mosque and dragged him out.

Mr. Mushtaq was tortured for hours and eventually killed, his body hung from a tree. A handful of police officers were among those who watched.

The Feb. 12 killing in the district of Khanewal was denounced across Pakistan. Prime Minister Imran Khan said the government had "zero tolerance" for such mob violence and promised that the police officers would be punished.

But lynching over offenses to Islam, real or imagined, are far from new in Pakistan, where blasphemy is punishable by death. Rights activists say lynch mobs exploit anti-blasphemy laws to take matters into their own hands.

In recent years these episodes have risen to an alarming level, with increasing cases of fatal violence.

Critics and rights activists say that vows like those made by the prime minister are mere lip service and that Mr. Khan's government, much like his predecessors, has not taken any practical steps to curb violence.

Instances of mob violence, and state-enforced criminal blasphemy cases, are more frequent in Pakistan than anywhere else, according to a report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom.

"The lack of political will and commitment has always stood as the biggest obstacle to prevent the abuse, misuse, and exploitation of blasphemy laws," said Tahira Abdullah, a rights activist based in Islamabad.

Mr. Khan's government is no different from its predecessors in promising to tackle the menace of religious violence, she said. But "it is too cowardly to confront" influential religious parties in Parliament, Ms. Abdullah said, "and the rampaging militant extremist groups outside Parliament."

Blasphemy allegations have led to the vandalizing of Hindu temples and neighborhoods, the burning of police stations by angry mobs, the lynching of a student on a university campus and the killing of a provincial governor by his own security guard. After Musthaq's killing, a senior police official told a parliamentary committee that 90 percent of those involved in blasphemy violence are between the ages of 18 and 30.

Just two months ago, a Sri Lankan, Priyantha Diyawadanage, was lynched by workers he oversaw in a factory in the eastern city of Sialkot. Mr. Diyawadanage was accused of tearing off stickers with religious inscriptions from the factory walls. He was tortured for hours by an enraged mob before his body was thrown off the factory's rooftop, beaten and set on fire.

In 2021, at least 84 people faced blasphemy accusations in courts and from angry street mobs, according to the Centre for Social Justice, a Lahore-based minority rights group. Three people, including Mr. Diyawadanage, were killed by a mob over such allegations, it noted.

In August, a mob in the Rahimyar Khan district, also in Punjab Province, damaged statues and burned down a Hindu temple's main door after a court released an 8-year-old Hindu boy on bail. He had been charged with blasphemy for allegedly urinating in the library of a madrasa.

Defense lawyers are also at risk. In 2014 gunmen murdered a Pakistani lawyer, Rashid Rehman, in Multan city for defending Junaid Hafeez, an academic charged with making derogatory comments about the Prophet Muhammad. Mr. Hafeez had been in prison, unable to find a lawyer, before Mr. Rehman agreed to take up his case.

In 2011, two politicians were murdered in similar episodes. Salman Taseer, then a provincial governor, was killed by a bodyguard after expressing opposition to blasphemy laws. Shahbaz

Bhatti, a federal minister, was murdered for opposing the death sentence imposed on Asia Bibi, a Christian convicted of verbally insulting the Prophet Muhammad. Though Ms. Bibi was acquitted in 2019, she fled Pakistan and her lawyer has been receiving death threats.

"The increasing theocratization of Pakistan and rising militant extremism makes it very difficult for lawyers to defend alleged blasphemers," Ms. Abdullah said. "It takes a great deal of personal courage and professional integrity to withstand huge overt pressure and threats."

Law enforcement agencies are not trained, or equipped to handle, frenzied vigilante mobs, and find themselves overwhelmed, Ms. Abdullah noted.

Pakistan inherited 19th-century British laws outlining punishments for offenses related to blasphemy. But the government revamped these laws in the 1980s, introducing new clauses adding severe penalties and even a death sentence for anyone who insults Islam.

Iran, Brunei and Mauritania are the other three countries that impose the death penalty for insulting religion.

"Since the death penalty, a mandatory punishment for blasphemy, was made a law, there have been several bouts of religion-based violence in Pakistan," said Peter Jacob, executive director of the Centre for Social Justice.

While no one has ever been executed for the offense, violence against alleged blasphemers is hardly unusual.

Rights activists link the current spike in blasphemy-related violence to the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, an emerging radical religious party. And Islamist parties and militant groups in Pakistan have been emboldened by the Taliban's coming to power in neighboring Afghanistan last year.

"The government's narrative about Islamophobia in the rest of the world" fuels the religion-based violence, Mr. Jacob said.

"This narrative builds on anger among the youth, which becomes ready-made ammunition for sporadic but large-scale violence against anyone who is suspected of offering any disrespect to religious persons, scripture, places or articles," he said.

Tehreek-e-Labbaik, the radical religious party, first came to prominence as an organized force when it demonstrated for the release of Mumtaz Qadri, the police bodyguard who fatally shot Governor Taseer in 2011. Mr. Qadri was eventually sentenced to death and hanged in 2016. Since then, it has shaped itself into a political party, contesting elections and continuing to unsettle governments.

In April last year, Tehreek-e-Labbaik organized violent, countrywide protests demanding the expulsion of the French ambassador after President Emmanuel Macron of France eulogized a French teacher murdered for showing caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in a classroom.

The Pakistani Taliban have also announced support for anti-blasphemy campaigns and promoted armed struggle to protect the honor of Islam.

Posters offering a reward of some $56,000 to kill Faraz Pervaiz, a Pakistani Christian, for posting anti-Islamic content on social media often appear in anti-blasphemy protests in the country.

Mr. Pervaiz, 34, now living in self-exile in Thailand, said that he started speaking out for the rights of non-Muslim communities on social media after a Muslim mob attacked a Christian neighborhood in Lahore in 2013, torching more than 150 houses and two churches following reports that a Christian sanitation worker had blasphemed the Prophet Muhammad.

"Even in Thailand, I feel insecure," he said in an interview, after a Pakistani Muslim refugee shared one of his videos and his location on social media. Mr. Pervaiz left the country in 2014 after receiving threats, he said.

Journalists in Pakistan have refrained from reporting on blasphemy cases since the rise of the extremist parties and their growing influence.

"Covering the issue of blasphemy as a journalist, and especially for the Urdu-language press, can either get you killed, or you'll be fired for jeopardizing the survival of the organization you work for," said Razeshta Sethna, a journalist and author of a recent report on the stifling media environment in the country.

SOURCE: THE NEW YORK TIMES, 20 MARCH 2022

Teenage Hindu girl shot dead over 'marriage refusal' in Sukkur

Pooja Kumari

A young girl from the Hindu community was shot dead in Sukkur, drawing widespread condemnation from several quarters of the country.

Pooja Kumari, 18-year-old, was targeted near the Chhuahra Mandi area over her refusal to marry the accused.

Station House Officer Bashir Jagirani told media that the assailant, later identified as Wahid Bux Lashari and two of his aides, barged into Kumari's house and opened fire on her.

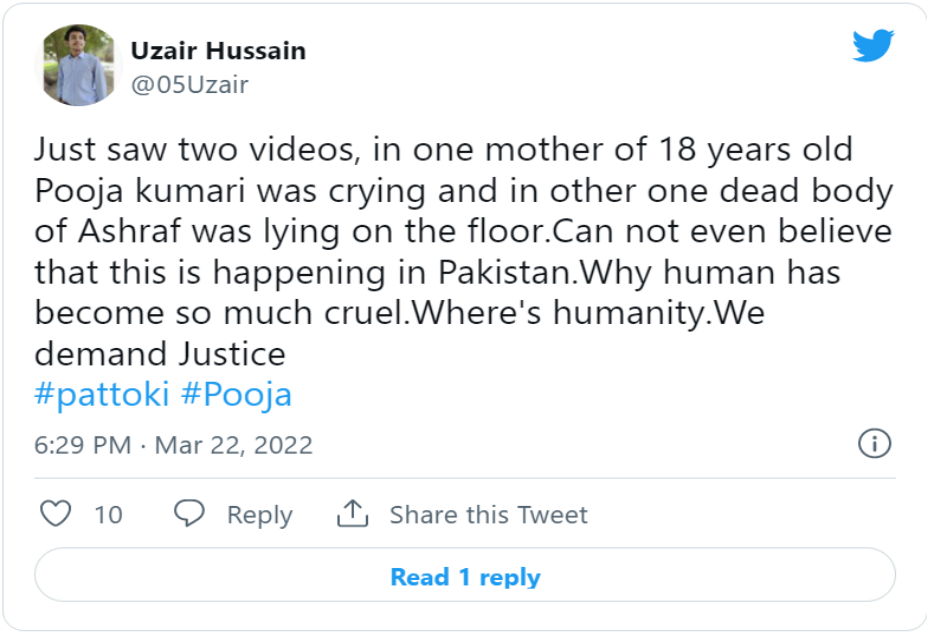
Lashari reportedly wanted to marry the girl but resorted to taking her life after the victim refused the same.

Police registered a first information report (FIR) on the complaint of the teenager's father under Section 34 Section 302, and 337H(ii) of the Pakistan Penal Code.

The law enforcement agency apprehended the main accused today and produced him in a local court, which remanded him into its custody for 10 days.

The brutal murder drew widespread condemnation on social media, as #JusticeforPooja began to trend.

Social media users, in general, and renowned personalities, in particular, took to the online platform to express their anger over the incident.



SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, 22 MARCH 2022

THE DEADLY GULF DREAM

VITAL SIGNS

Illustration by Radia Durrani

Adeel Riaz was only 22 years old when he died in November 2018 in Saudi Arabia. He had three older brothers and two sisters. His family are farmers in a rural region of Pakistan. And he was part of a team that painted mosques.

"There was no engineer at the site to better guide them, [as] per the normal routine," Adeel's mother says, remembering the day she lost her son. The workers would be dropped off at a location and would have to undertake all tasks without any supervision, she says.

The day that Adeel died, only junior staff was present on the site — Adeel and three other co-workers. The men placed a ladder on the wrong spot, which had exposed electrical wires. All the men, including Adeel, were electrocuted. Two people were severely injured while the other two died.

Adeel's death certificate states that the cause of death was "electrical short circuit" and adds that the death was "natural". But his family wasn't informed about this "natural" death. They found

out about the accident when somebody posted pictures on social media. And they did not get confirmation of his death until one week later.

Adeel's mother says that he worked in "abysmal" conditions, and his workplace lacked training and safety equipment. But, she says, due to the debt their family had incurred to send Adeel to Saudi Arabia, they had no funds left to seek compensation from his employer in Saudi Arabia.

Labourers wash their lunch boxes at a construction site in Doha

"I have nothing to say," Adeel's mother responds to a question. "I am only heartbroken. The helplessness is the worst part, there is no recourse. There is no system of fair, impartial hearings," she adds.

Adeel's mother says that there is no legal remedy that her family can avail. They do not know what to do. "I do not know what is a greater curse — our poverty or our illiteracy," she says.

Adeel's death has left the family in significant amounts of debt to banks and to the local recruitment agent who arranged for Adeel's employment in Saudi Arabia. "From the very beginning, it was all very difficult," Adeel's mother says. "We have spent everything on Adeel only so he could earn a better living and make us financially stronger. We sold off most of our valuables."

"We have sold off land," she adds. "We gave a lot of money to the agents, and [we] got Adeel's dead body in return."

Low-paid migrant workers are generally over-represented in the most dangerous sectors of the global economy and this is very clearly the case in the Gulf, where they occupy virtually all of the

positions in labour intensive sectors such as construction, which have historically been badly regulated.

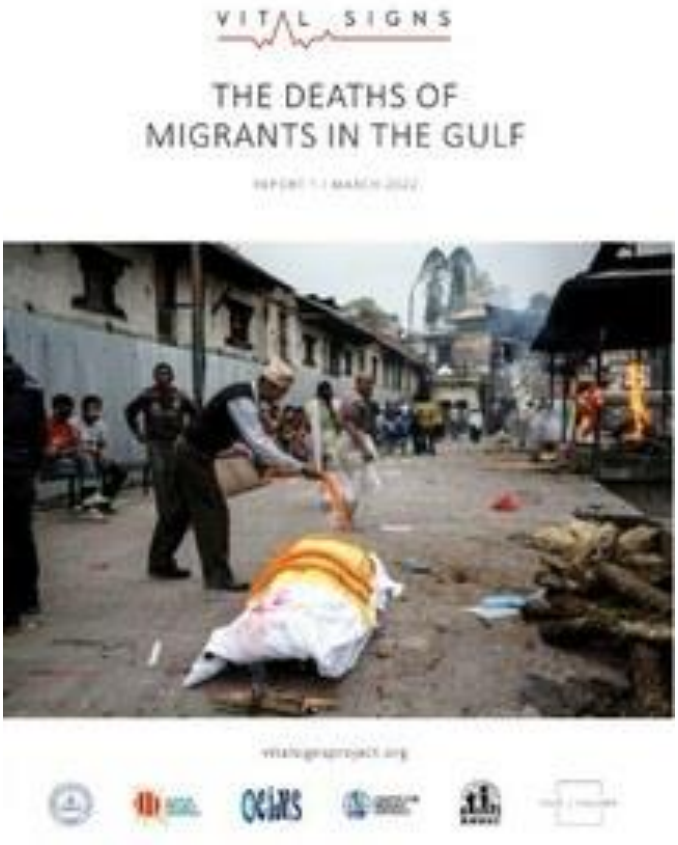
A 2009 paper by medical researchers in the UAE states that "the rapid development of projects employing large numbers of expatriates has often outstripped the ability of education, health and labour ministries to train and deploy adequate numbers of industrial hygienists and safety inspectors to protect workers' health and safety."

The economies of the six oil-rich Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are highly dependent on low-paid migrant workers from Asian countries such as Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. These workers sustain a wide range of sectors, from domestic service, to hospitality, to construction.

Despite widespread criticism of their systematic abuse and exploitation in the international media — notably in relation to Qatar's preparations to host the 2022 World Cup — the Gulf states have largely avoided structural labour reforms, and origin states have been unable to ensure proper protection for their nationals abroad.

The perceived benefits of outward migration for origin states, combined with vested interests in the South Asian and Southeast Asian recruitment industry, and the Gulf states' effective use of their economic and political leverage, in large part explains why origin states have never collectively demanded better protection for their workers.

Whereas rights groups, trade unions, academics and the media have extensively documented the serious abuses to which these workers are routinely subjected, and identified the laws and policies and practices responsible, there is a critical gap in this body of research: nobody knows how many of these workers are dying, or the causes of their deaths.



Here we take a look at what is currently known about the issue. And the knowledge gaps that exist.

HEALTH RISKS FOR LOW-PAID MIGRANT WORKERS

There are approximately 30 million migrants in the Arab Gulf states, accounting for 52 percent of the region's total population of 58 million, according to

estimates provided in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs International Migrant Stock 2019. A significant proportion of these migrants — between 70 and 80 percent — work in low-paid sectors of the Gulf states' economies.

Low-paid migrant workers in the Gulf are subject to a combination of risks to their physical and mental health. These risks originate from the workplace, their living conditions (encompassing their accommodation and their broader neighbourhoods), and the environment. They vary in seriousness and they are, to varying extents, under-researched and under-reported.

Some of the risks are more measurable than others, but they are cumulative, and the likelihood is that, when they combine (as they often do), they can do so to deadly effect.

Heat and humidity is one of the risks that can be most easily measured and where protection is most obviously lacking. Dust storms are also a frequent occurrence in all of the Gulf states throughout the year. A 2019 paper explored the association between exposure to poor air quality and acute mortality in Kuwait during a 17-year period from 2000 through 2016. The report concluded that the risk of dying among non-Kuwaiti males was 5 percent higher during dust storm days as compared to non-dust days.

These risks are compounded by abusive working conditions, which often include excessive working hours. Occupational health specialists have partly attributed the disproportionately high rate of male deaths from occupational diseases — 80 percent of the global total deaths involve men — to their involvement in occupations with a heavy physical workload.

The aforementioned risks disproportionately affect male workers, but the gendered aspects of migration mean that women are also acutely at risk from their working conditions. It has long been established that domestic work makes women vulnerable to physical, psychological and sexual abuse, and these abuses have been extensively documented in the Gulf.

A Human Rights Watch report that documented abuses of domestic workers in Oman and the UAE found that 21 out of 87 domestic workers they interviewed experienced "psychological or health problems upon their return because of their exploitative working conditions in the Gulf."

In 2012 a therapist at Hamad Hospital's Psychiatric Unit in Doha told a local newspaper that 12 to 15 domestic workers visited the unit daily for treatment to cope with anxiety, including suicide ideations and attempts.

The Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated many of the health risks facing migrant workers. The pandemic also exposed systemic problems with migrant workers' access to healthcare, which is often dependent on their employers providing them with health cards that they need to access affordable, subsidised care.

A MURKY PICTURE

The data that is available on the deaths of migrant workers in the Gulf is incomplete and contradictory in places. It precludes effective analysis of the extent and gravity of the problem. And these problems are compounded by a general lack of transparency.

In Pakistan, for example, the only data available on this issue relates to the raw numbers of claims made for compensation to the State Life Emigrants Insurance Fund, with no disaggregation at all.

In India, where a relative wealth of data is available, there is a serious discrepancy relating to the number of nationals who have died in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf country that employs more migrant workers than any other. Whereas India's Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs said that 12,595 Indians had died in the Kingdom between 2015 and October 2019, the Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia, responding to a right to information request from the Centre for International Migration Studies in Kerala, said that 7,444 Indians had died in almost exactly the same period — a difference of 5,151 people.

Despite the number of migrant workers it employs, Saudi Arabia publishes no meaningful mortality data, so India's data cannot be cross-checked against anything published by Saudi Arabia.

A more systematic discrepancy is evident in the distribution of causes of death. According to the Indian authorities in Kuwait, 42 percent of deaths were classified as heart attacks. The Indian authorities in Bahrain, meanwhile, reported that only 4 percent of Indian deaths there were from heart attacks, while 47 percent were attributed to "cardiac arrest".

These discrepancies are critically important and point to serious problems — either in the investigation, the certification, or the categorisation of these deaths, or a combination of all three problems. Whereas a heart attack is something that physicians can diagnose as an underlying cause of death and can appear on a properly formulated death certificate, 'cardiac arrest' provides no information on the underlying cause of death and should not appear on a death certificate.

Further evidence of systemic problems in the reporting of the causes of deaths is available in the data published by the Qatari authorities. From 2010 to 2015, a significant number of non-Qatari deaths were coded in categories indicating that the cause of death was unknown. However, from 2016 onwards, these numbers dropped dramatically, while at the same time the numbers of deaths classified as "circulatory diseases" increased correspondingly.

Information about the deaths of migrants in the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is fragmented and incomplete. This makes analysis of the causes and circumstances of migrant workers' death more challenging. Not knowing how migrant workers have died means there is no pressure on governments to implement public health policies to better protect migrant workers and minimise preventable deaths. This also prevents families from seeking compensation that may be available to them.

In the case of Pakistan, for example, there is a lack of transparency in the reporting of deaths of overseas Pakistani workers in the Gulf. The only data available relates to death claims made to the State Life Emigrants Insurance Fund. Insurance is compulsory for migrant Pakistanis and 96 percent of Pakistani migrant workers are employed in the Gulf region, and thus this figure gives us a very approximate overview of the number of deaths in the Gulf each year.

However, not every death is likely to be reflected in a claim made by the deceased's family, and it should also be noted that death claims of pilgrims and tourists are also included in the data.

The most serious problem with the data produced by the Gulf states is that the data is unreliable in relation to its specification of the causes of migrant worker deaths. Indeed, in criticising origin state failures in relation to data on deaths, it should be stressed that it is the responsibility of the authorities in the Gulf to provide origin states with specific and detailed information on how their nationals are dying.

Based on the material inconsistencies between the data on causes of migrant worker deaths made available by origin states and that made available by the Gulf states, and the apparently very high rate of deaths for which no underlying cause is provided, it is clear that this is not happening.

LACK OF INVESTIGATIONS

Carlos de Guzman Ely Jr from the Philippines died in Saudi Arabia on February 13, 2021, at the age of 45. His roommate tried to wake him up to go to work but found him lifeless.

Because of a lack of employment opportunities in the Philippines, Carlos had gone to Saudi Arabia to work as a pushback (the procedure during which an aircraft is pushed backwards away from its parking position) operator at Jeddah Airport.

His son says that Carlos was diagnosed with a heart condition and high cholesterol before he left the Philippines in 2018. Nonetheless, he worked 10 to 12 hour shifts, taking overtime whenever he could.

His son noticed that his father was frequently stressed, partly due to a lack of sleep because of changing shift patterns. The job required Carlos to work long hours outside, in intense heat. His son says that Carlos often had to go inside the airport staff lobby to cool down and drink water.

Despite his medical history and the fact he was taking medication for his heart condition, his death notification, issued by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health, recorded the cause of death as "unknown". His family say that, to their knowledge, there was no investigation into Carlos's death. A friend of the family, who had worked as a nurse in Saudi Arabia, told them it was common practice for examining doctors to only check bodies for signs of injury.

According to Carlos's son, the family were shocked by this at first, but decided not to press for an autopsy upon researching the issue and concluding that the remains of non-Saudi Arabians were not a priority.

Lack of transparency surrounding the deaths of workers such as Carlos is very common. As noted above, origin states do not, in general, report on this issue with sufficient detail or transparency. However, it should be noted that they are not responsible for investigating and certifying the deaths of their nationals abroad. That responsibility primarily lies with the Arab Gulf states and an examination of the manner in which they investigate the deaths of low-paid migrant workers reveals serious shortcomings.

There are currently no internationally recognised guidelines detailing how states should investigate the cause of someone's death, but there are internationally accepted standards on death certification and these are inextricably linked to investigations.

The lack of investigations into migrant worker deaths means that there is also rarely any effort to determine if a fatality was related to occupational accidents or diseases. As a result of this, the families of workers who have died cannot claim any compensation from employers or from the Gulf states. Instead, the burden to compensate workers' families is shifted to the origin states or on to workers' themselves via insurance schemes.

The families of Bangladeshi nationals who die overseas, for example, are eligible for compensation from its Wage Earners Welfare Board, which is a single trust fund pooled from the mandatory membership contributions of migrant workers. The board pays 3,500 Bangladeshi taka in fees to become a member, and other sources such as investment and interest income on these funds.

Families receive 35,000 Bangladeshi taka in burial costs when they collect their family member's body at the airport and they then receive a 300,000 Bangladeshi taka payment in compensation. But these payments are only for the families of workers who were documented abroad at the time of their death.

UNSAFE WORKING CONDITIONS

Julhas Uddin was a 37-year-old farmer from the district of Tangail in Bangladesh, who moved to the Gulf for work in 2017. He moved owing to his inability to financially support his wife, two children and elderly parents through agriculture. He paid a local recruitment agent 450,000 Bangladeshi Taka (approximately 948,372 Pakistani rupees) to secure him a job as a sewage line cleaner in Saudi Arabia. He began the job in June 2017.

His family says that Julhas completed a mandatory medical check-up and was declared fit and healthy prior to departure. On October 23, 2017, Julhas was instructed by the company supervisor to enter a sewerage line without an oxygen cylinder.

He experienced breathing problems and made it back to the entrance to the sewage line, but he lost consciousness, fell and drowned in the sewage. Despite the fact that Julhas was not provided with essential safety equipment, his family says that there was no investigation into the circumstances of his death. His death certificate states that the cause of his death was that his "heart and breathing stopped." Julhas's family was informed of his death by his colleagues by telephone.

Julhas's brother says that, based on information from Julhas's colleagues, his employers had not provided him or the other employees with the Iqama card that serves as a work and residence permit and without which foreign workers can be detained and deported.

He says that the company only provided details of Julhas's registration on the Iqama system after his death. Julhas's colleagues told his family that they were all under pressure to perform unsafe tasks at work on account of their precarious status within the country.

They say that their employer often made men go into sewerage lines without oxygen cylinders in an effort to cut costs. Julhas had reportedly refused a previous order to go into the sewage line without an oxygen cylinder, but he complied with the order on the day he died because he felt under pressure.

Julhas's family received compensation from the Bangladesh's Wage Earners and Welfare Board (this is statutory compensation for all Bangladeshi workers who die abroad), but an official document provided to the family by the Bangladeshi authorities states that since the cause of death had been documented as "accidental", the family would not receive any compensation from Saudi Arabia.

Julhas's elder brother, Habibur, says that Julhas's death has resulted in incalculable loss for this family, in particular for his two daughters, aged 13 and 7. The family, he says, is now completely reliant on the charity of others to survive.

The most fundamental duty of all states is to protect the lives of its nationals and all others under its jurisdiction. Where migrants are concerned, however, it appears that states around the world

do not approach this basic obligation with the requisite rigour and seriousness. Tragedy and hardship for millions of the poorest people on the planet is the inevitable consequence of their inaction.

Life for a migrant worker in the Gulf appears to have a particularly high harmful potential for the millions of low-paid migrant workers employed there, whether in construction or domestic work or other sectors of their economies.

Despite the Gulf states' practical dependence on their migrant workforces and the bolstering impact migrant worker remittances have on the economies of their homelands, both origin and Gulf states have for too long paid inadequate attention to ensuring they return home in good health. As a result, far too many workers do not return home at all, or do so in coffins or body bags.

There are many stories such as Julhas's, Carlo's and Adeel's. And many will continue to add to the death toll, unless swift action is taken to address the issues.

Based on Vital Signs: The Deaths of Migrants in the Gulf, Report 1. The complete report can be accessed online on vitalsignsproject.org

Excerpted with permission from Justice Project Pakistan, one of the partners behind the report

SOURCE: DAWN, EOS, 27 MARCH 2022

'Terror outfits' regrouping in Balochistan

The interior ministry on Monday confirmed that anti-Pakistan terror outfits are regrouping in Balochistan via the Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchestan.

This was revealed in a written reply submitted to the National Assembly during the question hour in response to a query posed by PPP MNA Dr Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro. She asked if it was true that "anti-Pakistan terror outfits are regrouping in Balochistan via Sistan, and if yes, details thereof along with action plan thereof, if any". In its response, the interior ministry stated: "Yes, anti-Pakistan terror outfits are regrouping in Balochistan via Sistan."

The response, attributed to Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, also mentioned the measures being taken by the government to mitigate this trend.

According to the response placed before the National Assembly on Monday, the National Intelligence Co-ordi-nation Committee (NICC) has been institutionalised to integrate all federal and provincial intelligence grids for effective and timely countermeasures. Effective border management and fencing along the western border would also stem this tide, the response added. "Persistent intelligence-based operations are being undertaken to neutralise terror organisations," the response stated, adding that operational capabilities of the counterterrorism apparatus were being enhanced. The response also recalled recent government initiatives to engage disgruntle Baloch tribesmen for reconciliation, including special socio-economic development packages for mitigating extremist threats in Balochistan and KP, and addressing the most marginalised segment of society through the "Ehsaas Programme" along with engaging the youth in constructive activities.

Banned terrorist organisations — including Baloch separatists, the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the self-styled Islamic State (IS) group — have recently intensified their activists in different areas of the province, carrying out terrorist attacks, bomb blasts and targeted killings.

Since the beginning of the year, these groups have carried out at least seven major attacks, in which at least 22 people lost their lives, including security personnel. Two major attacks were carried out at the camps of Frontier Corps in Nushki and Panjgur on Feb 2 at the same time. The attackers were well equipped with the latest weapons and equipment.

Both sides suffered casualties during the attacks — nine security personnel, including an officer, lost their lives, whereas 20 attackers were killed by the security forces.

SOURCE: DAWN, 29 MARCH 2022

Witness intimidation

ONE of the most infamous cases of sexual harassment has come to a fitting conclusion. On Friday, a sessions court in Islamabad sentenced five men to life imprisonment for holding a couple hostage at gunpoint, physically assaulting them, forcing them to strip and carry out sexual acts on camera. After they had committed this depravity, the gang had then used the video to blackmail the couple for money. When the video surfaced on social media in July last year, it went viral and sparked outrage across the country. Even the prime minister weighed in, directing the police to ensure that the men were brought to justice. The main accused was arrested within a day, and several others were apprehended soon after. The charges against the gang, based on the victims' statements and bolstered by video evidence, made for what seemed to be a watertight case. And then, Pakistan's social dynamics kicked in, and it all began to fall apart.

Early this year, the prosecution told the sessions court judge that the victims' phones were switched off. Then, in January, the female victim retracted her statement against the accused and told the trial court that she did not wish to pursue the case. The next day, however, Parliamentary Secretary for Law Maleeka Bokhari announced that the state would pursue the case regardless of the recent developments. "Irrefutable video and forensic evidence on record; anyone harassing and stripping a woman must face full force of the law," she tweeted. The government took the correct approach; clearly, attempts were being made to intimidate the witnesses and pervert the course of justice — a crime in itself. Sadly, this is far from uncommon in this country. Powerful groups bribe, threaten and blackmail witnesses to recant their testimony, which often weakens the case and enables perpetrators to go scot-free. These ploys are even more frequent in cases involving female victims, as in the case at hand, when the stigma attached to sexual crimes already inhibits women from coming forward to file charges. Until the criminal justice system can inspire trust in victims and instil in them the confidence that their tormentors will be brought to book, women will remain vulnerable to such pressure tactics. Even otherwise, witness protection programmes must be strengthened in the country. In the present case, the video evidence was compelling enough to bring about a conviction; that is not always the case.

SOURCE: DAWN, 29 MARCH 2022

Woman slaughtered in DI Khan over alleged blasphemy; 3 seminary teachers arrested

Three female teachers of a seminary in Dera Ismail Khan were arrested for allegedly killing a former colleague after accusing her of blasphemy, according to District Police Officer (DPO) Najamul Hasnain.

The DPO told the murder occurred early in the morning outside the Jamia Islamia Falahul Binaat. According to the first information report (FIR), a copy of which is available with Dawn.com, when police reached the site of the crime, they found the victim lying in a pool of blood with her throat slashed.

Sharp objects were used in the attack on the victim, the FIR added.

DPO Hasnain said the suspects — aged 17, 21 and 24 respectively — killed the 21-year-old victim over "difference of opinion on religious issues" and allegations of blasphemy.

He said the victim was a follower of well-known religious scholar Maulana Tariq Jameel, which was not liked by the suspects.

The DPO quoted the suspects as saying that a 13-year-old female relative of theirs "saw a dream last night" in which she found out about the alleged blasphemy committed by the victim and was subsequently "ordered to slaughter her".

A register containing details of the dream has been recovered during the initial investigation, the DPO said, adding that the trio of suspects, along with their relative, have been arrested.

The women belong to the Mehsud tribe and hail from South Waziristan tribal district, he said, adding that their current residence was in DI Khan's Anjumabad area.

Following the incident, Wafaqul Madaris al Arabia Pakistan, which is a board of seminaries, condemned the murder, terming it "unfortunate".

In a statement, the board demanded an independent and fair investigation into the incident and called for arresting and punishing the culprits.

SOURCE: DAWN, 29 MARCH 2022

Transgender killings

SPURNED by family and largely scorned by society as they live, even in death transgender persons cannot hope to be treated as equal citizens. A spate of targeted attacks on transpersons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has again shone a spotlight on the harsh realities of life for this cruelly marginalised community. A story published recently in these pages uncovered that a toxic belief that one 'owns' the person they desire is behind men violently attacking and killing transpersons in KP. Experts say that a culture of impunity has taken root over the years, with the murder of transpersons seldom prosecuted and killers walking free without being punished for their crimes. The recent surge in murders and violent attacks is also a clear indicator that the matter is low on the provincial police's priority list. Indeed, the biggest complaint put forth by community representatives is that police have repeatedly bungled investigations and failed to register proper FIRs and collect the evidence necessary to convict the murderers.

The families of transgender persons, too, are of little help in prosecuting murders, as they either disassociate completely — refusing to take part even in the burial of their loved ones — or simply pocket 'blood money' settlements and allow the killers to walk free. Therefore, while the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government's attempts at greater inclusion of the trans community are certainly commendable, it is clear that legislation alone is not going to be enough. There needs to be greater public awareness of the issues facing the transgender community to encourage the citizenry to proactively invite transpersons into mainstream society. As far as preventing more deaths is concerned, the government may consider the community's demand that the state become a party in murder cases. As the victims do not leave behind any real heirs willing to fight for their cause, the state must step in by supporting the trans community as well as by providing material resources to hire strong legal counsel to prosecute the killers.

SOURCE: DAWN, 30 MARCH 2022

3 security personnel martyred, 18 injured in attack on FC fort in KP's Tank

Three security personnel were martyred and 18 others injured in an overnight attack on a Frontier Corps (FC) fort in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Tank district, District Police Officer (DPO) Waqar Ahmad said.

Ahmad said the injured were shifted to the district hospital where an emergency was declared while more troops had been dispatched to the area.

In a statement, the DPO said three terrorists were killed in the exchange of fire that began late on Tuesday night and continued till today morning.

The incident comes days after four soldiers were martyred in North Waziristan's Hassan Khel area during an exchange of fire with terrorists who attempted to infiltrate Pakistan from Afghanistan in the night between March 23 and March 24.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), a group of terrorists had tried to infiltrate Pakistan at midnight, but their attempt was foiled due to the "alertness and timely response of army troops".

"The terrorists, having failed, fled ... and as per intelligence reports, suffered heavy casualties," the statement had read.

SOURCE: DAWN, 30 MARCH 2022

Dreams of murder

HORRIFIC as it was, the cold-blooded murder of a seminary teacher in D.I. Khan by three of her students on allegations of blasphemy is yet another sign of the increasingly toxic social environment we live in. The incident was not the first of its kind, nor will it be the last unless the state decides to stop accepting, cajoling and using religiously inspired extremists for short-term political gains, and, instead, punishes them and their leaders for taking the law into their hands. What sets this incident apart from similar atrocities linked to blasphemy accusations, is its frighteningly surreal dimension. The three young girls aged 17, 21 and 24 — barely adults themselves — who allegedly murdered their teacher told the police that a religious personality had appeared in a dream to their 13-year-old relative to tell her that the teacher had committed blasphemy. It is a terrifying thought that the suspects had no qualms about going ahead with their deed — in fact, deeming it necessary. Further investigation will reveal the truth — was it a case of being brainwashed by the anti-blasphemy narrative or was there another reason?

Sadly, others too have resorted to murder in similar situations. Both those accused of committing blasphemy, such as university student Mashal Khan and Sri Lanka factory manager Priyantha Kumara, and those defending the accused against such allegations, including Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer and lawyer Rashid Rehman, were killed. No doubt the killers were emboldened by the inaction of the state. Otherwise, blasphemy-related accusations would not reach such high numbers — 1,300 between 2011 and 2021, according to the Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies. Meanwhile, in instances where the accused are acquitted of false charges, as in the case of Asiya Bibi, the extremist culture makes it very difficult to ensure their safety after their release. Blind extremism will keep on taking lives unless the authorities take radical steps to revisit the blasphemy law and ensure punishment for both those who indulge in false accusations and those who resort to violence.

SOURCE: DAWN, 31 MARCH 2022