



TRUTH TRACKER

WATCHING OUT FOR PAKISTAN



New call in Senate to stop misuse of blasphemy laws

Pg. 05

Pakistan moves to protect endangered birds but welcomes hunter from Qatar royal family

Pg. 07

Magazine By:



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Editorial

The dying National Action Plan

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's strong body language while announcing the National Action Plan against terrorism in January 2015 had shed a ray of hope for those who want to see Pakistan a terrorism and extremism-free state. The NAP was considered the state's final battle against terrorism, sectarian violence and hate speech.

The top leaders of the government asserted with conviction on various occasions that the government would not compromise even a single one of NAP's 20 points.

Point 5 of the NAP says, "There will be a crackdown on hate-speech, and action will be taken against newspapers, magazines contributing to the spread of such speech."

Point 7 reads, "The government will ensure against re-emergence of proscribed organizations."

The nation has witnessed that the government compromised these two critical points for political or personal reasons.

Most of the proscribed organizations are still active with new names and their leaders enjoy official protocol. Civil society, analysts and peace activists witnessed several violations of the NAP by the government.

The most recent episode took place on December 1 in a by-election for Punjab Assembly's constituency PP-78 Jhang. Masroor Nawaz Jhangvi, son of Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, the slain founder of banned group Sipah e Sahaba Pakistan, won comfortably against the ruling PML-N, Pakistan Peoples' Party and Pakistan Tehrik e Insaaf's candidates.

According to media reports, his name is included in the Fourth Schedule, a list under anti-terrorism law against those found to be or suspected to be involved in anti-state activities, delivering hate speeches and/or activists of religious outfits not yet banned but related with militancy in any way. Jhangvi ran his campaign based on hate speech against Shiites and his video went viral.

People were quick to blame the Election Commission of Pakistan, Government and Law Enforcing Agencies for allowing this to happen. However, some apologists took the position that the banned outfits and their leaders should be brought into mainstream politics and de-radicalised.

It would not be a new experience. We have experienced this in past several times and faced the outcome.

In 2002, Gen Musharraf and his team masterminded formation of Muthida Majlis e Amal (MMA), a six-party religious alliance, and its success in Elections 2002 as the result of which the MMA formed provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and a coalition government in Balochistan. The outcome was more radicalisation and extremism in the society. We saw the emergence of Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and their safe havens in tribal and settled areas of KP.

In 2009, Pakistan Peoples' Party's Government struck a deal with Tehrik e Nifaz e Shariat Muhammadi in Malakand Division of KP. As a result, TTP occupied Swat, Buner and adjacent areas.

In 2014, the PML-N Government tried to give space to TTP - offered them negotiations and formed a committee to talk with TTP for peace and surrender. And the result was a horrible attack on Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014 that claimed 144 lives.

The incident compelled the rulers to announce the NAP, but still they did not learn.

A state cannot eliminate extremism and terrorism without implementing policies in letter and spirit. Giving militants more space means giving them Pakistan.

Mubasher Bukhari

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Price: 100 Rupees



Editor's Note

No Data, No Accountability

The worldwide trend in data is toward greater openness. Governments, NGOs and private industry worldwide are moving swiftly towards hosting data online.

Open data sources provided by these groups have proliferated, and we now have a large number of tools for creating interactive visuals of this information. Even data that is not hosted online is becoming more accessible.

Over the past two decades, right to information laws in Pakistan have also taken root. Given that, journalists in Pakistan should now have unfettered access to a large amount of public data.

Unfortunately, this has not been the case. The patchwork of provincial laws that govern access to public data can be hard to navigate, and enforcement still lags.

Despite these challenges, Truth Tracker journalists are committed to making requests and demanding that the laws be enforced and improved - until all the information that should be public, is made public. This is an important part of their role in a democracy.

Even with improved access to data, journalists must be wary of the quality of this information, and also must guard against drawing inaccurate conclusions from it.

In working with data, journalists must always examine the source of the information and ask questions about it: "How was this information collected?" "What information isn't here that would be helpful in for this story?"

Truth Tracker journalists are committed to questioning the data, finding the stories that it tells and telling our readers the truth.

The growth of publicly available data is a boon for news organizations and, especially so, for Truth Tracker as it focuses on keeping public officials accountable. Without data on the actions of our elected officials and the effectiveness of their programs, how will the public know if they have kept their campaign promises?

Our reporting strives to be neutral and factual, so that you the reader can make this decision for yourself.

Christopher Sullivan

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Human Rights

New call in Senate to stop misuse of blasphemy laws



Waqar Gillani

ISLAMABAD: The Standing Committee on Human Rights of Senate of Pakistan, upper house of the country's Parliament, has, consensually, moved to make suggestions for a specific definition of "blasphemy" in the law to stop its ongoing misuse, legislators said.

Religious parties, once again, are opposing the move. Senator Mufti Abdus Sattar of Jamiat Ulema e Islam (Fazl), said, "This is an attempt to change blasphemy laws and to allow people to freely commit blasphemy which is not acceptable." He said there is no need to change or review any section of these laws at all.

The committee has planned to take up this issue in the light of recommendations of a similar standing committee on human rights of the house, formulated almost 25 years ago, with its report lying in some record shelves "untraceable", Nasreen Jalil, current chairperson of the committee said.

The move, considered as very important because of this highly sensitive subject of blasphemy amid blatant misuse of this law, is expected to start an honest and serious discussion by the committee members on this sensitive topic, she said.

Jalil said the status of the traced 1991 report was not clear in the sense whether there was any further debate on the recommendations of the then committee to define "blasphemy" properly while introducing only death penalty against any such crime committed against dignity of

Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

The blasphemy laws in Pakistan were modified to introduce severer sentences in the 1980s during the time of military dictator Ziaul Haq. An analysis by the human rights groups, testify that the number of blasphemy cases increased many times over after the sentences were revised, indicating misuse after the induction of stricter punishments.

Death penalty for derogatory remarks against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the severest of all punishments. Others included life imprisonment for desecrating Holy book of Quran and up to 10 years for ridiculing family and companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Further, in October 1990, country's Federal Shariah Court ruled the alternative (life imprisonment) punishment in Section 295C of Pakistan Penal Code (blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad) should be deleted "as it was repugnant to Islam."

The Section 295C of PPC addressing "Use of derogatory remarks, etc, in respect of the Holy Prophet" reads: "Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine."

"A blatant misuse of this law was feared and that is why the 1991 senate committee also called for defining "blasphemy" properly. However, there is no record available whether this exercise was done or not. Now, we want to

continue that debate with the consensus of the committee members to address this important and sensitive issue," Farhatullah Babar, a member of the current senate committee from Pakistan People's Party said. He added a critical re-examination of Section 295-C was required also because this provision also did not enjoy the unanimous support of Muslim scholars holding different views.

To give effect to a part of the Shariah Court verdict relating to the deletion of the alternative punishment), government moved the Criminal Law (Third Amendment) Bill 1991. In its report on the bill the then committee showed serious concerns about the definition of the offence calling for a dire need to define "blasphemy" first.

The report of 1991 committee says the committee after detailed deliberations decided to recommend the proposed deletion of 'or imprisonment of life' from Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, PPC. The members, however, observed that there was a need for a more specific definition of the offence under Section 295 PPC which the members were of the considered opinion was in the present form very generalised.

The committee suggested the matter may be referred to the Council of Islamic Ideology for suggesting a more specific definition of the offence falling under Section 295 PPC as well as for its opinion as to whether during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) or during the period of first four caliphs (Khulafa-i-Rashideen) or afterwards in any of the Muslim countries, what was the punishment awarded to the offenders for committing

offence falling under Section 295 PPC. "We are not in a hurry and we want to take all members of the committee on board and we will seek suggestions of every member in detail to proceed further," Jalil, chairperson of the committee said. She says in a latest blasphemy case, country's Supreme Court has also given judgment urging the government to take steps to stop misuse of blasphemy laws.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) in its verdict, has also clearly said that discussion on these laws and constructive criticism of them is justified and should not be treated as crime. She said there is serious challenge in this task as anyone can stand up and sabotage the efforts but we feel there is serious need to start this discussion for the betterment of the country.

In a landmark judgment in October 2015, the Supreme Court of Pakistan upheld the death sentence of Malik Mumtaz Qadri who murdered the former Governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, in January,

2011. The bench also rightly observed that the laws are made by parliament, a place where the people's representatives sit in order to legislate and introduce laws to govern society. The laws made by parliament can be criticised and discussed freely without any hurdle as the Constitution of Pakistan provides freedom of speech to every citizen in the country.

Muhammad Mohsin Khan Leghari, another member of the committee, declared this move a positive development towards.

"We should not be afraid of this discussion and we should also keep in mind that this law, according to statistics, is mostly used against the Muslims themselves. The number of cases against the Muslims is highest as compared to minorities."

However, some senate committee members from religious parties are opposed to this argument, he mentioned.

The National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), a human rights group

working under the Catholic Church, in one of its published reports reveals that 1,058 cases of blasphemy have been registered in the last 25 years.

Between 1927 and 1986, only seven cases of blasphemy were registered in the subcontinent. According to data from a report of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Bishops of Pakistan, 200 Christians, 633 Muslims, 494 Ahmadis, and 21 Hindus (more than 1,300 cases) were charged with blasphemy from 1987 to 2013. In 2014 the complaints registered were 1400, while in the last 30 years 70 accused of blasphemy have been extra judicially executed.

"There is dire need to positively move forward to discuss this issue and the current senate committee can take up the previous report and can come up with fresh suggestions," IA Rehman, secretary general Human rights Commission of Pakistan observed.



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As a part of journalism profession we, at Media Foundation 360, have been seeing the problems and pressures journalists face within the organization and out in the field regarding their rights and security ranges from salary payment issues to murders and kidnappings. This is when we decided to be their voice and stand up for their rights.

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Accountability

Pakistan moves to protect endangered birds but welcomes hunter from Qatar royal family



Rehmat Mehsud

Islamabad: A sharp decline in the number of migratory and houbara bustard birds has forced the government to establish a Rs. 250 million endowment fund in 2016 to protect the rare species, say officials.

The PML-N Government after making the decision to protect the birds, gave free hand to Qatar's prince to hunt houbara bustard in Bhakkar, a district of Punjab bordering Khyber Pakhtunkhawa.

Focal Person of prime minister's Green Pakistan Programme Rizwan Mehboob told Truth Tracker that a sharp decline in the number of migratory and houbara bustard birds forced the government to establish the fund. He said that the number of migratory birds making stopovers at several spots in Pakistan has dropped considerably, however, he stopped short of telling the estimated number of those birds. "The number of endangered and migratory birds that making stopovers in Pakistan has decreased from approximately 200,000 to 14,000 since the last two decades," he added.

Dr. Arif Alvi, a PTI Member National Assembly (MNA), said that a Qatari prince Jassim (bin Jabber Al-Thani) is among the delegation of Qatari royal family who has arrived in Pakistan to hunt Houbara bustard. This welcome of Qatari royalty presents a contradiction to the move by Pakistan government to allocate a Rs. 250 million endowment fund in 2016 to protect the rare species which are on the verge of extinction due to poaching and destruction of its habitats.

Alvi said leaders are placing the country's resources and beauty under the feet of Qatari princes, which is very shocking. The government is of the opinion that Houbara bustard is not endangered while the entire world is convinced that the bird is on the verge of extinction, he added. "The government has issued wrong statements and mounted pressure to get a decision from the Supreme Court in its favor regarding limited hunting of the bird," he claimed.

A Houbara bustard is declared 'vulnerable' by the International Union for the Conservation of nature (IUCN). It arrives in Pakistan in winter months from Central Asia and China. According to Wild Life Rules and Act of Pakistan, a study compiled by Muhammad Shafiq, deputy conservator (Wildlife) Pakistan Forest Institute 2005, wildlife is a main component of Pakistan's biological



diversity and an important renewable natural resource.

An official at the Ministry of Climate Change who wished anonymity because he isn't authorized to speak to media told Truth Tracker that the strength of Asian Houbara is experiencing a steady decline because of poaching and sabotaging their habitats.

Illegal poaching and other factors such as damaging their habitat, Mehboob said have contributed to dramatic decline in the number of migratory birds. According to UNDP "Forests and Biodiversity Information/Data Report" Pakistan is a forest poor country. Only 4.72 million hectares or 5.36 per cent of its land mass is covered with forests. This compares unfavorably with several other countries of the region; Malaysia 65.5, Sri Lanka 42.4, India 23.7, China 17.7 and Bangladesh 15.3 per cent.

A senior official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who wished to go unnamed because the ministry's officials do not speak on the poaching subject as wealthy Arab Sheikhs from Gulf countries are awarded specific areas in Pakistan for hunting of endangered Houbara bustards.

However, the official said a number of Arab Sheikhs from Gulf States such as Al-Thani of Qatar and well-off Pakistanis have been poaching migratory and Houbara bustards' birds for years.

Dr Ejaz Ahmad of WWF Pakistan said "Arab dignitaries are coming every year to hunt Houbara through their falcon which is their traditional game." The population of such birds in most of the Middle Eastern

countries has reduced and they started hunting in other countries, he recalled. "Mostly different areas are allocated to various dignitaries for Houbara hunting and normally they are from royal families," he added.

In a recent move, media noted that many farmers of district Bhakkar came out and protest against Houbara bustard killing. These residents claim that they are forced into staying away from their fields for weeks sometimes while the hunting is on. Chickpea is the cash crop of Bhakkar and farmers have been complaining of their ruin owing to racing SUV's while the birds are hunted.

Alvi said he is the first man to raise voice on the floor of Pakistan's National Assembly against hunting of houbara. "I view all these things (Panama Leaks, Qatari royal family visit to hunt houbara) interlinked," he added.

According to media reports, the former Qatari prime minister Al-Thani recently sent a letter dated November 5, 2016 -- marked private, confidential and not to be disclosed to any party, except for the benefit of the courts of Pakistan. The letter was written on the letterhead of Al Thani, which is viewed by analysts an attempt to salvage the beleaguered Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif amid Panama Leaks case in the Supreme Court.

Al-Thani is known for his wealth and the controversy surrounding his politics. He was the Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister until he stepped down from the post in June 2013.

Pakistan's media has been skeptical of

Al-Thani's role in the recent political events. Provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) has objected to government's action in providing special hunting licenses to the Qatari prince. Upon request by the federal government to allow the Qatari prince to hunt in KPK, the PTI led provincial government resisted.

Istiaq Armer, KPK provincial advisor on environment spoke to media vowing that a ban was strictly observed against killing of houbara bustard and the (provincial)

government will not allow the Qatari prince to hunt Houbara Bustard.

If unchecked hunting, illegal trapping and trading of the bird continue at the existing scale, the Asian houbara could be extinct within 15 to 25 years, according to a study conducted by the Environment Research and Wildlife Development Agency. The Agency estimates that the natural death rate of the bird was 3.28 percent while death due to hunting accounted for more than 73 per cent. The rate of hunting has

reached nearly 20.8 per cent, dangerously exceeding the acceptable 7.2 per cent.

This endangered species may perish for questionable diplomatic gain. According to Mehboob, "The fund will help develop conservation, breeding initiatives for migratory birds and Houbara bustards, their habitats and protected areas and ecosystems." But the government would have to stop being a party to, what could be a crime against biodiversity.

Human Rights

Sindh's law against forced conversion faces resistance



Shaukat Korai

Karachi: The Sindh Assembly has passed landmark legislation against forced conversions amidst strong opposition by religious parties, banned outfits and extremist elements in the Pakistan. The law states that those found guilty of forceful religious conversion will be incarcerated for a minimum of five years and even life imprisonment, along with a fine that is to be paid to the victim, which has no limit, while those acting as a catalyst will be handed a three-year sentence and a fine.

The long-awaited 'Sindh Criminal Protection Act, 2015' was finally signed into law through unanimous approval by the southern provincial legislature of Pakistan on November 24, 2016. This law forbids minors from choosing another religion of their free will until they reach the age of eighteen.

The move was a response to the pressing demands by religious minorities and human rights activists. It has been lauded by human rights organisations, liberal forces and the political elite.

Opposition religious parties, proscribed outfits and extremist elements protested against the law and demanded its withdrawal.

Anjali Kumari Meghwar was allegedly abducted and forced to convert to Islam. She was later married to a Muslim man in 2014 from Daharki, a small town in Sindh. As she was a minor, the court had to send her to a shelter. Her father Kundan Kumar Menghwar praised the law, saying, "This law against forced conversion will at least protect our children. The new law is a ray of hope for minorities. Hopefully, others will not experience what I went through."

The new law defined forced conversion as the use of any form of pressure, force, duress or threat, whether physical,



emotional or psychological to make another person adopt another religion.

Specific courts and commissions would be established in the province. The courts have to dispose cases within 90 days and the commission will oversee and ensure the implementation of this Act.

Under the newly passed law, adults will be given 21 days to consider their decision to convert and it forbids minors from choosing another religion. The political elite and Human rights activists of the country welcome the new law.

Chairman of the ruling Pakistan Peoples' Party in Sindh, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari wrote on Twitter, "Felicitations to the lawmaker over the unanimously passed bill into a law against forced conversion."

He pledged that the PPP will introduce the same legislation in the other three provinces when it comes into power.

Senate Standing Committee on Religious Affairs has already declared that forced conversion is against Islamic principles during its sitting in June 2016 in

Islamabad.

Senator Eng. Gian Chand of Pakistan Peoples' Party said, "We are moving forward but I don't think that forced conversion will be easily eliminated despite the new law. At least now there is a law to punish inhumane evils such as forced conversions. Without a doubt, the Sindh Assembly has taken a remarkable decision."

Religious Parties, extremists and banned outfits oppose the new law and demand its withdrawal.

Proscribed outfits and religious parties including Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWL), and Jamat Islami, Jamiat Ulema Pakistan (JUI-F) held protest rallies across the country on November 26, 2016, and demanded that the new law be repealed. "The protests caused fear and distrust among religious minorities," the spokesperson of Pakistan Hindu Council (PHC) Hote Chand told Truth Tracker.

He said, "These banned outfits have a history of various rights violations against minorities, so fear is natural within our

community.”

There are no confirmed statistics regarding forced conversions in the country, “PHC estimates that at least 300 girls or women were forced to convert to Islam during the first half of current year,” he said.

The bill against the forced conversion was also tabled in the Sindh Assembly a year ago by Nand Kumar Goklani, a member of Sindh Assembly on the reserved seat for minorities. After opposition and protests, Kumar limited his activities to his house. He refused to comment on the protests held against the law when approached on the phone by Truth Tracker.

Asma Jehangir, a renowned rights activist, slammed those opposed the law and said,

“These extremists have a long history of such practices. They have to oppose every positive move that is in the public’s interest. Jehangir further commented,” These religious parties have damaged the image of Pakistan internationally.”

The Parliament is authorised to adopt any law to avoid violations of basic human rights. “Those who have reservations regarding the new law should get themselves elected to the parliament first, and then try to change the law,” Dr Sikander Ali Mendhro, a member of Sindh Assembly, said. He said that the law will not be repealed at any cost. “We must ensure that no one is forced to change their religion, and this law will help to stop this practice,” added Mendhro.

Senator Eng. Gian Chand replied cautiously regarding the protests held by those who oppose the bill and said that everybody has the right to express their opinion.

Mufti Naeem-Ur-Rehman, a well-known cleric, and Nasir Mehmood Soomro, Secretary General of JUI-F Sindh chapter both said that prohibition for minors to convert is wrong. According to them, the law is against the ‘Quran and Sunna’ and demanded that it be repealed immediately. “Several companions of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), including Hazrat Ali (RA), had accepted Islam when they were in their teenage,” they added.

What the promise fulfilment levels mean

Promises, promises, promises. That’s the sum of much campaigning, but then we hear little until the next election rolls around. Then we hear that the party fulfilled all its promises.

It is easy to lose track of these promises, when there are so many - and they sound so great in a rousing campaign speech. They make colourful, catchy quotes as well.

But Truth Tracker is going to watch as the winners

unfold their plans to fulfil those promises. We’ll write about the key promises and then check in occasionally to see how it’s going. When a promise is broken, fulfilled, or compromised, we’ll let you know.

We used the party symbols for our icons portraying the stages. PML-N, holding the Centre and Punjab, is a tiger. PTI, ruling in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is a cricket bat. And PPP, which rules in Sindh, is the arrow.

These are the five stages of promise fulfilment:

Not Started

If a promise is just hanging there, with no action at all, we label it as Not Started. No action, just talk.

Underway

Once the party has taken some action or positive steps, we label the promise as Underway. This means there is visible progress toward fulfilment.

Compromise

The reality of politics is that you can’t always get what you want. Promises that can’t be fulfilled, but lead to an action that goes partway to fulfilment, are labeled Compromise.

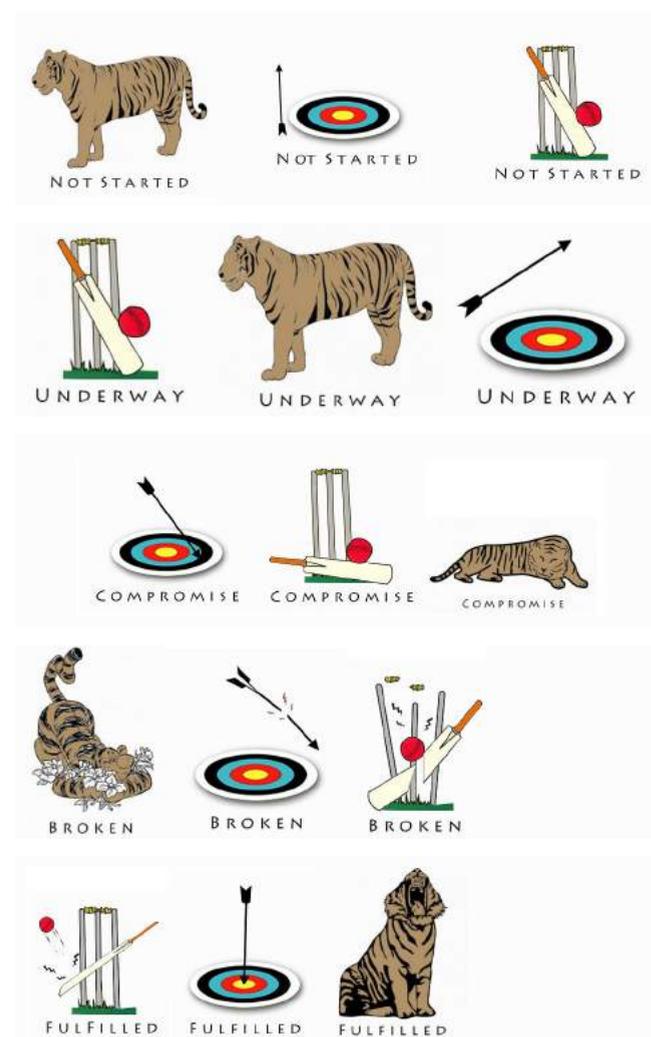
Broken

When the promise is clearly not going to be fulfilled, we label it Broken. A promise can stagnate for a long time, but we won’t call it broken until there is a decision by the ruling party or a defeat in legislation.

Fulfilled

On those happy occasions when a promise is actually carried out, we will mark it Fulfilled.

Ruling symbols of PML-N, PPP and PTI



Promise Tracking

Sindh government failed to fulfill its promise to eradicate polio



Durdana Najam

The Promise

In its 2013 manifesto, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) pledged to eradicate polio completely from the country by 2016. After the 2013 elections, the PPP could not form a government in any province except Sindh.

With the passage of 18th Amendment in 2010, the health sector was devolved to the provinces. So far, PPP has not been able to curb polio in Sindh. In 2016, seven cases of polio had been identified in different parts of the province.

Background

After the emergence of the seventh polio case in Sindh, the total number of polio cases in the country stands at 43 for this year. One of the polio cases was confirmed in Karachi. According to reports by the Sindh Emergency Operation Centre for Polio (EOC), one polio incident was also confirmed for the first time in Khairpur Mir District.

Three-year polio history

Year	Total cases
2014	306
2015	54
2016	43

The Polio Campaign has been in the crosshair of militants in Pakistan.

Seven policemen were killed in broad daylight in Karachi in April this year because of their involvement in polio campaign, raising the toll of police officers killed during polio campaign to 10 in Karachi alone. The attack took place in Orangi Town Karachi. A splinter group of the Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar claimed responsibility for the murders.

Pakistan's anti-polio campaign has been a dangerous task. Since 2012, almost 100 people including polio health workers and law enforcement personals have been killed nationwide.

Some ultra-conservative elements in the country have been spreading fear regarding the ingredients used in the polio vaccine. Militants claim the vaccine either contains pork derivate or has contents that could render the child infertile. They say it is a Western conspiracy against Islamic values intended to deplete the population of Muslims, and unleashed a bloody campaign to stop children from taking the anti-polio drops.

The government's effort to eradicate the scourge of polio, which is gone from every country in the world except for Pakistan and Afghanistan, has been inconsequential. It was when international pressure grew, and the Independent Monitory Board recommended restriction against travel to Pakistan, which was finally enforced on May 5, 2014, Pakistan began sincere effort to eradicate polio.

The World Health Organization says, "Despite the progress achieved since 1988, as long as a single child remains infected with polio virus, children in all countries are at risk of contracting the disease. The poliovirus can easily be imported into a polio-free country and can spread rapidly amongst unimmunized populations. Failure to eradicate polio could result in as many as 200,000 new cases every year, within 10 years, all over the world."



Polio cannot be cured, only prevented.

However, during the third National Polio Campaign this year, 46,967 parents refused to get their children vaccinated in Pakistan.

The Sindh government has hired women health workers to administer the vaccine. To date, 2,500 neighborhood vaccinators are working in the city of 20 million people.

Specialized clinics to vaccinate polio were built in Karachi. However, instead of getting appreciation, the government's intention was questioned by the parents of the children. They questioned the prioritization of polio over access to health care and clean drinking water.

In 2012 Sindh unveiled an ambitious Health Sector Strategy for the next eight years. The eight-year plan decided to focus on polio through the community-based Polio Plus program and malnutrition health packages

According to the data included in the 2012 strategic plan for health, women and children experience high rates of malnutrition. Approximately 40 percent children and 62 percent mothers are malnourished, while 60 percent of poor women do not have access to health facilities.

Tracking

To track the promise made by the government, Truth Tracker talked to Saeed Ghani, Senator Pakistan People's Party from Sindh. He said that his government has done everything possible, to eradicate polio in Sindh.

"I agree that some areas are vulnerable and shall remain so because of a paucity of the police force that makes deployment of police in every area of Sindh impossible," said Ghani.

When Truth Tracker put the same question to the PTI lawmaker in the Sindh Assembly, Khurram Sher Zaman said there was no seriousness about polio eradication in the government ranks. Almost every year, billions of rupees of irregularities were identified by the auditor general of Pakistan in the Sindh Health Sector, but it failed to stir the conscience of the authorities

PTI chairman directs chief minister KP to stop discretionary funds



Rehmat Mehsud

The Promise

In April 2014, Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan had directed Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Pervez Khattak to immediately put a stop to all discretionary funds.

Plan

Khan's directive circulated after a number of PTI provincial ministers started transferring discretionary funds to their personal accounts. Angered Khan directed Khattak to ensure that no ministers, bureaucrats and even the chief minister received discretionary funds.

Background

Truth Tracker repeatedly tried to know about the volume of the discretionary fund but Chief Minister's Office did not share details. Officials kept on saying that the concerned person is in Germany for an official visit.

Khan in his directive stated that every taxpayer's rupee spent by the government should be audited for greater transparency and accountability in governance.

Khan said he hoped the PTI-led KP government would once again lead the way in that as it was doing in so many other fields of governance.

Tracking

Behramand Jan, press secretary KP chief minister, said that in the previous fiscal year 2014-15, the KP government has transferred Rs. 35 billion to district governments so that they could make their own decisions at the local levels.

He said earlier, when the chief minister would visit certain districts, he would announce development projects wherever he wanted under his discretionary powers. However, now that discretionary powers have been curtailed---even abolished, he added.

"Those directives (of PTI chairman) have fully been implemented. The provincial government doesn't have any space to allocate any funds," he added.

The provincial government has decentralised everything and even the PTI members don't interfere with the working of certain departments, Jan said.

"There is no discretionary fund at the moment because this was abolished soon after Khan's directives," he noted.

Sardar Hussain Babak, a lawmaker and former education minister from Awami National Party (ANP), said, "Chief Minister Khattak has already spent all the discretionary funds to development in his home constituency PK-13 Nowshera," he remarked.

Arif Yousaf, a PTI MPA and advisor on law, said he has no details on the funds. PTI MPAs have no discretionary funds, he said, but he has no information if ministers have any discretionary funds.

Sayed Jaffar Shah, another ANP leader, said the province is experiencing the worst financial crisis because the budget was approved in June this year by the KP Assembly but the government has not released any fund for ongoing projects which are at standstill.

"The promise to abolish the discretionary fund has not been fulfilled. The PTI awards funds to its own MPAs unchecked,"



he added. To support his claim, he said that there are still some constituencies where development projects are underway.

He recalled Peshawar High Court had ruled in 2015 that the KP Government should give the opposition 30 percent of the funds from the total funds but the provincial government did not follow the orders. Only three constituencies are the PTI targets for carrying out development work such as Nowshera, Hari Pur and Dir---the strongholds of the chief minister, speaker and Jamat-e-Islami, said Shah.

"I don't have the exact idea but these funds are in billions, which are in three heads such as chief minister directives, district initiative and special projects," Shah added.

Sahibzada Sanaullah, an MPA from Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), said that all funds, including discretionary funds, are being distributed among PTI lawmakers and its coalition parties while the opposition is not being given even Zakat.

"I don't have all the figures at the moment but I can give you all the facts from the Annual Development Program (ADP). The discretionary funds are increased instead," Sanaullah added.

He said that the PTI's Government had released Rs. 5 billion to the constituency of Siraj-ul-Haq, the incumbent head of Jamat-e-Islami, as his party is a coalition partner of PTI.

However, he said that some funds from the provincial budget are being given to local bodies.

Independent Viewpoints

When approached for comments, Dr. Amjad Amin, professor of economics at University of Peshawar, said that he could not specifically talk on the subject regarding abolishment of the discretionary fund because he has no data.

He said there is a slight development in the functioning of institutions such as health and education as the government has increased allocations to these sectors otherwise on economic front the PTI could not make any change.

"However, the PTI during its three and a half years rule in the province has failed to work out a broad industrial policy to usher an era of economic development," Amin added.

Ruling

Truth Tracker tried its best to get the fact about discretionary funds of previous governments and the current one from the Chief Minister's Office but the officials refused to provide facts.

Keeping in view the available facts and views of opposition and treasury lawmakers, Truth Tracker finds the PTI promise of abolishing discretionary funds has been compromised.

Sindh government fails on promised increase in job quota for women



Durdana Najam

The Promise

During election 2013, PPP promised women that their job quota in public entities would be increased by 20 percentage point. This promise was made with the women of the entire country. After the 2013 election, PPP could not make government anywhere in the country except in Sindh. It could have been much easier to fulfill this promise at the province level, but with the new election hardly one year away, women job quota in public sector had been increased only by 0.1 percent, or 2 percentage point, taking the existing 5 to seven percentage point in Sindh. And a total of 3,500 jobs were promised against the 0.1 percent increase, according to Women Development Department Sindh officer.

Background

According to the former Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Qaim Ali Shah, it was the dream of Benazir Bhutto to empower women financially through an increased job opportunity. Shah recalled Bhutto's words on the occasion of announcing Sindh government's initiative to increase women job quota from five to seven percentage point in November 2015.

While the PPP government was planning through its Women Development Department to give more job opportunities to women, its police took the possession of the working women hostel in Shaheed Benazirabad. The hostel was built at the cost of Rs 13.2 million. The hostel is still functioning as police station.

Though the Sindh government had been efficient in proposing new policy initiative for women and enhancing annual budget for women development, a sharp incongruity has been observed between the action and performance of the Sindh government. Many projects, at least five out of seven total from last year were taken forward to 2016-17 budget. Similarly, according to the Sindh Ombudsman Report 2016, during the first seven months of 2016, 92 cases of women harassment had been recorded in different parts of Sindh.

Tracking

Shehla Raza, the Deputy Speaker of the Sindh Provincial Assembly (who belongs to PPP), in an Interview with Truth Tracker, said the quota for public jobs for women had been increased to seven percent. She added that in the remaining years of the present tenure her government would try to add a few more percentage to the quota.

"Though we could not form the government in Center we have tried our level best to improve the job conditions for the working women in Sindh. Our government will keep putting the welfare of women at the core of its development agenda. We have done legislation on women's rights during our last tenure and have kept the tradition alive to date," Shehla said. She also stated that if PPP couldn't form a government in the Center, it did not mean PPP had forgotten its promises. "It has already fulfilled its promise though only by 2 percentage point," said Raza.

She told Truth Tracker that when in power during 2008-13 the PPP government more than 3,000,000 women benefited from the Benazir Income Support Program. Also, the Sindh Government gave 175,000 jobs to women. Women were also given the right to gain from land distribution laws and secure business loans.



COMPROMISE

Arshad Vohra, MPA Sindh Assembly Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), told Truth Tracker that the Sindh government did not follow its promise in letter and spirit. "A government that has no vision to take the mega-city forward - can one expect it to do any good for women?" Vohra said. He told Truth Tracker over the phone that PPP's promise to increase the job quota for females does not conform with reality.

"It's a mere political statement. The PPP is good at making an impression by making laws on sensitive issues that could earn it audience nationally and internationally."

He added, "The PPP's manifesto is nothing but a dreamland that has nothing to do with the reality on the ground."

Jam Zulfiqar Ali, the member of PML-F, endorsed Vohra and rejected PPP's claim that it has been serious in women development leave along creating a decent increase in job quota for women in the public sector.

"Look at them, with a 2 percentage point increase PPP is trying to create an impression as if it has earned a landmark as far as women development is concerned," he said.

Independent Viewpoints

I.A Rehman, Sectary General, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, said that though PPP has been very progressive about legislation concerning women, their performance in Sindh has not been up to the mark. "With 2 percentage point increase in the quota, not much is possible," he added.

It is also not enough that the government raises job opportunities but remain dismal in improving work conditions for them, he said.

"The rising trend in harassment at the public space in Sindh is alarming," said Rehman.

Ruling

Though the PPP government has been able to increase job quota for the working women by 2 percentage point, taking it up from 5 percent to 7 percent, it has not been able to fulfill its promise of 20 percentage rise. With election year starting next year it seems impossible if the government with its existing economic condition could make to its promise.

Accountability

Right to Information in KP marred by bureaucratic delays



Izhar Yusafzai

Peshawar: The much celebrated Right to Information Commission in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province remains hamstrung by delays in response to public requests because the officials tasked to address these lack IT skills, says the 2016 annual report of the commission.

As per the RTI Act, the officials are required to furnish the information sought within ten days of the request, says the RTI website (kprii.gov.kp). This can be extended by another ten days maximum in case the information request requires searching through a large size of records located in different offices, or consultation with third parties or other public bodies. "Information needed to protect the life or liberty of any individual will be provided within two working days," says the RTI website.

The RTIC's annual report speaks of delays on part of the information officials in addressing the information requests and public complaints - in case citizens are not happy with the way their RTI requests have been handled, the Public Information Officer (PIO) did not respond or did not provide the information sought. The RTIC is mandated to look into these complaints and follow up on them. According to the PTIC report, one of the reasons for delays is that the PIOs lack IT skills to process information requests filed through the commission's website.

"The need for an IT literate PIO is the need of the time as the commission's day to day business is going digital," said the report, "while on the other hand PIO, who plays a key role in the whole process, is handicapped [by lack of IT skills], retarding the whole process."

The RTIC report says 600 PIOs nominated by the public departments are responsible to address the information requests and complaints from citizens. However, in the majority of cases, the PIOs are neither computer literate nor have access to the online RTI website due to non-availability of computers or internet connectivity, causing delays in processing of requests at the primary level.

Moreover, the commission, according to the report, has observed that majority of complaints received from the citizens about their information requests are not addressed in time due to delay in response on part of the PIOs.

According to an RTI official, who wishes



anonymity as he is not allowed to speak to media, three years have passed since the RTI Act was promulgated but administrative actions for implementation the law have not been taken. As a result, it is being executed in an ad hoc way.

"For the law to be effective, RTI has to be included in the official rules of business of public departments," said the official. "[Only then can we] ensure action against those who do not provide information to citizens."

The official said that absence of RTI from rules of business results in lack of interest on part of the officialdom to entertain requests for information from citizens. He said only six officials had been fined in the last three years for not providing information. But the fine money hadn't been recovered from them because of absence of RTI from the official rules of business making it binding for PIOs to respond to requests.

Complainants seem to agree with this trend. Kamal Ahmad, head of the Private Schools Association in Peshawar, showed News Lens 30 requests he had filed at different times. One of them related to information about real estate that the Peshawar Development Authority had sold to Iqra, a college, in the residential area of Hayatabad town in Peshawar. Another was about the Edwardes College in Peshawar acquiring land in the cantonment, apparently in violation of rules. However, the information he received, said Ahmad, wasn't what he had asked for.

Muhammad Alam, based in Peshawar, filed 12 requests through the RTI website as a citizen, seeking information from departments including the Peshawar

Development Authority, the finance department, the local government department and the local council board. Among his requests was one about information related to the number of people who had received food aid under the PTI government's Insaaf Food Programme, started to provide food to the poor in the province. Another sought information about the rules under which the Local Government Department had hired 700 employees since the PTI government came to power. It has been two months since Alam filed the requests and he has yet to receive the information sought.

When asked why he hadn't complained against the departments to the RTIC Commission, he said appearing before the commission regularly was time consuming for him. "The RTIC should deal with the departments not providing information without dragging the requesters into the matter."

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa RTI Act was passed by the KP assembly in November, 2013. It was widely assessed by national and international experts and dubbed as an outstanding piece of legislation by various organizations including Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) Pakistan.

Under the act, every citizen of the country except those from the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), could seek any information about any public department of the province.

The RTIC report says the commission received a total of 1771 public requests for information from April 2015 to June 2016,

of which 1409 have been disposed of. The highest number of these complaints (662) related to the Elementary and Secondary Education Department for not providing information, of which 373 were resolved. Another 342 information requests were received by the Higher Education, Archives and Libraries department, of which only 65 requests were addressed. Out of 220 requests received by the Local Government Department, only 42 requesters were provided information. Another 65 requests were resolved out of the 308 received by the Home and Tribal Affairs department.

Of the 1771 requests, only 215 were filed by women, according to the RTIC report.

"The PIOs usually do not respond to requests immediately as they are assigned this [taking up requests] as an additional charge without remuneration," said the RTIC report. It suggested that the administrative head of a public department be designated as PIO to ensure smooth supply of information under RTI. It said the law hadn't been extended to PATA region including the Malakand division and a large number of requests about PATA were ignored.

When asked about delays in response to information requests, RTI Chief Commissioner Azmat Hanif Orakzai said he had only recently taken charge of the office and was looking into improving the response process.

About the lack of rules of business, Orakzai said that a proposal seeking amendments in the RTI act had been sent to the Law Department and RTIC was pursuing the matter aggressively.

"We are striving to strengthen the commission through reforms, amendments and formulation of rules of business," he said.

He said the RTI Commission planned to deploy interns in all divisional headquarters of the province to facilitate requesters and prepare monthly reports for the RTI headquarter in Peshawar.



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Accountability

Marble industry pollution in Buner threatening environment, biodiversity



Qaiser Buner

Buner: Israr Hussain, a resident of Pir Baba, Buner, says that white powder runs through Buner's water like a virus runs through human blood. He points to the river that has turned to a thin milky slush from the sediment flowing in from marble industries in the district.

"The streams and rivers running across Buner were as clear as crystal before marble-extraction became a local industry," says Hussain. "With their arrival, industrial waste in the form of dust and white powder has increasingly choked nature and made people sick."

The factories are situated close to rivers in the district as they need water to wash the marble tiles. The waste for these units is seen running directly into streams and rivers. According to Murad Ali Khan, Vice President of the Marble Industrialists Association in Buner, the marble industry in Buner started in 1992 but the rise in the number of units happened after the year 2000.

According to the Federal Boards of Revenue's Directorate of Training and Research, there are 160.2 million tons of marble reserves in Pakistan. Of these reserves, 158 million tons are based in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Of all the districts in the province, Buner alone possesses 50 percent of the total marble reserves of KP. Local industrial units extract and process marble for a national market and depending on their capacity, says the directorate's report, nearly 300 tons of marble are extracted each day in Buner.

A study published by the International Journal of Recent Scientific Research says "the spills of waste/calcium from marble industries [in Buner] in some areas [have been] harming human lives and spreading diseases in the form of kidney problem/kidney stones, skin and eyes diseases."

"These industries not only affect human lives but also threaten aquatic biodiversity, natural beauty and crop production in the area," says the study titled "Pollution Load in Industrial Effluent and Groundwater due to Marble Industries in District Buner." The study states that there are as many as 400 marble factories in Buner and all of them contribute to local river water pollution.

Dr. Umar Farooq, a nursing officer at the District Headquarters Hospital Daggar in Buner, says patients from the marble factory regularly visited the facility. He



said roughly 50 per cent of these patients complained of respiratory diseases caused by marble dust. In some cases, he said, patients had cancer of the lungs. "The blast in the marble mines produces dust that could result in serious respiratory problems," adds Farooq.

According to Dr. Tariq Ahmad, Assistant professor at Bacha Khan Medical University, the marble waste running through the streams and rivers contains calcium carbonate that is ultimately absorbed by the land. "People using ground water within a kilometer of such streams are susceptible to developing kidney stones," said Ahmad. "Due to this, the problem of kidney stones is more pronounced in the areas around marble factories. It needs a research to know exactly if the ground water is causing kidney stones."

Another study observes the adverse effect of marble spill on dragonflies, "Biodiversity of Dragonflies and their Life Threatening Factors in Buner" shares this observation: "Dragonflies, a very important component of ecosystem and effective biocontrol agent of crop pests are at threat in district Buner, due to the continuous spills of marble and pesticide factories in fresh water bodies."

Says Salman Ahmad, a resident of Buner city, "The rivers that were once popular spots for fishing and swimmers are now a threat to them due to industrial waste. The money from the marble units goes into a few pockets while their pollution has disturbed the whole area. The government must take proper steps to preserve the environment from further degradation".

Director general Environmental Protection

Agency (EPA), Dr. Muhammad Bashir Khan, told News Lens that the white powder residue produced by marble industries is not toxic in itself. However, as a sediment and pollutant, it becomes a real threat to environment when discharged into water bodies in such large quantity as in Buner.

"The continuous spill of marble waste affect the agricultural lands by depositing a layer of sediment waste, 7 to 8 inches thick, on their surface," says Khan. "It also affects aquatic life as marine life cannot breathe in polluted waters," he adds.

Khan said EPA had provided a model to the marble units for a settling tank to filtrate industrial waste. Some of the marble factories in Buner did adopt the EPA designed model to filtrate industrial waste. However, he said, there was no proper place where the waste from the settling tanks should be dumped.

The previous government of Awami National Party (ANP) had proposed the Buner Marble City project under which all industrial units would be based in one place, making it easy to process the industrial waste and provide raw material to marble factories. The project was taken up by the present government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf and according to the budget document, the KP government allocated a sum of PKR 300 million in the 2013-14 budget for the establishment of Buner Marble City. However, the project has been long in gestation.

"The Buner Marble City project is a good idea to overcome pollution in the area," says Khan. "However, it is a long term project and industrialists may not be willing to shift their units to the Marble

City. It is good for those planning to start marble industries in future”.

In February, 2015, the Peshawar High Court’s Green Bench ordered closure of 45 marble units in Buner for violating Environmental Protection Orders (EPOs). An EPA document obtained by Truth Tracker, says the agency issued notices to 180 units - out of the 256 inspected by EPA in Buner – for violation of EPOs in 2014.

Presently, the issue of marble pollution is under court review. In August 2016, the Peshawar High Court summoned high officials from the local government department in Khyber Pakhtunkwa to arrange for acquisition of land to dump industrial waste of marble factories in Buner.

According to Sajid Nawaz, an official at the KP Economic Zone Development and Management Company (KPEZDMC), the case is with them for review since October 2016. The company is regularly attending the proceeding of the courts to update it on progress on acquisition of land. Nawaz

said that they are currently evaluating the cost of local land availability for setting up the Marble City.

Murad Ali Khan, Vice President of the Marble Industrialists Association in Buner, said the Marble City had not materialized because the site suggested for the project fell on agricultural land. He said the newly established KPEZDMC was now working on the project. “However, the project implementation process is still very slow.”

Khan said all marble units in Buner had built settling tanks for filtration of industrial waste. Depending on production capacity, a settling tank could fill up with waste in a week, he said. “To take that waste out of the settling tanks and to dispose it is a real problem. There are no dumping sites for industrial waste in the area. Dumping the waste in streets may result in further pollution.”

He said the local marble industry had asked authorities to provide dumping sites in five areas of Buner at Pirbaba, Towarask, Deewana Baba, Cheena and Salarzai. However, said Khan, a decision on this

was still awaited. To him, “even allocation of dumping sites was not a solution to pollution and the Marble City must be established keeping in mind a lasting solution to the problem.”

Khan said the marble units in district Buner produced 10 different types of marbles and engaged 80,000 to 100,000 workers. The locally produced marble tiles are taken to markets in Karachi and Lahore, and thereafter exported to other countries.

Nawaz of KPEZDMC says: “There are models available to help reprocess industrial waste of marble industry for use as raw material cement industry, ceramics, pharmacy, detergent and other products.”

For reprocessing marble waste, he said, the company was going to engage the Chemical and Mechanical Department of the University of Engineering and Technology Peshawar to analyze the waste samples. “On analysis, we will be able to know how we could use the waste. In the second stage, the Mechanical Department will help us develop a plant for the waste reprocessing.”

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Accountability

Lack of skilled teachers challenges e-learning efforts in KP schools



Asad Khan

Peshawar: Lack of skilled IT teachers is setting back efforts to institutionalize e-learning through digital training at the school level in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province.

Teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa schools are pleased with their government for making IT tools available in its schools at the primary and secondary level. But they are concerned about the lack of necessary training required to teach the students. In addition to skills, many schools also lack proper IT classrooms or labs where students could use computers. This, they say, makes expensive equipment prone to damage.

Rasul Jan, a teacher in a government school that has received IT equipment, said the education authorities were not serious about putting to proper use the latest, expensive IT equipment provided to government schools.

"There is no proper lab or room for computers and due to lack of expert IT teachers, equipment worth millions of rupees is rusting in storerooms of schools," said Jan. "The government should take notice of this. It should direct staff at schools to care for the IT equipment and use it properly."

Official documents of the KP Elementary and Secondary Education Department (ESED), obtained by Truth Tracker, claim that 839 IT labs were established in 2013-14 and 500 more with interactive smart-screens would be established by the end

of 2016.

The official document states that the IT labs are equipped with the latest IT technology i.e., interactive learning tools, virtual/distance learning tools and smart connected-classroom tools necessary for e-learning. It adds that 700 IT teachers and lab assistants have been hired by October 2016, and more are expected to join after skills assessments through the National Testing Service (NTS). The NTS conducts tests and assessments for admissions, scholarships, recruitment and promotion in the education sector.

But as things stand, according to teachers at government schools, the number of IT staff dwarfs in comparison the need. Moreover, said Ibrahim Khan, a teacher and subject specialist in the Government High School district Mardan, the newly hired teachers are good at IT while the old teachers need skill enhancement.

"The problem is further compounded by the fact that the e-learning initiative focuses largely on urban ignoring the rural areas," said Khan. "In urban locales, the students are more aware of IT tools and internet but in the rural districts, don't know the basics such as operating a computer."

Although Pakistan has remained in a state of technological-isolation, especially in the public education system, this has been changing rapidly, says Zunash Abbasi, an IT and communications expert, who works in the development sector.

Given the challenge thrown up by this change, said Abbasi, the provincial governments should make proper use of educational technologies. She said of late, the government, international

development partners and social entrepreneurs have shown a growing interest in ICT-based solutions to myriad problems related to access and quality of education in the public sector.

"The development sector, educationists, government officials and teachers pushing for these technologies believe that equipping public schools with IT tools could actually reverse the gap that exists in learning and education between the students of public and private schools," she said.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education Muhammad Atif Khan told Truth Tracker that the government's e-learning initiative would facilitate teaching and learning by making it interesting and challenging for students and the school faculty. He hoped such an initiative would decrease the drop-out rate by providing the students the skills that are practical and in-tune with the needs of the job-market.

Khan claimed that by the end of 2016, the provincial government would provide e-learning tools to schools in all the districts of KPK and hire skilled teachers for the purpose.

On their part, students seem to appreciate access to IT tools for e-learning. Abdul Aziz, a student of the Government Higher Secondary School in Peshawar, said computer classes have started in his school this year, and students take interest by regularly attending them.

"However, there is a tendency to use computers for surfing useless websites," said Aziz. "Teachers should keep a check on students by limiting access to websites that waste our time."

Human Rights

In Balochistan, forced repatriation spells education crisis for Afghan students



Hizbullah Khan

Quetta: Refugee schools and colleges are shutting down in Balochistan owing to the repatriation of thousands of Afghan students to Afghanistan.

Refugee students studying in various colleges and universities are leaving their education without completing degrees, demanding certificates instead of degrees. They are also asking for transcripts to prove they have studied in Pakistan so they could continue education in Afghanistan.

Qari Naqeebullah, a principal at the Ahmed Shah Baba High School Quetta and a member of Afghan Private Schools Association in Balochistan, told Truth Tracker that 44,000 Afghan students study in 98 schools and 32 colleges in the province. The figures, according to Naqeebullah, have been gathered by the Afghan Private Schools Association.

“The majority of these schools and colleges face closure as fifty percent of their students have left school due to crackdown on refugees,” said Naqeebullah, who like most Afghans go by one name.

He said the government had imposed strict sanctions on movement of refugees including random checks and search in the streets, resulting in harassment of refugees at the hands of police. “Students cannot go to school in the environment of fear.”

Naqeebullah said given the situation, Afghan students and teachers were opting to discontinue working and studying in the

province. However, he said, for students this option posed a dilemma: those who wanted to return to Afghanistan would be wasting one year of education.

In Balochistan, he said, the academic year starts in March whereas in Afghanistan the academic year usually starts at the end of November. This means students leaving before or after November would not be able to get admission in Afghanistan’s schools to start a new academic year.

Even though the deadline for repatriation of refugees has been extended a number of times in recent months and years, the Pakistan government has toughened its stance on Afghan refugees as relations between the neighbouring countries have worsened among mutual acrimony and allegations of supporting terrorist groups active in the region.

After the December 2014 attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in which 147 students were killed, the government decided to repatriate Afghan refugees under the 20-point National Action Plan against Terrorism. The authorities in Pakistan believe that terrorists of Afghan origin can easily hide among the refugee population in Pakistan. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan’s militants who masterminded the attack on the school in Peshawar are based in Afghanistan that for its part blames Pakistan for harbouring and supporting the Afghan Taliban waging an insurgency against the Afghan state.

Afghan refugees first came to Pakistan in the early eighties after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. During the three decades of their stay in Pakistan – mainly in the border provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and in the port city of Karachi – the country has hosted close

to 4 million refugees at different times.

A United Nations High Commission for Refugees fact sheet says Pakistan has been host to one of the world’s largest refugee populations for more than 27 years. The country is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, says the fact sheet, but “Pakistan has generally respected the principles of international protection.” Since March 2002, nearly 4.1 million Afghans have repatriated with UNHCR’s assistance. However, some 1.45 million registered Afghans remain in Pakistan.

Naqeebullah said after migration to Pakistan, thousands of young Afghans had been out of school for a long time due to the conflict in Afghanistan. “Educating a school-age refugee was a major problem. Over the years, Pakistan allowed refugee children to attend local schools and colleges. Alongside this, hundreds of private schools and colleges were established for Afghan refugees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.”

March 2017, the deadline Government of Pakistan had set for the repatriation of refugees, approaches fast, making Afghan students anxious about their future in the country.

Arsalan Khan, a 14-year-old Afghan student at Ahmed Shah Baba High School Quetta, says: “I am a Pakistani by birth but my parents have no legal documents. My father has decided to leave Pakistan fearing an arrest. I believe Pakistan is my country and it is painful for me to leave my school, my city and country. I don’t see any future in Afghanistan because of the ongoing war. Returning to Afghanistan would kill my dreams.”

Mirwais Afghan, a refugee student at Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUIITEMS), says according to the International Refugee Law, Afghans have the same rights as Pakistani students. But for the last two years, said Afghan, they have been facing discrimination from students and teachers in the school.

“There is restriction on admission of Afghan students in major government and private education institutions,” says Afghan, whose name has been changed to protect his identity.

Maqsood Ahmed, father of a refugee student, migrated to Quetta from Afghanistan in 1985. He got education there and became a teacher. In Quetta, he married a Pakistani woman and they have a child.

“We have no shelter or work in Afghanistan,” said Ahmad. “We would

become refugees again in Afghanistan. Our children need education. One generation of Afghans was deprived of education during the civil war, another in the War on Terror and a third is being deprived due to repatriation.”

Bashir Khan, an executive member of the Afghan Students’ Union in Quetta, said refugee students cannot continue academic activities in government and private educational institutions out of fear and legal restrictions. On the other hand, he said, the Afghan education system would not be able to accommodate a huge number of returnee students. He said Pakistan should allow Afghan students to complete their education.

“The majority of refugees who have completed their education here and returned to Afghanistan have filled key positions in the government sector and are playing a vital role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan,” Khan said. “If these students

left without completing their education, it will have a negative impact on the future of Afghanistan.”

In October 2016, Pakistan pledged a further \$500 million to help reconstruct Afghanistan, in addition to an existing \$500 million package on health, education and infrastructure that includes a 400-bed hospital in Kabul and more than 2000 scholarships for Afghan students. However, the Afghan students in Balochistan say the hate-campaign against Afghans on social media after the APS attack, December 2014, has created an environment of intolerance and discrimination against them.

“Social media users blame Afghan refugees for incidents of terror in Pakistan,” said Mirwais Afghan, the student at BUIITEMS. “This has had a negative impression on people in general. They now view us with suspicion and have turned intolerant towards us.”

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Economic Development

Mehsud from Pakistani tribal region forces his way to Guinness World Record



Rehmat Mehsud

Dera Ismail Khan: Muhammad Ifran Mehsud's name was added to the Guinness World Record (GWR) for his unbeatable Kung Fu skills. His biggest achievement came for breaking five records consecutively in the year 2016, said Malik Iftikhar, president of Pakistan and South Asia Wushu Federation.

The Guinness World Records (GWR), the global authority on recordbreaking achievements, approved Mehsud's records for, "The most full contact knee strikes in one minute using one leg is 87." The rest of his records include most pushup (one leg raised, carrying 40lb pack) in one minute is 31, the most knuckle pushups (carrying 40-lb pack) in one minute is 26, the most knuckle pushups (one leg raised carrying a 40-lb pack) in one minute is 21, and the most pushups (one leg raised and carrying an 80-lb pack) in one minute is 21. He achieved these records during July to October in 2016.

Pittsburgh Kung Fu, specializing in the Northern Kung Fu System, deems the term Kung Fu to an art that includes hundreds of styles of Chinese martial arts. Strikes are crucial to Kung Fu. A strike is a direct physical attack with a part of the human body and has many variants.

Mehsud, 26, is an MPhil student from Ladha, a dusty hamlet in the militancy-plagued South Waziristan tribal region. It was much of a surprise for Iftikhar. "I was really stunned to know that a person from the tribal region and whose family has been displaced has emerged at the global arena", he exclaimed.


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Most knuckle push ups (one leg raised, carrying 40-lb pack) in one minute











Who

IRFAN MEHSOOD

What

21 REPETITIONS

Where

PAKISTAN
DERA ISMAIL KHAN

When

01 SEPTEMBER 2016

The most knuckle push ups with one leg raised and carrying a 40-lb pack in one minute is 21, achieved by Irfan Mehsood (Pakistan) in Khyber Pakhtoon Khwa, Pakistan, on 1 September 2016.

Irfan is a serial record breaker.

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In his chat with News Lens, Mehsud recalled that his parents had to migrate to Dera Ismail Khan, a district on the border of South Waziristan tribal region in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, because of clashes between Pakistani security forces and militants.

Mehsud termed his achievement as a "Record Title Holder" as a life turning event. He said there are no limitations on a player to break the record on any given day. "My predecessor had maintained the record for one and a half year until I broke it in October," he added. Mehsud broke the record of another Pakistani too. Ahmad Amin Bodla was the record holder for making 79 strikes in one minute while Mehsud got 87 strikes in the same time. Bodla belongs to Punjab province of Pakistan.

The annual Guinness World Records Book examines, verifies and documents the ground



breaking achievements from around the world. Making a new record is a rigorous process. GWR states that it receives more than 1,000 applications each week. "First you need to open an account on GWR website and then fill the given application form. The GWR management approves your record for go ahead," Mehsud advised future contenders. All that the GWR requires from a new applicant for making a record is to shoot a slow motion video from front and side while performing. "I performed in my small club with around 30 people in attendance in Dera Ismail Khan," he recalled.

Mehsud recalled drawing inspiration from Jackie Chan, a renowned Chinese martial arts player known for Kung Fu art. Chan had the grit that kept him going despite any given challenges. He persevered and taught his art when he didn't have a proper building for training.

Mehsud dreams to improve his skills, train and mentor the future players. "I want to build a martial arts academy to prepare pupils to perform outstandingly," he added.

Mehsud's dream comes at an opportune time as Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) revised its National Sports Policy 2005. The policy aims for promotion of sports at grass root level. The declining standards of sports in the country, the policy stated, has deeply concerned the government to take remedial measures to remove flaws and bottlenecks for smooth functioning of the sports institutions and revive the booming past.

Sadly for Mehsud and his ilk, the PSB policy is silent about the promotion of Kung Fu in the country.

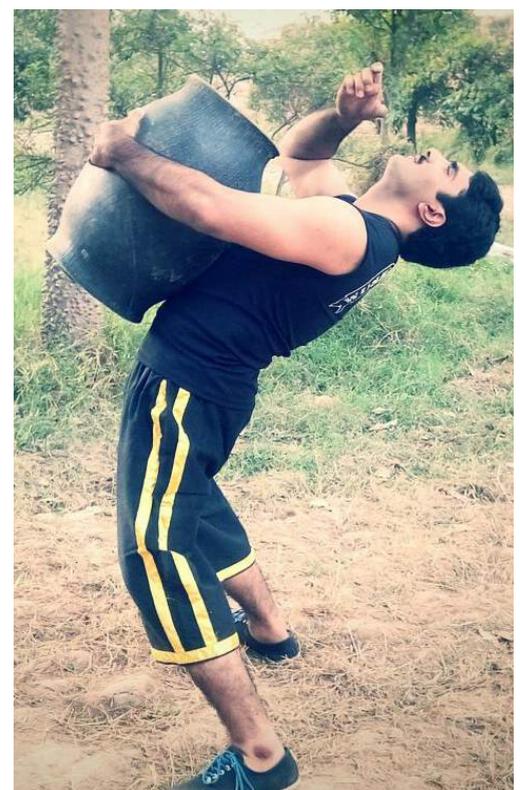
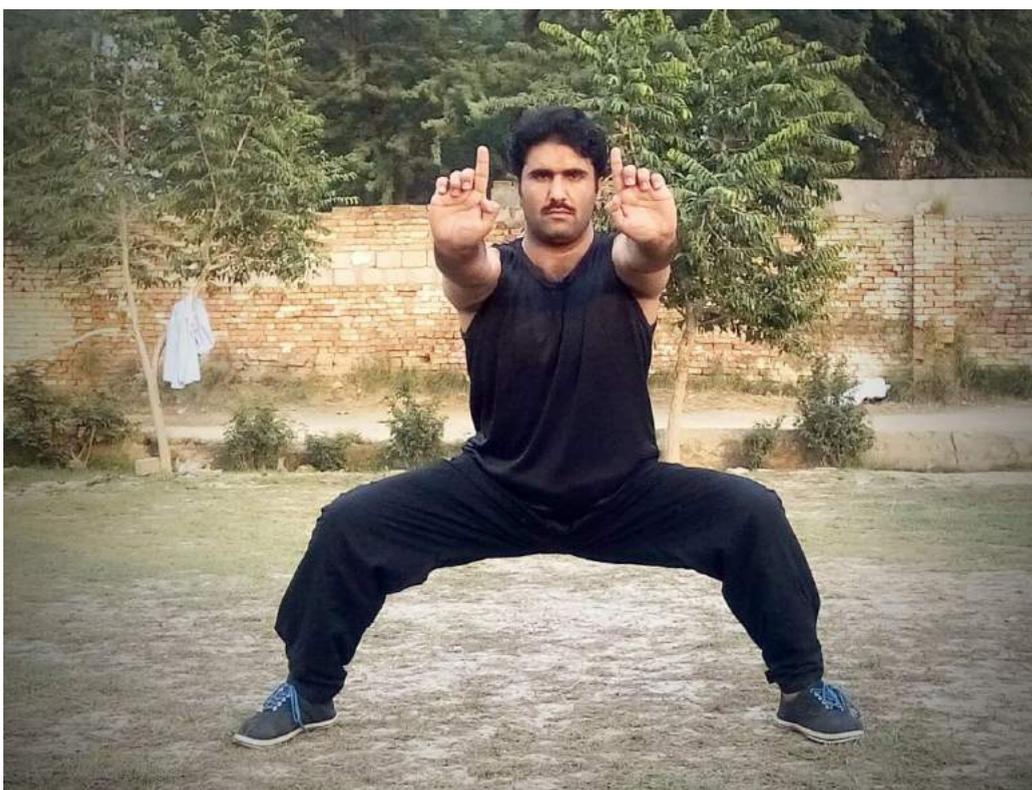
Soon after the Pakistani military declared parts of South Waziristan tribal region purged of militants, repatriation of thousands of displaced families is underway in the region, once regarded as the most dangerous place on earth.

Iftikhar said the world was hearing about militancy and extremism only from the Pakistani tribal region but the emergence of Irfan Mehsud as a budding player clearly depicts that "the area has matchless

talent but needs to be explored." Iftikhar said he would personally "leave no stone unturned" to promote Mehsud because he has faced challenges boldly at a time when he was leading his life in displacement.

Habib Ullah, another Kung Fu player, said that Mehsud would emerge as a "global star" in Kung Fu world if he gets good training, equipment and level playing field. "Mehsud is the person who introduces Wushu Kung Fu to this part of the country," he remarked.

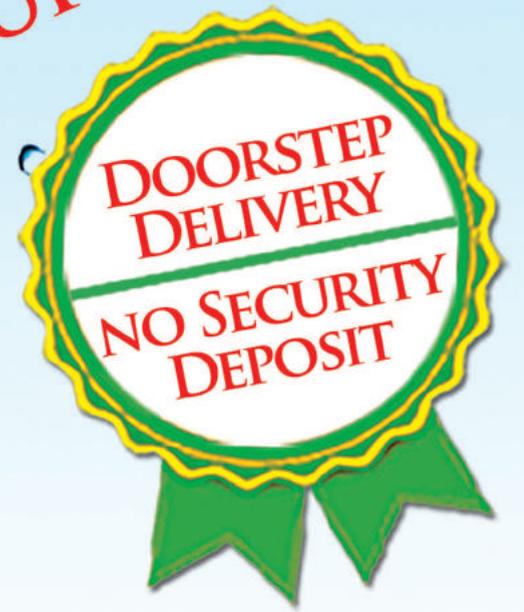
Mehsud said that currently he is getting daily exercise in a rented mud-built house yet he is determined to project the soft image of the country in the world. However, he plans to go abroad for advance training if the government supports him. "I'm leading a hard life with limited resources and have no support from the government," he added hoping, he is provided with "direly needed equipment and building" so that he is able to take part in global competitions and bring achievements home.



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