



TRUTH TRACKER

WATCHING OUT FOR PAKISTAN



Daesh (ISIS) making inroads in Pakistan amid security forces offensives

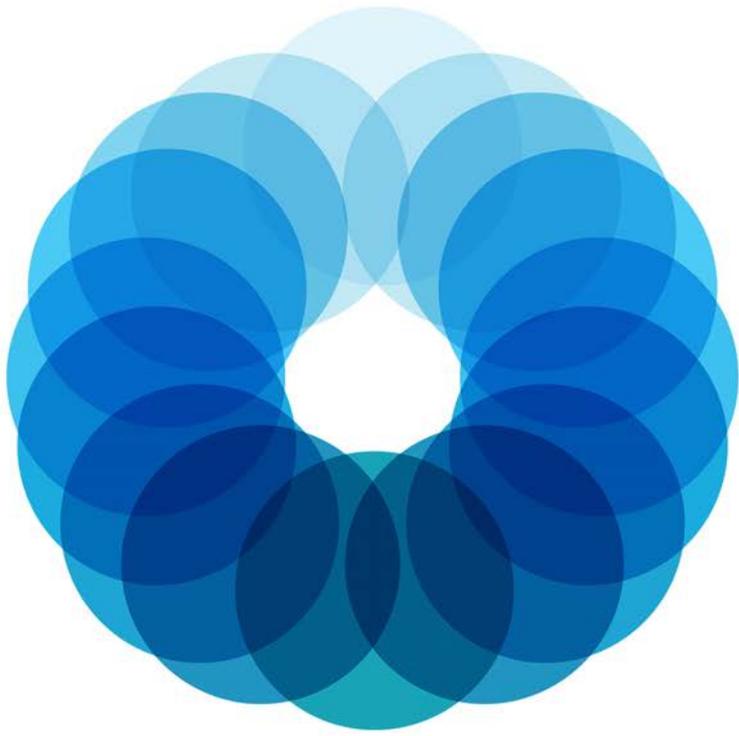
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Media Tracker :
challenges and achievements of the journalists worldwide

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THE WHOLE JOURNALIST

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.

With the slogan of “A Whole Journalist”, we are here with the ambition of helping media professionals getting their rights as well as their training to improve journalism standard in the country. In this regard, we arrange workshops and discussion sessions for journalists with country’s top media professionals and foreign trainers. We also intend to be a watchdog of media outlets in the country, keeping an eye on journalism standards and practices they follow, and pointing out the areas where they failed to follow ethics and laws.

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Editorial

Election 2018 has already begun

Amid a strong wave of terrorism, mainstream parties in Pakistan have accelerated their political activities in preparation for Election 2018 in Pakistan. The current elected government will complete its tenure in June 2018 and election will be held anytime within 90 days after June 5, 2018.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, which holds federal government in Islamabad and provincial governments in Punjab and Balochistan, is under pressure because of Panama Papers Case in Supreme Court. Still, PML-N leaders are trying to highlight China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and their development projects such as Metro Bus System in Multan. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in his speeches reiterates that his government will end electricity load-shedding before Election 2018. This all indicates that they have started election campaigning.

Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), ruling in Sindh province, is also very active these days in holding public rallies and bringing back its old stalwarts like former ministers Faisal Saleh Hayat, Khalid Ahmad Kharal and Sardar Khalid Lund. PPP also invites people from other parties. Several leaders from Pakistan Tehrik e Insaf (PTI), PML-N and PML-Functional from Sindh have joined the PPP. It shows that the PPP has also launched unofficial campaigning for the next elections.

PTI, ruler of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is the leading petitioner in Panama Leaks Case. It is trying to win popular support through the case, claiming that it is only party that stood against the rulers' corruption. At the same time, PTI Chief Imran Khan holds public rallies in various parts and mentions his party's achievements in KP. His anecdotes about success show he too is running an election campaign.

But what the ruling parties are completely ignoring is the promises made in their manifestos before Election 2013. They seem to believe that voters have fallen asleep and forgotten all their previous words.

We didn't.

Truth Tracker introduced journalistic innovation of government accountability through promise tracking in Pakistan before those 2013 elections. We have been tracking promises of PML-N, PPP and PTI to educate voters and let political leaders know that they are being watched.

During last 45 months, Truth Tracker journalists observed that the three ruling parties either broke or compromised the majority of their promises. A small number of promises were fulfilled. You can view this track record on our website at TruthTracker.com.pk

The lack of promise fulfilment has not discouraged Truth Tracker reporters and editors. Quite the opposite. We stand firm in our resolve to keep tracking promises and keep checking the factuality of statements by political leaders.

Our slogan is to watch out for Pakistan. We have, and we will continue.

Mubasher Bukhari

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Whither the Muslim World's NATO?

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Editor's Note

The need of a narrative shift

The last ten days have been violent. Pakistan finds itself in the throes of terrorist attacks. More than a 100 lives lost. Half a dozen cities targeted. Government officials wring their hands as questions are raised. The questions are crucial: how can peace prevail and how can security be guaranteed? Could it?

There are a few good answers. There is little way of predicting damage to come, but the authorities have closed down borders with Afghanistan; initiating Radd al Fassad, combing through the country for terrorist remnants like never before. Punjab that had enjoyed its carte blanche until now is also under scrutiny.

These measures are at the heels of growing pressure from the west to pull the plug on the terrorist perpetrators. The terrorist organisations like the Pakistani Taliban who oppose the law of our country and call themselves the Islamic State need to be brought to justice in the public eye.

In the political analysts view, what Pakistan needs at the moment is a narrative shift. Priorities need to be sifted. Our country caters to different races, religions and ethnicities. Hence pluralism should be celebrated and a shared language should prevail that deters the paranoia of the other.

The international media faults Pakistan for passing the blame to its neighbours and running a campaign against Valentines a day ahead of Lahore blast on February 13th. A dialogue with neighbours is more important than enmity.

The civil society is weary of the use of religious propaganda by terrorists to further their cause. In the light of the recent paramilitary operations media has started to tear away religious justification and glory from criminal and terrorist actions. A crime should be viewed as such and no episode of divine consequence should be attributed to it. The government's decision to shed any prejudice between good and bad Taliban has also made it easier for law enforcers and the media to call a spade a spade.

However, media is an industry too. In recent years media studies departments in Pakistan and across the world have criticised the ethics of the news media for indulging in practices to raise viewership and hence ratings disregarding quality and credibility. Recently, as many as 31 media outlets were given show cause notices by PEMRA to explain how could they air news of a second bomb attack in Lahore's Gulberg area on the 23rd Feb without any corroborating evidence.

In the war against terrorism, military, law enforcement agencies and the media are targets alongside the general public. It is important for the media to air reliable coverage and refrain from sensationalism, unless there is evidence that the sole target of this recent countrywide terrorism was PSL alone. Taking a responsible position would allow the media to become a watchdog, keeping a check on the government and, its narrative.

Ameerah Javeria

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Security

Daesh (ISIS) making inroads in Pakistan amid security forces offensives



Waqar Gillani

ISLAMABAD: It has been almost nine months now that Saudi Arabia has detained one of popular Pakistani preacher of Salafi school of thought – Talibur Rehman Rashidi – along with four others to investigate any of his alleged links to Daesh (ISIS), a close relative of the cleric told Truth Tracker.

The detention, reported in later half of 2016, was followed by the death of preacher Talib's young son – Osama – in an American drone strike at Daesh camps in mid June 2016. The drone strike had hit Hafiz Said Khan Orakzai, then head of Daesh chapter of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and many other Daesh soldiers including Osama.

“Following the death of Osama in the drone strike, the family came to know from Saudi Arabia about his detention,” a close relative of Talib told Truth Tracker (TT), adding, “Saudi authorities have detained preacher Talib, who was a frequent visitor to the Kingdom, when he was with his younger brother Toseefur Rehman and his teenage son.” Talib was informed about his son's fate during this visit to Saudi Arabia prior to his detention. The preacher is originally based in capital city of Islamabad and has led Friday prayers in a famous Islamic Center in Rawalpindi for many years.

“Talib is only a preacher and nothing else. He has condemned Daesh many times for her acts and he had deplored his son's affiliation to that extreme organisation,”

the relative said. The relative revealed that some elements in Pakistan had trapped Osama, who joined Daesh and left Pakistan quietly. “Earlier, we were sympathising with Daesh and liking its objective to set up one Islamic caliph-ship in the whole world but after seeing their acts of killing innocent people we began to speak against the group,” the relative, who is also a preacher, said, adding, “Daesh elements are misleading our youth in Pakistan.”

The preacher has been long associated with the academic wing of Jamiat Ahle-Hadith, a Salafi group with, more than a decade of, alliance with the ruling party of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz. “We have asked Saudi authorities to explain this detention but there is no reply yet,” a senior leader of the party told TT. The group's bigwigs have visited Saudi Arabia in this connection for a number of times.

This tale of youth getting impressed and joining Daesh is not new in Pakistan. Home Department of the largest populated province of Pakistan in December 2015 in a circular with subject ‘Recruitment of Pakistan boys and Afghan Refugees by Daesh (ISIS)’ highlights, “Various militant groups including Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (formerly aligned with Al-Qaeda), Turkistan Islamic Movement, Uzbek and Chechen Militias in Afghanistan, Ahrarul Hind, Jamaatul Ahrar and Lashkar e Jhangvi have joined hands with ISIS.” It further discloses that an important commander of Afghan Taliban Maulana Abdul Rauf has also joined ISIS and is spending lavishly on the organisation's militant activities.

The circular further states that ISIS is recruiting Pakistani youth and Afghan refugees on a monthly salary ranging from Rs 30,000 to Rs 50,000. In this regard, it has recruited 40/50 boys from Afghan Refugees' Camp in Shamshato, KP and sent them to Afghanistan for military training. In Pakistan, Daesh recruitment of youth is largely done from the capital city of Islamabad and surrounding.

A week ago, Nasir Durrani, inspector general of Khyber Paktunkwah province, told the media that Daesh was making inroads in Pakistan through the border with Afghanistan. “They are coming from the porous border and attacking Pakistan. We are after them and their facilitators,” he said.

Late in year 2016, Lt. Gen. Asim Bajwa, the former spokesperson of the Pakistan Army, claimed that Daesh had a presence in the country and more than 300 people were arrested in connection to Daesh in the several months. He noted that the authorities were very vigilant and thwarted a number of attacks too.

Aftab Sultan, director general of the Intelligence Bureau of Pakistan has also told the Senate's Standing Committee on Interior a year ago, Daesh was emerging as a threat in Pakistan because several militant groups, such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan, were sympathetic to it.

Punjab's Law Minister Rana Sanuallah has also publicly stated that over 100 Pakistanis from Punjab province had left the country to join Daesh. In December

2014, in a video message on social media, female students from a Deoband seminary linked to Lal Masjid in Islamabad had praised Daesh.

Pakistani security forces have launched a new offensive titled Operation Rad-ul-Fassad (Operation to Eliminate Violence and Anarchy) against violent extremist groups against militant groups. The latest offensives is orchestrated following a terrible suicide attack on Pakistan's most famous shrine of saint Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan, province of Sindh. The shrine, named after the Sufi saint, was filled with hundreds of people who had come to watch an evening ritual known as Dhamaal, featuring traditional dancing which sends performers into states of ecstasy. At least 90 people were killed and 300 people were injured in this gruesome suicide bomb attack on February.

Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack within hours of its occurrence.

Earlier, suicide bombers slaughtered nearly 50 people at another Sufi place of worship, the shrine of Saint Shah Noorani, in Balochistan province in on November 12, 2016. Jamaatul Ahrar (JuA), a group comprising militant factions from Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Lashkar-e-

Jhangvi (LeJ), claimed responsibility for Shah Noorani and other recent attacks on public places and security forces. According to security analysts, JuA is believed to be linked to Daesh.

The JuA emerged in Pakistan after the National Action Plan (NAP) to counter terror groups mainly TTP and its allies. The JuA was formed by those militants who refused to enter dialogue with the government and lay down arms.

However, Pakistani government, Punjab law minister, and Punjab Inspector General Police Mushtaq Sukhera, talking to Truth Tracker for a number of times, have denied any organised presence of Daesh in Pakistan. They take these cases steps of individuals after getting impressed from Daesh on social media and Internet.

"Recent attacks are coordinated efforts of terrorist groups with greater unity under the banner of Daesh with lead role of JuA in Pakistan," Tariq Pervez, former head of the National Counterterrorism Authority (NACTA) told Truth Tracker. Previously, such groups active in Pakistan were connected to Al-Qaeda, Pervez added. Now they are working for IS, he said.

Daesh, basically, an extreme version of the Salfi school of thought in Islam which aims to make the whole world one Muslim state, surfaced in Pakistan in 2014, Pervez said.

It emerged in Pakistan via social media and later its flags and pamphlets were seen in different parts of Pakistan from time to time.

Pakistan officially banned Daesh a couple of years ago. According to a notification of Interior Ministry, Daesh is not to be allowed to operate in Pakistan at all.

Security experts blame lack of political will in a counter narrative providing ground to such groups to nurture.

"The JuA is a breakaway faction of TTP operating through Afghanistan, with the possibility of getting funding from different "enemy" sources of Pakistan to de-stabilize the country," Khawaja Khalid Farooq, another former head of NACTA, told TT. He added there are reports that many other TTP splinter factions are allying with the JuA and this unity is threat to Pakistan. The JuA, terror group, in its latest online video message after Lahore attack on February 13, has further warned Pakistan of future attacks targeting state forces and installations

Media Tracker

Truth Tracker presents Media Tracker is a new feature will be listing the challenges and achievements of the journalists worldwide. Here's a list of journalism in the recent month. We would like to thank international media protection organisation and news outlets for their content.

- **Pakistan** and **Bangladesh** termed as the deadliest countries of 2017.(CPJ)
- **Abdul Hakim Shimul, Samakal Shahjadpur, Bangladesh**
On February 3, 2017, a 42-years old Abdul Hakim was killed while covering the political unrest in Shahjadpur. He is remembered by his colleagues as an honest journalist.(CPJ)
- **Muhammad Jan, 'Qudrat. Qalat, Pakistan.**
On January 12, 2017, a 37 years old Jan was a reporter for Qudraet and also a press secretary at the press freedom group the Pakistan Media Council and a teacher at a secondary school in Qalat.(CPJ)
- The **White House** barred several news outlets from an off-camera press briefing on Friday. Organisations whose requests were denied included the Guardian, the New York Times, Politico, CNN, BuzzFeed, the BBC, the Daily Mail and others. Conservative publications such as Breitbart News, the One America News Network and the Washington Times were allowed into the meeting, as well as TV networks CBS, NBC, Fox and ABC. The Associated Press and Time were invited but boycotted the briefing.(The Guardian)
- Woman journalist **Tahereh Riahi** was arrested on 27 December 2016, as Iranian revolutionary guards came to her house. After searching her home , they arrested her and took her to Evin prison. There she remains in detention ever since without charges. She is the chief editor for the social section of news agency Borna and used to work for Iranian newspapers Shargh and Mardom Emrooz. Journalists in and around the world are concerned about her health and demand her immediate release.(IFJ)
- **United Kingdom** has recently ushered new proposals that threaten journalists with jail time of up to 14 years for obtaining leaked official materials, and would make it easy to categorise journalists, whistleblowers, and human rights defenders as 'spies'. (RSF)
- **Mehman Huseynov**, Azerbaijan's leading political blogger and chairman of the local press freedom group, was abducted in Central Baku on Monday 9 January and has been subjected to torture by Azerbaijan's authorities. (PEN Int.)

Economic Development

Bridging the gap: Minority women fill the void left by absence of female teachers in FATA



Ashraffudin Pirzada

Landikotal, Khyber Agency: Rukhsana Sultan is a teacher at the lone girls-school in Landikotal in Khyber Agency, a tribal district along the Pakistan- Afghanistan border.

For a woman from the troubled border region, Sultan's choice of profession and the subjects she teaches fall squarely in the male domain - more so when one considers she works in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) where women rarely venture out of home, much less to work.

Sultan is an instructor in physical education. When she is not busy training girls in physical education, she teaches in the class and also doubles up as sports-instructor, playing indoor and outdoor games with students.

She says physical exercise and sports builds up confidence among girls, encouraging them to excel in the male-dominated tribal society that stress purdah for women, with few opportunities for them to make a mark in fields outside the confines of homes.

"I chose a profession dominated by men because I feel nothing is impossible for women to achieve," said Sultan. "For

example, women can play sports. My students not only play cricket and football but also take part in outdoor games like long jump, high jump and other indoor games."

Women professionals like Sultan are hard to come by in the tribal society where a conservative cultural milieu discourages them from working, even when parents only want women to teach their girls in schools. Over the last 15 years, conflict in the region where schools have been bombed by militants and safety has become a major concern, women from outside the tribal region do not venture there for jobs, worsening the crisis of availability of women professionals.

"An important aspect of the girls' educational institutions in the tribal areas is the non-availability of qualified and trained teachers locally," says the research paper "Socio-Economic and Political Status of Women in FATA -The Process of Development and Phenomenon of Militancy" by Naila Aman Khan, a researcher at FATA Research Center. "Girls' schools in FATA could not be efficiently and meaningfully run without the availability of the qualified female teachers. Traditionally, there have been a very few women teachers available in FATA as most of the female imparting education in the girls' schools of FATA have been going to and from on regular basis from the adjoining district of KPK [Khyber Pakhtunkwa province]. However,

due to adverse security situation many of these female teachers have stopped going to FATA. Some of them were even killed by the militants," says the report.

In the absence of local professionals, it is women from local minorities based in the tribal areas who have risen to the occasion because they are not ethnic tribal Pashtuns. Even though locally integrated, religious minorities in the tribal areas have maintained their progressive outlook on women education and employment even when they follow purdah and stay sensitive to local sensibilities. One such woman teacher is Yasmeen Ara, 35, belonging to the local Christian community.

Born in Landikotal subdivision in Khyber Agency, Ara attended a local girls-school before going for a bachelor's degree and a Primary Teaching Course (PTC) from the virtual Allama Iqbal Open University because there are no higher education institutions for women locally. In 2007, Ara was appointed a primary teacher at the Government Girls Primary School in Ashkhel in Landikotal.

"We have never felt as a minority group in the strict Pashtun society because we have received kindness and respect from the local population," Ara told Truth Tracker. "It is for this reason that around 60 Christian women have adopted teaching as a profession to increase the ratio of girl education and empower women."

Haidar Ali Afridi, Assistant Agency Education Officer (AAEO), says there are 55 girls-schools including a Girls Higher Secondary School (GHS) and four Government Middle Schools (GMS) in Landikotal. More than 20,000 girls study in these schools.

Afridi said they needed at least three teachers at each school but due to unavailability of qualified female teachers, they had hired women from the Christian community to teach in schools.

“Most of the minority female teachers are dedicated to their jobs and dutiful,” said Afridi. “Still several positions for female teachers are vacant in primary and higher secondary schools. The cultural taboo of not allowing girls to take up jobs is dying and hopefully in the coming few years, we will not face shortage of female teachers.”

Kainat Andreas, another teacher from the Christian community, said she did not take up teaching by choice but to support HER parents. She said teaching was honourable, but she wanted to be a nurse.

“I wanted to be in the medical field but my parents asked me to adopt teaching as a profession,” said ANDREAS TOLD TRUTH . “Teaching was the last option for me but there are no other job opportunities in FATA for women. I am now happy with my job and motivated that other minority and Muslim girls are taking up teaching to support their families.”

Kiran Edwin, who recently completed intermediate schooling, is teaching at a private girls -school in Landikotal. She said her parents and brothers were jobless so she was forced to take up a job. She said due to shortage of female teachers locally,

several of her cousins were employed in different state-run and private schools.

Arshad Masih, Chairman Christian Community in Landikotal, said he had given his children Muslim names and they speak Pashtu, the language of the local population. However, despite integration and the services the minority people rendered, they were still second-class citizens in Pakistan. He said after a long struggle for basic and constitutional rights, the state of Pakistan had issued “B category” domicile certificates to minority members.

“Christians, even though they are considered a minority in Pakistan, have served the people and the state of Pakistan by working in different institution of Pakistan,” said Arshad. “It is time our services are recognized.”

Accountability

Distances to schools make FATA girls give up education



Maimoona Akhtar

Peshawar: Madina Shah, 9, lives in village Uchat in the tribal area of Lower Kurram Agency. She gave up education after primary school because there is no middle school for girls in her village.

“I was a position holder in my class,” says Shah told Truth Tracker. “But I couldn’t continue studies after primary school because I cannot access a middle school.”

In absence of a local middle school in her village, girls have to travel to another village to attend the school there. This, says Shah, is not acceptable to her parents and those of other girls from the village. Tribal traditions that put much stock in purdah and honour do not favour exposure and mobility of women and girls outside their families and villages.

Besides local socio-cultural obstacles, security concerns also get in the way of female education in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border where militants have targeted girl schools in

recent years.

Kurram Agency where Madina Shah lives has seen some of the worst incidents of sectarian conflict in recent years, deepening the divide between the local population along the mutually hostile Shia and Sunni lines.

Sharif Ul Nissa, a 12 year old student from the village of Bagan in Lower Kurram Agency left studies after middle school because her village has no high school for girls. Other villages that do have one are far from theirs, says Nissa, who wants to continue studies but cannot. “My parents do not feel secure sending me out of

village alone to attend school elsewhere," she says. "There are scores of girls who give up education due to long distances to schools. The government high schools are in Sadda and Alizai that fall in the Shia areas. Parents are afraid of sending their daughters to study in these areas due to the conflict between Shia and Sunni communities."

Nissa said the government should build high schools in Bagan, her village.

According to a 2014 survey conducted by Shaoor Foundation for Education and Awareness (SFEA), a non-government organization that works on girls' education,

FATA's population is estimated to be 3.69 million, of which the female population is 1.52 million. Of this, 14.7 per cent of girls between ages 3 to 13 have never been enrolled in any school. The overall school enrolment for FATA's schools stand at 27 per cent for girls and 73 per cent for boys.

"A subsequent decrease was observed in the transition of female students from primary to higher secondary levels from 33 per cent to 13 per cent – the lowest in the country," says the study.

Muhammad Asghar, who lives in the Central Kurram Agency, says he wish he could send his daughters to a school but they are situated a long distance from his village. "In Kurram agency, people have family feuds and enmities and they cannot freely send their daughters away from home," Asghar told Truth Tracker. "There are no proper transport facilities and security at schools for girls, which is why girls can't go to schools other than those in their villages."

He says there was no high school for girls in Central Kurram spread over 250 km, 22

primary schools and only 9 middle schools.

"All of these schools are situated in a way that they leave out several villages without any middle schools," says Asghar. "This leaves many girls without any access to middle schools and due to distances and poverty, parents stop sending their daughters to schools."

Former Additional Agency Educational Officer and a senior government teacher, Haji Maeen Gul, said girls from poor families had access to higher secondary schools in Kurram Agency and elsewhere in FATA.

"Those who are financially strong, send their boys and girls to Peshawar for further studies. I have also sent my daughters to Peshawar for higher education. If the government facilitates us by building schools for girls in our own villages and towns, most of the girls will continue education and serve their communities."

He said there was not a single high school in several villages of Lower Kurram including Bagan, Manduri, Chapri, Uchat, Doll Ragma, Lanha, Poloseen, Pastawana, Chinarak and Manatoo. "In these areas, many girls give up studies every year because of the distances between schools and villages."

According to Article 37 of Constitution of Pakistan, it is the responsibility of the state to provide compulsory and free education to all citizens of Pakistan. The 2013-2014 annual statistical report of the Directorate of Education in FATA says the government policy regarding the distance between schools and hometown should be 1.5km.

Managing Director of Bacha Khan Education Trust, Khadam Hussain, said the capacity of Education Department in

FATA Secretariat was low and there was no policy as such for education in FATA because of bad governance.

"Access to schools is difficult and distances between schools great," Hussain TOLD TRUTH TRACKER. "Due to hilly areas, parents feel insecure and stop sending their daughter to distant schools. It is the responsibility of FATA secretariat to provide schools according to the population of the area. If in the village there are more than 200 to 250 children, there should be a primary school. In villages where there are more 500 children, there should be one middle, secondary and high school."

If schools are developed according to the population of a particular area, he said, the distance between homes to school would be greatly reduced, girls would start going to schools and the literacy rate in FATA would improve.

"Mostly girls join madrassahs [religious seminaries] because they are close to their homes and can be easily accessed," says Hussain. "In madrassas, education is free for children and students learn basic reading and writing."

Meanwhile, Madina Shah, the student from Lower Kurram has started going to a madrassah in her village after finishing primary school. "I feel very sad when I see some of my friends from rich families go to schools and continue studies," she said. Religious studies are important but modern education is also necessary for our times."

Shah hopes her family would move to a village with accessible schools. "A middle school exists in Manduri but it is far from my village Uchat and I can't go there alone because my family doesn't allow me."

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Promise Tracking

PTI's promise to attract investors in KP stands compromised



Rehmat Mehsud

The Promise

PTI will attract overseas investment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Background

Participating in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Investment Roads show 2015 in Dubai in February last year, Khan had said: "We are setting up investment cells to make things easier for investors."

He had vowed that an office would be set up in the Chief Minister's Secretariat to specifically deal with investors; to 'redress any problems faced by investors'.

Imran had also announced the government was planning development of a mass transit system in the provincial capital city of Peshawar, which would be environment-friendly and help reduce congestion.

"KP wants to develop marble cities, granite processing plants. KP is an extremely fertile land for quality crops, fruit, and vegetables. Both national and international airlines connect to Peshawar and all of Pakistan is accessible with ease," he had said.

Tracking

Truth Tracker approached Abdul Karim, Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) from Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) and special assistant to chief minister on commerce and industry, who said that KP's investment; trade and commerce sectors are on takeoff position but in the long run.

"From the day-one, we have been trying to remove hurdles to facilitate investors," Karim remarked. He said that after broad-based consultations with the private sector, the KP coalition government has established Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zone Development Management Company (KPEZDMC).

"We have identified 17 or 18 locations throughout the province for establishing economic zones. The Chinese government has offered to give an industrial estate to each province in the CPEC project," he recalled.

He said that the chief minister's visit to China in September last year yielded positive results in favour of his province.

In addition, he said that the Chinese government has offered to extend all possible technological help to units, which have no resources but want up gradation. "We have offered incentives to local and foreign investors after six months of their commercial production," he added.

He said the KP government is working on war-footing to exploit rich mineral of the province and Fata region.

"We have set up a separate cell known as one-window operation of KP Economic Zone to facilitate investors after Khan's announcement in Dubai last year," Karim added.

He also said that one-window operation is working to remove hurdles in the way of investors. "The incentives include that if you want to establish an industry then the provincial government will give you 5 per cent mark-up back," he added.

Haji Muhammad Afzal, president KP Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KPCCI), said: "The PTI members are immature and don't



know how to work in tandem."

But the chamber of commerce, he said has its own world and it is largely linked to federal government. The only positive step the PTI has taken was that to abolish the Sarhad Development Authority (SDA), which was virtually a dead body and formed a new body comprised with private sector members to deal with setting up new industrial estates, he added.

Afzal said the PTI should have focused on power generation and exploitation natural and untapped resources soon after assuming the office but he is not sure they would deliver on the investment sector because they have almost one and a half year at its disposal.

"The PTI was in a position to generate almost 10,000 megawatts of electricity but nothing could be done in power sector," he rued.

Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha, Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) from Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), said that investors often flock to the areas offering attractive opportunities but here in KP there is nothing on the ground to woo investors.

"KP couldn't utilize the budget properly even. Let me tell you very frankly, not in capacity as PPP member but in capacity of common citizen, that there is no commerce and trade activities on the ground," he added.

When approached for comments on investment and trade activities in KP, Zahid Khan, a senior leader and spokesperson of Awami National Party (ANP), said: "There are zero investment activities on the ground but yes there are a lot of investments in KP if you directly ask PTI chairman."

Independent Viewpoint

Zahid Shinwari, former president KPCCI, told Truth Tracker that the only positive aspect of PTI rule is their industrial policy in which they have offered attractive incentives to investors.

In addition, reforms were introduced in the institutes of Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA), he added.

"In policy matters the PTI is doing very well but there is nothing on the ground if you talk on implementation stage of their policies," he noted.

The PTI has reformed TEVTA, abolished the SDA, which was replaced with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zone Development Company on modern line and it's vice chairman is from private

sector.

But again, he said there is no industrial investment and they plan to establish industrial estates but there is snail's pace progress on them.

For example, he said that people are waiting for the promised expansion of the sprawling Hattar Industrial Estate and extension of Gadoon Industrial Estate. The PTI, he said could not built its promised industrial estate in Peshawar so far.

Similarly, the PTI is planning to build two new industrial estates in Rashakai and Kohat district but with no progress reported as of yet. "There is no progress to woo investors in KP," he noted.

When asked how he would sum up the PTI past performance to bolster the KP investment sector, Shinwari said: "They have practically done nothing. They are wasting time on petty issues. They have nothing solid things in hand to show people."

Ruling

In the light of comments and views of advisor to chief minister on commerce and industry, KP Chamber of Commerce and Industries incumbent and former officials and opposition lawmakers, Truth Tracker rules that the PTI pledge to bolster the KP investment sector stands compromised.

Promise Tracking

PML-N didn't live up its promise to make Pakistan the largest exporter in the region



Durdana Najam

The Promise

The Pakistan Muslim League-N had promised in its 2013 manifesto that upon coming to power, it would increase the total share of Pakistan's export especially in food to become the largest exporter in the region.

Background

Pakistan is the 27th largest economy in the world. Political instability, corruption, and insignificant infrastructure development have been the bane of the development of export in the country. Today Pakistan is contributing 0.15 per cent to the total world export. Regionally Pakistan's export figures are dismal as compared to other nations such as India, Bangladesh, and Vietnam. In spite of political instabilities besetting these countries, they have managed a hike in exports due to aggressive export policies.

In 2016 both the food and textile industries in the country registered a negative growth. Apparently, we exported more rice in term of weight in financial year (FY) 2016 than FY 2015, but not in term of value. Few of the reasons for this decline were diminishing the international price of our export material and the slow rise in the quantity that it could not translate into export progress.

The federal government announced an Export Enhancement Initiation program worth Rs 180 billion to increase the competitiveness of the export sector. Pakistan's economic woes stem from the energy crises; however, this new program eliminated electricity and gas load shedding and, reduced the electricity price by nearly Rs 5 per unit for the industry. Even though PML-N is dubbed as a businessmen's party, the efforts to revive an export-led growth remains glum through out the party's existing tenure. On the other hand, the import bill of Pakistan has been on the rise.

In the first half of the FY 2016, the trade deficit has gone up to 22 per cent reaching \$ 14,490 million. From July 2016 to December 2016, the total exports were \$ 9912 million while total imports in the same period were \$ 24, 402 million. The government had set a trade deficit target, for the current financial year, of \$ 30 billion. Unfortunately, in the first half of the fiscal year that is from July to December 2016, the deficit is already \$ 22 billion.

Food export

Pakistan's food export, account for only 0.22 per cent in the



global market of nearly two trillion dollars. The country exported food item of \$ 3.4 billion in 2015. The reasons for this low productivity are an antiquated farming mechanism, post-harvest losses, the high cost of doing business and shortage of gas and electricity.

According to Khurram Dastagir the Minister of Commerce and Industries, the lack of growth in exports revenue is due to price reduction and economic recession.

Tracking

Mian Najeebuddin Awasi, Parliamentary Secretary for Commerce in the National Assembly told Truth Tracker that both the government, industrialists and, traders were to be blamed for the decline of the national exports. He said that unless the government and the trader community were on the same page, the economic issues could never be resolved. He blamed the trader community for their desire to become rich overnight and, in the process, tarnishing Pakistan's image abroad with bad business practices.

Senator Saleem H. Mandviwalla, Chairperson Standing Committee on Finance Revenue Economics Affairs Statistics and Privatization disagreed with Najeebuddin that the traders are not cooperative; instead, he blamed the government for making business policies in isolation.

Saleem accused the government for lack of focus and planning. "Unless we bring down the input cost of farm produce, we will remain uncompetitive in the region and the world market. Last year there was 40 per cent decline in the cultivation of Cotton. Every farmer is growing sugar cane because it is a cash crop. It is the duty of the government to convince the farmers to grow

wheat and cotton instead of sugarcane,” said Saleem.

Najeebuddin said that national economic policies are usually rigid and lack the spirit of incentivising the business community and the farmers. “Every government that comes into power does projects that provide it with quick success or projection. No body, is concerned doing things for posterity or something that would have long-term implications,” he added. Najeebuddin argued for the elimination of trust deficit between the business community and the government.

Muhammad Baqi Moulvi, Chairman Rice Export Association of Pakistan, told Truth Tracker about the declining trend in rice export in Pakistan. He said that once 80 per cent of Saudi Arabia’s rice import was fulfilled by Pakistan, which had gone down to 20 per cent. Rice export to Iran and Dubai had also diminished from 75 and 60 per cent to 10 and 30 per cent respectively.

“When Iran was under economic sanctions, it was still allowed to import food items, but Pakistan, in an effort to please the US, stopped exporting rice to Iran. This gap was filled by India with the result that India is now exporting 80 per cent rice to Iran,” said Baqi. He told Truth Tracker that Iran had even offered Pakistan to adjust the payment of electricity Iran was exporting to Quetta against rice the latter was importing from Pakistan.

Baqi further added that since we did not have, even to date, any direct banking channel with Iran, we export rice via Dubai that pushes the cost of production further up, making our export costlier.

Muhammad Ashraf, spokesperson of Minister for Commerce Khurram Dastagir, while talking to Truth Tracker agreed that Pakistan has gone way down in exports. He said that it was in 1995 that Pakistan developed last variety of Basmati Rice named Super Basmati. Since then, he stated, our research and scientists have stopped being innovative. He informed that now Indian PUSA 1121 Basmati Rice holds the reign in the Rice market especially in Gulf.

Another official of the Ministry of Commerce who does not want to be named told Truth Tracker that the Rice Research Institute, Kala Shah Kaku, established in 1962, received funds for the first time this year for research and development. Otherwise, he told, scientists were given salaries and paltry resources to carry on with their jobs.

The solution Baqi said rest in two things. One, we need to have a government that is stable. Our governments, Baqi lamented, most of the time, are busy protecting their hold on power, leaving

them with little time to concentrate on real issues. Second, technocrats should be appointed under every minister to give professional advice. Many problems, said Baqi, are due to the short-sightedness or lack of vision of our politicians.

Asad Umer, MNA from Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaaf shared his view point with Truth Tracker and laid the entire blame for the decline in exports on the wrong policies of the government. He said the recently announced farmer package had been made useless due to corruption giving way to the influential agriculturists to get away with the significant share of the package and leaving the small farmers dry.

Asad alluded to rising unemployment in the country owing to the underperformance of manufacturing sector and worsening business environment. Taking about the food industry he said, with the agriculture sector in ruins how could we expect the international market to respond in a positive way. He stressed the need for research-based polices and programs to boost the economy.

Independent Viewpoint

Salman Shah, former minister of finance and a leading economist, said that it was the low productivity of our agriculture sector that had damaged our export economy. By low productivity, he meant that the output per acre does not correspond to the input. Elaborating on low productivity Salman enumerated the issues such as usage of substandard seeds, inefficient water management, expensive or low quality fertilizers and high cost of energy. All these factors he said had contributed into the rising cost of doing business.

World over, Salman emphasized, there is a sharp decline in the prices of food commodities but because of high prices Pakistan cannot compete and has been shunted. When asked that as to why the government had not been undervaluing the currency to make export competitive, Shah said that, in that case, Pakistan’s external liabilities would rise due to increased debt servicing, which according to Shah would exacerbate the fiscal deficit. “Such measures could benefit the economy in short-term, for longer term we need to improve our productivity.”

Ruling

PML-N has been unable to keep up to its promise of improving exports after coming to power. In fact, there has been a sharp decline in the export.

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Promise Tracking

PML-N failed to setup protection centers and shelter homes for women



Aroosa Shaukat

The Promise

The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, enacted in February 2016, says that Punjab Government will setup protection centers and shelter homes for women, victim of violence. The law provides for establishment of a system for 'protection, relief and rehabilitation of women against violence'.

Background

Since 2010, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz government has enacted various laws that deal with women rights, including those relating to workplace harassment, representation as well as exploitation in family and marriage disputes. In 2015, the then provincial Law Minister had introduced the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence bill in a bid, to enable the State to ensure protection and facilitation of women, in the Punjab Assembly. The bill stirred much controversy with not just the right wing political and religious parties opposing the penalties proposed in it, but also by women rights activists who claimed it did not provide sufficient penalties. After much consultation, the bill was finally passed by the provincial assembly nine months after it was introduced.

Plan

The law listed several implementation provisions including the establishment of a toll free helpline and taking measures for mass awareness of the act. But one of the most important implementation measures provided for in the law was the setting up of protection centres and shelter homes for women victims of violence. While they were to be set up in a phased manner, the centres would ensure provision of several facilities including police reporting, registration of criminal cases, medical examination, first aid, psychological counselling and legal aid, among others.

Tracking

With the passage of a year since the enactment of the act, the government has yet to launch a protection centre. But the government claims the first of its kind centre is ready and will be launched in Multan on Women's Day – March 8. Speaking to Truth Tracker, Provincial Law Minister Rana Sanaullah says that the government had planned to initiate the implementation in south of the province, with the law giving the government provision to specify the date and area through notification for its implementation. According to Sanaullah, the centre, which is near completion, will cover three divisions of the southern province with central and northern areas under consideration in the next stages.

As for the time that has so far elapsed since the enactment of the law, Sanaullah says for the police to take action, a parallel infrastructure providing all necessary resources to an aggrieved woman needed to be in place first. And for that infrastructure, he says, legislation was a prerequisite. "Only the police couldn't have done it without a supporting infrastructure for the victims," he adds. With the Multan centre awaiting its inauguration this Women's Day, Sanaullah says the centre is a detailed project that offers multiple resources under one roof, and for which time was required for not just construction but also induction and training of staff. "It has been a speedy process so far and we hope to ensure monitoring and sustainability," he says.

According to PMLN MPA Azma Zahid Bukhari, the



implementation has come a long way. While Azma says that the first protection centre, also called the Violence against Women Centre, is all set for launch in Multan next month, hiring and training of protection officer and staff for the centre had been done as well. "There was a lot of unneeded controversy surrounding the law but we managed to move past it. It is an on-going process," she says. The lawmaker adds that after Multan, the government aims to launch similar centres in five other major cities of the province by transforming already existing infrastructure, such as Dar-ul-Aman. As for sensitization, besides mass awareness programs in educational institutions, she says the opposition also played its role – by opposing the law. "Through that continuous debate and opposition, they generated a lot of awareness and people started learning more about it."

Opposition lawmaker Saadia Sohail of the Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf disagrees with the notion that progress in implementation has been made. "We supported the law but there is nothing on ground," says Saadia adding that the government had failed to even inaugurate the first protection centre in Multan during this time. Saadia was one of the women lawmakers from the opposition who withdrew all the proposed amendments to the law during its passage in the assembly despite a symbolic protest absence by their male colleagues. "There is no budgetary allocation to ensure long term sustainability and nor do we see any mass awareness campaign by the government."

Independent Viewpoint

But while there may be some delays, rights activist Umme Laila says the real challenges are for budgetary allocations, awareness and monitoring mechanism. "Outreach is a problem across all 36 districts," she says adding future monitoring will help determine the effectiveness of the implementation mechanism. Executive Director at HomeNet Pakistan and Lahore division member for the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, Laila says implementation has progressed in terms of the finalizing of the soon-to-be inaugurated Multan protection centre, appointment of relevant staff as well as up-gradation of an already existing helpline. "We can't say there is full implementation. It will require time as well as mass awareness. But while there isn't a 100% implementation, things are on track."

Ruling

In consideration of the views expressed by independent observers and with the government hopeful of inaugurating the protection centre in March, and subsequent centres in other parts of the province, work is underway to ensure implementation of the said law. However, the provincial government, with election year around the corner, had better pick up pace. Women voters will make a note of implementation of the Act.

Promise Tracking

Pakistan People's Party failed to revive student unions



Durdana Najam

The Promise

During its election campaign for 2008 general elections, Pakistan People's Party had pledged to revive student union after coming into power. The promise was part of party's manifesto as well.

Background

On February 9, 1984, Ziaul Haq imposed a ban on student union in all the colleges of the country. Apparently, the ban was enforced to curb violence on the campuses between the Left and Right wing parties. In 1988, during her first tenure as the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto restored the student unions. Three years later, the unionization was challenged in the Supreme Court of Pakistan on the ground that they were inciting violence. In 1993 a three-member bench of the SC headed by Chief Justice Afzal Zullah, reinstated the ban on the 'political nature' of the student union. The court, however, asked the government to develop a mechanism for the peaceful revival of the student union in the country.

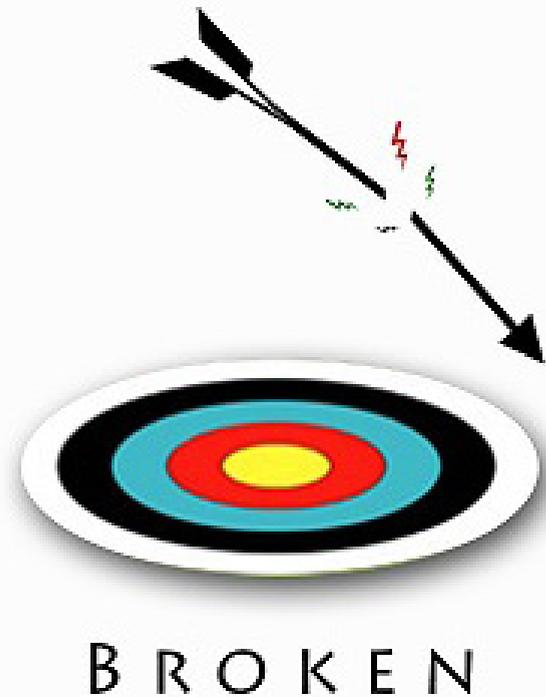
In January 1953, the Democratic Student's Front under the leadership of Dr Sarwar, then a student of Dow Medical College, began a student movement to bring to light the anomalies affecting the academic institutions of Karachi. The movement gained momentum within no time and spread across the country. DSF also started publishing a fortnightly called Student Herald. When the US joined the alliance against communism DSF was banned along with the communist party of Pakistan. Herald too was shut down. Later many students of DSF joined the National Student Federation (NSF). The 1969 protest and then the downfall of 1969 the military rule of General Ayub Khan, was led by the students of NSF.

Giving reasons for the ban on the Student Union the leader of Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf, Ijaz Chaudhry, who himself had led student union from the front, told Truth Tracker: "Violence on campuses was engineered by different political parties to perpetuate their ancestral hold on politics. Circumstances were created to deny the emergence of leadership from academic institutions through division within the student unions on ideological lines. It not only rendered the union weak but also became the reason for its demise."

Tracking

PPP won 2008 elections and formed a government in the center. Standing by its promise, Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani in his inaugural speech in the National Assembly ordered to lift the ban on the student union. Notification to that effect was issued, and a committee was formed under the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. Nothing happened. To find out what led to the procrastination, Truth Tracker talked to the leadership of PPP and other political and student organizations.

Pakistan People Party's Punjab Chapter President, Qamar Zaman Kaira, talking to Truth Tracker said his party had always wanted to see Student Unions revived. He added that the reason why his party could not make any effort in this direction was its inability to garner enough support within the assembly. Secondly, said Kaira, the party had so many targets before it from 2008 to 2013 that virtually no space was left for it to concentrate on other issues. However, he said being an essential component of the democratic process; the party had been raising voice for the revival of Student Union. "I agree my party could not implement the order passed by our Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani." Said



Kaira.

On January 12, 2017, the Senate Committee of the Whole with Mian Raza Rabbani in the chair had decided to draft a resolution on the revival of the student union in education institutions.

Sheikh Rasheed, the leader of Awami Muslim League, said though it was a good idea to have the student union, it was also, he acknowledged not advisable to have students running around the campuses with guns in hands. "So much intolerance has penetrated in the society that people are not at ease to listen to one another or give space to the opinion of others in a peaceful manner," Unless the culture of intolerance was done with said Rasheed to Truth Tracker, student union would not deliver productive results.

Former Chairman Higher Education Commission, Dr Atta ur Rahman told Truth Tracker that the committee formed to spearhead the revival of student union had partially worked under his supervision; however, nothing had been heard of it since his retirement, since October 2008, said Rehman.

Former Nazim-e-Aala Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba Pakistan and former president of Muttahida Talaba Mahaz, Muhammad Naveed Anwer, giving detail about the reasons why student unions were banned said the students were divided on ethnic lines leading to sectarian sentiments in the campus. It was a turf war that resulted in the weaponisation of campuses, he elaborated. Further adding, he said, the mind-set behind this polarization was the fear in communities that if they failed to raise voice for their rights, they would be left behind. "The situation had become so intense and volatile that the unions were at last banned in colleges." Talking about the effects of the ban, Naveed said since the prohibition the quality of education, teacher, teacher-student relations and leadership has gone down.

Jabran bin Salman, the President Lahore Chapter, Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba, agreed that the revival of the student union is significant. Talking to Truth Tracker, he said for the restoration of quality in education system students should be allowed to become the stakeholder, so that they could participate in policy making. "The new student union should be an amalgamation of student, teacher and non-teaching staff so that all issues affecting an academic institution are addressed." He further said that it was a lie that student unions were banned because of the fear of violence. "More student had died after the ban than when there was no ban." An 18-year-old person, Salman retorted, is allowed to elect his representative in elections, but he is considered immature to lead a student union, what a dichotomy!

Independent Viewpoint

Iqbal Haider, a social activist, who had done extensive work on the Student Union from the platform of an NGO, Bargad, while talking to Truth Tracker, said the ban on student union was laid because of unstoppable violence that had ripped the peace and academic environment of campuses across Pakistan. The same situation prevailed in India as well, but the Indian government, Haider informed, handled the situation professionally. He further explained that the Indian government after applying the temporary ban on the student union revived it with the condition that the student would not represent any political party in the

campuses and that only those students would be allowed to contest election who had secure relatively higher marks in exams. These measures Haider told Truth Tracker could be replicated in Pakistan as well. "The main issue in Pakistan is that political parties had been given a free hand to use students for their political interests,"

Ruling

In spite of repeated promises and resolutions, the PPP had been unable to restore student union in the colleges.

Promise Tracking

PM's promise to create southern Punjab, Bahawalpur provinces stands broken



Rehmat Mehsud

The Promise

Canvassing for 2013 elections, incumbent Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had promised to carve out more provinces such as Southern Punjab and Bahawalpur provinces if he were elected to power.

Background

Participating Back in December 2012, the premier had said that creation of these small units would help the country flourish.

"I am the greatest supporter of creating more provinces. Come with me to create Southern Punjab and Bahawalpur provinces. I will be the first man to sign it," Sharif had said.

Tracking

Truth Tracker approached Senator Mushahid Ullah Khan of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to know about the status of PM's promise regarding creation of southern Punjab and Bahawalpur provinces, Mushahid said he (the prime minister) had not made a formal promise. He added, "Nawaz had only said that if other provinces can be created on administrative basis then these provinces can be carved out."

He recalled rather it (southern province) was the slogan of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), as they had repeatedly promised to deal with the issue but it was more of a political gimmick.

Mushahid said his party's stance was that if there was need for creation of other provinces such as Hazara province on administrative basis then PML-N has no objection to form the southern province, however, there has been no formal promise by his party.

When asked would PML-N support the need of southern provinces on administrative basis, he said: "Look everything has its own priority. Some political parties are doing dirty politics and you need to respond to them and our political position was accepted by the people that's why the masses voted for us and our candidates won with thumping majority from southern Punjab and Bahawalpur," he recalled.

Mushahid said those who were making tall claims and the people like Muhammad Ali Durni, a minister during former president Gen. (Retd) Pervez Musharraf tenure, have disappeared from the scene like "seasonal quails."

Without naming any political party, he said that they (politicians



of opposite camp) are now trying to oust Nawaz Sharif from power with the help of Panama case but it would be impossible.

The people of Pakistan, he said have rejected PPP and voted for PML-N because the former was just making promises and failed to deliver.

Faisal Karim Khan Kundi, former speaker National Assembly and PPP leader, said that these all are fake promises by the prime minister to create southern Punjab or Bahawalpur provinces.

What about the PML-N's promise of reduction in power load shedding within a year or six months, Kundi questioned? "Yes, maybe electricity load shedding is reduced in Punjab but in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa we have 16 to 18 hours load shedding daily," he added.

The PML-N, he said has all fake promises because the ruling party has done nothing to implement the National Action Plan (NAP) or to bring some sort of judicial reforms. Faisal accused the PML-N for concentrating on materializing only those promises, which have had some business benefits for them. "The PML-N knows the day southern Punjab comes into being their political power will die its own death," he added.

Shafqat Mehmood, a lawmaker from Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI), said on PML-N's promise: "They have no program (to create the two provinces) otherwise they could have done it much earlier."

Independent Viewpoint

Hassan Askari Rizvi, a political analyst, said of PML-N promise to create southern Punjab and Bahawalpur provinces that it seems next to impossible to honour the promise at this juncture of time.

“The party made the promise before the 2013 polls but the PML-N didn’t make a single mention of creation of the provinces since it is in power for the last three years almost,” he noted.

For creation of more provinces, he said a party needs homework and permission from the National Assembly and the Provincial Assembly but they didn’t take a single step for the last three years.

When asked whether the promise could be materialized as the PML-N has almost two years at its disposal, Hassan said there is no hope although Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had clearly said to create southern Punjab and Bahawalpur provinces.

He recalled that PPP had a stance to create southern Punjab

province and the PML-N in response had said it would create two provinces such as southern Punjab and Bahawalpur provinces in an apparent attempt to neutralize PPP.

“Neither me nor you saw or heard any statement by the prime minister or any other PML-N leader regarding creation of more provinces,” Hassan added.

Ruling

Keeping in view the comments and views of ruling, opposition lawmakers and independent analysts, Truth Tracker rules the PML-N promise to create southern Punjab and Bahawalpur provinces stands broken.

Human Rights

FATA’s lone woman journalist breaks barriers to highlight women issues



Sheraz Akbar

Peshawar: What makes Mahrukh Jabeen, a journalist based in the Kurram Agency, distinct from others working in the tribal areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border is her gender. She is the only woman journalist of the hundreds reporting on the troubled region.

Jabeen, from Parachinar in the Kurram Agency, works as a correspondent for the Tribal News Network (TNN), a Peshawar based online and radio newswire service. She is the only female journalist in her town and agency. None of the other six of the seven agencies in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), stretched over 2500 kms along the Durand Line, has any.

“Journalism is a difficult job for men in FATA but for women it is way tougher

due to zero tolerance among tribesmen for working women,” Jabeen told Truth Tracker. Her hometown of Parachinar has been in the news since the 1980s for some of the worst outbreaks of sectarian conflict.

More recently, Parachinar was cut-off from the rest of the country for more than four years when in 2007 the Taliban closed down the Thall-Parchinar Road, blocking travel and supplies to the town.

According to the ‘Profile of Press Clubs in FATA’, an MA thesis by Rehan Muhammad, a former student of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Peshawar, there are more than 324 journalists in FATA. They work with different national and international news organisations, as registered members of 12 different press clubs in the seven agencies and six frontier regions of FATA. The research, published in 2013, said not one of them was a female.

Jabeen took up journalism recently after TNN approached her to report on issues faced by the women population of her agency. FATA remains a deeply conservative region, where women rarely venture out of home, much less to work.

Centuries old customs like Swara, Vulvar and Tor that put women at disadvantage are still practiced. Over the last 15 years, mobility and safety has become a major concern in the region due to militancy and military operations, further setting back the lot of women about whom there is little by way of news or information in mainstream media.

Naila Aman Khan, a Lecturer of Sociology at the Institute of Social Work, Sociology and Gender Studies, University of Peshawar, says in her thesis report “Tigah”:

“The tribeswomen do not have any say in any affairs that regulate, rather govern, their lives, let alone in general matters.



Women in FATA do not inherit or own any property.” Khan mentions the threat to social workers like Farida from Khyber Agency, who while working to create economic rights awareness among women of her area, was killed in her village in 2012.

“For women in the tribal areas hurdles, not charity, begin at home,” Jabeen told Truth Tracker.

She says everyone in her family tells her to abandon journalism as they feel ashamed of her voice on the radio, because it is heard by men outside her family.

“It is my passion and spirit that keeps me motivated every day for this challenging job in a hostile region,” Jabeen remarked, pride and confidence evident in her eyes, the only visible part of her veiled face.

Had it not been for her uncle who persisted in his support for her despite resistance from the rest of the family, Jabeen would have long given up her career.

Shafaq Saba, a TNN correspondent who also belongs to FATA but is based in Peshawar, says that a grown-up woman could never imagine stepping outside home while living in FATA.

“Tribesmen do not like their women to be exposed to the outer world visually or verbally. If a woman must go out for reasons of emergency or otherwise, she must be accompanied by another or a male relative” he told Truth Tracker.

Saba says tribal men are strict, conservative and excessively possessive of the women of their families. “In tribal culture where the joint family system endures, every man of the family is like a ‘guardian’ to all women of the family

and dictate their will and decisions about them,” he told Truth Tracker.

“How can a woman imagine taking up a profession like journalism without rebelling against such a stern and authoritarian environment?” .

While absence of opportunities for women and the socio-cultural odds stacked against them is a grave problem, say women rights’ activists, the fact that women take up journalism means women-specific problems in the tribal areas remain hidden from the rest of the world.

Sana Ejaz, a Peshawar based social activist, says a multitude of issues related to health, education, employment and women’s rights violations go unreported in media. As a result, they have gone unattended and unaddressed for decades in FATA.

“The main reason for this is lack of women journalists, with male journalists having no access to the female population in FATA due to socio-cultural reasons,” Ejaz told Truth Tracker. “Even if women-specific issues arise, media in FATA cannot approach victims or women officials or experts to get their comments. Media ends up having comments from men which leaves out the gender perspective from their reporting.”

Women in FATA don’t let men of the family know their problems because they are not open enough with each other, Ejaz believes.

“This is especially true of taboo topics that always remain undiscussed among both genders,” she said.

“How can men explain such women issues to media, then?” she says. “Men let their women endure their problems alone without exposing them to media to address them.”

However, not everybody thinks that not having women journalists in FATA puts the women population in the region at a disadvantage. Akmal Khan Qadri, a journalist and ex-president of Landi Kotal Press Club in Khyber Agency, says: “Lack of female journalists in FATA is not an issue at all. Women have a lot of other immediate problems to take care of [then take up journalism.]”

Qadri, who has been a journalist for more than a decade now, claims that male journalists could do their job more effectively than a women would be able to. “If we (males) can do our job perfectly, why should women be out of homes for the same reason, putting their tribe’s honour at stake?”

Qadri says the tribal people keep their women confined to homes because they respect them according to their centuries-old tribal culture.

Tayyab Afridi, Director TNN, says since its inception, TNN has trained more than 25 women from FATA as reporters, news editors and newscasters, several of them now working with different news organisations in Khyber Pakhtunkwa and other provinces. “This indicates their (tribal women) potential for journalism but none of them could dare continue in the profession, upon returning to their hometowns, due to the extremely unfriendly and unwelcoming environment there.”

Women in FATA, Tayyab says, continue to suffer because their voices are suppressed instead of being amplified. “In a milieu where male journalists can hardly approach women, female journalists could serve as whistle blowers to bring their issues to the fore.”

Economic Development

Foreign radio broadcasts popular among the home bound women in FATA



Maria Akhtar

Peshawar: In the ill-lit studio of Radio Tehzeeb, Romeen Khan smiles and clears her throat before speaking into the microphone: "This is Radio Tehzeeb and I am your host Romeen Khan. What do you want to talk about on the programme today?"

Romeen is a presenter at Radio Tehzeeb, the FM station based in Peshawar's Karkhano Bazaar, also known as the smuggler's bazaar where one can find anything from cheap Chinese goods to high-end British toiletries and American supplies meant for marines in Afghanistan – filched from containers and smuggled into Pakistan.

Romeen's radio broadcasts youth and entertainment programmes for audiences in Khyber Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Her programme "Rangoona", or colours, seeks to engage listeners in discussion around issues in a region that is not allowed to have local media of its own under the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), a parallel law under which the tribal area is governed.

"The audience response to my programme is good," Khan told Truth Tracker. Khan is from Charssada district in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering FATA. "Men call to request songs and

speaking about issues but it is the women from FATA who love participating in the programme."

According to Khan, she gets regular feedback from listeners, with some 80 SMS messages and 50 calls daily. Sixty per cent of these are from women in FATA."

"Due to cultural and traditional barriers in FATA," said Khan. "we do not have any female presenters from FATA," Khan said. Through her programmes, she tries to spread awareness among her female listeners about the issues they face.

"I try to be a role model to women in FATA, encouraging them to get education and be aware of their rights and responsibilities. And most of all, to live their lives as they wish to."

She says that although women in FATA are still faced with cultural barriers, there is a "noticeable change" in their behaviour towards the issues that affect them.

"Earlier, women did not even have permission to call the radio station and express their likes and dislikes on radio or give their names on the air. Now they regularly call the radio station to talk about programmes, the content they prefer and their issues."

According to a research study titled 'People's dependency on Foreign Radio News [in FATA]' conducted by Danish Babar, a former student of the journalism

department at the University of Peshawar, several studies over the last 15 years have established that radio is a popular medium in the border region.

"In FATA due to some cultural and traditional barriers as well as low literacy rate, women do not have access to media outlets like radio, TV and print which directly and indirectly affect their lives. For example, they are unaware of their basic and fundamental rights, far away from education and entertainment etcetera," The report stated.

Over the last 15 years, the FATA Secretariat that carries out development projects in the tribal area had set up four state-owned FM radio stations in the region.

One of them, in Wana in South Waziristan, was blown up by the Taliban in 2006 and the other three – two in North Waziristan and one in Khyber Agency – were closed down in 2013 after funds dried up.

In 2016, the political administration in Bajaur allowed a private FM station – Shamaal Radio – to broadcast in the tribal agency.

In addition to Tehzeeb and Shamaal Radio, the state-owned Radio Pakistan can also be heard in the border region. But according to the study by Danish Babar,

International radio broadcasts from Voice of America, Mashaal Radio and the BBC

remain widely popular “because of quality transmission and reception, credible information, timings, news presentation style, interactive, agenda, programme formats and balanced content.”

The research study says that more than 80 per cent of men and over 70 per cent of women sampled in FATA regularly listened to radio. However, the FM stations based there before 2013 rarely did programmes for the women population in the tribal area.

“The three radio stations of FATA under the government control, neglected [women listeners] and the contents were mostly of interest to men,” says the study.

Asiya Shah, a student from FATA, says she listens to special broadcasts for women in FATA on VoA and Mashaal Radio Station in the evening. They bring out the real talent and voice of women in FATA, she says, and

discuss their health and education issues. She says she prefers programmes that seek to create awareness among the male population of FATA about the basic rights of women.

“[I want programmes] to make the FATA men understand the importance of female education and to make women understand their fundamental rights and prevent the physical violence they face.”

Zarmeena, a housewife in Khyber tribal agency, says she listens to different radio programmes on VoA’s Deewa Radio and the BBC with great interest because women in the border areas do not have access to television for cultural and religious reasons.

“I like listening to health programmes where a doctor advises women on their health problems and suggest remedies,” says Zarmeena. “Other than health issues,

I also like listening to entertainment programmes.”

Shah Nawaz, a tribesman from FATA, says that women in the region are not allowed to go out of their houses. “Radio is the only medium for them to keep themselves entertained and informed about different aspects of life, religion, health, education etc.”

About the preferences of women radio listeners, Program Manager Zahid Khan of Shamaal Radio in Bajaur Agency says that 40 per cent of their programming is reserved for female audience. The programmes, he said, had “awareness” content about health, education and other issues. “Female’s feedback and participation in these programmes is more than 60 per cent whereas the peak time for their calls is between 10am to 12pm.”

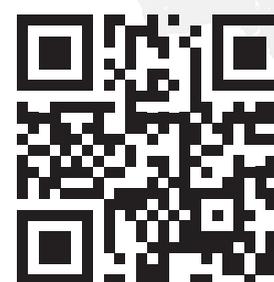


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Commentary

Whither the Muslim World's NATO?



Dr. James M. Dorsey

Controversy and uncertainty over the possible appointment of a Pakistani general as commander of a 40-nation, Saudi-led, anti-Iranian military alliance dubbed the Muslim world's NATO goes to the core of a struggle for Pakistan's soul as the country reels from a week of stepped up political violence.

It also constitutes a defining moment in Saudi relations with Pakistan, historically one of the Gulf state's staunchest allies and a country where the kingdom is as much part of the problem as it is part of the solution. Finally, whether the general accepts the post or not is likely to be a bellwether of the Muslim world's ability to free itself of the devastating impact of Saudi-like Sunni ultra-conservatism and bridge rather than exasperate sectarian divides.

Retired Pakistani military chief of staff General Raheel Sharif's acceptance of the command of the alliance, the Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism, would kill several birds with one stone. The alliance, created in 2015 to bolster Saudi Arabia's two-year old, flailing intervention in Yemen and counter Iran, has so far largely been a paper tiger.

The alliance has staged military exercises that appeared to target Iran but has not yet established a joint command or command infrastructure. The appointment of General Shareef could potentially help

the alliance evolve into a force that is credible, assuming that he can overcome widespread hesitancy towards it across the Muslim world.

In personal terms, the appointment would award Mr. Sharif for opposing the Pakistani parliament rejection in 2015 of a Saudi request for military support in Yemen.

The decision took Saudi Arabia by surprise given that Pakistan has been one of the world's foremost beneficiaries, if not the largest, of Saudi government and non-governmental largess and its dependency on remittances from Pakistani workers in the kingdom.

The appointment of General Sharif would have also been a favour to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, a politician and businessman with close ties to the kingdom who like the general favoured Pakistani military support in Yemen. It would remove the popular general as a potential political rival of the prime minister. Namesakes, Messrs Sharif are not related to one another.

The uncertainty about General Raheel's appointment that has been lingering since it was first announced two months ago, and then been called into question is indicative of strains in relations between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, once the closest of nations in the Muslim world.

In a telling tale of the times, remittances to Pakistan from Saudi Arabia dropped 5.8 percent over the last seven months while cheaper and better trained Indians

and Bangladeshis have begun to replace Pakistani manpower. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has deported 39,000 Pakistanis since October as part of its crackdown on militants.

Abdullah Ghulzar Khan, a Pakistani national who lived in Saudi Arabia for 12 years, last year blew himself up in a parking lot near the US consulate in the Red Sea port of Jeddah. Fifteen Pakistanis have since been arrested on suspicion of being militants. Two of them were believed to be part of a plot to attack the city's Al-Jawhara Stadium with a truck carrying 400 kg of explosives during a Saudi Arabia-UAE soccer match that was attended by 60,000 spectators.

The arrests like the story of Tashfeen Malik, the Pakistani woman who together with her American-Pakistani husband, gunned down 14 people in San Bernardino, California, in December 2015, tell a much bigger tale about the risks inherent in Saudi backing at home and abroad, including Pakistan, of puritan, supremacist interpretations of Islam.

Ms. Malik moved with her parents to Saudi Arabia when she was a toddler to escape sectarian skirmishes and family disputes. In the kingdom, the family turned its back on its Sufi and Barelvi traditions that included visiting shrines, honouring saints and enjoying Sufi trance music, practices rejected by the kingdom's austere Wahhabi form of Islam. The change sparked tensions with relatives in Pakistan, whom the Malikis accused in Wahhabi fashion of rejecting the oneness of God by revering

saints.

Ms. Malik turned even more conservative when she returned to Pakistan in 2009 to study pharmacology. She started attending religion classes at a branch of Al-Huda (The Correct Path) International Welfare Foundation, a controversial academy that has made significant inroads into Pakistan's upper and middle classes, and propagates an ideology akin to that of Saudi Arabia.

In a statement after the San Bernardino attack, Al Huda described itself as "a non-political, non-sectarian and non-profit organisation which is tirelessly serving humanity by promoting education along with numerous welfare programmes for the needy and destitute." It said that it "does not have links to any extremist regime and stands to promote peaceful message of Islam and denounces extremism, violence and terrorism of all kinds." The institution said that it could not be held responsible for "personal acts" of its students.

To be sure, Al Huda like Sunni ultra-conservatism in its various guises does not breed violence by definition. Yet, like any inward-looking, intolerant and supremacist ideology it creates potential breeding grounds in a given set of circumstances. Similarly, as in the case of the Islamic State (IS) or Al Qaeda, the shared basic tenets of ultra-conservatism has led to the formation of groups that have turned on Saudi Arabia itself.

A newly formed alliance of IS and Pakistani Taliban that strives to impose strict Islamic law was responsible for the series of attacks in the last week that killed 83 people at a Sufi shrine in southern Punjab and targeted the Punjabi parliament, military outposts, a Samaa TV crew, and a provincial police station.

Complicating Pakistan's struggle with militancy is the fact that massive, decades-long backing of ultra-conservatism by

successive Pakistani political, military and intelligence leaders and Saudi Arabia has made it part of the fabric of significant segments of Pakistani society and education as well as key branches of the government and arms of the state.

That coupled with geopolitics and Pakistan's increasingly troubled relationship with its religious and ethnic minorities is precisely what makes the proposed appointment of General Raheel so problematic.

Pakistan, a country with a long border with Iran and the world's largest Shiite minority, has long been a major frontline in Saudi Arabia's almost four-decade long covert proxy war with the Islamic republic, dating back to the 1979 Islamic revolution. Saudi Arabia, in cooperation with the Pakistani military and intelligence as well as senior government officials, has long backed militant sectarian groups that have helped push Pakistan towards Sunni ultra-conservatism and are responsible for a large number of deaths among Shiites, Ahmadis, Sufis and others.

General Raheel's appointment would bring the chicken home to roost. By taking the command, General Raheel would give the alliance the credibility it needs: a non-Arab commander from one of the world's most populous Muslim countries who commanded not only one of the Muslim world's largest militaries, but also one that possesses nuclear weapons. The appointment would build on decades of Pakistani military support of Saudi Arabia dating back to war in Yemen in the late 1960s.

Yet, accepting the command would put Pakistan more firmly than ever in the camp of Saudi-led confrontation with Iran that Saudi political and religious leaders as well as their militant Pakistani allies often frame not only in geopolitical but also sectarian terms. Ultimately, it was that step that the Pakistani parliament rejected in 2015

when it refused to send troops to Yemen. Acceptance of the command by General Raheel would fly in the face of parliament's decision.

Pakistani Shiite leaders as well as some Sunni politicians have warned that General Raheel's appointment would put an end to Pakistan's ability to walk a fine line between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It could raise the stakes in Balochistan, the province bordering Iran where separatists are agitating for independence and China has invested billions of dollars as part of its One Belt, One Road initiative.

Pakistani news reports suggest that General Raheel has sought to alleviate the risk by setting conditions that are unlikely to be acceptable to Saudi Arabia, including that Iran be invited to join the alliance and that he be the mediator in disputes among alliance members with no need to report to a higher i.e. Saudi authority. Iran reportedly advised Pakistan that it would work with General Raheel if he took the command to reach a negotiated resolution of the Yemen war.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir, in a speech last weekend to the Munich Security Conference, laid out a vision that rules out General Raheel's thinking. "Iran remains the biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world. Iran has as part of its constitution the principle of exporting the revolution. Iran does not believe in the principle of citizenship. It believes that the Shiite, the 'dispossessed', as Iran calls them, all belong to Iran and not to their countries of origin. And this is unacceptable for us in the kingdom, for our allies in the Gulf and for any country in the world... So, until and unless Iran changes its behaviour, and changes its outlook, and changes the principles upon which the Iranian state is based, it will be very difficult to deal with a country like this," Mr. Al-Jubeir said.

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