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WATCHING OUT FOR PAKISTAN



**Mashal lynching: Psychologist suggests emotional health be taught in schools**

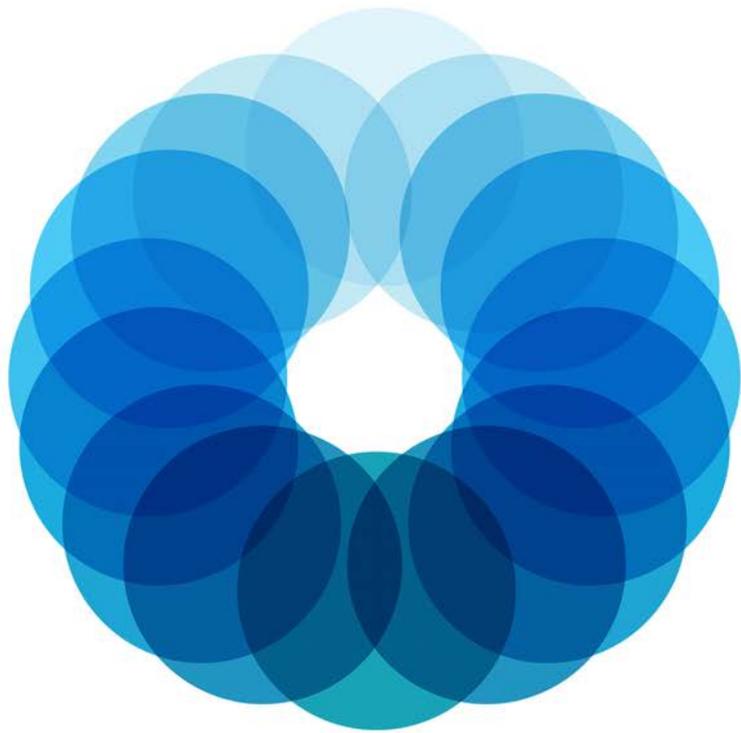
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**Dangerous drugs to child brides to make them look older**

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Magazine By:





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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**

### **When rule of law turns to rule of mob**

Mashal Khan, a 23-year-old student of Bacha Khan University, Mardan, was brutally lynched on April 15 by a violent mob of educated people -including some of the teachers of the same university - on suspicion of posting blasphemous material on social media. The issue was highlighted by local and international media after which the state machinery arrested several men involved in lynching.

A terrible fact of the story is that Mardan police were present when people were planning to kill Mashal. When the mob marched towards his room in the hostel, the police officials were there like silent spectators—or probably silent supporters, which can be observed in the videos of lynching that have gone viral.

That night, when a mullah of his village issued a decree that he was a blasphemer and nobody should attend his funeral, the same Mardan Police were present in the village to protect the family and funeral rights. We have great respect for the group of youth from a nearby district who rushed to the scene purely on human grounds and helped the family bury Mashal.

On April 21, an angry mob attacked a person with a mental disorder in a mosque for committing alleged blasphemy. The Imam of the mosque barely saved him after he was brutally beaten by the mob. Later, police took him into custody.

These are not new trends in Pakistan. It has turned into an everyday routine.

In August 2010, two brothers, 22 and 16, were lynched by a mob in the presence of police and rescue officials in Sialkot. Initially, the mob spread a rumour that they were alleged robbers.

In November 2014, a mob burnt a Christian couple in a kiln for alleged blasphemy in Kasur. The female victim was pregnant.

In March 2015, a Christian mob lynched two men soon after suicide bomb attacks on two churches in Lahore. The mob suspected that the two men had links to the bombing, but later they were identified as peaceful citizens.

The situation is getting worse in Pakistan. Extremism has led the people to a point where they have started settling personal vendetta or grudges by misusing religion or the country's laws. It speaks of the poor performance of the government.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, hours after Mashal's death, issued a statement that 'mob justice' cannot be allowed in Pakistan. He should have known: one, the terminology 'mob justice' is not used in the law-abiding societies and democracies; two, mobs of the youth, who grew up in an extremist society like Pakistan, don't need any permission to eradicate their targets.

PM Sharif should not ignore the facts that police officials deviated from their oaths on several occasions and gave free hands to such mobs. And, a few retired and serving judges, as lawyers, had offered their volunteer services to the criminals, involved in murders and terrorism.

This indicates that Pakistan's democracy is rapidly turning into ochlocracy, mob rule - a democratic system spoiled by the tyranny of the majority and a rule of passion over reason.

*Mubasher Bukhari*

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News Lens Pakistan's mission is to strengthen democracy, governance and society in Pakistan through ethics-based, quality journalism. We educate journalists and citizens about their roles, duties, rights and responsibilities by practicing responsible and enlightening journalism.

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## Human Rights

# Mashal lynching: Psychologist suggests emotional health be taught in schools



**Rehmat Mehsud**

**Swabi:** Ali Shah (pseudonym) and a dozen of other men offered funeral prayers for Mashal Khan, a university student lynched to death by a vigilante mob on accusation of blasphemy, defying the decree by a religious leader who barred people from attending Mashal's burial rituals.

Earlier this year in April, Mashal Khan 23 and a student of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan (AWKUM) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was killed and another wounded by a mob for allegedly "publishing blasphemous content online", police had said.

When approached for comments on the entire saga right from Mashal's lynching to the cleric announcement barring people not to attend his burial ceremony and to offering funeral prayers by some villagers, defying cleric's edict, Shahid Ijaz, head of psychology department at Islamabad Model College (IMC), told Truth Tracker: "Behavioral change is direly needed through education at the grassroots level."

Earlier, Dr. Main Saeed, a District Police Officer (DPO) in Mardan, had said at least 45 people had been arrested in connection of Mashal's lynching.

However, Mohammad Alam Shinwari, Mardan's Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of police, had told media the deceased student was blamed for running Facebook pages "which allegedly published

blasphemous content".

Television footages showed Mashal is lying on the floor in a pool of blood and surrounded by the group, having severe torture marks on his body. A number of students are seen kicking his dead body and beating him with wooden batons.

In his brief chat with Truth Tracker, Shah 45 who is a social worker in Swabi district recalled it was really a tense situation for him and his compatriots to bury Mashal "in an honorable way."

The first thing, Ijaz said is that Mashal's lynching was an act of mob and their psychology is different from individuals. He said there are two things in human nature such as emotion and ideology.

"As a society, our emotional level is uncontrolled with abysmally deeper level of intolerance," Ijaz remarked. Now the question is how the society can overcome emotions, he suggested emotions are compensated through aggressive behavior.

Hailing from Swabi district, a dusty hamlet in the northwestern province, Shah along with his colleagues marched to Mashal's village soon after he was told that a local religious leader barred people from either offering funeral prayers or condolences for the deceased.

"Funeral prayers could not be held for blasphemer," the cleric had told villagers on loudspeakers.

Muhammad Junaid, another citizen of the town, said Shah and his colleagues' act

inspired villagers to offer funeral prayers, prompting political leaders and human rights activists to pour in to Mashal's village to condole his death amid chants "Mashal is innocent and Mashal is martyr."

Shah had though taken a bold step but it was really tragic why law of the land and law enforcement agencies could not surge into motion to deal with the "special nature of case."

According to a report by Amnesty International (AI), The Impact of Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan, it is difficult to establish precise information on the number of blasphemy cases, as there is limited available data.

However, data provided by human rights groups the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) shows a large increase of cases since the 1980s.

For example, according to NCJP, a total of 633 Muslims, 494 Ahmadis, 187 Christians and 21 Hindus have been accused under various provisions on offences related to religion since 1987.

A question arises whether the government, religious scholars and civil society activists can dare lobbying for amendments to the controversial blasphemy laws, Shah questioned.

He recalled people of Mashal village stayed indoors because a religious leader of the neighborhood had already made announcements that those who attend

funeral prayers would commit Kufr (sin).

Shah recalled he got a phone call regarding the cold-blooded death of Mashal; he then went straight to his village to perform his burial ceremony.

“Burying Mashal Khan was a challenging job for us but we took the risk avoiding any mishap in the village,” Shah added.

Commenting on the lynching of Mashal, he said that individuals should not dub a person as a blasphemer because state institutions should deal with issues of serious nature.

Junaid said that Shah’s move infused renewed zeal to shoulder beleaguered and frightened Mashal’s family. “We changed the entire scenario after burying Mashal honourably and our act paved way for politicians and civil society activists to come and openly denounce his killing,” he noted.

Ijaz observed that the society’s intellectual level is overwhelmed by its ideological

level.

Shah noted that accusation of blasphemy is often used as a pretext to settle personal scores by the rival people. He recalled a number of villagers told him that the boy (Mashal) was an intelligent student and the university administration was acting like a mafia group. “The charge of the blasphemy was totally wrong,” he said while quoting relatives of Mashal.

Again how the mob had popped up, Ijaz is of the opinion that the mob was stirred into action on emotional level with their polluted ideologies. To mend society’s brains, he said hectic work is needed on mega level because the problem is not there in individual capacity rather dynamics of the entire society are similar.

“There is need of educational transformation or emotional health transformation at the grassroots level,” he added. Ijaz pointed out there is deficiency in the country’s education system because highly educated people from leading educational institutions are not

emotionally balanced.

He said the tragedy is that the students are being taught how to be intelligent but never taught how to manage or deal with brimming emotions. “We are not being taught at home, by parents and in educational institutions as how to deal with emotions and aggression,” he observed.

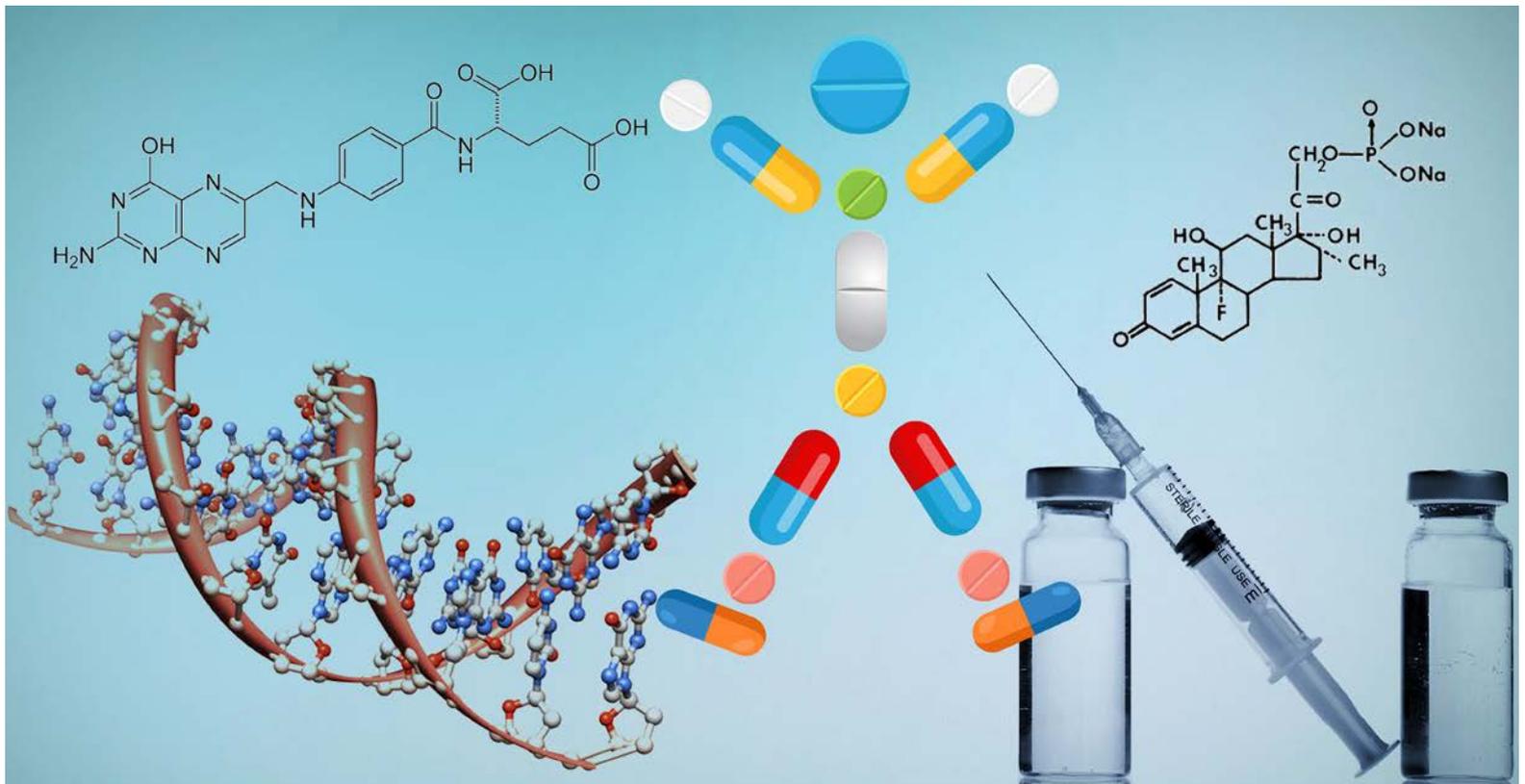
The country, he said direly needs to introduce emotional health related subjects in its curriculum, which would help contain the vicious cycle of tragic nature of mishaps. “There is need to introduce some curriculum from early school stage to know about minorities’ and women rights and to stimulate emotional tolerance,” Ijaz noted.

“It was not an issue between two states rather it was an issue of humanity to offer condolences and bury Mashal with dignity,” Shah concluded.



## Human Rights

### Dangerous drugs to child brides to make them look older



**Sana Ejaz**

**Peshawar:** Child brides will no longer be under the radar of the law, as these children would look mature after taking medicinal drugs for weight gain. Child marriages are a common but illegal practice across Pakistan where families marry their children in their early teens, and sometimes even earlier.

The tribal regions of Pakistan have a large

number of cases that have yet to garner media and government attention. These child marriages are deemed as the norm every time someone marries his/her children according to their religious and cultural ways.

In the valley of Peshawar’s Yakatoot area, Sehrish (not real name) was fourteen years old when her parents decided to make her tie the knot with her life partner who was 33 at the time. “I didn’t know what was happening with me, all I had heard from fellow school girls was that marriage is a necessary part of a girl’s life”, says Sehrish,

while smiling over her past as a school going child suddenly plunged into the daunting reality of being a bride. “I used to take a syrup and IV drips that changed my thin frame into that of an older, heavier girl in a matter of months.”

Most of the girls from the locality get married during their late formative years, oblivious of their basic rights of education and the harmful effects of being a child bride.

Sehrish’s mother is of the view that her daughter was too weak and these

medicines were never meant to change 'Sehrish' in order to make her look like an adult girl ready for marriage. "Many of the families use such medicines with the prescription of local doctors", she told Truth Tracker.

Upon being questioned, Sehrish's mother said that a private medical store where the staff do not have a license or a degree in medicine call themselves 'doctors' and continue to practice in the village. These phony doctors are common all across the suburbs of Peshawar.

Most child marriages cases are swept under the rug by the families themselves, although they are involved in this to avoid intervention from the government, Saba Ismail, co-founder 'AWARE Girls' expresses her concerns regarding child marriages in the country. "It is a mindset in Pakistan, as these girls are conditioned into thinking that they do not belong to their families, or in their homes since childhood because they're going to be married off."

She says that this mindset is steeped so deep into their ethos that cultural proverbs commonly reinforce the same concept; in Pakhto: Khaza da pradey deran khazala da— (a woman is supposed to take care of someone else's home).

"Unless the discrimination towards girls is not completely eliminated in Pakistan, it is difficult to fight against child marriages," said Saba.

According to the paper published by the Institute of Social Justice in 2001, an estimated 37 percent of women were reportedly married before the age of 18. Unfortunately, the percentage remains the same.

Health experts and doctors consider the unnecessary intake of medicines for weight gain dangerous and unethical when prescribed by common people in medical stores or by medical technicians.

According to Dr Saud, Medical Officer at Khyber Teaching Hospital, Peshawar, people take multivitamins like Fefolvite, and syrups like Trimetabol which help in digestion to get the required bulk, coupling them with power injections in ringer lactate solution. Apart from all that, steroids like "dectadron" injections, which professional doctors would never allow, since these medicines and steroids can make a person look older than they are, while having numerous side effects. Saud said it is dangerous because it abuses the natural growth hormone, and it causes the body or face to swell up but halts bone growth in children.

"Fake doctors (Quacks, who happen to be mal-practitioners) in street and village clinics play with people's lives," says Saud. Usage of such medicines affects the growth of the pelvic bone and affect pregnancies, he added.



## #ChildNotBride

On the other hand, child marriages reinforce the 'honour' that is tied to a woman's body in Pakistan. Families in this patriarchal system want to control the women and prevent them from being equal to a normal human being, therefore they want girls to get married at an early age," said Saba.

"Any form of drugs used to make girls' bodies look mature is inhumane, she might look mature, older than her age, but her body system, her mind and her dreams still need nourishment and she deserves to be treated with dignity and respect," says Saba.

Pakistan's government in all of the provinces is seemingly unable fully outlaw child marriages in the country.

"After the 18th Amendment, provinces were given the legislative power on different subjects including the child marriages law, but Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has yet to pass the 2014 proposed draft of law on child marriages," explained Zahoor Rehman, a lawyer from Peshawar.

He said, "Controversy exists in the country

regarding laws banning child marriages, where Pakistan's Islamic Ideology Council has declared that a girl reaching puberty at the age of 9 can be married which is in contradiction with the Universal Human Rights Charter."

"The Muslim family law ordinance 1961 enhanced the minimum age limit for girls up to 16 years, which was previously 14 years, and it can create a lot of confusion if the Islamic Ideology Council of Pakistan views are considered," says Zahoor.

While Truth Tracker tried to reach Khyber Pakhtunkhwa law officials via phone, it failed to get a response despite repeated attempts.

Although Sehrish is currently happy with her life partner, she still has regrets about missing years of schooling, years of childhood play, and the chance to be a mature, sensible bride. "What can one say when your family and parents decide your fate, we can only follow their instructions as we are required to respect our elders," says Sehrish.



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## Accountability

# The culture of secrecy challenges the right to know in Punjab



**Waqar Gillani**

**Islamabad:** The provincial Punjab Information Commission, the official appellate body for non-compliance of Right to Information requests to government departments, received nearly 4,000 complaints, a high number than expectations, since it was established three years ago, deciding 70 percent of those in favour of complainants, officials told Truth Tracker.

“By early this year we received 4,000 complaints of non-compliance from public. Nearly 70 per cent have been decided in the favour of applicants,” the Commission’s information chief Mukhtar Ahmad Ali told Truth Tracker.

Initially non-compliance with the public’s right to know under Right to Information laws was as high as 90 per cent, particularly by the health, education and development departments, Ahmad said.

To make government more transparent and accountable, and to acknowledge the public’s right to know, the provincial government introduced the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act in 2013.

Under those laws, the public can obtain information and seek records of any type from government departments, other than those classified as protected for national security.

The appellate Punjab information Commission (PIC) was also formed to handle complaints against denial of information by government departments.

The PIC’s annual 2014-2015 report states that it received 1,200 complaints of non-compliance in its first year of functioning. Complaints rose to 1,330 the following year.

“The major reasons for non-compliance are lack of awareness about the law, and a culture of secrecy in government departments. Other typical reasons are lack of training and staff too,” Ahmad said. Many times, he said, the departments denied very small and general information i.e., budget details of some projects.

“I filed so many application with Punjab various departments in the past three years,” Waseem Abbasi, a journalist told Truth Tracker, adding, “Most of the time information was only given after I complained to the information commission.”

Recalling one specific and interesting example, Abbasi, who has done nearly two dozen stories based on RTI, further said, last year he sought Governor’s House of Punjab province for the details of gifts, which governor has given in one year in his official capacity, but there was no response. “Later, I complained to the PIC and the Governor’s House official said the information could not be given owing to “security reasons”. The PIC held a hearing summoning official concerned and after more than a year they finally released the details in response to my request,” he

recalls.

“There is a traditional mindset of bureaucracy of hiding information from public. Even, in some complaints, simple budget information is not shared with the applicants,” Abbasi observed.

PIC officials believe that amid this culture of secrecy, obtaining more and more information and acknowledging the right to know is a continuous process, Ahmad believed.

There is gradual improvement with more and more application of the law by citizens and media persons, PIC information commissioner viewed. With the passage of time, journalists are using this law, the official said.

Most of the applications seeking public records are filed in provincial capital and very few from other smaller districts, Truth Tracker came to know from the PIC officials.

“Actually, there is need of awareness among officials and among the public to improve the system and make it beneficial,” Tariq Javed, a Public Information Officer for Education department in Gujranwala region, told Truth Tracker. He said he had not received a single application under RTI law from the public or media in his eight months in the office.

Umar Cheema, a senior journalist who has advocated for right to know laws, said the process was still in its infancy. “Bureaucracy tends to be secretive in nature. To disclose information, it will

take time. Most of all it depends upon the use of law. The more people use the law, the further bureaucracy will be inclined to share the information," Cheema, who frequently files right-to-information requests, told Truth Tracker.

The non-serious attitude of public bodies has been noted by the Commission as a major challenge for its work, in earlier annual reports. Cheema said that he wants the PIC to publicise complaints and reasons of the non-compliance on its website to increase awareness. "Mindsets take time to change. I don't think the government is receptive to the idea of transparency but there is a law and we must use it," Cheema said adding, "This law is facing organized resistance from bureaucracy. We can only overcome that

through pro-active use and follow-up of the applications through the information commission or appellate authorities."

Zahid Abdullah, program manager at the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives, working on right to information related issues, said that the lack of public awareness may be linked to the lack of advertising budget for the Commission. "The Punjab government slashed its advertising budget from 30 million Pak Rupees in the first year after the enactment of the law to one million in subsequent years," he told Truth Tracker.

A culture of secrecy reigns in Punjab public bodies and Public Information Officers (PIOs) need to be trained on the rights of the public under the new

freedom of information laws, Abdullah added. However, the Punjab Information Commission is facing resource constraints as the Punjab government has not approved service rules. The organisation needs 43 staff members urgently to enable it to function properly.

Abdullah said no data was available on the number of information requests submitted under the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act. "It is the duty of Punjab Information Commission to track this information. But, owing to the lack of staff, it has been unable to develop a monitoring mechanism to report on the number of information request and to report on the compliance of public bodies," he said.



## Accountability

# Sindh optimistic for transparency through Law on Right to Information



**Lala Hassan**

**Karachi:** Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Sindh government took almost seven years in compliance to its own landmark legislation known as 18th constitutional amendment in 2010 on access to information by amending article 19, when it was in power at federal and provincial level.

Sindh Assembly on 13th March 2017 unanimously passed "Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Bill, 2016" which became "Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2017" after the consent by Governor Sindh Mohammad Zubair Ahmed on 10th April.

The new legislation allows citizens to seek information from all public departments, courts, commissions and tribunals as well. Public bodies are bound to designate officials not below than grade of Basic Pay Scale-BPS 16 in all districts within 45 days; while Sindh Information Commission should be established within 100 days of the commencement of the law.

PPP led federal government passed article 19 (a) which gives right to information to the citizens of Pakistan and it reads as "Every citizen shall have the right to have access to information in all matters of public importance subject to regulation and reasonable restrictions imposed by law".

Sindh Information Commission's decisions

cannot be challenged in any court except through a constitutional petition under article 199 of the constitution of Pakistan as per new law on Transparency and Right to Information Sindh, Pakistan.

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) led KP government was the first provincial government which introduced the law on the right to information in 2013 followed by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) Punjab government in 2014; however Balochistan citizens are yet to receive such new legislation.

PMLN led federal government and its representatives though against General (Rtd) Parvez Musharraf, could not replace his introduced legislation, Freedom of Information Ordinance 2002, in the backdrop of 18th amendment.

Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, senior provincial minister Sindh on the floor of the House avowed the legislation as historical and hoped that besides providing access to information to common man it will contribute towards good governance and elimination of the corruption.

In compliance to Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Pakistan introduced Article 19 in the Constitution on Freedom of speech, which says "Every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, and there shall be freedom of the press, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan or any part thereof friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, or incitement to an offence.

The Law further says that official can refuse information which may affect protection of legally privileged information or of the rules relating to breach of confidence; commercial and financial interests of a public body or a third party, including information subject to party's intellectual property rights or it cause harm to life, health or safety of any person and may affect law and order situation. Official can uphold information on revealing the identity of a confidential source or hamper investigation of a case; affect prevention or detection of crime, the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

Freedom of Expression Ordinance 2006 stands repealed after this legislation. As per the new Law, the applicant can make an appeal within 60 days in case of rejection the application. Any officer who fails to provide information without genuine reason may be fined of 10% of his basic salary; while any person misuses the received information with malafide intentions will be fined Rs. 0.1 million and two years and six months imprisonment.

Former Vice Chairman Sindh Bar Council Barrister Salahuddin Ahmed while appreciating the enactment of the law

said that the section 2 (d) "Document" means any order or decision made and duly notified" can be used by government for delaying the information and the 10% basic salary fine is nothing, it should be increased.

Ahmed while talking with Truth Tracker shared details of the law and explained that the new law allows citizen of Pakistan or a legal person registered or incorporated in Pakistan to seek information through a simple application. The information can be sought from public bodies and those non-governmental organizations, which are substantially funded, by the government or a local government.

"The designated official is bound to respond within maximum 25 working days (15 days initially and 10 more days for further compliance); however the official may refuse an application for access to information where disclosure of the information, in their opinion, shall or is likely to Cause harm to the national interest; national defence or security; public order or international relations of Pakistan" he added.

Dr Hassan Raza Gardezi of Shehry for better environment, a non-governmental organization, which worked on the draft bill while appreciating the law said it would provide great opportunity to citizens in obtaining information from various departments. "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) RTI law forbids information from Courts but Sindh gives right to its citizens to seek information form Courts under the law" Gardezi added.

Ahmed observed that two years and six months imprisonment on the misuse of the information is out of context because when information becomes public then there is not point of fixing criminal liability on its use.

Rana Ansar Siddiqui, Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)-Pakistan's member of the Sindh provincial Assembly while talking to Truth Tracker said that enactment of the law is good indication but owing to the track record, our governments

lack implementation of the laws. She emphasised on raising awareness among masses about the laws as citizens can get more benefits.

Gardezi regretted that people, in our country are reluctant to use such laws but they should use new legislation as to make it more reliable and as public interest issues. He analyzed that the old law awarded no fine for officials and the application processing took too long but this recent legislation has fixed a processing time and it its extensive use can increase transparency in the province. "The difference between Sindh Freedom of Expression Ordinance 2005 and current Law is as comparing Mehran car with Mercedes" Dr Gardezi chuckled in his telephonic response to a Truth Tracker question.

Ahmed told that Sindh Information Commission will be formed within 100 days of the commencement of the law, headed by Chief Information Commissioner, a retired government servant of grade 20 under the age of 65 years for three years with two other members known as commissioners one Lawyer of the High court meeting the requirement of being Judge and another from civil society of having not less than 15 years' of experience. He expressed his concern that most bureaucrats in Pakistan retire around 60 or 65 making the age limit unrealistic.

ST&RTIA 2017 gives authority to the Commission as to determine that due public interest in such disclosure outweighs the harm that shall or is likely to be caused by such disclosure; it may direct the Designated Official to provide due information.

Asad Iqbal Butt, Sindh Vice Chairman of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan lauded the enactment of the law and hoped that it will bring people more benefits and minimize the bureaucratic atmosphere of secrecy in Sindh.



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# Promise Tracking

## PML-N breaks promise of making PIA one of the best airlines in the region



**Durdana Najam**

### The Promise

Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) had promised the nation in their 2013 manifesto that they would make the Pakistan International Airlines one of the best airlines in the region once it ascended to power.

### Background

PIA is a classic case of the failure of Public Ownership. Key reasons for this failure are political interference, excessive hiring to extend patronage to supporters, over staffing, inefficient management, and a powerful trade union. An airline that was emulated by other airlines during their years of origin and development now stands stagnant and only represents mismanagement.

PIA runs at a staggering loss of over Rs 36 billion annually while the accumulative loss runs over Rs 300 billion. The carrier failed to even take advantage of the falling oil prices lately. While the government bails out the airline by burning a hole in the taxpayer's pocket, the debate over the privatization of PIA has gathered more storm than any resolution.

The opposition is always trying to extract political mileage out of the turmoil without giving a solid argument for or against private ownership. The government was bent on beginning the process of privatization of PIA in 2015 in hopes that private management would bring some sanity to the chaos but the Union, with massive support from the parties in opposition, sabotaged the effort.

The government had decided to off-load 26 percent shares in PIA and enter into a strategic partnership with a private stakeholder.

Pakistan has had a fairly good experience with the privatization of the banking sector. The six large scale banks, all local except one, had posted a whopping cumulative profit of Rs 130 billion in 2015.

PIA has been identified as an outlier in terms of its poor safety record. The national carrier has one of the highest employees per plan ratio, which stands at about 700 employees per aircraft, while Emirates has around 220. The reason behind this massive difference is the range of services that, unlike other international airlines, PIA carries out single-handedly. From engineering services to ground handling to cargo management and maintenance to name a few, PIA does it all alone.

PIA had removed the Chief Executive Officer Bernd Hildenbrand on corruption charges. He is accused of leasing an aircraft from the Sri Lankan airline for an exorbitant price. PIA went into a wet lease with the Sri Lankan airline and leased an aircraft for \$8,500 an hour, while the same aircraft had been leased by a private firm for \$4,500 an hour.

Hildenbrand has been replaced by Nayyar Hayyat who interestingly had been removed as the Chief Financial Officer of PIA by its Board of Directors for misusing Rs 3 billion from the Provident Funds. PIA officials have confirmed that no inquiry is underway against the newly appointed acting CEO in connection with the embezzlement of the provident fund.

### Tracking

Khurram Dastagir, Minister for Commerce said that the PIA is not for sale. "We were only following the international practice of off-loading a certain amount of shares so that more competitive



parties could be brought forward to manage the airliner," he said. "Frankly speaking, the government should not be feeding this giant organization without the competency that it so clearly lacks," he added. He explained that they had been trying to turn PIA around but it required massive investment, while adding: "The government is firm about paying for the losses."

Kawaka Izharul Haq, leader of opposition in the Sindh Assembly from MQM, said that manifestos and realities are two different things. Every government works against their manifesto. According to him, the reason that the state owned institution had failed to make profit in Pakistan was due to political hiring, which led to overstaffing and ultimately, and incompetent workforce. "Our politicians have always considered state run organisations as their personal fiefdoms and PIA is no different. The government has never been serious about reforming it," said Izhar.

An insider from PIA, who does not wish to be named said: "The government had tried to take the first step towards reforming PIA in 2015 by getting a part of the organization privatized but the hue and cry made by the union at the behest of the opposition parties did not let it happen." When asked about the future plans of the government regarding PIA, he said that there were no plans. He told Truth Tracker that the government is not serious or concerned. "Government officers dispensed with the responsibility to take policy decisions pertaining to PIA are absolutely inept when it comes to civil aviation matters," he said. When questioned about why the government had accused the outgoing CEO of PIA of corruption charges, he said that the fault lied with the government and all those committees formed to oversee the working of the airline. "Where were they when PIA was making the lease? Did they know how much it cost to buy a new airplane? What has been their input in policy decision of leasing aircrafts and other matters that have left the airline in shambles?" said the source.

Senator Sehar Kamran from Pakistan People's Party blamed the government for the current situation of PIA. She said that PPP and other parties in opposition had to unite with or support the union when the government was planning to off-load 26 percent shares of the airliner was the opacity of the deal. "Lack of sincerity to promote and secure businesses, political interests, political appointments, wrong decisions, wet lease and above all, a policy to sell the national asset to meet budgetary deficits," said Kamran, "has led to the deteriorating condition of PIA." She added: "The privatization plan was developed to serve Mansha interests." "The opposition had demanded transparency, sincerity and protection of the national assets," she said.

## Independent Viewpoint

Former Director PIA, Irshad Ghani, who had served in the organization for 35 years in different capacities, said that the decisions the government had been taking to turn the organization around were never meant to serve PIA; they were far from it. "Political meddling is rife and the union has been allowed to become so strong that the real employees do not get the chance to perform or show their talent," he said.

"The solution," said Ghani, "lay in firing all those who had been

hired on political basis and in initiating a bottom up accountability mechanism."

## Ruling

The PML-N government has failed to introduce reforms for a turnaround in PIA, even at a local level.



# Promise Tracking

## PTI fails to release 30% of the provincial ADP to local bodies



Izhar Yusafzai

### The Promise

Minister for Local Government, Elections and Rural Development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inayatullah in May 2015 prior to local bodies' elections in the province pledged while talking to journalists that his government would allocate 30% of the total provincial development funds for local bodies.

### Plan

One of key points of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) led KP government's manifesto was to conduct local body elections in the province and they also claimed that it would be the model Local Government (LG) system for other provinces to devolve power to the grass root level.

The government has pledged time and again that they will earmark 30% of the total Provincial Annual Development Program (ADP) which will be allocated for the district Annual Development Program to be distributed among the three tiers of the LG system-District, tehsil/town, and village and neighborhood councils.

Local body elections was held on 31st May, 2015 and the provincial government has allocated 30% of the provincial ADP to local bodies. However, the allocation was restricted to papers only and the total amount was not released to the local bodies.

### Tracking

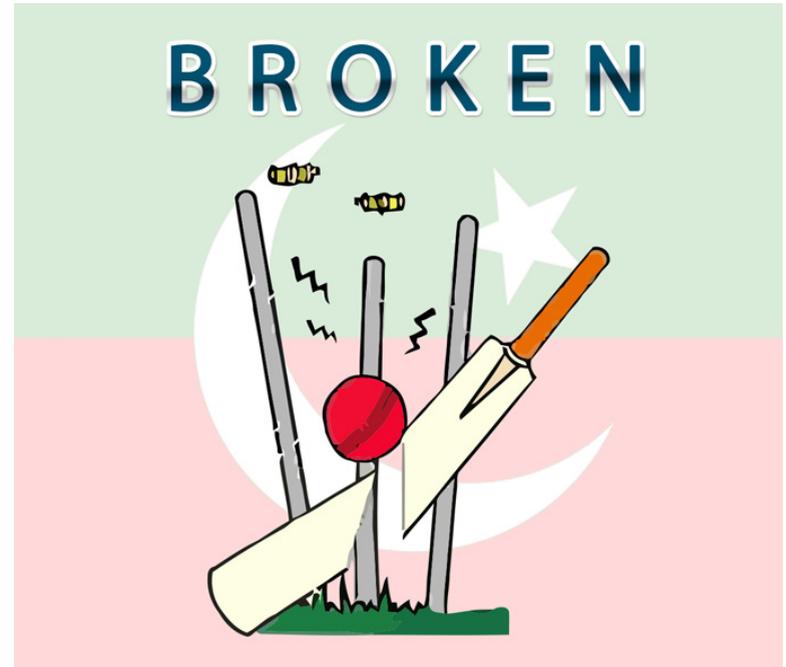
According to the budget documents of 2015-16, the KP government has allocated over Rs.33 billion for the district ADP for the three tiers of the LG system which will be released on a quarterly basis.

However, according to official documents obtained by Truth Tracker, the provincial government has so far only released over Rs.20 billion in three quarters of this year to the local bodies with a 25% cut on the district ADP.

The local bodies were assured by the provincial government that they will release the remaining funds in the last quarter but that is yet to happen, despite the fact that around a month has been left to end the ongoing financial year.

Speaking to Truth Tracker, KP's district Mardan, Nazim Himayatullah Mayar belongs to Awami National Party (ANP) said that the KP government was not about the timely release of funds which halted many of the developmental projects.

He disclosed that the government has slashed district ADP by 25% and now after the cut, the government is bound to release over Rs. 25 billion but they have only released Rs20 billion of the total Rs. 25 billion. "About a month is left before the end of



the ongoing financial year, and the government hasn't released the remaining funds which is against the Budget Release Rule prepared by the KP government," he said, adding that he didn't think the government would release the remaining amount.

Like Mardan, most of the districts are facing financial crises owing to delays in the release of the budgets. Speaking to Truth Tracker, Lower Dir district Nazim, Muhammad Rasool Khan, of Jamat Islami, which is in coalition with the PTI in the KP government, said that the district council do not have funds to release salaries to the employees.

He lamented that many of the developmental projects have been left incomplete by the contractors as they haven't been given money due to delaying tactics in release of the district ADP by the provincial government. "We have released tenders for the projects and contractors signed in for the execution of the projects but they [contractors] left the projects incomplete due to insufficient funding from the district council," Rasool said. "If the government has no issues providing the funds then why have they not released the remaining funds of district ADP?" he asked.

When KP's government Spokesperson, Mushtaq Ahmad Ghani was contacted by Truth Tracker, he said that the government has planned to release the funds of the last quarter over the next couple of weeks. "The government is left with around a month," he said. "Actually, KP is looking towards the federal government to release the amount under the Finance Commission, which is also supposed to be released on a quarterly basis."

"Whenever federal government releases funds for the last quarter of the district ADP, the KP will release it for the local bodies," Ghani vowed, adding that there is no plan to slash or halt the release of the amount to the local bodies.

Continued on page 12

## Independent Viewpoint

Mudasir Alam Taherkheli, an independent expert on LG system who works as a consultant with Centre of Governance and Public Accountability (CGPA) said that it's poor planning on the department's part, for preparing the annual budget.

He said, "The KP government has issues with the federal government as the federation has yet to release funds for the last quarter to the province. "However, there is always a contingency plan," he said, "while preparing the budget which includes what to do if there is any emergency or no provision of funds to the province from the federation." "The Province could prepare the budget while keeping in view the financial capacity and should avoid allocating a budget that is not possible to release to not halt the developmental works of the local bodies," Taherkheli

said, adding that if the government will not release the remaining funds, it would be a burden of the local bodies to run their financial businesses.

## Ruling

While keeping in view the comments of officials, stakeholders and independent experts, Truth Tracker observed that the PTI government in KP could not release funds to local government for last quarter. The promise of releasing 30% of total provincial ADP to district ADP stands broken since they have slashed the district ADP by 25%.



# Promise Tracking

## PPP breaks promise of introducing constructive courts' reforms in Sindh



Durdana Najam

### The Promise

Pakistan People's Party had promised in its 2013 manifesto that it would bring about constructive court reforms especially by introducing the Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism and mobile courts, once it came to power.

### Background

The judicial system in Pakistan has been unpopular because of its tendency to dispense delayed justice. The same is true with the justice system in Sindh.

According to the statistics available at the web site of Sindh High Court (SHC), the number of pending cases at the SHC stands at 51,120 on March 2016. At the district judiciary level the number of unresolved cases are 111196, as of March 2017. A steep rise of 15 percent in the institution of new constitution petitions has been witnessed at the SHC by December 2015.

However for the first time in recent year the SHC managed to decrease the backlog of cases in 2015 because of the induction of 10 extra additional judges that took the strength from 23 to 33. The total sanctioned strength is 40 therefore there was still a shortfall of seven judges.

Expeditious justice is the fundamental right of every citizen under Article 9 of the constitution of Pakistan. The state is also obligated to provide speedy justice under Article 37(d). In case of failure to provide justice in time to its citizen, the state would be said to have failed in fulfilling its obligation. A few years ago, the Chief Justice of India broke down in tears because of the pendency of cases in Indian courts that had exceeded the figure of 20 million. Judges in Pakistan have a similar reason to break down in tears, however we have yet to see any form of remorse.

In January 2015, Justice Asif Saeed Khosa of the Supreme Court of Pakistan had deplored that 2,400 judges had the daunting task of clearing a backlog of 1.7 million cases in different courts.

The downside of not having a expeditious justice system is that it does not only keep the litigators in constant agony, since a case that is heard and closed, whether in favour or against, is far better than the one that goes on for years undecided. Similarly, when the accused is not punished, or punished in time, it makes the offenders of law more emboldened and takes away the fear of the law.

The criminal justice system in Pakistan is known to be faulty, exploitative and inequitable. These problems, according to legal



experts, have accelerated the rate of crime in the country.

The criminal justice system in Pakistan comprises of five components: Police, Judiciary, Prison, Prosecution, Probation or Parole. The legal basis of the criminal system of Pakistan includes the Criminal Procedure Act of 1898 and the Pakistan Penal Code 1860. In spite of the fact that many amendments had been introduced in both the legal systems, the basic structure and nature of dispensation of justice of both the legal systems has failed to keep pace with the changing legal needs of society. It was probably in view of this situation that the Supreme Court of Pakistan once painted the picture of Pakistan legal system in these words "...people are losing faith in the dispensation of criminal justice by ordinary criminal courts for the reason that they either acquit the accused persons on technical grounds or take a lenient view in awarding sentences." As justice is either delayed or distorted, people have been taking law into their hands with the result that the cases of lynching of an accused by public through street justice has become a norm.

The Alternative Dispute Resolution system has been introduced in Sindh.

Section 89A of the Civil Procedure Code, 2001, stipulates that an on going case may be referred to the National Centre for Dispute Resolution (previously called Karachi Centre for Dispute Resolution) if both parties agree to resolve their dispute through the alternative dispute resolution method.

The National Centre for Dispute Resolution, approved by the SHC is headed by former Chief Justice of Pakistan.

## Tracking

Senator Farhatullah Babar from PPP told Truth Tracker in a telephone conversation that the Sindh government has been trying to bring about a comprehensive programme to not only reform the judicial system in Sindh but to make the alternative dispute resolution method effective. When asked as to when this deliberation would take a legal form, Babar said that such initiation and policy making takes time. He gave the example of the federal government where it took parliament seven years to finally get over with the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act. Talking about the seriousness of the Sindh government in reform courts, Babar said, that the PPP has always been in the forefront to make such reforms. However he agreed that there were innumerable loopholes in the judicial system of the country because of which the working of the courts were affected.

Khawaja Izzatullah, the leader of opposition in the Sindh Assembly blamed the judiciary of Pakistan, including the one dispensing justice in Sindh to be one of the main reasons of rising corruption in the country. While talking to Truth Tracker, he said, "The lack of an independent judiciary has resulted in the politicization of every institution. Cases are settled on the whims of the mightier." He added: "Look at the number of commission reports and suo mottos taken. Not a single decision of any commission report has been implemented." About courts in Sindh he said that because the culture of accountability was almost absent in the country, the same applies to Sindh. "This is a country where a commoner is punished for stealing Rs 4,000 while a robber of the highest order is graced with a gold crown," he lamented. When asked about the performance of the alternative dispute resolution system in Sindh, Izzatullah said that in the presence of an underperforming criminal system should one expect the alternative dispute system to be working any better.

## Independent Viewpoint

Former Vice-Chairman Sindh Bar Council, Barrister Salahuddin

Ahmed told Truth Tracker that unless the government and the courts, armed with proper data, brought meaningful reforms in the criminal justice system of the country, the alternative dispute resolution or the mobile courts, for that matter, would make no difference. He said that the NCDR has been working in Karachi for the past 10 years but they have failed to resolve more than seventy to eighty cases.

Ahmed said that he could not recall if the Sindh government had brought any reforms in courts, neither has he heard anything pertaining to mobile courts. "Sindh High Court is still faced with a very high number of pending cases," he said.

One Investigation Officer (IO), said that Ahmed handled 400 cases, and because he is not properly equipped, it is not humanly possible to investigate such a large number of cases. Hence, the IO ends up resurrecting false evidences and witnesses, which causes the accused to be free, or they languish in jails without conviction.

When asked about the quality of judges and lawyers in Pakistan, Ahmed said, "They were as good as the quality of education system in Pakistan."

## Ruling

From the discussion above, it can be deduced that the Sindh government has been unable to bring any change in the working of the courts, and as far as mobile courts are concerned there has been no initiative to that effect. The alternative dispute mechanism has been in place in Sindh since 2007, the PPP government in Sindh however has failed to even make the existing system effective.



# Promise Tracking

## Khan's promise to deal firmly with the KP timber mafia is underway



Rehmat Mehsud

### The Promise

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan had declared war against the timber mafia in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, promising to ensure the provision of a hazard-free environment for the people of the province and country.

### Background

Speaking at a press conference at Hazara University in February last year, Khan had said: "Today, I declare war against the timber mafia and warn politicians and officials to stop supporting timber smugglers as we can sacrifice our government for this cause but would never allow anyone to support timber mafias."

"The timber smugglers," he said, "had illegally cut trees worth Rs. 100 billion from forests over the past decade."

"Our government is taking concrete steps and will introduce legislation to remove hurdles involved in ending timber smuggling in the province," he claimed.

He also added that his government had put a firm hand on the timber mafia, who had incurred huge losses to the national exchequer.

Separately, while addressing the event held to commemorate



the Pakistan Forest Institute in Abbottabad, Khan had said that the timber mafia in the country is far more harmful than offshore companies for the development of Pakistan.

### Tracking

Truth Tracker contacted Syed Muhammad Ishtiaq, advisor to KP chief minister for environment, who could not be reached for comment on the subject despite repeated attempts.



Imran Khan  
@ImranKhanPTI

Follow

The "untouchable" timber mafia of KP is no longer invincible



**Facing off the 'timber mafia' – Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's forest crusade**

The northern Pakistan province has dramatically reversed forest loss by cracking down on illegal logging as part of a major afforestation campaign, writes Malik ...  
[thethirdpole.net](http://thethirdpole.net)

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However, Mushtaq Ahmed Ghani, adviser to KP chief minister on information and higher education, told Truth Tracker, "No doubt, we have introduced proper legislation and initiated a ban on forest cutting and timber smuggling."

"Cutting down forests is totally prohibited in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province," he remarked.

Arif Yousuf, another PTI stalwart and special assistant to the chief minister on law, commented: "The PTI government has already held three cabinet meetings on forest issues, which were attended by Chief Minister Pervez Khattak and officials from the forest department."

"We have a vigilant team to control and check timber smuggling at every level," he noted.

During these meetings, it was unequivocally decided to award severe punishment and levy heavy fines on those involved in the illegal forest cutting or timber business.

"I am optimistic that timber smuggling has considerably reduced since the PTI came into power here," he observed.

Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha, a lawmaker from Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), said that the cutting of forests is raging unabated in the jungles of Dir and Malakand.

"However, timber smuggling has reduced to a certain extent," he noted. "The chopping of trees has destroyed forests and the timber mafia is uncontrollable," he added.

"Tell me of a single promise that they (PTI) have honored?" he questioned. He said that the PTI has a merit policy for the common people only, since the provincial government has no merit for PTI workers and lawmakers.

A lawmaker from Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Sardar Aurangzeb claims that all the promises made by the provincial government have either been broken or compromised.

"The PTI decides first and thinks later. Simply, they are unable to implement their decisions," Aurangzeb noted.

"Entire sectors of the province," he said, "are in shambles; such as forest, education and health." "With the exception of Imran Khan's own hospital, the PTI has not built a single hospital in the province," he added.

"The PTI," he recalled, "talked about introducing an equal and uniform education system in KP, but today the province is experiencing a difference in school systems, which is ample proof of their broken promises."

"Whenever problems erupt in the center or in Karachi (Sindh),"

he said, "the PTI government brings them to KP, which is a bad precedent."

## Independent Viewpoint

Mumtaz Malik, a Peshawar based environmentalist, told Truth Tracker that the forest related law was framed back in 2003, but there had been no further amendments.

"Management plans have to be revised if you want to reduce timber cutting and I think that so far, no plan has been revised," he observed.

Aside from that, they (the PTI) have issued administrative orders to reserve forests in order to put a stop to harvesting them.

Regarding the sapling plantation, he said that the PTI's Billion Trees Tsunami campaign has witnessed 'record breaking plantation of new saplings.'

Now the success of plants planted under the Billion Trees Tsunami campaign totally depends on time. "Let's see how much time those saplings take to become mature," he added.

"If the plantation drive continues for at least another five years, then it is expected to be a huge success," he noted.

"It is pertinent to mention here that the department (forest) has been shaken up amidst huge plantations but the people whom the PTI considered to have created problems in plantation have been brought on board," he added.

"Tree chopping and timber smuggling can be controlled through a simple administrative order," he observed.

"I was one of the people who proposed a paradigm shift in forest management that you (PTI) need in order to focus on better protection of old trees instead of planting new trees," Mumtaz recalled.

"Now," he said, "the PTI is involving communities to protect the old trees and plant new saplings elsewhere in the province." "I think the tree plantation will have its impact, but in the long run," he added.

He said that tree plantation is a long drawn process and the government should continue to protect trees for a long time, which would lead to a far-reaching, positive impact on the environment.

## Ruling

In light of the comments and views by the ruling, opposition lawmakers, advisors to chief minister on information and higher education, law and independent analyst, Truth Tracker rules that the PTI's promise to control forest cutting and timber smuggling is underway.



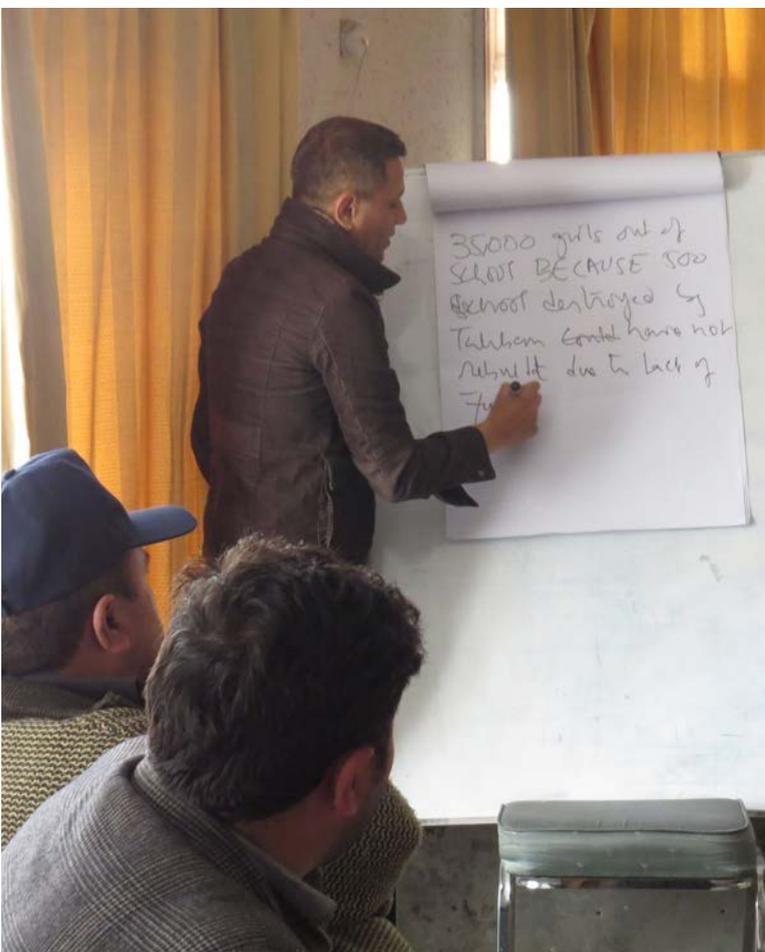
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## Training Workshop & Forum

# Media Foundation 360 holds “RTI for investigative stories.”

“Media Foundation360 organised a three-day training session for working journalists in Skardu. The participants discussed importance of Right to Information law for investigative stories.”





## Accountability

# No textbooks for FATA schoolchildren



**Abdul Salam Afridi**

**Peshawar:** Concerns are raised in FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), as the FATA Secretariat Education department, supported by UNICEF, is yet to provide free Textbooks to government schools in tribal areas. The new academic session has commenced from 8 April without Textbooks and the enrollment campaign with the aim to enroll out of school children into classroom is underway. Further it is clear that in the absence of adequate laws and monitoring system in FATA public officials are fearlessly misusing their powers.

FATA, located between Afghanistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, was given the status since Pakistan's Independence has been governed through a separate set of laws known as FCR (Frontier Crimes Regulations) developed by the colonial British. However, the unchecked powers at the hands of FATA's jirgas gave FCR the much-maligned name of the black law.

FATA secretariat draws its funding from the federal government but little changes have been brought about in the region: unfortunately, basic education one of them. Basic education seems far from the right path due to lack of policies and absence of monitoring systems. In the recent decade most of the schools, destroyed by the militants, are in need of reconstruction; some were and are still used by Pakistan Army; and some of them are still not functional. The absence of

properly staffed schools makes it harder for students to pass their final exams especially with challenges of security situation and lack of timely support by FATA secretariat education department.

Education is one of the basic fundamental human rights. Pakistan is a signatory to UN convention right to education in 1989. The vision of Prime Minister of Pakistan realizes this, promising that every child should be in schools further complying to Article 25-A right to education: "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law."

In discussion with Rana Asif Habib, Lawyer and President Initiator Human Development Foundation (IHDF), says that the issue of missing Textbooks in schools of FATA is violation of article 25-A, vision PM, and UN convention right to education; the concerned authority should be responsible to provide books on time. It's clear that the concerned authority has to fail to provide Textbooks before new academic session, which may exacerbate the dropout rate in FATA. He rued that if there are no books in the classrooms, student will lose their interest to come to schools.

Truth Tracker (TT) investigated the matter of Textbooks in Tribal Area's schools, confirming with different sources ranging from FATA locals and teachers. The sources confirmed that despite the demand submission by schools for Textbooks to Agency Education Officers (AEO) no Textbooks we have been

received. FATA's school year started on April 8th. Truth Tracker discovered that class 8th students received two books, class 9th students got only three books and class tenth students only have English books.

FATA teachers added that this is not the first time they are facing the issue, it happens every year and many a times they have reported the issue to Education Department. The Authorities just give hope that textbooks will be dispatched soon, which doesn't resolve the issue. Further TT became aware of the fact that Head Masters of a Khyber Agency schools personally approached and requested urban area schools for donating. Similar cases were found in Kohat region.

When Truth Tracker discussed the issue with FATA Secretariat Education Department. The officials confirmed that schools in South, North Waziristan, Khyber and Kurram Agency have already received textbooks. TT discovered that South Waziristan and Kurram agencies receive more attention by FATA Secretariat. Out of total education budget of FATA for year 2014-2015, South Waziristan received 30 per cent and Kurram agency 23 per cent; the rest of the education budget was distributed to the rest of the agencies and regions of FATA.

However, upon further investigation from the FATA Agencies, where authorities dispatch of books, Truth Tracker confirmed that the statements offered by Education Department were false, as the sources from these places confirmed that textbooks were never received by the

schools. Truth tracker discovered that the education department keeps no record of Textbooks delivery to the schools. Upon investigation head master disclosed that the little number of schools that received the textbooks got them due to their personal relations with FATA secretariat.

Further Education Department agreed that the issue of Textbooks was cyclical despite the fact that the department brought the matter to the attention of KP education department and Textbook printing center in Islamabad. The Education Department noted that they don't own printing centers therefore the issue is out of their hands.

They however confirmed that the dispatch process has begun and they are hopeful that by end of April or first week of May all government schools of FATA will receive the books.

Zeeshan Qasim Assistant Professor, Gomal University DIKhan says "without a book how can be they survive in class room, this will destroy the student's interest and maybe the target to enroll out of school children will remain out of schools"

A local parent talking to Truth Tracker "we can tolerate militancy despite they affected our lives but missing books in

schools cant as this will destroy the future of our children's"

Whatever the concerned authorities say does not mitigate the gravity of the textbook disappearance from FATA schools. It is high time that a monitoring division be placed for education related activities outside of FATA secretariat to ensure and make the process of printing textbooks quick prior to the new academic year session. Sadly despite many attempts by Truth Tracker, the governor KP was not available for comment.



## Human Rights

# Buddhist pilgrims return to sacred ruins after a decade of terror



**Rehmat Mehsud**

**Takhtbai, Mardan:** The historical Buddhist remains at Takhtbai echoed with prayers and hymns once again as a delegation of Sri Lankan monks visited the site on May 31, 2016. The ruins of a monastic complex at Takhtbai or the Throne of Origins are a sacred Buddhist site dating back to the Gandhara civilization that existed in what is now northern Pakistan and Afghanistan from the mid 1st millennium BCE to the beginning of the 2nd millennium CE.

Closed to Buddhist pilgrims and international tourists for over a decade

due to conflict and terrorism, the site has been recently reopened to visitors. Last year, a delegation of Korean monks visited the site.

For the 40 members delegation comprising Sri Lankan officials, religious scholars, media representatives and pilgrims including 16 senior monks, it was the first ever visit to Takhtbai to offer prayers and perform religious rituals.

"The archaeological sites [in Pakistan] are considered sacred for Buddhists all over the world," Wajira Thero, a Buddhist monk in the delegation, told Truth Tracker.

"The preservation of centuries-old Buddhist site reflects the tolerance and

respect of the Muslim-majority Pakistan has for other religions."

The monks and foreign dignitaries performed prayers and sang hymns at the main stupa and visited various parts of the Buddhist remains.

Takht Bhai was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980. It is one of the oldest settlements documented in the history of the subcontinent. The heritage site was excavated in 1836 for the first time and since then archaeologists have excavated hundreds of relics made of clay, stucco and terracotta.

According to UNESCO, the Buddhist ruins of Takhtbai have high authenticity



of setting as it continues to occupy its original location at the hilltop.

“Authenticity of form and design has been preserved and the layout of the monastic complex and buildings are visible. Authenticity and materials as well as traditions and techniques of construction is retained in the stone construction in Gandhara patterns.”

The Pakistan’s government had invited the Sri Lankan delegation on account of the Vesak festival that was celebrated for the first time in the country, said Mashood Ahmad Mirza, Joint Secretary National Heritage.

Vesak is a religious festival in the Buddhist religious calendar which is usually celebrated in May or early June. It marks the birth, enlightenment and death of Lord Siddhartha Gautama Buddha in the Theravada or southern tradition. Vesak was recognised by the United Nations in 1999 as the day of enlightenment to acknowledge the contribution of Buddhism to humanity. After performing prayers in Takhtbhai, the monks went to Hund museum in Swabi – the last capital of Gandhara civilisation. “The site in Takhtbhai is well-preserved and is one of the largest ancient monasteries in the world,” said Wajira Thero. “It was our privilege to visit these sites as we have always dreamt of being

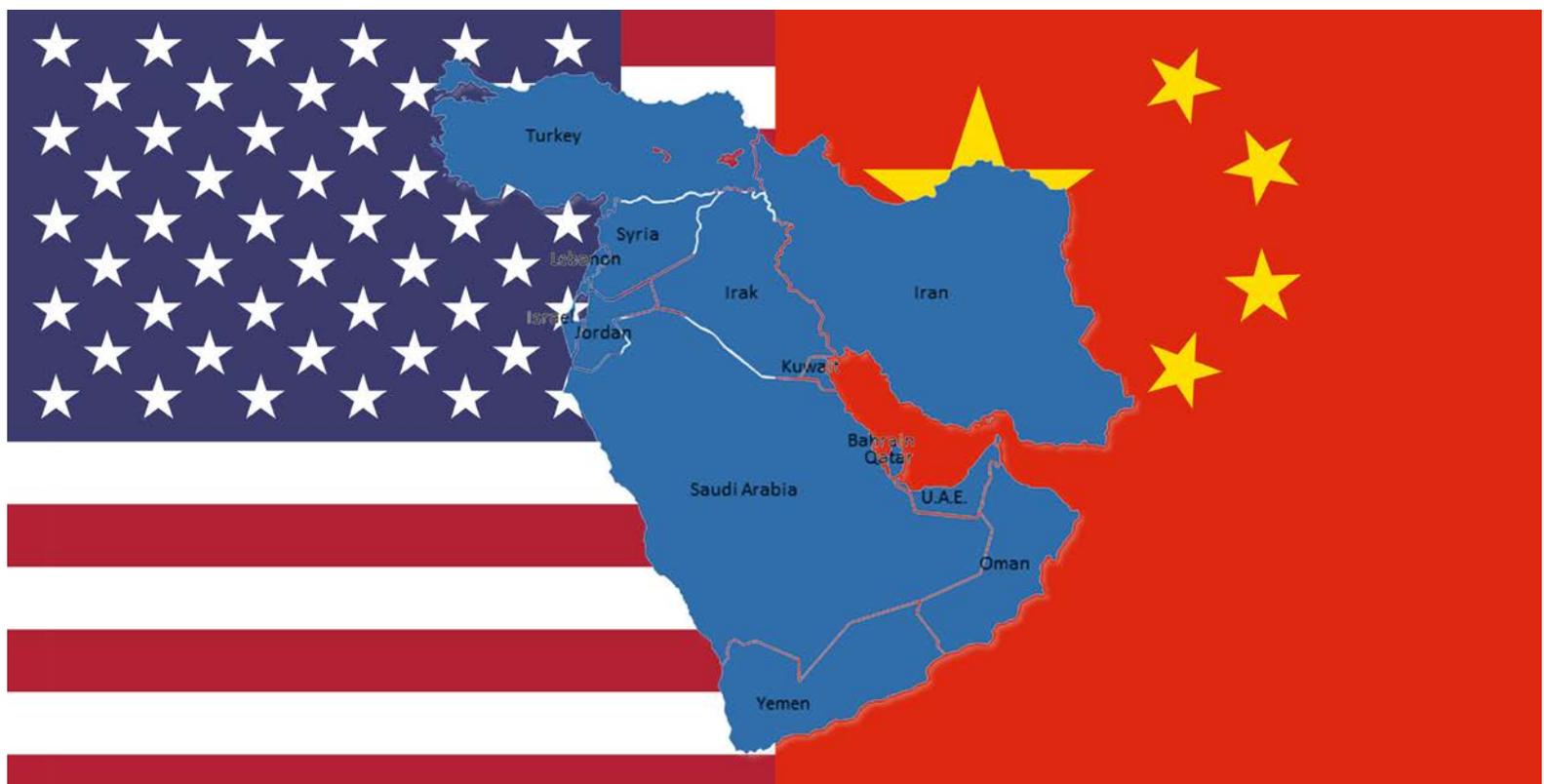
here.”

Nilmini Fernanda, a member of the delegation, said it was because of the “efforts of governments of both countries” that they were able to visit the site. “I feel at home in Pakistan,” said Fenanda. “The people here are very friendly.” Mashood Ahmad said that the authorities have tentatively opened up the site, inviting a small number of foreigners. He said the visit marked the beginning of pilgrimage to the site that visitors from different countries would be able to make in future. “We want to show the world our cultural diversity, heritage and beauty,” said Mashood.



## Commentary

# Saudi-Iranian rivalry fuels potential nuclear race



**Dr. James M. Dorsey**

Forced to acknowledge that Iran is complying with the nuclear agreement it concluded two years ago with the world's major powers, US President Donald J. Trump appears to be groping for ways to provoke Iran to back out of the deal. If successful, Mr. Trump could spark a nuclear arms race in the Middle East at a time that a Chinese agreement to build a drone manufacturing plant in Saudi Arabia could initiate a similar drone race that threatens to take hostilities in the region to a whole new, more dangerous level.

Mr. Trump's strategy stems from the realization that the United States would render itself impotent if he were to unilaterally terminate the agreement with Iran. America's European allies as well as Russia and China would condemn termination, uphold their end of the agreement, and refuse to adhere by punitive measures the United States might adopt. With other words, termination would significantly reduce the United States' ability to influence Iran.

As a result, Mr. Trump, who has described the nuclear agreement as "one of the worst deals I've ever seen" and vowed to "dismantle" it, has since coming to office taken steps to lower incentives for Iran to continue to adhere to the accord. The outcome of May 12 elections in Iran could play into Mr. Trump's hands if a hardliner rather than incumbent President Hassan Rouhani were to emerge victorious.

At the same time, sticking to his desire to remain unpredictable, Mr. Trump has

not ruled out terminating the agreement. Asked point blank by the Associated Press whether he would stick to the deal, Mr. Trump replied: "It's possible that we won't."

The president, besides charging that Iran has violated the spirit rather than the letter of the agreement and ordering a 90 day review that in the words of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will "evaluate whether suspension of sanctions related to Iran pursuant to the JCPOA is vital to the national security interests of the United States," has also aligned the United States squarely alongside Saudi Arabia, which charges that the Islamic republic is the world's foremost source of political violence. JCPOA is the acronym for the nuclear agreement or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Re-imposing US sanctions against Iran that were lifted alongside punitive United Nations measures would stop short of a unilateral termination of the agreement, but leave Iran no choice but to respond. It could retaliate with relatively meaningless sanctions of its own, but that would unlikely satisfy hard line critics as well as a sense that the agreement has so far failed to produce economic benefits for the average Iranian. On the plus side, cooler heads would likely counsel that US punitive action would allow Iran to play the international community against the United States.

US Defense Secretary James Mattis, on a visit to Riyadh last week, echoed the kingdom's view of Iran, saying that "everywhere you look if there is trouble in the region, you find Iran." Mr. Mattis went on to say that "it is in our interest to see a strong Saudi Arabia."

Since coming to office, Mr. Trump has stepped up military support for Saudi Arabia's troubled intervention in Yemen with increased strikes against jihadist targets, a loosening of the US rules of engagement, and a lifting of restrictions on US arms sales to the kingdom because of the high civilian casualty rates in the conflict.

"We will have to overcome Iran's efforts to destabilise yet another country and create another militia in their image of Lebanese Hezbollah, but the bottom line is we are on the right path for it," Mr. Mattis told the Saudis. Iran has backed Houthi rebels in Yemen whom Saudi Arabia accuses of being Iranian stooges.

Ironically, the staunchest opponents of the nuclear agreement, Saudi Arabia and Israel, have since its conclusion urged the Trump administration not to scrap the deal. Both countries remain critical of the agreement, but believe that it has bought them a decade of an Islamic republic deprived of a nuclear weapons capability. That approach has been reinforced by the rise of Mr. Trump and his tougher policy towards Iran.

Mr. Trump's high stakes poker game that will likely embolden Saudi Arabia in what is for the kingdom's ruling Al Saud family an existential battle with Iran coupled with Chinese nuclear energy and military deals with Saudi Arabia and Iran nonetheless threatens to spark a regional arms race with potentially dangerous consequences.

With the United States refusing to share its most advanced drone technology, China has agreed to open its first overseas defense production facility in Saudi Arabia. State-owned China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) will

manufacture its CH-4 Caihong, or Rainbow drone as well as associated equipment in Saudi Arabia. The CH-4 is comparable to the US armed MQ-9 Reaper drone.

The deal could spark an arms race in the Middle East with Iran and other states seeking to match the kingdom's newly acquired capability to launch strikes from the comfort of a computerized, Saudi-based command-and-control centre without putting Saudi military personnel at risk.

Similarly, China signed an agreement on nuclear cooperation with Saudi Arabia during last month's visit by Saudi King Salman. The agreement is for a feasibility study for the construction of high-temperature gas-cooled (HTGR) nuclear power plants in the kingdom as well as cooperation in intellectual property and the development of a domestic industrial supply chain for HTGRs built in Saudi Arabia.

Arabia's effort to develop nuclear energy and potentially a nuclear weapons capability. Saudi officials have repeatedly insisted that the kingdom is developing nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes such as medicine, electricity generation, and desalination of sea water. They said Saudi Arabia is committed to putting its future facilities under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

A recent report by the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) concluded however that the nuclear agreement with Iran had "not eliminated the kingdom's desire for nuclear weapons capabilities and even nuclear weapons... There is little reason to doubt that Saudi Arabia will more actively seek nuclear weapons capabilities, motivated by its concerns about the ending of the JCPOA's major nuclear limitations starting after year 10 of the deal or sooner if the deal fails," the report said.

balance relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, with which it has had a far longer military relationship. To do so, China has moved cautiously to restore nuclear cooperation with Iran in the wake of the lifting of the UN sanctions. Iran's government-controlled Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA) reported this weekend that that China had agreed to redesign Iran's Arak nuclear reactor under US supervision.

China and the United States are pursuing different objectives in the Middle East and its dominant Saudi-Iranian dispute. In doing so, the two world powers risk however further destabilizing the region rather than contributing to ending debilitating disputes, reducing volatility, and putting an end to large scale bloodshed. As a result, despite their different goals, both powers' approaches threaten to reinforce one another in putting the Middle East at greater risk.

The agreement contributes to Saudi

China, unlike the United States, has to

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