



STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN 2022

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Human Rights Commission
of Pakistan



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Considering the limitation of official reports, press accounts and sample surveys conducted by NGOs, the figures and assessments offered here may not always represent the full or exact picture. They should be taken as a reflection of the trend during the year.

Images have been taken from national and regional newspapers and other online sources.



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ABBREVIATIONS



AJK	Azad Jammu and Kashmir	MQM-P	Muttahida Qaumi Movement (Pakistan)
ANP	Awami National Party	NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
ATA	Anti-Terrorism Act 1997	NCHR	National Commission for Human Rights
BAP	Balochistan Awami Party	NCOC	National Command and Operation Centre
BLA	Balochistan Liberation Army	NDMA	National Disaster Management Authority
BLF	Baloch Liberation Front	NGO	nongovernment organisation
BNA	Baloch Nationalist Army	PDM	Pakistan Democratic Movement
BNP-M	Balochistan National Party (Mengal)	PDMA	Provincial Disaster Management Authority
CDA	Capital Development Authority	PEMRA	Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority
CII	Council of Islamic Ideology	PILAP	Public Interest Law Association of Pakistan
CNIC	computerised national identity card	PILDAT	Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
COIED	Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances	PLWD	person living with a disability(ies)
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor	PMDA	Pakistan Media Development Authority
CTD	Counter-Terrorism Department	PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)
DSP	deputy superintendent of police	PML-Q	Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid)
ECL	Exit Control List	PPP	Pakistan People's Party
ECP	Election Commission of Pakistan	PTA	Pakistan Telecommunication Authority
FAFEN	Free and Fair Election Network	PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
FC	Frontier Corps	RUDA	Ravi Urban Development Authority
FIA	Federal Investigation Agency	SEPA	Sindh Environmental Protection Agency
FIR	first information report	SHC	Sindh High Court
GB	Gilgit-Baltistan	SHO	station house officer
GBDMA	Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority	SNC	Single National Curriculum
GBLA	Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly	TLP	Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan
ICT	Islamabad Capital Territory	TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
IDP	internally displaced person		
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists		
IHC	Islamabad High Court		
IJT	Islami Jamiat-e-Taliba		
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence		
ISPR	Inter-Services Public Relations		
JI	Jamaat-e-Islami		
JUI-F	Jamiat-e-Ulema-Islam (Fazal)		
KIU	Karakoram International University		
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa		
LBOD	Left Bank Outfall Drain		
LHC	Lahore High Court		
LOC	Line of Control		
MNA	Member of the National Assembly		
MPO	Maintenance of Public Order (Ordinance)		
MQM-L	Muttahida Qaumi Movement (London)		



GLOSSARY

<i>Aurat</i>	Woman
<i>Bait-ul-zikr</i>	Ahmadiyya place of worship
<i>Dar-ul-aman</i>	Women's shelter home
<i>Diyat</i>	Blood money: financial compensation paid to the heirs of a victim in cases of murder
<i>Fuqaha</i>	Islamic jurists (singular: faqih)
<i>Hadith</i>	A collection of traditions containing sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
<i>Hijra</i>	A term specific to South Asia used to refer to intersex or transgender people
<i>Iddat</i>	In Islam, iddah or iddat is the period a woman must observe after the death of her husband or after a divorce, during which she may not marry another man.
<i>Jirga</i>	A gathering of elders, especially in tribal societies, which settles disputes, decides criminal cases, etc.
<i>Kalma</i>	A verse that constitutes a formal declaration of Islamic faith.
<i>Karo-kari</i>	'Karo' and 'kari' were originally terms for 'adulterer' and 'adulteress' but this term is now used for multiple forms of perceived immoral behaviour. It describes a traditional custom whereby a woman and a man found in, or more often suspected of, an illicit relationship, are killed by family members to restore the family 'honour'.
<i>Katchi abadi</i>	An irregular or informal urban settlement or shanty town, generally inhabited by low-income households.
<i>Khalisa</i>	A term used in Gilgit-Baltistan for barren or uncultivated land that was originally collectively owned.
<i>Khatam-e-Nabuwat</i>	A religious principle concerning the finality of prophethood, belief in which is considered a basic article of Islamic faith.
<i>Khateeb</i>	A person who delivers sermons during congregational prayers.
<i>Khawaja sira</i>	Any person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the social norms and cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at the time of their birth, otherwise known as a transgender person.
<i>Khunsa</i>	A term used by medieval Arab jurists to classify a set of non-normative bodies.

<i>Khunsa-e-mushkil</i>	A category of gender (along with mard, aurat, khawaja sira mard, khawaja sira aurat) under a 2012 NADRA policy.
<i>Mard</i>	Man
<i>Mukhanna</i>	A category of gender; Arabic term for a gender-variant person.
<i>Nikahnama</i>	Marriage contract
<i>Nullah</i>	Watercourse
<i>Peshgi</i>	Money given in advance in cases of debt servitude
<i>Purdah</i>	Social and religious practice of female seclusion in Muslim societies, refers to physical segregation of the sexes and the requirement for women to cover their bodies.
<i>Ulema</i>	A body of Muslim scholars.
<i>Wani</i>	A custom in some parts of Pakistan where forced child marriages take place, given as compensation to an aggrieved family to settle a dispute, often murder.
<i>Zina</i>	Adultery, fornication.



It would not be incorrect to say that things came to a head in many ways for Pakistan in 2022. The year began with a sense of control and preparedness about the Covid-19 pandemic, even though there were hundreds of thousands of new cases across the country.

Unfortunately, the political and economic scenario was not as optimistic. As the governments tried to negotiate kinder deals with international lenders, the economy took a nosedive. Inflationary pressure made ordinary people's lives more difficult; businesses were stalled, leading to unemployment and poverty.

It was a year of political unrest and instability, exposing the fragile moorings of our democratic system like never before. The legislature and executive struggled with a crisis of credibility, and the judicial overreach, instead of solving the ensuing constitutional and political crises, only made matters worse. Draconian colonial-era laws continued to be used, as generously as before, against political opponents throughout the year. Moreover, people's rights to privacy and dignity were violated in the form of audio and video leaks, with no one taking the necessary steps to fix responsibility for undertaking this illegal invasion of privacy and seeking accountability from those found responsible for such acts.

Resurgence of terrorism and the fact that the year witnessed the highest number of terrorist attacks in five years is of serious concern.

It was indeed the most inopportune time for the climate-change induced catastrophic floods to strike all four provinces of the country as well as Gilgit-Baltistan in July, with devastating consequences for individual lives, livelihoods, agricultural land and houses, education and health. These losses overburdened the reeling economy in the last six months of the year.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) was particularly concerned about the threatened reversal of transgender rights during the year. The progressive federal act of 2018, which was a result of a year-long consultative process, was made unduly controversial in and outside the courts and legislature. Meanwhile, over 19 transgender persons were murdered and hundreds faced violence. Thus, the *State of Human Rights in 2022* addresses this as the key theme of the year.

As with preceding reports, this report delves into a wide spectrum of human rights violations. Following last year's pattern, this year's report comprises separate chapters on the federating units, Islamabad Capital Territory, and the administrative units of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

HRCP was happy to note that, despite political upheavals, some progressive legislation was put into effect, both in the federal parliament and the provincial assemblies. These include laws against workplace harassment, torture and custodial deaths, decriminalising suicide at the federal level, and laws for raising minimum wages, enhancing punishment for crimes against children, providing universal healthcare, restoring student unions, regularising *katchi abadis*, setting up and empowering provincial human rights and women rights commissions, and providing for the welfare of senior citizens at the provincial level. We are also pleased with the Supreme Court ruling in March that the Constitution does not disown Ahmadis as citizens or deprive them of their fundamental rights, and welcome the appointment of Justice Ayesha Malik as the first female judge of the Supreme Court.

Yet, other depressing developments and human rights violations far outweigh these gains. We are concerned that despite being functional theoretically, both the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and the National Commission on the Status of Women are waiting to be provided resources for an efficient running.

Although local government elections were held in three of the provinces, these were obligated on the orders of the superior courts. It was evident from the failure to adequately furnish the local governments with resources and authority that the political elements of the state lacked the commitment to facilitate the established of a fully functional local government system. Participants of a national conference on the subject organized by HRCP strongly argued for a comprehensive local government scheme, defining its role and functions, through an amendment in Constitution

HRCP was alarmed by a decision of the Government of Punjab to incorporate a mandatory declaration of belief in the finality of prophethood and fears that such unnecessary intrusion of the state in personal matters of Muslims will fan more extremist views.

There was no respite from cases of enforced disappearances which saw an uptick in Balochistan and elsewhere following a suicide bombing in Karachi in April. The law that criminalises enforced disappearances still faces unnecessary procedural delays. The report notes with concern that freedom of expression as well as freedom of movement and assembly remained compromised throughout the year. Cases of blasphemy, mob lynchings, forced conversions, desecration of Ahmadiyya places of worship, discrimination and persecution of minorities continued during the year. Women became victims of honour crimes, rape, domestic violence and acid attacks, in addition to experiencing discrimination and marginalization in the political, social and economic spheres.

The report also notes the human rights violations of children, labourers,

persons living with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons and regrets that the prevailing social and economic conditions enhance their vulnerability to neglect, abuse and exploitation.

Despite the challenging conditions, HRCP's nine offices across Pakistan and governing Council actively worked in the field, and stayed engaged in advocacy and lobbying work. Apart from several reactive fact-finding missions, three thematic fact-finding missions were conducted in South Punjab, Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan during the year. More than a hundred mobilisation, outreach, advocacy and policy meetings, and seminars were held, and 25 publications released. Three national conferences on electoral reforms, local governments and access to citizenship rights for itinerant workers were organised. The I. A. Rehman Research Grant was granted this year to lawyer Usama Khawar. HRCP was pleased to award a certificate of merit to human rights activist Salahuddin Siddiqui from Sindh for his tireless work in the flood affected areas. We also set up a legislation watch cell and released its first report on federal budget allocations to the NCHR. Our complaints desks functioned effectively at all regional offices.

HRCP was deeply grieved by the loss of its Council member Akhtar Baloch this year. A highly respected journalist and progressive activist, Mr Baloch served as the Sindh coordinator for HRCP's network of core human rights defenders, leaving behind a legacy of dedication and commitment that will be remembered.

In the end, I would like to acknowledge the effort put into compiling this report by our contributors, including Mehlab Jameel, Council member Farhatullah Babar, Dr Mahvish Ahmad, Akbar Notezai, Muhammad Badar Alam, Alefia T Hussain, Israruddin Israr, Jalaluddin Mughal, Shujauddin Qureshi, Zebunnisa Burki and Bilal Abbas. Special thanks are owed to Maheen Pracha, Maheen Rasheed, Ali Haider, Zarnaab Adil Janjua, Aymen Fatima and Adeel Ahmed who assisted in conceptualising and editing the report with the Director Farah Zia. I am grateful to the Secretary-General Harris Khalique for his constant and valuable guidance in preparing the report.

HRCP deeply appreciates the work of all human rights defenders who continue fearlessly to struggle for the realisation of human rights for all within Pakistan and globally. On its part, HRCP too remains committed to the promotion and protection human rights for all without any distinction or discrimination on grounds of gender, race, religion, sect or belief, ethnicity, area of origin, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. We will continue to struggle for a more equitable, and just world in the years to come.

Hina Jilani
Chairperson



Governing (trans)gender in times of moral panic

Late-night commuters in Kohat found the Jarma Bridge blocked in the early hours of 12 February 2023. The mood was grim. After all, the bridge was the site of a gruesome murder. A man had sprayed bullets onto a car, killing one transgender woman and injuring two others. Arif Saleem happened to be the brother of the deceased, Mishi, and he had decided to put five bullets in her body to preserve the family's 'honour'. Mishi was 21 years old. Saleem confessed to receiving taunts from people about his sibling's identity and line of work, so he took matters into his own hands. The town is not unfamiliar with such stories. Two years ago, 18-year-old Dolphin met a similar fate at the hands of her own brother.

Mishi was returning from an event where she was the choice of 'entertainment' for the night. Such events, referred to as 'functions' in the community parlance, are fairly common in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the only major source of income for the ostracised transgender community. However, these male-dominated functions also become sites of bloodshed. A week after the attack on Mishi, another such targeted attack occurred in Swat. Mahnoor was returning from a function with her friend when both were shot by the former's resentful lover. Mahnoor died on the spot, making her the third transgender woman to be killed in a month.

In the week separating the two attacks, some two dozen senators with different political affiliations gathered twice at the Senate Secretariat to discuss the situation of transgender rights in the country. However, the subject that the learned senators sought to address was not the vulnerability of transgender persons to gender-based violence nor lacunae in criminal laws and barriers to accessing justice. It was not even strengthening laws and policies for the welfare and protection of the transgender community.

The committee, instead, deliberated upon several bills proposed in 2022 to remove the word 'transgender' itself from a law passed in 2018 that protects the rights of transgender people. Less than two weeks before, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Human Rights, Walid Iqbal, along with Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar, had proudly enlisted the measures taken by Pakistan to protect its transgender citizens, including passing and implementing the law in question, to the 122 state delegates at the United Nations Human Rights Council during Pakistan's fourth Universal Periodic Review.

The year 2022 has been a protracted U-turn on the rights of transgender people in Pakistan. While the federal 2018 Act that provides for the protection of the rights of transgender people faced intense backlash, over 19 transgender people were murdered and hundreds faced violence. That the members of an already marginalised community become more

vulnerable to persecution as the state gets cold feet on protecting their rights, is an unprecedented blow to the human rights situation of minorities in the country. Accordingly, *State of Human Rights in 2022* addresses this as a key theme in this report.

The law and its discontents

As the activists took their seats on one side of the conference table, the room began to fill with bureaucrats, parliamentarians, lawyers, academics and members of civil society. The chatter died down when the star of the show, the chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), Qibla Ayaz, walked into the room and took his seat next to Senator Rubina Khalid. On the table were copies of a draft bill on the rights of transgender people. The activists and experts had been invited to provide feedback on a contentious clause that provided for the creation of district ‘screening committees’ for legal recognition of transgender people.

This room in the Federal Ombudsman Secretariat had witnessed months of work put into drafting comprehensive legislation on the rights of transgender people in consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders. The meeting on 16 January 2018 with the chairman and his research team was called to seek the advice of the CII as the Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights deliberated on two competing bills.¹ Senator Rubina Khalid gave the floor to the activists in the room. Medical research studies, global standards of care, medieval legal compendia, historical regional practices, rulings of *fuqaha* [Islamic jurists], exegeses and hadith references – nothing was left out. Activist Bubbli Malik spoke last and delivered an impassioned appeal to the *ulema* [religious scholars] to preserve the dignity of transgender people in the law by not having their bodies, identities and traumas subjected to the whims of a ‘screening committee’.

The chairman finally spoke in a kind but firm voice. He categorically reaffirmed the right to dignity of transgender people—a sentiment unmistakably reflected in the CII’s subsequent reports. This meeting proved to be crucial in turning the tide in coming weeks. With the CII’s input, the Senate Functional Committee gave its nod of approval to one consolidated bill in February 2018. The bill was read in its entirety on the floor of both houses. In a move that simultaneously righted a colonial wrong by attesting to the suffering levied on this community and affirming the dreams and joys of transgender people across the country and the region, Parliament passed the bill with a majority vote.

The consultative process lasted well over a year before the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act was passed in May 2018. The federal Act, with its basis in Articles 19, 25, 26 and 27 of the Constitution, prohibits discrimination in access to employment, education, healthcare, public spaces and services on the basis of sex, gender identity and gender expression. In addition to affirming the fundamental rights of transgender

people, including but not limited to the right to legal gender recognition, the Act obligates the government to undertake welfare measures and create shelter homes and separate prison cells for transgender people. Amnesty International hailed the Act as ‘one of the most progressive pieces of legislation’ of its kind,² moving Pakistan onto a growing list of states around the world that have similarly recognised the rights of transgender people.

Four years after its enactment, the law became a controversial document when a Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) senator from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mushtaq Ahmed Khan, launched a bid to have the Act repealed for promoting ‘the legalisation of homosexual marriages’.³ Khan’s constituency has seen hundreds of murders and gruesome cases of violence against transgender people in the past few years.⁴ There were six attacks in March 2022 alone, leading to five fatalities. Faulty investigation methods and out-of-court settlements lead to perpetrators walking free in most cases and repeatedly targeting vulnerable transgender people in the form of organised gangs.⁵ The police have a history of threatening harm to activists who highlight the former’s direct or indirect complicity in these attacks.⁶

Instead of responding to a glaring gap in the criminal justice system and law enforcement practices, Khan’s explosive counter-claim that a law that protects the rights of transgender people has singlehandedly undermined the very foundations of an Islamic republic, managed to induce nationwide moral panic. Protests erupted to stop a bill that had already been passed four years ago. Resolutions were submitted in provincial assemblies to condemn the law. Even the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan were prompted to issue a decree to ‘rid the holy land of blasphemers’ for passing such a law. A placatory press conference by the federal law minister and prime minister’s advisor did little to quell the flames.

In the next few weeks, the term ‘transgender’ blazed across online platforms in a widespread disinformation campaign. An expert analysis of online trends against the 2018 Act reveals that the content originated from accounts that associated themselves with a party that had championed the Act in Parliament in the first place. This content was then amplified by accounts affiliated with right-wing parties that game the algorithms of social media platforms as part of the larger disinformation ecosystem online.⁷

Misreported facts and exaggerated fears in incendiary speeches spread like wildfire.⁸ Those presenting a counter-narrative were not organised and fact-checkers had few resources. In an unprecedented display of legislative efficiency, five more bills were submitted in the Senate within a month to hastily amend the offending Act and bring it into conformity with Islamic injunctions.⁹ One such bill proposed an alternate Islamic definition for transgender person as someone who ‘keeps one hole for urination’.¹⁰ Other bills sought to create a requirement for transgender

persons to undergo a 'medical examination' in order for the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to issue them correct national identity cards. Such a provision is tantamount to seeing all transgender citizens as 'suspicious' by default and denying them their right to equal recognition before the law.

A common theme underlying these amendment bills is that gender is not a subjective matter and the authority to decide the gender of persons who do not fit the binary of 'male' or 'female' should rest with a committee of medical professionals. This is notwithstanding the fact that 92 percent of transgender people report facing discrimination in healthcare settings and 74 percent avoid going to public hospitals altogether.¹¹ These bills outline no standard operating procedures. There is no mechanism for applicants to access information on their case. Nor do these bills address the glaring lack of capacity of healthcare professionals in this regard.¹² Notably, this lack of capacity leading to 'medico-legal and administrative complications' was accepted as reasonable justification for excluding transgender victims of rape from the protections provided under the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021,¹³ ignoring the fact that 56 percent of transgender people report being tricked into, lied to or forced into sexual activity; 35 percent experience drug-facilitated assault, including gang rape; and the majority of cases go unreported.¹⁴

Unwilling or unable to address these systemic issues, the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights instead decided to debate nomenclature and go in for an old-fashioned rebranding. The committee's solution to the problem is to replace the word 'transgender' with '*khunsa*' [a term used by medieval Arab jurists to classify a set of non-normative bodies] in the law and constitute medical boards to certify '*khunsas*' in each district within 30 days for them to finally receive their much-awaited rights.¹⁵

From unix to intersex: What's in a name?

This rebranding is by no means a novel venture. What were 'she-males' in Aslam Khaki's acclaimed human rights petition in the Supreme Court in 2009, later became eunuchs (earlier, 'unix') in court dossiers and judgements. NADRA decided to create a third gender category of *mukhannas* in 2011, further subclassified as *zankha* [he-male] and *khawaja sira* [she-male].¹⁶ The revamped 2012 policy included not two, not three, but five categories of gender: *mard*, *aurat*, *khawaja sira mard*, *khawaja sira aurat* and *khunsa-e-mushkil*. This was later instituted as Rule 13-1 in NADRA's policies through a statutory regulatory order that provided for the registration of male eunuchs, female eunuchs and unisex persons. This rule was removed in 2022 as it was rendered redundant by the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018.¹⁷

Since 2017, computerised national identity cards (CNICs) use the symbol 'X' in the gender column for transgender citizens. The Transgender and

Intersex Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2017 did little to change the NADRA policy itself. At the time, however, a senator from Balochistan managed to take offense at the word 'sex' in the title of the bill, leading to its eventual omission.¹⁸ Following the enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2018, the government began to recognise 'transgender' as the new term for its official use,¹⁹ with an all-encompassing definition in the law that codified preceding domestic jurisprudence on the subject. The Rules of the Act notified in 2021 further clarified that citizens recognised as transgender under the law would only be registered as gender 'X', that is, not as 'F' (female) or 'M' (male). Notably, there is no provision for marriage for persons of 'X' gender in the law. Marriage is solemnised between 'M' and 'F' and registered as such in the official *nikahnama* [marriage certificate] document.

The process of governing these transgender citizen-subjects remained fraught with bureaucratic anxiety about impersonators laying claims on state welfare measures and quotas. It is pertinent then, that it has taken a decade for the quotas promised in the Supreme Court rulings (2009–12) to be realised in only one province so far. Sindh reserved a 0.5 percent employment quota for transgender persons in July 2022. In contrast to the 2018 Act, which does not provide for employment quotas nor mandates any medical screening, a transgender person is eligible to avail the quota under the Sindh Civil Services (Amendment) Act 2022 only after inspection by a standing medical board. In December 2021, the Sindh Assembly also passed the Local Government (Amendment) Act, which creates a 1 percent quota for transgender persons in local government bodies without such a requirement. The Musawaat programme by the Punjab Social Protection Authority for the welfare of transgender persons also became functional in 2022, albeit with a low uptake.

As criticisms of the 2018 federal Act grew due to lack of implementation in the provinces, the term 'intersex' saw a popular revival on the one hand and the spectre of men and women impersonating transgender persons raised on the other. Embroiled in controversy, the law was gutted and given a makeover by the learned senator from the JI in the form of the Khunsa Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2022 in order to make it shariah-compliant. The new bill was virtually the same as the 2018 Act, with an added provision to constitute a 'gender reassignment board' delegated the task of inspecting people's genitalia as a prerequisite to receiving their elusive rights.²⁰ The bill, in direct contravention of domestic jurisprudence on the subject and medical standards increasingly being adopted around the world, also prohibits sex-reassignment surgeries on the basis of diagnosis of gender dysphoria.

In the service of this noble cause of protection of rights, the lawmakers of the day have responded to the complex and multi-layered problem of gender-based and sexual violence against transgender people, exacerbated by institutionalised discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression, by simply trying to legislate transgender people

out of existence. The logic is impeccable. How can you be harassed or discriminated against on the basis of your gender identity and expression when the latter is itself a disputed matter in front of a medical board that must consult a 'district *khateeb* [one who delivers the sermon during prayer]' for guidance in determining your gender? You do not get the right to appeal the decision of this board either. Case closed.

Keeping it halal

But the case is far from closed. The quest for certainty in determining the gender of a person whose body, identity or expression are seen as defying the gender binary has led a range of parties to battle it out in the Federal Shariat Court. The court held no fewer than 14 hearings on these petitions in 2022. The petitions (filed in 2021) challenged primarily Section 3 of the 2018 Act (which provides for recognition of transgender persons on the basis of self-perceived gender identity) for being against the injunctions of Islam. Similar petitions filed before the Lahore High Court and the Sindh High Court, contending that the Act was contrary to social and cultural norms, were dismissed in 2022. Quoting a medley of *hadith* [sayings of the Prophet PBUH] and Quranic verses, these petitions in the Federal Shariat Court echoed a common apprehension: that the Act would provide recognition to persons who were not actually transgender.²¹ This is perhaps best epitomised in the ominous warning in the petition filed by Hammad Hussain:

This [Act] will open gates to a flood of immorality and haram practices in the Islamic society, which will ultimately give shoulder to the International Satanic Agenda of lesbians and gays being promoted in the Western world [*sic*].

This contention that a conspiratorial agenda was afoot was not supported by any evidence. In fact, there is more research to indicate that only one out of every ten transgender persons surveyed even consider obtaining a CNIC as per their gender,²² that transgender people are still required to submit medical or other proof to have their legal documentation amended,²³ and that NADRA centres, particularly in smaller cities, remain inaccessible for transgender people who face stigma, discrimination and even harassment at these centres.²⁴ The petitions also harboured the impression that the Act had opened the way for arbitrary changes in gender.²⁵ A thorough review of NADRA policies indicates that this claim is also incorrect.²⁶

The arguments made by the petitioners in the Federal Shariat Court also seemed unconcerned by the fact that the miniscule proportion of the Pakistani population whose gender has been successfully corrected on legal documents²⁷ continue to face human rights abuses, as evidenced by the number of petitions filed in the higher courts.²⁸ Transgender people continue to face abuse and assaults on their dignity in the public sphere. In April this year, a petition was filed in the Lahore High Court by

transgender rights activist Zanaya Chaudhry, seeking action against a film that included a dialogue that ridiculed transgender persons.²⁹

In a stark break from the tradition of local jurisprudence in which the rights of transgender people have been upheld by the higher courts, the petitions in the Federal Shariat Court seem to rely on instigating mass moral hysteria in the absence of solid evidence. However, on wading through the plethora of unfounded claims, one finds that these petitions mount a vigorous case against what the petitioners perceive as an over-reliance on the feelings of a person in the 2018 Act. Notably, the word 'feelings' appears nowhere in the text of the law; this criticism is directed largely at the definitions of 'gender identity', 'gender expression' and 'transgender person' in the law.³⁰

At the risk of simplifying the arguments made in the court, the assertion that feelings have no place in the law, specifically shariah, has been reiterated by the petitioners in the court. At a time when there is such callous disregard for the worth of feelings in adjudicating the rights to life, dignity and equality of the members of a marginalised community, it serves well to remember that Pakistan's judiciary has time and again displayed a remarkable degree of empathy for transgender people in a range of rulings concerning their fundamental rights. Justice Abid Aziz Shaikh of the Lahore High Court has observed:

Seldom Society realise[s] or cares to realise the trauma, agony and pain which the members of the Transgender Community undergo, nor appreciates the innate feelings of the Transgender Community, especially of those whose mind and body disown their biological sex [sic].³¹

The Federal Shariat Court bench has so far not shown much interest in considering the international human rights law as guiding principles in this matter.³² The Court has also paid little attention to the relevant jurisprudence from countries in the region.³³ There are valuable lessons to be learnt from reviewing how Pakistan's neighbouring states have risen to the challenge of protecting the rights of transgender people in a balanced and holistic manner.

Family values

'There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex,' reads Article 25(2) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The 2018 Act is in troubled waters precisely because it reads a dynamic social reality of gender into the static constitutional category of sex. It is built on the understanding that, when we talk about discrimination, we mean discrimination and violence meted out on the basis of oppressive gender norms, as held by the Supreme Court too, recently.³⁴ The impact of this violence is felt not just in the body, nor is this violence incurred merely on account of physiology. This violence is triggered by the expression

that identifies a body as gendered, and it is this psychic expression of identity—the possibility of being one’s true whole self—that such violence ultimately seeks to subjugate or destroy.

Thus, the 2018 Act too, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity and gender expression, and offers remedies for victims in order to create protections from gender-based violence. It does not simply cast its subjects as hapless victims in need of rescue. It confers on them precisely what the violence sought to take away — their ability and agency to determine and express who they are. They are recognised as equal before the law and entitled to equal protections of the law (Article 25(1)). Their freedom of expression is protected by the law (Article 19) and their dignity is restored by the law (Article 14). And it is by virtue of this, that they are able, once more, to enjoy their right to life (Article 9). This is why in *Mian Asia v. Federation of Pakistan*, the Lahore High Court held:

Gender identity is one of the most fundamental aspect of life which refer to a person intrinsic sense of being male, female or transgender. Everyone is entitled to enjoy all human rights without discrimination on the basis of gender identity. Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law

Conversely, this right to self-perceived gender identity has brought some deep-seated anxieties to the surface. In arguing that the 2018 Act threatens family values by paving the way for ‘same-sex marriage’, critics of the law have read an ideology of sexuality into the constitutional category of sex. Just as the sodomite was produced before the law in the nineteenth century by the colonial administration through a moral panic about *hijras* [a South Asian term for the ‘third gender’] in order to strengthen its control over local populations,³⁵ it is now the transgender (a homosexual in disguise, as per the JJ), conveniently rediscovered in times of political turmoil,³⁶ that has become the harbinger of ‘legal and social chaos’ which must be kept at bay by the Pakistani nation-state to ensure its survival.³⁷ This panic is perhaps best epitomised by the misguided ban imposed by the censor board on the critically acclaimed film *Joyland*, which features a trans woman as one of its central characters.³⁸

The search for this transgressive subject itself produces these subjects in the public discourse who must then be eliminated by law. This is made possible by obstinate schemes to police and redefine the nebulous legal category of ‘transgender’ (or its many avatars), that are fuelled by recurring panics about ‘fakes’ and ‘imposters’, which allow this category to be cast as a persistent threat to gender and sexual norms. Conveniently, this does not address the fact that the family itself is often the site of upholding these sexual and gender norms, that in their most oppressive form discipline, punish, abandon and even kill those who fail to obey these normative ideals based on a fictional gender binary. It gains particular significance then, that none of the laws on domestic violence

in Pakistan—with the partial exception of the law in Sindh—provide protections to transgender people.³⁹ To date, only one protection centre has been established in the country for transgender people.

A cure for cold feet

Pakistan has celebrated many ‘firsts’ in its journey to empower transgender people. The initiatives undertaken by the federal and provincial governments have been extolled at various human rights forums, most recently in the report to the Human Rights Council during Pakistan’s Universal Periodic Review.⁴⁰ The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 features prominently in Pakistan’s GSP+ assessment.⁴¹ At a time when transgender people are facing an onslaught of violence, Pakistan cannot afford to backtrack on its numerous human rights commitments to protect vulnerable communities.

Meanwhile, Mishi and Mahnoor have been surreptitiously laid to rest. Four other transgender women injured in the attacks languish in hospital. No one took notice. No one assured them of justice. The message from the state to the perpetrators of such violence is clear—we will keep looking the other way. Even though the National Security Policy explicitly calls for the protection of transgender people from gender-based violence as a key objective for ensuring human security,⁴² Pakistan has failed to live up to its own ideals as moves are made to chip away limited legal protections and an environment of impunity is created for perpetrators of violence against transgender people.⁴³ As Pakistan continues to gain global notoriety for being a death zone for transgender people, it seems that state institutions are failing to address the epidemic of violence consuming transgender people in the country. Forty-four transgender women have been killed in Pakistan since 2021.

Pakistan is at a delicate crossroads today. The country has the opportunity to show the world what it means to stand firm and defend an old and long-suffering indigenous people. A welcome move was the launch of a complaints portal by the Prime Minister’s Strategic Reform Unit in October 2022. However, regressive actions that are informed by fear, rather than evidence, such as amending the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, do not instil much confidence. As a result of such misguided campaigns, the process of enacting provincial legislation on the rights of transgender people has been indefinitely stalled.⁴⁴ There has been a sharp uptick in threats issued to transgender rights defenders in the country.⁴⁵ The word ‘transgender’ itself has become taboo in policy dialogues.

It is vital that the Government of Pakistan quash these amendment bills and protect a law that exemplified for the world what it means to undo a colonial wrong and restore the dignity of transgender people. In order to ensure proper implementation, it is crucial that provinces create adequate legislation on the rights of transgender people. It is imperative that such policy actions are guided by evidence and a careful review of international

standards and guidelines as well as good medico-legal practices adopted worldwide. At a time when the lives, dignity and security of transgender people are under threat, it is the duty of the state to protect a vulnerable minority. Above all, Pakistanis need to show the world what it means to embody empathy in times of uncertainty instead of letting fear and hatred win.

Endnotes

- 1 See infra note 19.
- 2 Amnesty International. (2018, May 25). Pakistan: Historic rights advances for tribal areas and transgender people. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/05/pakistan-historic-advances-for-rights-tribal-areas-transgender-people/>
- 3 The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) (Amendment) Bill 2021 submitted by Mushtaq Ahmed mentions 'legalisation of homosexual marriages' as a reason for amending the 2018 Act.
- 4 As per the organisation Blue Veins, 90 transgender people were killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during 2015–21 and 150 others subjected to various forms of physical violence. See also: A. Mohmand. (2022, March 19). Trans persons are soft targets in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. <https://voicepk.net/2022/03/transpersons-are-soft-targets-in-khyber-pakhtunkhwa/>
- 5 A. Khan. (2019, March 23). No respect for life, no path to justice. *The Express Tribune*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1935811/no-respect-life-no-path-justice>
- 6 S. B. Shah. (2021, October 13). DSP enters Peshawar press club, threatens transgender persons. *The News International*. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/899936-dsp-enters-peshawar-press-club-threatens-transgender-persons>
- 7 Digital rights activist and lawyer Shmyla Khan, who studies online disinformation campaigns, monitored Twitter trends on the 2018 Act in September 2022 and provided input for this article.
- 8 Fact check: Senator peddles disinformation about trans community changing gender. (2022, October 24). *The Correspondent*; H. Zaman. (2022, October 27). Associated Press report includes misleading info on trans rights act. *Soch Fact Check*.
- 9 The amendment bills were presented in the Senate by Mushtaq Ahmed (JI), Fawzia Arshad (PTI), Mohsin Aziz (PTI), Syed Muhammad Sabir Shah (Ind) and Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, Atta-ur-Rehman, Faiz Muhammad and Kamran Murtaza (JUI-F). One amendment bill by Qadir Khan Mandokhail was already unrelatedly under consideration in the National Assembly.
- 10 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) (Amendment) Bill 2022, submitted by Fawzia Arshad on 26 September 2022.
- 11 RHRN Young Omang. (2017). *Health and access to care and coverage for transgender individuals in Pakistan: A call for action* (pp. 3–4); Good Thinkers Organisation. (2016). *Recognition of third gender: Realising the plight and rights of transgender community in Punjab* (p. 18).
- 12 When asked if their education adequately prepared them to provide care for transgender patients, 34–46 percent of healthcare providers said they were unprepared or partially prepared. See: *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 13 Senate of Pakistan. (2021, September 1). Committee press release. <https://senate.gov.pk/com/pressreleasedetail.php?id=152&pressid=4010>
- 14 National AIDS Control Program. (2017). *Integrated biological and behavioral surveillance in Pakistan, 2016–17* (p. 24); N. Kirmani & R. Hasnain. (2022). *The hidden crisis: The causes and consequences of sexualised drug use ('chemsex') amongst key populations in Pakistan*, p. 21. Dareecha Male Health Society.
- 15 Senate of Pakistan. (2022, March 3). News detail. https://senate.gov.pk/en/news_content.php?id=4794
- 16 The policy on third gender classification on CNICs based on some kind of test of hormonal levels was widely protested for its discriminatory and arbitrary nature and consequently scrapped. See: A. Khan. (2011, April 26). Transgender rights: SC tells NADRA to amend gender verification process. *The Express Tribune*.

- 17 H. Zaman. (2022, October 31). Fact check: NADRA cancels gender reassignment rule. Soch Fact Check.
- 18 This is based on the account of lawyer Sabahat Rizvi who was present at the Senate Committee deliberations on the said bill in July 2017. The JUI-F senator in question accused members of trying to promote 'Western values' in Pakistan.
- 19 The Punjab government was the first to make a change from 'she-male' to 'transgender' in November 2018 after a lawyer filed a petition against the Punjab Public Service Commission's use of the former derogatory term.
- 20 It is worth noting that, in 2017, a similar bill was proposed by Karim Ahmad Khawaja (PPP) with a provision for establishing a district screening committee. However, on consultation with the community, Khawaja decided to withdraw this bill and put his support behind the bill presented by Rubina Khalid (PPP), Kulsoom Parveen (PML-N), Rubina Irfan (PML-Q) and Samina Saeed (PTI), which proclaimed the right to self-perceived gender identity for transgender persons.
- 21 Two of these petitions misspelled the name of the court as 'Federal Shariyat Court'. Legal scholar Jeffrey A. Redding says that these 'hastily drafted [petitions] would clearly benefit from more research, fact-checking, and contemplation of its true goals.' See J. A. Redding. (2022). Islamic challenges to Pakistan's transgender rights law. *Melbourne Asia Review*, ed. 10.
- 22 The key reasons for this are lack of awareness and fear of discrimination. See also: M. Jameel & M. Osama. (2018). *In the eyes of the law: Legal challenges to being transgender in Pakistan* (p. 67). Naz Male Health Alliance.
- 23 M. Jameel & H. Zaidi. (2022). *Legal gender recognition in Pakistan: The hurdles and limitations* (p. 16). HOPE.
- 24 M. Fatmah & H. Yusaf. (2022). The (in)accessibility of NADRA and union council processes for women and gender minorities. *Gender Bi-Annual*, 3.
- 25 It was argued in the Federal Shariat Court hearings and in the Senate that nearly 38,000 people had amended their CNICs using the 2018 Act. A NADRA spokesperson later clarified that the figure was misrepresented. See: Fact check: Senator peddles disinformation about trans community changing gender. (2022, October 22). *The Correspondent*.
- 26 The 2021 Rules of the Act only allow for CNICs to be issued with gender X, and any correction of gender on CNICs can happen only once, unless further amendment is supported by cogent reasons. The NADRA policy also specifies that an application to have a CNIC amended from 'M' to 'F' or vice versa should be scrutinised by a zonal board that requires stringent medical evidence and final approval is provided by the director general. Only 14 such cases have been entertained by NADRA to date, mostly on court orders. For instance, in *Kainat Manzoor v. NADRA* (2022), NADRA responded to a Gujrat civil court that it had denied an application for gender change to a candidate who had failed to submit adequate medical proof.
- 27 As per a response submitted by the director operations NADRA to the Ministry of Human Rights on 27 July 2022, NADRA has registered 2,978 transgender persons to date. Out of these, 1,856 CNICs were issued on first-time registration, whereas 1,035 CNICs were changed from 'M' to 'X' and 87 CNICs changed from 'F' to 'X'.
- 28 In *Fiaz Ullah v. PPSC and others* (WP no. 3176 of 2021), the Lahore High Court found that the Punjab Public Service Commission had discriminated against a transgender person seeking employment. In *Muhammad Nawaz v. Government of Punjab* (WP no. 57820 of 2021), the Lahore High Court issued notices to police authorities for not providing employment to transgender people. In MA No. 8156/2020, CR. Appeal no. 371/2020, the Sindh High Court found that separate barracks were not provided for transgender people in prisons, leading to the abuse of a transgender person by inmates. In a separate case, the Lahore High Court also sought a report from the Punjab prisons department on the status of implementation of separate prisons for transgender persons.
- 29 The petition was filed by barrister Ahmad Pansota in April 2022. PEMRA has also previously imposed a fine on a private channel for airing offensive remarks against the transgender community (in a complaint filed by advocate Nisha Rao).
- 30 Section 2(e) defines 'gender expression' as 'a person's presentation of his gender identity and the one that is perceived by others.' Section 2(f) defines 'gender identity' as 'a person's innermost and individual sense of self as male, female, or a blend of both or neither that can correspond or not to the sex assigned at birth.' Section 2(n) defines 'transgender person' as '(i) intersex (*khusra*) with mixture of male and female genital features or congenital ambiguities; or (ii) eunuch assigned male at birth, but undergoes genital excision or castration; or (iii) a transgender man, transgender woman, Khawaja Sira or any person whose gender identity or gender expression differs from the social norms and cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at the time of their birth.'
- 31 See *Mian Asia v. Federation of Pakistan* (WP no. 31581/2016).

- 32 In a hearing on 3 March 2022, Justice Syed Muhammad Anwar admonished the director general of the Ministry of Human Rights for referencing the Yogyakarta Principles in its response to the court. The Yogyakarta Principles are a set of principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, first drafted in 2006. Although not binding, this document draws on the ICCPR and ICESCR and has been widely referred to in courts worldwide, as guidance on how to apply international human rights standards in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.
- 33 In *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014), the Supreme Court of India affirmed the fundamental rights of transgender persons, including the right to self-identification. Similarly, *Sunil Babu Pant v. Government of Nepal* (2007) upheld the right to self-determination, granting equal protections on the basis of gender identity. Although surgeries for certain conditions have been practiced in Iran since the 1930s, it was not until the 1990s that the process was formalised. Following a fatwa by Ayatollah Khomeini, later affirmed by Ali Khamenei and others, transgender people are allowed sex reassignment surgeries and full recognition. In 2010, the Iranian Legal Medicine Organization formulated a standardised protocol in this area.
- 34 See, for instance, the Supreme Court's reading of 'gender equality' under Article 25 of the Constitution in *Uzma Naveed Chaudhary & Ather Farook Buttari v. Federation of Pakistan* (Civil Petitions No. 1347 and 1655 of 2019).
- 35 J. Hinchy. (2019). *Governing gender and sexuality in colonial India: The hijra*. Cambridge University Press.
- 36 The first time the JI rang alarm bells and took to the streets about an 'American conspiracy' to 'spread homosexuality' was in 2011 when the US embassy in Pakistan hosted a private 'Pride' event in Islamabad.
- 37 This was argued in a paper published by a conservative think-tank, the Institute of Policy Studies in Islamabad (founded by JI worker Khurshid Ahmed). See S. N. Farhat et al. (2020). Transgender law in Pakistan: Some key issues. *Policy Perspectives*, 17(1), 7-33.
- 38 Although the ban was lifted by the federal government and the film released, with some cuts, in parts of the country, the Punjab government reversed its decision to release the film and imposed a ban. Saim Sadiq's debut feature, with Malala Yousafzai as one its executive producer, has won numerous awards for its nuanced portrayal of gender and sexuality.
- 39 A recent study by UNDP also found that transgender people living with hostile families faced added stress and compromised health. See UNDP. (2020, August 6). Social inclusion of vulnerable transgenders in times of COVID-19. <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/stories/social-inclusion-vulnerable-transgenders-times-covid-19#:~:text=A%20community%2Dbased%20awareness%20mechanism,safe%20in%20their%20personal%20spaces.>
- 40 See A/HRC/WG.6/42/PAK/1.
- 41 European Commission. (2020). Report on the Generalised Scheme of Preferences covering the period 2018–2019. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0003&rid=4>
- 42 National Security Division. (2022). *National security policy of Pakistan: 2022–26*, p. 47.
- 43 The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) has found that, even where victims and their families pursue cases with the authorities, the police either fail to register complaints or carry out prompt, thorough, competent and effective investigations that could eventually lead to the prosecution and conviction of the perpetrators. See: ICJ. (2022, March 31). International Transgender Day of Visibility: End impunity for attacks against transgender people. <https://www.icj.org/international-transgender-day-of-visibility-end-impunity-for-attacks-against-transgender-people/>
- 44 The Punjab Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2020, the Sindh Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2021 and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Transgender Persons Welfare Endowment Fund Bill 2022 were introduced in the respective assemblies but have not been passed.
- 45 At least five prominent transgender rights activists have received threats of violence or been attacked by mobs since September 2022, including Pakistan's first transgender news anchor Maarvia Malik, who narrowly survived a gun attack in Lahore's Cantonment area and Karachi-based activist Shehzadi Rai, who evaded an acid attack.



Climate crisis and floods

- Catastrophic floods induced by climate change affected much of the country in 2022. Over 33 million people were affected, 1,739 lives lost and 12,867 injured. Crop damage constituted 82 percent of flood damages, followed by livestock at 17 percent.
- Sindh was worst-hit by the floods with an estimated 823 deaths, over 12 million people affected and a large number displaced. More than 20,600 schools and 4.4 million acres of agricultural land were destroyed.
- In Balochistan, 336 lives were lost due to the floods. The floods also destroyed over 700 basic and rural health units, washing away most of the province's scant health infrastructure.
- In October, Helpage reported that 69 percent of flood-affected older people did not have shelter.

Laws and law-making

- A total of 207 laws, 62 federal and 145 provincial, were enacted in 2022.
- Legislating through presidential ordinances continued during the year.
- The Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment) was passed in January.
- The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, which criminalises enforced disappearances, was returned to the National Assembly from the Senate in October where it was further amended instead of being sent to a joint parliamentary sitting, effectively delaying the law's enactment.
- Another amendment bill to the same law decriminalised suicide.
- After six attempts, the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act received presidential assent in November.
- The KP Assembly passed significant legislation raising the minimum wage to Rs 26,000, establishing stricter punishments for crimes against children and providing universal health care under the Sehat Card.

- The Sindh Assembly passed significant legislation to restore student unions, initiate the regularisation of *katchi abadis* and empower the Sindh Human Rights Commission.
- The GB Assembly passed legislation authorising the setting up of a commission on the status of women, establishing the right to food and providing for the welfare of senior citizens.

Administration of justice

- In January, Justice Aysha Malik was appointed the first female judge of the Supreme Court, following protracted conflict between judges over the appointment criteria. Only 4 percent of Pakistan's high court justices are female.
- In January, the LHC ruled that a marriage without completing *iddat* is not void and does not constitute a cognisable offence of *zina* (adultery).
- In October, the law ministry notified two juvenile justice committees for Islamabad to dispose of cases against juvenile offenders through various non-custodial measures and designated two special human rights courts.

The death penalty

- 98 death sentences were handed out, a drop from the 129 awarded in 2021.
- No executions were carried out with a de facto moratorium in place following a 4-year spree of 519 executions after the APS attack.
- Pakistan's death row reduced significantly from 7,164 in 2012 to 3,226 in 2022.
- In August, the Control of Narcotics Substances Act 1997 and Railways Act 1890 were amended to replace punishments of death with life imprisonment.
- In November, Pakistan opposed a UNGA resolution calling for a moratorium on the death penalty, stating that it only applied capital punishment after adhering to the full due process of law.

Law and order

- Around 318 people were the victims of target killings. 384 cases of honour killings and 1,952 reported cases of sexual violence took place.
- A total of 376 terror attacks took place in 2022, the highest in five years, in which 533 people were killed and 832 were injured. The majority of the deceased were security personnel. These included the attack on a Shia mosque in Peshawar killing 63 people, an attack on a counterterrorism centre in Bannu and a suicide bombing at the University of Karachi.

Jails and prisoners

- Prisons in Pakistan remained sorely overcrowded with 88,687 inmates at an occupancy rate of 136 percent. 71.5 percent of the inmate population comprised under-trial prisoners.
- In September, the IHC chief justice visited the Adiala Jail following a report by the NCHR and termed prisoners' maltreatment a "grave violation of human rights". The court ordered the setting up of a complaints centre in the jail.
- In October, Guantanamo Bay inmate Saifullah Paracha was repatriated to Pakistan after 17 years in detention. He was never charged with a crime.
- 434 Pakistani citizens, including 45 fisherfolk, were lodged in Indian jails.
- In a report submitted to the National Assembly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs revealed that around 12,000 Pakistanis were jailed abroad with 7,195 in the Middle East. Consular access and adequate legal representation remained an issue for these prisoners.

Enforced disappearances

- Enforced disappearances continued throughout the year without any respite, as did the intimidation of families seeking justice. According to the COIED, at least 2,210 cases remained unresolved.
- There was an uptick in enforced disappearances in Balochistan following a suicide bombing at the University of Karachi in April. On 28 April, Baloch student Bebagr Imdad was forcibly disappeared from Lahore and was released 13 days later. In June, Doda Elahi and Gamshad Baloch were forcibly disappeared from Karachi and returned a week later. Baloch writer Lala Fahim Baloch was abducted in August. Two female Baloch activists were disappeared, with four Baloch men who had been disappeared earlier being murdered in an allegedly staged encounter in October.

- In June, journalists Nafees Naeem and Arsalan Khan were abducted in separate incidents in Karachi and released after 24 hours.

Democratic development

- In April, Prime Minister Imran Khan lost a vote of no-confidence motion jointly tabled by opposition parties. Earlier, the speaker had rejected the motion, deeming it against national integrity and sovereignty, following which the National Assembly was dissolved by the president. The Supreme Court then took suo motu notice of the speaker's ruling and ordered that the dissolution of the National Assembly had no legal effect.
- In KP, around 30,000 candidates took part in the second phase of local government elections held in 18 districts on 31 March; the ECP identified numerous violations of its code of conduct during the campaign and reprimanded several leaders, including then PM Imran Khan.
- In March, the IHC struck down the ICT Local Government Ordinance under which the PTI government was planning to hold mayoral elections. Later, the PDM government issued a notification increasing the capital's union councils to 101, forcing the ECP to delay the polls.
- Punjab saw frequent changes of government, destabilising the province.
- After 31 years, local bodies' elections were conducted in AJK.
- In April, PTI parliamentarians in the AJK assembly tabled a motion of no-confidence against their own PM Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi, and elected Sardar Tanveer Ilyas as his successor.
- In May, local government elections were held in Balochistan with sporadic violence on the polling day.
- The Punjab Assembly passed the Local Government Bill of 2021 on 15 September, after repealing the Local Government Act of 2022 which was passed by the PMLN government in June. On 30 November, the ECP announced that it would hold local government elections in Punjab in April 2023.
- In August, the ECP issued revised lists of constituencies, decreasing National Assembly seats to 336 seats due to FATA's merger.
- The 7th population census, to be undertaken digitally, kept seeing delays in 2022.

Freedom of movement

- The misuse of the ECL to bar foreign travel of political opponents continued throughout the year. In April, the federal interior minister vowed to streamline ECL rules and disclosed that 4,863 people were currently on the ECL, along with 30,000 people on the “blacklist” and FIA-supervised Provisional National Identification List.
- In November, lawmaker Mohsin Dawar was prevented by the FIA from travelling to Tajikistan despite his name having been removed from the ECL.

Freedom of assembly

- PTI’s ouster from the government led to protests, with some turning violent. In May, protesters in Islamabad clashed with police and were repressed with excessive force. In the same month, police fired tear gas shells on protesters in Lahore.
- In January, doctors protesting in Quetta clashed with police leading to 16 wounded.
- In June, the police used unlawful force to disperse protesters outside the Sindh Assembly. In the same month, people in Karachi protested against water and power outages, with police using batons and tear gas to violently disperse protesters blocking a road to the port.
- In June, farmers in Sindh’s Dadu district protested at the main Indus Highway against the unavailability of irrigation water to their lands. A clash occurred between police and farmers with at least 25 injured.
- In December, violence erupted in Gwadar as protestors from the Haq Do Tehreek were tear-gassed and charged with batons to end a two-month long sit-in over governance issues.

Freedom of expression

- Pakistan was ranked 157th out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index.
- In February, the FIA arrested media owner Mohsin Baig after a case was registered against him for making derogatory remarks against a PTI minister. He was booked on terrorism charges after the raid resulted in a scuffle with the authorities.
- In April, the new government shelved plans to set up the controversial Pakistan Media Development Authority proposed by the previous government. It also committed to review the controversial Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act.

- On 13 April, the FIA arrested eight people in Punjab for allegedly organising a smear campaign against state institutions on social media.
- On 21 May, PTI leader Shireen Mazari, was detained by police in Islamabad over what her family suggested was state criticism. She was freed the same day on the orders of the IHC but a case was registered against her daughter, Imaan Hazir-Mazari, for making derogatory statements against the army.
- In May, PEMRA twice directed news channels not to air content casting aspersions on judiciary and army. In August, the IHC revoked a PEMRA ban on Imran Khan's live speeches after the PTI leader made threatening remarks against police and judiciary.
- On 1 July, unidentified men attacked journalist Ayaz Amir in Lahore.
- Notable arrests include those of PTI's Shahbaz Gill in August and Senator Azam Swati thereafter on charges of sedition and defamation of state institutions. The cases reeked of political victimisation after claims of torture were made by the defendants.
- On 5 July, police arrested journalist Imran Riaz Khan on sedition-related charges.
- In August, ARY News was taken off air after it broadcast a PTI leader's remarks alleging internal disagreements within the army.
- In October, journalist Arshad Sharif was murdered in Kenya, where he had allegedly taken refuge after facing threats in Pakistan.
- In October, Steven Butler of the Committee to Protect Journalists was detained by the FIA and interrogated at the Lahore airport for eight hours.

Freedom of religion or belief

- Police records confirm 35 blasphemy cases were registered across Pakistan. According to the CSJ, as many as 171 people were accused under the blasphemy laws, with 65 percent of cases taking place in Punjab.
- Forced religious conversions, particularly of young women, continued like previous years.
- HRCP recorded at least nine incidents of mob lynching, all of which took place in Sindh.
- In March, the Supreme Court held that the Constitution did not disown Ahmadis as citizens nor deprive them of fundamental rights.

- 92 Ahmadiyya graves and 10 Ahmadiyya worship places were desecrated, and 25 cases were registered against 105 Ahmadis on religious grounds. On 12 December, the Gujranwala district administration razed minarets atop an Ahmadiyya place of worship after receiving complaints from local religious outfits.
- On 31 July, the *nikahnama* [marriage contract] was updated by the Punjab government to incorporate a mandatory declaration of belief in the concept of *khatam-e-nabuwat* [finality of prophethood].
- In August, a clash erupted in Gilgit when a Shia leader attempted to hoist a flag at the city's Khomar Chowk, causing two deaths and 17 injuries.

Women

- Based on police reports, there were 3,901 rapes, 325 gang rapes, 316 honour crimes, 61 acid attacks and 1,022 domestic violence incidents registered in the country.
- Sindh police confirmed a 200 percent increase in rape cases in the province, with a less than 1 percent conviction rate.
- In February, Zahir Jaffer was sentenced to death for Noor Mukaddam's murder. In March, five people, including primary accused Usman Mirza, were awarded life imprisonment in an infamous sexual assault and harassment case. Also in March, the government challenged the LHC's acquittal of Mohammad Waseem, brother of model Qandeel Baloch.
- In August, the Supreme Court reiterated women's right to bail even in cases which were non-bailable under the relevant laws.
- In KP's local government elections, women's participation as contestants and voters remained abysmally low.
- In KP, an all-male *jirga* in Bajaur banned local women from visiting picnic spots.
- In Gilgit, religious groups managed to stop a women's sports gala.

Transgender persons

- Throughout 2022, the rights granted to trans persons in the 2018 law came under attack and resulted in a proposed amendment rolling back various freedoms, including change of gender.
- In January, rights activist Sarah Gill became the first transgender doctor of the country.

- According to HRCP's media monitoring, 12 trans persons were murdered, 10 trans persons were victims of sexual violence, and one trans individual was kidnapped.
- The South Punjab Education Department opened a school for the transgender community in Bahawalpur on 12 March and in Dera Ghazi Khan on 1 August. The first transgender school was also inaugurated in Lahore on 8 December.
- In October, the federal government launched a 24-hour helpline for trans individuals to register their complaints.
- In November, the first-ever Moorat March was held in Karachi, allowing members from the transgender community to voice their concerns.
- In November, the federal government banned the release of the censor board-approved film *Joyland* that depicts the story of a man and a transgender person. This ban was overturned, but Punjab continued to ban the film.
- The Sindh government fixed a 0.5 percent job quota and 1 percent reserved seats in the local government for the trans community.

Children

- According to HRCP's media monitoring, at least 937 children were victims of sexual abuse during 2022. Alarming, between January and October, around 4,503 cases of child abuse occurred in Punjab according to the Sustainable Social Development Organisation.
- In March, the IHC criminalised marriages under the age of 18, which was opposed by the Council of Islamic Ideology.
- At least 19 cases of child marriages were recorded by HRCP, with 13 taking place in Sindh.
- In April, Dua Zehra went missing from Karachi in what her parents alleged was a case of kidnapping. Found married to a boy in Punjab, Dua stated that she was of age. While the accused were found guilty of abducting Dua and orchestrating the child marriage, Dua approached a Lahore court in July requesting to be sent to a *dar-ul-aman*.
- According to UNICEF, by the end of 2022 as many as four million children in Sindh were living near contaminated and stagnant flood waters.
- More than one in nine children under the age of five admitted to health facilities in flood-affected areas of Balochistan and Sindh were found to be suffering from acute malnutrition.

Persons with disabilities

- In May, the human rights ministry directed 29 federal ministries and divisions to ensure the implementation of the 2 percent quota for employing persons with disabilities.
- In October, the Dyslexia Special Measures Act was passed for ICT to make schools more inclusive. The Access to Media (Deaf) Persons Act also became law in December to incorporate sign language in television programmes across Pakistan.

Labour

- On Labour Day, union leaders in Islamabad deplored that only 9 million out of Pakistan's 60 million informal workers worked under labour protection laws.
- In February, the human rights ministry directed the federal and provincial governments to cease discriminatory hiring of sanitation workers from minority faiths.
- In April, the Punjab and federal governments raised minimum wages to PKR 25,000. In KP, minimum wages were raised to PKR 26,000.
- According to the Hari Welfare Association, around 1200 bonded labourers were freed in Sindh. However, only 14 district vigilance committees were constituted in the year, and even these were largely dysfunctional.
- From January to July, 90 mine workers were killed in mining incidents across Pakistan according to the Pakistan Central Mines Labour Federation. HRCP's Quetta office recorded 24 incidents during 2022 in which 71 workers were killed and 25 injured in Balochistan.

Refugees and IDPs

- Pakistan has yet to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and lacks a national legislation or a policy on refugees.
- As of December, there were 1,316,257 registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan according to the UN Refugee Agency. However, administrative hurdles to obtaining identification documents or renewing visas persisted, leaving many at risk of arrest.
- In December, the Sindh government was widely criticised when a picture of Afghan children behind bars circulated on social media. The Sindh information minister clarified that the children were not under arrest, but accompanied by their mothers who had to appear in cases of illegal immigration.

- In July, the KP government allocated PKR 40 million for the rehabilitation of 5,000 families from the Sipah tribe displaced from their native Tirah valley due to the Zarb-e-Azb military operation. However, the IDPs were forced to vacate when the army declared an anti-militancy operation in the valley.

Education

- The Annual Status of Education Report revealed that 45 percent of fifth-graders could not read in Urdu or other native languages, while 44 percent could not read in English.
- In July, the education ministry renamed the controversial Single National Curriculum to the National Curriculum of Pakistan, claiming it would be more inclusive and consultative.
- Schools in Punjab were unable to resume an uninterrupted routine since the Covid-19 pandemic due to floods and smog. In Sindh, 47 percent of the 44,219 government-run schools in the province were either partially damaged or destroyed due to floods, affecting around 2.5 million students, and in Balochistan, more than 3000 schools were damaged, affecting approximately 386,000 students.
- Protests took place for the restoration of student unions in Punjab and reduction in university fees. The activists were both abducted and manhandled on some occasions.

Health

- There were 1,575,805 cases of Covid-19 throughout 2022. The spread of the Omicron variant resulted in increased coronavirus cases at the start of the year, leading to mini-lockdowns and further restrictions up till March.
- Dengue outbreaks led to another health crisis in the country in which at least 149 people lost their lives.
- Water-borne diseases became rampant due to stagnant floodwater across Pakistan. Lack of food and drinking water also caused additional health problems, especially for women and children. A WHO warning was issued after 38,476 malaria cases emerged in Balochistan.
- The status of the Sehat Sahulat programme in Punjab remained unclear.
- HRCP recorded at least 1,341 suicides across the country.
- A resurgence of polio took place with at least 20 reported cases.

Housing and environment

- The IHC ruled against the allotment of subsidised plots to members of the government and judiciary.
- The LHC restrained the controversial Ravi Urban Development Authority from carrying out land acquisition outside the Supreme Court mandated orders on 13 October.
- Demolitions continued unabated in Karachi. Parts of Mujahid Colony were razed to the ground without any plans for rehabilitation. Despite the passage of the Katchi Abadis Act, the government failed to rehabilitate residents of the Gujjar and Orangi *nullahs*.
- Land disputes regarding the GB-KP boundaries in Shandur, Babuser and Basha remained unresolved.
- Air quality in Lahore and Karachi dipped to its worst levels in 2022.
- A severe heatwave at the beginning of 2022 struck Sindh, with soaring temperatures in Karachi, Dadu and Jacobabad.
- A wildfire erupted in AJK during the summer, affecting approximately 3 million trees and also wildlife.

Pakistan and international human rights mechanisms

- As Pakistan approached its fourth Universal Periodic Review in 2023, civil society made a number of submissions to the UN working group, focusing on the misuse of the blasphemy law and violations of freedoms of expression, assembly and association.
- In June, a European Union monitoring mission visited to assess Pakistan's progress under the GSP+ scheme. With the current certification set to expire in 2023, Pakistan needs to fulfil its GSP+ obligations.
- The European External Action Service also added an additional 5 conventions dealing with environmental standards to the 27 already part of the GSP+ program.
- In September, the UN said that it was important that international flood relief efforts are guided by human rights, prioritising humanitarian assistance and relief to the most vulnerable.

National human rights institutions

- According to recent GSP+ assessment reports, the NCHR was not made fully compliant with the Paris Principles, calling for an independent and pluralistic statutory body with sufficient resources.
- Earlier iterations of the bill to criminalise torture had tasked the NCHR with investigating complaints of torture. Later in the act that was passed in October, this authority was given to the FIA. This proposed self-accountability of agencies like FIA raises significant concerns around ethics and impartiality.

PUNJAB





- Political uncertainty prevailed throughout the year as people's democratic rights were infringed upon, in a relentless fight between the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N), Pakistan Muslim League (Q) (PML-Q) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for the office of Punjab chief minister.
- The Punjab assembly sessions were irregular and marred by disorder in the fourth parliamentary year (2021-22). Of the four provincial assemblies in the country, the Punjab assembly met for the lowest number of working hours and sittings in the year.
- After a tussle between the government and opposition for a new local government law, the Punjab Assembly passed the Local Government Bill 2021 on 15 September.
- There was an uptick in the incidence of gang-rape, murder, acid crimes and police encounters in 2022 relative to 2021.
- Media-persons faced harassment and arrest if they dared criticise the state. The arrest of journalist Imran Riaz Khan and unwarranted interrogation of Steven Butler (of the Committee to Protect Journalists) at the Lahore airport illustrate the point.
- The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances reported receiving 57 cases of enforced disappearance from Punjab in 2022.
- Attacks on the Ahmadiyya community's right to life and freedom of worship were common, with at least three members of the community killed in faith-based violence.
- The acquittal of Qandeel Baloch's brother triggered a debate on problems in the law pertaining to honour killings and the need to make such crimes a non-pardonable offence.
- The labour system remained rigged against the poor, with workers increasingly discontent with wage structures and delays in disbursement of salaries.
- Transgender persons experienced considerable discrimination and violence. An intense public debate ensued on whether the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 was in accordance with Islamic provisions after the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) moved the Federal Shariat Court against the act.
- The Punjab government failed to protect people's right to a clean, safe and healthy environment. The effects of this neglect were evident from the devastating floods that swept through southern Punjab in August and the smog that enveloped Lahore in November.

- Schools have been unable to resume an uninterrupted routine since the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 due to fresh problems in the shape of floods and smog.
- The Punjab government banned the Oscar-shortlisted film *Joyland*, whose story revolved around a trans woman, from being shown in the province.



Divisive politics and devastating floods made the year 2022 long and arduous in Punjab. After PTI chief Imran Khan was ousted as Pakistan's prime minister, after having lost a vote of no confidence on 10 April, Punjab's politics became mired in successive political and constitutional crises. The province became a battlefield for the position of Punjab chief minister, leading to successive changes in office – from Usman Buzdar (PTI) to Hamza Shahbaz (PML-N) to Parvez Elahi (PML-Q) – and disorder in the Punjab Assembly April onwards. Political and economic governance was the main casualty. The province remained without a local government all year after the previous local government's term expired on 1 January. Civil servants were transferred frequently and prematurely.

People expressed considerable frustration at the government's seeming inability to solve their problems. Protests against inflation, job insecurity and wage regularisation were common. The government failed to protect the rights of religious minorities: attacks on the Ahmadiyya community and their graveyards and sites of worship continued unchecked. The government also attempted to curb freedom of expression through repeated arrests and the unwarranted interrogation of media persons.

While centres of power in Punjab reeled under the impact of the political and economic turmoil, heavy monsoon rains in August devastated the southern districts of Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur and Mianwali. Lives were lost and homes destroyed or damaged, while the destruction of road networks, schools and marketplaces meant that people were deprived of their livelihoods and free movement. Women seeking shelter in relief camps reported instances of physical and sexual harassment. It was not possible to get a clear picture of the extent of relief and rehabilitation fund set aside for flood victims, as figures pledged by the chief minister changed with successive news reports. By September, people in Rajanpur were compelled to return home on foot because they could no longer live in poorly facilitated relief camps.



Laws and law-making

Unruly assembly sessions. The Punjab assembly sessions were irregular and rowdy in the fourth parliamentary year (2021–22), and the average number of working hours per sitting stood at one hour and 49 minutes. The Comparative Assessment of Performance of Provincial Assemblies compiled by the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) shows the Punjab Assembly met for the lowest number of working hours (76.31 working hours) and sittings (41 sittings) among provincial assemblies during the parliamentary year 2021–22.¹ The report found that the assembly’s shortest sitting was only six minutes long on 27 July and the longest lasted seven hours and 42 minutes on 29 July. The report further points out that the three Punjab chief ministers—Usman Buzdar, Hamza Shahbaz and Parvez Elahi— together attended 21 percent of the Punjab assembly sittings; a quorum was stressed in five sittings, out of which two sittings were adjourned due to lack of quorum.

The atmosphere of the assembly remained hostile mainly due to tension between the PTI and PML-N, so much so that the budget session had to be held at the Aiwan-i-Iqbal Complex on 22 June for the presentation of the province’s annual budget for 2022/23 and supplementary budget for 2021/22.

The Punjab Assembly was in a state of unrest as violence broke out inside the assembly during the election for the post of chief minister on 16 April. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expressed outrage at this outbreak of violence, tweeting that ‘it was an affront to democracy, decency and the decorum that voters expect from the people



Violence broke out inside the Punjab Assembly during the election for the post of chief minister on 16 April.

they elect.’ This delayed the budget session as the opposition parties, the PTI and PML-Q, demanded an apology from the inspector general of police and the chief secretary for the violence.

To end the standoff and facilitate the passage of the annual budget, Governor Balighur Rehman promulgated the Punjab Laws (Repealing and Removal of Difficulties) Ordinance 2022, curbing the speaker’s powers (Parvez Elahi at the time) and empowering the Punjab law and parliamentary affairs department to issue notifications regarding the summoning or proroguing of the provincial assembly.

Bills passed. According to PILDAT, a total of 35 bills were passed in the year. In September, the assembly passed the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women Bill 2022, the Lahore Central Business District Development Authority Amendment Bill 2022, and the Ravi Urban Development Authority Amendment Bill 2022. These bills had earlier been rejected by the governor and sent back to the assembly secretariat. The Punjab Assembly also passed the Local Government Bill 2021 on 15 September after repealing the Local Government Act 2022. *See also Local government*

Administration of justice

Cases pending. In a full court meeting presided over by Chief Justice Muhammad Ameer Bhatti on 7 September, it was disclosed that the Lahore High Court (LHC) disposed of nearly 95,762 cases between January and July 2022. As many as 53,955 cases were decided at the principal seat in Lahore, 24,174 in Multan, 11,221 in Bahawalpur and 6,412 at the Rawalpindi bench. The district judiciary decided over 1.6 million cases in the same period, of which the sessions courts decided 40,000 cases while the civil and magisterial courts adjudicated over 1.2 million cases. Nearly 1.16 million new cases were instituted in the civil and sessions courts.

Key court rulings. At the start of the year, on 8 January, the LHC ruled that a marriage without completing *iddat* [a period spanning about four months after separation between a married Muslim couple or death of the husband] is not void and does not constitute the cognisable offence of *zina* [adultery].² The LHC also gave an important ruling that disallowed individuals from inciting the public to raise funds for *jihad* [holy war] in an Islamic state and dismissed the appeals of two men who had been convicted for raising funds for the proscribed militant outfit, the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, on 27 January.³

On 10 February, the LHC ruled that a presidential form of government is against the basic structure of the Constitution.⁴ Subsequently, hearing petitions on the persistent constitutional deadlock in the Punjab Assembly, the LHC ruled on 22 April that the governor could not refuse to swear in a newly elected chief minister and expected that the president would nominate any person to administer oath to the PML-N leader

without delay. On 28 April, the LHC advised the Punjab governor to ensure the process was completed and oath administered to the elected chief minister, Hamza Shahbaz, either himself or through his nominee under Article 255 of the Constitution on or before 28 April.⁵ On 30 June, the LHC ordered the recounting of votes for the election of Punjab's chief minister, held on 16 April, excluding the 25 votes of defecting PTI lawmakers.⁶



Law and order

Crime statistics. In comparing data on the number and nature of crimes committed in 2021 and 2022, it is evident that incidents of gang-rape increased from 269 in 2021 to 311 in 2022, murder from 4,379 in 2021 to 4,596 in 2022, acid crimes from 34 in 2021 to 59 in 2022, and police encounters from 294 in 2021 to 370 in 2022 (Table 1). Other crimes such as rape, honour killings and domestic violence show a marginal decrease. HRCP’s own data, based on media reports, indicates at least 69 instances of police excesses (in custody as well as in public places).

Table 1: Crime statistics for Punjab in 2022

Offense	Number of victims
Rape	3,656
Gang-rape	311
Murder	4,596
Honour killings	183
Domestic violence against women	695
Acid crimes	59
Blasphemy cases	11
Law enforcement personnel killed in the line of duty	12
Police encounters	370

Source: Punjab Police, in response to HRCP’s request for information

Frequent and premature transfers of police officials. In August, the inspector general of police transferred 55 superintendents and deputy superintendents of police. It was alleged that the move was politically motivated. A similar pattern of transfers continued throughout the year.⁷

Jails and prisoners

Statistics from the Punjab Home Department for May showed that the 42 functional jails across the province have a holding capacity of 36,806 prisoners and detainees, as against an inmate population of 50,789—a record 38 percent more than capacity.⁸

The Provincial Intelligence Centre noted malpractice and corruption in Adiala Jail in its report to the chief minister and inspector general of prisons.⁹ The report expressed serious concerns related to overcrowding¹⁰ and a prevailing culture of bribery. According to the report, about 700 convicted prisoners were brought to the jail factory for labour daily, of

which 200 were exempted from labour through bribes of up to PKR 5,000 each. The report also notes that prisoners are forced to resort to bribery to avail basic facilities such as healthcare. There were also reported cases of prisoners tortured to death in jails in Faisalabad¹¹ and Bahawalpur.¹²

Enforced disappearances

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED) reported receiving 57 cases of enforced disappearance from Punjab in 2022. The official data indicates that, since the COIED's inception in 2011, of 1,551 cases received as of end-December 2022, 772 persons had returned home, 91 were traced to internment centres and 172 to prisons, while 68 dead bodies were located over the course of 11 years. At the end of the year, the COIED still had a balance of 257 cases of enforced disappearance from the province.

Activists demanded the release of missing persons during the Asma Jahangir Conference in Lahore on 24 October. At the conference, Pashtun Tahafuz Movement chief Manzoor Pashteen alleged that national institutions were behind extrajudicial killings in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas under a policy of 'state of exceptions'.¹³ He also pointed to the helplessness of the courts, parliament, media and civil society, given that Ali Wazir, a member of the National Assembly, had continuously been denied a court production order. Mr Pashteen was subsequently booked on charges of terrorism on 25 October.

Death penalty

While no executions are reported to have taken place in Punjab in 2022, the death penalty was handed down in 61 cases during the year, according to HRCP's own data, based on media reports.

Freedom of movement

The government set up a number of relief camps mainly in Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur in South Punjab to provide shelter to people whose homes, crops and livestock had been swept away by the July/August floods. The destruction of infrastructure—houses, schools, healthcare facilities, roads and bridges—constrained the movement of not just residents, but also humanitarian workers. The movement of women and children was particularly impacted because of threats of sexual and physical harassment and concerns of *pardah* [segregation]. Many found they could not freely access toilets, healthcare facilities and humanitarian aid. The movement of pregnant and lactating women was particularly restricted in the affected districts.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Interfaith harmony. In the name of religious harmony, the government welcomed Hindu and Sikh devotees at Wagah and Kartarpur during the year. Thousands of Sikh pilgrims crossed the India-Pakistan border to attend Baisakhi in April, the Jorr Mela in June and Ranjit Singh's death anniversary again in June at the Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasanabdal. The Rakhi festival was celebrated at the same gurdwara after a gap of two years; it had been discontinued earlier due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Special arrangements were made to celebrate Diwali to express solidarity with Lahore's Hindu community in October.

The government of Punjab also assigned the Walled City of Lahore Authority to conserve churches, temples and shrines in Lahore. Work on the restoration of the Jain Mandir was initiated.



The Rakhi festival was celebrated at Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasanabdal after a gap of two years.

Persecution of Ahmadiyya community. Well intentioned and necessary as these efforts may be, the same level of enthusiasm was not evident with respect to all religious minorities living in Punjab. A seminary student, Hafiz Ali Raza, stabbed 33-year-old Ahmadi Abdul Salam to death in Okara in May.¹⁴ A 60-year-old Ahmadi man, Naseer Ahmad, was stabbed to death by an unidentified man over ‘religious differences’ in Chenabnagar in August.¹⁵ A case against five Ahmadis on charges of ‘hurting the sentiments of Muslims’ by having performed ritual animal sacrifices on Eid was registered in Faisalabad on 13 July. According to information provided by the Anjuman-e-Ahmadiyya, 105 cases were registered against Ahmadis in the year.

An HRCF fact-finding mission observed an upsurge in the persecution of members of the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya in Punjab—especially in Gujranwala and Wazirabad—during 2022. Crimes against the community included the desecration of graves, destruction of minarets at sites of worship, first information reports filed against community members for carrying out ritual animal sacrifice on Eid, the forcible removal of Quranic verses from houses belonging to members of the community, and faith-based murders.

The mission found that, on 12 December, the district administration removed the minarets atop an Ahmadiyya *bait-ul-zikr* [place of worship] in Gujranwala’s Baghbanpura area, after receiving complaints from local religious outfits. Earlier, in July, a few days before Eid-ul-Azha, police officials (accompanied by two local residents) desecrated 53 graves of members of the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya in Talwandi Khajoorwali—the fourth such incident in the city in that year alone (see also Table 2).

Table 2: Human rights violations against the Ahmadiyya community in 2022

Number of Ahmadis target-killed	3
Number of Ahmadis assaulted for their faith	7
Number of Ahmadiyya worship places sealed by the authorities	1
Number of Ahmadiyya worship places set on fire or damaged	10
Burial of Ahmadis denied in common cemeteries	4
Ahmadi graves desecrated and damaged	92
Number of cases in which the <i>kalma</i> was removed from Ahmadi homes, shops and worship places	6

Source: Press Section, Anjuman-e-Ahmadiyya

Minorities in South Punjab. Another HRCF fact-finding mission found serious violations of the rights of minorities in South Punjab, observing that the blasphemy laws were commonly used to intimidate Hindu and Christian families for purposes of land grabbing. The report said that forced conversions remained common: in one case, a landlord had forcibly married the daughter of a Hindu tenant.¹⁶

Changes to marriage certificates. The Punjab Local Government and Community Development Department updated Form-II of the standard *nikahnama* [marriage registration certificate] on 31 July to incorporate a mandatory declaration of belief in the concept of *khatam-e-nabuwat* [finality of prophethood]. HRCP strongly opposed this move, tweeting that ‘such a declaration is already mandatory when acquiring identity documents and should not be necessary at this stage.’ Human rights observers felt that the provision pandered to the right wing and could be used to incite violence against religious minorities, and specifically the Ahmadiyya community, if misused.

Freedom of expression

Curbs on the media. Media-persons lived and worked in fear for yet another year, contending with harassment and arrests if they dared criticise the state. Anchor Imran Riaz Khan was charged for abetment of mutiny and criticism of state institutions by private persons from different parts of the province, and arrested from the outskirts of Islamabad on 5 July. Condemning the arrest, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) said: ‘As the number of cases lodged against journalists increases in Pakistan, the IFJ urges the Pakistani authorities to withdraw the cases against Imran Riaz Khan and cease the use of government mechanisms to harass journalists and media workers.’

In another disturbing incident in October, Steven Butler, the Asia program coordinator of the Committee to Protect Journalists, was detained by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and interrogated at the airport in Lahore. Butler had been invited to attend the Asma Jahangir Conference being held in the city.

Hate speech. Geospatial data collected by the Minority Rights Group International unearthed some worrying realities about sources of hate speech in Pakistan. It found that the bulk of hate speech occurs in three cities: Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi.¹⁷ The organisation’s report said stated: ‘In most cases, Lahore and Rawalpindi, the two large cities in Punjab province, together have contributed around 45–50% of the entire hate speech output. Moreover, if the volume of hate speech originating from other smaller cities of Punjab, including Sialkot, Multan, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Gujrat and Bahawalpur are also factored in, it reaches up to 60% in some cases.’¹⁸

Freedom of assembly

PTI ‘Azadi’ March. After former prime minister Imran Khan was removed from office in April, after losing a vote of no-confidence in Parliament, PTI supporters gathered in parts of Punjab as part of a long march to Islamabad to demand the removal of the government. Clashes occurred between protestors and law enforcement personnel as police fired tear gas in several districts as PTI supporters tried to remove

roadblocks on highways leading to Islamabad.irate protesters pelted stones and threw tear gas shells back at the police before scores of them were taken into custody.¹⁹



Clashes occurred between PTI protestors and law enforcement personnel as police fired tear gas.

After the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) disqualified Imran Khan in the Toshakhana reference on 21 October, thousands of PTI supporters blocked roads and burnt tyres in cities of Punjab. Khan launched his 'Haqeeqi Azadi March' to Islamabad from Lahore on 29 October, delivering a fiery speech targeting the intelligence agencies. The following day, a female journalist, Sadaf Naeem, was crushed under a container truck near Kamoke.

Sit-ins by students and teachers. During the first quarter of 2022, school, college and university teachers took to the streets of Lahore and boycotted certain classes for over a month to demand service and pay protection. The protests came at the cost of students' education. In February, hundreds of teachers of the Basic Education Community School – from far-flung areas of the province – demonstrated in front of the Punjab Assembly to urge the government to regularise their service and fix their salaries under the provincial labour laws.

In March, teachers of public colleges in Punjab, alongside representatives of the Punjab Professors and Lecturers Association, Young Lecturers Association and Nawa-i-Asataza office-bearers, protested in Lahore. They alleged that around 7,000 college teachers had been affected by the policies of the government and were facing a substantial PKR 20,000 pay cut.²⁰ On 13 April, the thirty-seventh day of the protest, police forcibly entered the protestors' camp and asked them to leave. They took some teachers into custody and removed the camp. Subsequently, on 3 August, the police baton-charged teachers and clerks demonstrating in Rawalpindi against the appointment of the chief executive officer of the District Education Department.

Student protests. On 9 February, the Progressive Students' Collective demonstrated in Lahore for the restoration of student unions, reduction in fees and withdrawal of security forces from college campuses. On 18 October, hundreds of students from the Pashtun and Baloch Councils of Punjab University protested against the police and administration for arresting Riaz Khan, president of the Pashtun Educational Development Movement, from his hostel; they demanded his immediate release. Their other demands included not allowing the police to enter the campus, action against Islami Jamiat Tulba (IJT) activists for allegedly opening fire in the presence of the police, and the harassment and racial profiling of Pashtun and Baloch students.

Health workers' rights. Lady health workers and volunteers from Muzaffargarh, Layyah, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur took to the streets in Taunsa Sharif on 14 February to demand their reinstatement. Subsequently, they demonstrated in Bahawalpur on 15 May to protest against delays in payment of their honorariums. Despite their frequent protests, the government has appeared to ignore their demands.

Inflation protests. Thousands of people marched against the high cost of living and unemployment. Lahore saw workers stage a rally organised by the All Pakistan WAPDA Hydroelectric Workers Union on 2 July and 22 September and by the All Pakistan Workers Confederation on 26 July. Similarly, people blocked the roads in Toba Tek Singh to protest against inflated domestic and commercial electricity bills on 16 August. The Jamaat-e-Islami also assembled in Lahore on 18 August against the increase in power tariffs and inclusion of various taxes in people's electricity bills.

Illegal possession of Ravi land. Throughout the year, landowners and farmers protested against the Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project over the forced possession of their farmland allegedly by the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) for the development of a mega-city on the outskirts of Lahore. The protests gained momentum October onwards. One such protest was held on 21 September, with protestors claiming that the land acquisition process contravened the decision of the Supreme Court.²¹ The authorities, however, denied this claim.

Political participation

By-elections. By-elections were held on 17 July to the seats that had been vacated after the disqualification of defecting PTI members who had voted for the PML-N's Hamza Shahbaz as chief minister. The PTI managed to win 15 out of 20 seats.

A positive outcome of the by-elections was the record 49.7 percent voter turnout. According to data compiled by the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) from 638 polling stations in 20 constituencies, the number of contestants in the hotly contested elections dropped from 234

candidates (226 men and eight women) in the 2018 general elections to 175 candidates (170 men and five women) in the 2022 by-elections. Subsequently, by-elections were held on 16 October to eight National Assembly and three Punjab Assembly seats, of which the PTI won six National Assembly seats and two in the Punjab Assembly.

Transfers of civil servants. The federal and Punjab governments were unable to reach a consensus on the appointment of civil servants. Frequent and premature transfers of bureaucrats were common throughout the year. Bureaucrats and police officers worked under political pressure, with some officers preferring to opt for long leave.²²



Local government

After a long, intense tussle between the government and opposition for a new local government law for the most part of 2022, the Punjab Assembly passed the Local Government Bill 2021 on 15 September after repealing the Local Government Act 2022, which had been passed by the Hamza Shahbaz government on 24 June.

Uncertainty over the law and disruptions in the functioning of the provincial assembly prevented the local government elections from taking place on time. Ultimately, on 30 November, the ECP announced it would hold local government elections in Punjab in April 2023. The term of the previous local government had expired on 1 January.²³ Later, on 11 December, the ECP also issued a schedule for the delimitation of constituencies for the local government elections.²⁴

Shrinking spaces and role of assemblies

Punjab became a political battlefield for the mainstream parties, including the PML-N, PML-Q and PTI. Political instability reached fever pitch after Imran Khan was ousted from power in a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly on 10 April. Thereafter, Punjab became mired in crises with the PML-N’s Hamza Shahbaz and the PML-Q’s Parvez Elahi both vying for the chief minister’s office. The assembly proceedings were marred by confidence votes, the chief minister elections, bids to dissolve the assembly, sloganeering and hooliganism, with little, if any, constructive debate and critical legislation. The courts had to intervene to settle the constitutional emergencies (see Table 3).

Table 3: Timeline of developments in the Punjab Assembly

28 Mar	No-trust motion submitted against Chief Minister Usman Buzdar
31 Mar	Chief Minister Usman Buzdar resigns
16 Apr	Vote of no confidence succeeds against Usman Buzdar and Hamza Shahbaz elected chief minister
17 May	Interpreting Article 63-A of the Constitution, the Supreme Court decides that defecting lawmakers’ votes will not be counted
20 May	Election Commission of Pakistan de-seats 25 dissenting PTI Punjab Assembly members
30 Jun	LHC orders recounting of votes for chief minister election, excluding PTI dissenters

1 Jul	Supreme Court orders re-election of chief minister on 22 July after holding by-elections to 20 vacant seats
17 Jul	By-election held in Punjab for 20 vacant seats
22 Jul	Hamza Shahbaz re-elected chief minister. Deputy Speaker Dost Mohammad Mazari excludes 10 votes of the PML-Q.
26 Jul	Supreme Court sets aside ruling of Deputy Speaker Dost Mohammad Mazari and declares Chaudhry Parvez Elahi chief minister
19 Dec	Opposition parties submit no-confidence motion against Chief Minister Parvez Elahi
20 Dec	Governor Balighur Rehman directs Chief Minister Parvez Elahi to take a vote of confidence

Source: PILDAT.



Women

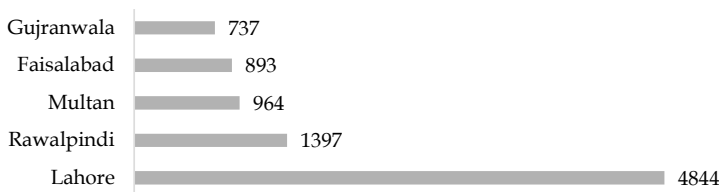
Gender-based violence. The record maintained by the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women of incidents reported through its 1043 helpline indicate a depressingly high incidence of gender-based violence (Table 4 and Figure 1).

Table 4: Gender-based violence reported by Punjab women’s helpline in 2022

Period	Family issues	Criminal offences	Property matters including inherited property	Harassment	Violence and torture, including domestic violence	Other general matters related to women’s issues	Total calls
Jan-Mar	448	160	706	1,053	1,256	2,582	6,205
Apr-Jun	376	128	455	1,054	1,127	2,941	6,081
Jul-Sep	370	118	409	894	1,201	2,124	5,116
Oct-Dec	324	201	1,159	535	1,215	2,210	5,643
Total	1,518	607	2,729	3,536	4,799	9,857	23,046

Source: Punjab Commission on the Status of Women.

Figure 1: Analysis of Punjab women’s helpline calls, top five districts



Source: Punjab Commission on the Status of Women.

Forced marriage. Two Spanish sisters of Pakistani origin – Arooj Abbas and Aneesa Abbas – were horrifically murdered in Gujrat in May for bringing ‘shame’ to their family: they had taken a stand against forced marriages to their cousins. The police booked six suspects, including their brother and cousin.²⁵

Qandeel Baloch case. A compromise was reached in the high-profile case involving the honour killing of social media star Qandeel Baloch.

Her brother, Muhammed Waseem, accused of murdering his sister in 2016, walked out of jail free on 14 February after his parents forgave him of the crime. The verdict initiated an important debate on the inherent problems in punishing honour killings as opposed to murder and the need to make honour killings a non-pardonable offence such that relatives cannot forgive the culprit.



Muhammed Waseem, accused of murdering his sister Qandeel Baloch, walked out of jail free on 14 February after his parents forgave him of the crime.

Incidence of rape. Cases of rape continued to be reported through the year, including the gang-rape of a pregnant woman in Jhelum in June,²⁶ and two cases involving men who raped their daughters in Muzaffargarh in June and in Divalpur in September.²⁷ However, the level of prosecution and investigation of rape incidents remained low, with 3,656 rapes reported to the police.

Acid crimes. The year also saw an alarming reverse on the progress made to eliminate acid crimes. Saima Akhtar, a 24-year-old woman, suffered serious burns when a man named Nauman threw acid on her on the street in a village near Vehari in January.²⁸

Nasreen Bibi and her 12-year-old son Jahanzeb, who were burnt in an acid attack, died at Multan's Nishtar Hospital in May.²⁹ A woman in Lahore, Abida, and her minor daughter Tania succumbed to injuries sustained in an acid attack at Mayo Hospital in June.³⁰

Women in flood-affected areas. Thousands of women endured poor living conditions after the devastating monsoon of 2022. Based on research by the Population Council in flood-hit districts of Punjab, some

110,000 pregnant women required antenatal, delivery and post-natal care.³¹ Although the government and nongovernment organisations sought to provide free medical help to women in such cases, many of their needs could not be met, such as hygiene requirements.

Women in South Punjab. Following a fact-finding mission to South Punjab in March, HRCP noted that ‘women in the tribal areas of Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur remain subject to harmful customary practices, with *karo-kari* and *wani* still entrenched in the fabric of their society – to the extent that even the Border Military Police does not provide the protection that victims are entitled to.’ The mission also found that many women were denied the right to citizenship documents by male members of their families and, as a result, had no political voice.³²

Right to maternity leave. On a positive note, on 2 April, the LHC ruled that availing maternity leave was a fundamental right of a woman even if not provided for in the terms and conditions of her service contract.³³ The case was filed by Sobia Nazir, a teacher who was denied maternity leave by her employers at the Punjab Workers Welfare School (Girls) Warburton in district Nankana Sahib. The judgment cited Article 35 of the Constitution, which provides that the state ‘shall protect the marriage, the family, the mother and the child.’

Transgender persons

Transgender individuals continued to face sexual and physical violence throughout the year, such as in the case of Nadeem (alias Bunty), who was stabbed to death after being sexually assaulted in Taxila on 11 February. In another case, the body of an unidentified transgender person was found on an empty plot near Muzaffargarh on 28 April; another transgender person was sexually abused in Rawalpindi on 9 August. Similar incidents were reported from different parts of the province and trans rights to life, health and physical integrity continued to be violated.

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018. The Federal Shariat Court started hearing a petition filed for the review of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 on 21 September. The Act gives transgender people in Pakistan the right to choose their gender identity as they perceive it and to change it on previously issued government documents. After four years of the Act, an intense debate was sparked by the Jamaat-e-Islami on whether the provisions of the Act were in accordance with Islamic principles.

Across the province, clerics claimed that the law was an attempt to legalise homosexuality in the country. In an interview with Voice of America, Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan of the Jamaat-e-Islami said the law should only encompass those who cannot be categorised as male or female at birth, based on their sexual or reproductive anatomy. He proposed amendments to the 2018 law, which include establishing

medical boards that conduct detailed exams and then advise the person what their gender should be. Trans rights activists have opposed examination by medical boards to determine their gender identity and trans rights activist Zanaya Chaudhary has termed this ‘discriminatory’ to the transgender community.

Schools for transgender community. On a positive note, the South Punjab Education Department opened a school for the transgender community in Bahawalpur on 12 March and in Dera Ghazi Khan on 1 August. The aim was to educate transgender students to allow them to earn a decent livelihood. The first transgender school was inaugurated in Lahore on 8 December.³⁴



The South Punjab Education Department opened schools for the transgender community in Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan and Lahore.

Children

Child abuse. Some 4,503 cases of child abuse were reported in Punjab between January and October 2022, according to the Sustainable Social Development Organisation, with 27 percent of all cases occurring in Lahore, implying that over one in four cases occurred in only one of the 36 districts of Punjab.

Districts such as Jhelum, Chakwal, Mianwali, Narowal and Khushab were ‘among those with the lowest prevalence of violence against women and children,’ the report states (Table 5).

Table 5: Incidence of child abuse in Punjab (January to October 2022)

No.	District	No. of cases of child abuse	No.	District	No. of cases of child abuse
1.	Lahore	1,221	19.	Bahawalnagar	79
2.	Faisalabad	290	20.	Sargodha	77
3.	Sheikhupura	204	21.	Chiniot	70
4.	Kasur	181	22.	Lodhran	66
5.	Gujranwala	177	23.	Gujrat	62
6.	Rawalpindi	154	24.	Layyah	59
7.	Muzaffargarh	154	25.	Mandi Bahauddin	59
8.	Multan	151	26.	Nankana	53
9.	Rahimyar Khan	137	27.	Attock	53
10.	Sialkot	130	28.	Pakpattan	52
11.	Vehari	118	29.	Sahiwal	52
12.	Khanewal	111	30.	Jhelum	49
13.	Dera Ghazi Khan	109	31.	Mianwali	38
14.	Bahawalpur	101	32.	Jhang	38
15.	Okara	94	33.	Chakwal	33
16.	Rajanpur	84	34.	Bhakkar	24
17.	Toba Tek Singh	81	35.	Narowal	20
18.	Hafizabad	81	36.	Khushab	18
Total				4,503	

Source: Sustainable Social Development Organisation.

Based on cases reported in the media, the nature of crimes against children included rape, including that of girls living with disabilities, gang-rape, abduction, corporal punishment, physical violence perpetrated by employers against child domestic helpers, and the sexual abuse of students by seminary teachers. Incidents of parents or stepparents torturing children were commonly reported throughout the year. A three-year-old girl was killed by her father in Lala Musa on 9 August for insisting on meeting her mother, who had been divorced by the father a year ago.³⁵ Similarly, a seminary teacher was arrested for burning two students with a hot pan because he suspected them of having stolen PKR 200 in Basti Bhora near Bahawalnagar on 27 September.³⁶

Child labour. The Punjab government failed to protect children from forced labour, especially from engaging in domestic labour. The parents of nine-year-old Maria Bibi handed over their daughter to a couple for employment as domestic help against a salary of PKR 2,000 per month in 2021. Subsequently, in October 2022, she was recovered from a house in Faisalabad where she had been kept in chains to prevent her from running away.³⁷

Labour

Wages and salaries. Protests against low wages, regularisation of service and delays in salaries were routine in 2022. During a sit-in outside the Civil Secretariat in Lahore in March, the All Government Employees Grand Alliance—alongside other government employees’ associations of clerks and lady health workers—presented a charter of demands to the Punjab government for the implementation of a disparity reduction allowance and service protection. Similarly, employees of Punjab University staged a demonstration to demand a 25 percent disparity reduction allowance for employees from grades BS-1 to BS-22 without any discrimination.

Workers came out onto the streets to protest against the nonpayment of salaries. In April, the Kamalia Municipal Committee sanitation workers protested in Toba Tek Singh, as did around 2,000 employees of the Punjab Mass-Transit Authority. Scores of industrial workers also staged a rally organised by the Labour Qaumi Movement and Haqooq-e-Khalq Party in Faisalabad’s Saddar area on 24 June to demand an increase in the minimum wage to PKR 40,000 and provision of basic health and education facilities.³⁸

Farmers affected by the floods. The floods disrupted agricultural production, which affected the low-paid labour force. Hundreds of farmers were left destitute after they lost their crop. Some 0.7 million acres of agricultural land was affected by the floods in Punjab.³⁹

Bonded labour. An HRCP fact-finding mission to South Punjab in March raised concerns over serious labour rights violations, particularly in terms of dysfunctional district vigilance committees set up to monitor and report the use of bonded labour. HRCP also condemned the restoration of the *peshgi* [debt bondage] system by the Punjab government, amending the Punjab Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1992. HRCP noted an allegation by power loom workers that they were compelled to work 16-hour days and had no recourse to social security or compensation in case of accidental death or injury, nor did they receive the minimum wage.

In June, brick kiln workers in Toba Tek Singh protested against unfair wages of PKR 700 instead of the PKR 1,250 against 1,000 bricks determined in a government notification.⁴⁰ Brick kiln workers also faced distressing circumstances after torrential rains submerged kilns in Rajanpur, making it impossible for them to find work.⁴¹

Occupational health and safety. Protection for workers remained well below accepted standards of safety. Shockingly, two sanitation workers were asphyxiated while working without proper safety gear in a manhole in the Rohilanwali area near Muzaffargarh on 14 July.



Education

School closures. Schools have not been able to resume regular routines since being interrupted during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. In flood-hit South Punjab, children lost family, safety and access to education. Although an exact number is not available for schoolchildren affected by the floods or the effects of the floods on school infrastructure, their learning and psychological and physical wellbeing is believed to have been severely impacted.

The LHC directed private and public school administrations to follow a four-day week due to the toxic air quality in Lahore and its surrounding areas on 8 December.⁴² Later, on 27 December, a week-long extension in the winter holidays was given to schools and colleges in Lahore due to the unrelenting smog.⁴³

Poor learning outcomes. UNICEF made startling revelations about school education in Punjab, such as the primary completion rate, which stands at 66 percent. Notable differences were observed along urban-rural as well as socioeconomic lines. Overall, 36 percent of children aged 7 to 14 have foundational reading skills and 12 percent of children aged 7 to 14 have foundational numeracy skills. Only 46 percent of those whose highest level of education is primary were able to read short, simple statements. The UNICEF report's observations on out-of-school children are alarming. The report states that, 'In Punjab, 13 percent of children of age to go to primary school are out of school. At the middle school level, the percentage of out-of-school children increases to 21 percent, and at the junior and senior secondary level it increases to 34 and 47 percent of children.'⁴⁴

Lack of facilities. In Lahore, the Punjab School Education Department failed to install water filtration plants at 100 schools in Lahore despite allocation of funds worth PKR 50 million in last year's budget. There was no clean drinking water in public schools and students were compelled to drink contaminated tap water.⁴⁵

Single National Curriculum. Confusion around the PTI-initiated Single National Curriculum (SNC) persisted for a second year. In March, the Punjab government distributed SNC textbooks to primary students and administrations of 500 *madrassahs* [seminaries]. The Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board decided to roll back the SNC in grades 6–8 and Islamiyat for grade 9 in schools of the province in May.

Violence on campus. Violence continued on campuses as the police arrested 40 students associated with the IJT for obstructing examinations, damaging property and injuring fellow students in January.⁴⁶ Government College University students protested against the administration over a student who had been thrashed allegedly for

sitting with a female classmate on campus. Later, the proctor who had thrashed the student was suspended.⁴⁷ As many as 21 students were critically injured when two groups clashed at the Punjab University campus in March after the IJT objected to a girl and boy sitting together.⁴⁸

Demand for student unions. In February, the Progressive Students Collective staged a sit-in in Lahore, demanding the restoration of student unions and reduction in fees at all educational institutions in the province on the thirty-seventh anniversary of the ban on student unions. They also demanded the release of all student activists and teachers subjected to enforced disappearances all over the country—including students Sohail Baloch and Faseeh Baloch from Quetta—and the withdrawal of the Rangers and Frontier Constabulary from all campuses. Students from Pakpattan demanded the construction of Baba Farid University, which the government had earlier promised.⁴⁹

Administrative issues. The University of Engineering and Technology functioned without any appointed heads, following which candidates were appointed by the vice-chancellor amid allegations of lack of due process. These interim appointments have had a negative impact on the functioning of the university.⁵⁰ In Lahore, the All Pakistan Universities BPS Teachers Association demanded that the Higher Education Commission provide a service structure for appointment and promotions of BPS faculty. They held press conferences and protests in front of the Punjab Assembly in February but to no avail.⁵¹

In March, teachers of public colleges in Punjab staged a sit-in outside the Civil Secretariat in Lahore to demand the regularisation of their service and withdrawal of pay cuts. However, no one from the government side, including the Higher Education Department, approached the teachers for a dialogue.⁵² In April, the Punjab government barred schoolteachers from using social networking platforms and directed them to stay away from the ongoing ‘smear campaign’ against state institutions and to refrain from siding with any political party.⁵³ Additionally, the vice-chancellors of public sector universities expressed concern over drastic cuts in the higher education budget for 2022/23.⁵⁴

Health

Covid-19. The fifth wave of Covid-19 raged on at the start of the year. On 20 January, Lahore reported a Covid-19 positivity rate of 15.2 percent, with 10.3 percent in Rawalpindi.⁵⁵ An increase in the positivity rate was reported from other parts of Punjab as well. A surge in cases of Covid-19 was observed five months later when Punjab reported 55 new cases in one day on 29 June. One death was also reported the same day.

Leprosy. Shockingly, leprosy—which was thought to have been eliminated—re-emerged in Punjab in 2022. Eighteen women and children of the Mirkhani (a sub-clan of the Buzdar tribe) in Jhandi Tuman Buzdar developed this condition due to extreme poverty and lack of adequate nutrition and potable water.⁵⁶

Hepatitis. On 10 March, a report prepared by the Planning and Development Board of the Punjab government on the prevention and control of hepatitis in Punjab exposed the failure of strategies to save Punjab from this life-threatening virus. The report covered the government's performance for the last four years (2017–2021). It observed a high percentage of patient-dropout in Punjab, which had increased the likelihood of transmission of Hepatitis C and Hepatitis B, putting millions of healthy people at risk.

Dengue. October proved to be the worst month for dengue. On 26 October, the Punjab Health Department disclosed that some 293 cases of dengue had been observed in a day.⁵⁷ By the end of November, the Punjab Primary and Secondary Healthcare Department confirmed at least 14,882 patients of dengue in all districts of Punjab during 2022.

Shortage of Panadol. A shortage of Panadol, an over-the-counter drug commonly prescribed to relieve pain and fever, was reported on 30 August. Many health experts speculated that the shortage was either caused by the resurgence in cases of dengue and Covid-19 or by the black market creating an artificial shortage. An official of the health department reportedly said the drug had disappeared from Punjab's local markets due to the nonavailability of raw materials in international markets and the low price of the medicine, which was difficult to maintain due to exchange rate volatility.⁵⁸

Newborn deaths. A report prepared by the Punjab government's Planning and Development Board on the Integrated Reproductive Maternal Newborn, Child Health and Nutrition Programme revealed that 1,000 pregnant women and more than 88,000 newborns and children under five had died at basic health units (BHUs) and rural health centres (RHCs) in Punjab during 2021, showing the poor state of rural health facilities and critical healthcare issues affecting poor women and children. The report was made public on 24 March and also stated that, out of a total of 88,021 deaths of children at BHUs and RHCs, 62,813 were stillbirths.⁵⁹

South Punjab Health Secretariat. On 14 January, the Punjab Primary and Secondary Healthcare Department issued a notification stating that matters related to health authorities in 11 districts of South Punjab were being transferred to the South Punjab Health Secretariat in Multan in phases.⁶⁰ Records relating to pharmacy, nursing, medical officers and women medical officers, specialist cadres, and dental and general cadres have been transferred from the Lahore Civil Secretariat to the South Punjab Health Secretariat in Multan.

Sehat Sahulat Programme. The status of the PTI-initiated health card scheme remained unclear in 2022. The year started with former Chief Minister Usman Buzdar declaring, 'Every family in Punjab will have access to medical treatment free of charge through the national health card by the end of March.'⁶¹ However, by the end of the year, Chief Minister Parvez Elahi had to write to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for payment of the health insurance card scheme's dues in the province.

Throughout the year, the media reported cases of hospitals refusing treatment under the programme. They complained of unreasonably low treatment rates offered by the government for surgeries because of which the hospitals were unable to bear the cost of medicines, surgical tools and operation theatre protocols and infection controls.

Housing and public amenities

Ravi development project. Farmers, landowners, environmentalists and legal experts feared the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA)'s forcible land acquisition for the development of a megacity along the river Ravi. They hold that the project is meant to feed the greed of real estate investors at the cost of the environment.

Following a petition filed by the Public Interest Law Association of Pakistan (PILAP), a group of concerned citizens, the LHC ruled on 25 January that the process of land acquisition by RUDA was ultra vires and violated environment laws. However, on 31 January, the Supreme Court suspended the LHC ruling and allowed RUDA to continue construction on the land that had already been acquired.⁶²

Allegedly, the Supreme Court ruling failed to restrain RUDA and it tried to acquire additional farmland in the area. PILAP filed another petition in the LHC to plead that RUDA was pursuing further land acquisition in contravention of the Supreme Court judgment of 31 January. The LHC restrained RUDA from carrying out land acquisition outside the orders of the Supreme Court on 13 October.⁶³

Illegal housing societies. Illegal housing societies remained a problem in Punjab. Fifteen housing schemes and town developers were declared illegal in the Gujarat district in June. The Rawalpindi Development Authority issued notices to 12 illegal housing schemes for illegal advertisements and marketing on 23 July.

The Lahore Development Authority demolished the infrastructure of private illegal housing schemes in an operation on Bedian Road on 2 June. Similar crackdowns on illegal developments were conducted in Toba Tek Singh and Gujranwala.

Environment

Devastating floods. A climate catastrophe hit Pakistan in the shape of flash floods, wreaking havoc across Pakistan in July and August. The southern districts of Punjab were among the areas worst affected. Between 15 July and 15 October, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority reported 49 deaths in Dera Ghazi Khan, 31 in Rajanpur, and 8 in Mianwali. A total of 3,177 people were injured in Rajanpur, 562 in Dera Ghazi Khan and 5 in Mianwali.

The unprecedented rains swept away livestock and damaged houses

and other infrastructure, including roads, train tracks, schools and healthcare centres. The stagnant water exposed local populations to dengue, malaria, diarrhoea, eye and skin infections and other ailments. Lack of food and drinking water caused additional health problems, especially for women and children.

As people in the flood-affected areas scrambled for survival, Chief Minister Parvez Elahi announced several financial aid packages for the flood victims of Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Muzaffargarh and Mianwali. The package, announced on 1 August, promised PKR 600,000 to victims whose houses had been destroyed and PKR 400,000 to those whose houses had been partially damaged. However, the figures pledged by the chief minister kept changing in subsequent months and news reports do not provide a clear picture of the extent of relief and rehabilitation funds set aside for flood victims.

The people of Rajanpur in particular felt they had been left in the lurch. They claimed that the government had failed to repair broken banks and dykes to prevent water from reaching their residential areas. By September, most people in the district had begun returning home on foot, saying they could not continue living in tents and camps because the government was 'not facilitating them.'⁶⁴



The people of Rajanpur claimed that the government had failed to repair broken banks and dykes.

Smog. The government of Punjab claimed to work throughout the year to solve the acute problem of air pollution. It approved a master action plan to deal with the danger of smog on 27 August. Taking pre-emptive measures, the environment department in Bahawalpur booked 42 brick kiln owners and imposed a PKR 100,000 fine on them on 29 April for violating the standard operating procedures of 'zigzag' technology. Tyre burning factories were raided in Rahimyar Khan on 1 July and Shalamar Town in Lahore on 12 December for causing pollution. The government also took measures to check smoke-emitting vehicles and industrial

units; it imposed Section 144 across the province to ban the burning of crop residue and garbage on 22 September. The district administration in Gujrat announced a ban on stubble burning and formed an anti-smog squad.

However, these efforts remained insufficient to protect Lahore and its surrounding areas from the toxic air. The area's air quality index for pollution remained higher compared to other cities across the country towards the end of 2022. People, especially the elderly and those with heart and respiratory conditions, remained at risk, and minor ailments such as throat, skin and eye infections were common.

On 2 November, the US Air Quality Index indicated that Lahore was the world's most polluted city, with an air quality score of 438.⁶⁵ On 7 December, Punjab Chief Minister Parvez Elahi announced an environmental emergency in Lahore and other cities to deal with the smog. On 8 December, on the orders of the LHC, public and private schools were instructed to remain open only four days a week.⁶⁶ Later, on 28 December, the court directed the education department to extend the winter holidays in schools across the city for another week – till 9 January – due to poor air quality. Even shops and restaurants were ordered to close by 10 pm on weekdays.

Regional cooperation to control air pollution. Much stress was laid on regional cooperation to control the toxic air that blows across Pakistan's neighbourhood. A World Bank report released in December identified six major air sheds (geographical areas cutting across national and international boundaries within which polluted air remains trapped) in South Asia where 'spatial interdependence in air quality' was high.⁶⁷ Pakistani Punjab was one of the regions included in this category. The report revealed that current levels of air pollution were estimated to cause over 2 million premature deaths each year in South Asia and that deaths would be highest in India's Indo-Gangetic Plain, Bangladesh and Pakistani Punjab.

Cultural rights

Saim Sadiq's debut film *Joyland*, which looks at themes of sexuality and gender conformity, stirred controversy in Punjab for much of the year. Although the film was cleared by the federal government, the Punjab Information and Culture Department decided to ban the film, 'in the wake of persistent complaints received from different quarters' under Section 9 of the Motion Pictures Ordinance 1979.⁶⁸ The film's producers approached the LHC, challenging the ban in Punjab on 17 November. *Joyland* became the country's first-ever movie to be shortlisted for the Academy Awards. Condemning the ban, Human Rights Watch stated that 'censorship and a clampdown on artistic expression undermines the basic principles of a democratic society... Pakistan is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression.'⁶⁹

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SINDH





- Catastrophic floods inundated most districts of the province between July and September, affecting some 12 million people, destroying more than 20,600 schools and over 4.4 million acres of agricultural land, and displacing at least 82,000 people. Although the Sindh government claimed to have provided shelter to 500,000 people in need, rehabilitation efforts have proven inadequate, given the sheer scale of the disaster.
- Karachi witnessed the return of terrorism, when a suicide bombing at the University of Karachi in April led to the deaths of three Chinese academics and their Pakistani driver.
- A record 2,544 police encounters were reported to have occurred in the province.
- Karachi witnessed a 10 percent increase in crime in 2022, with a total of 85,948 crimes reported.
- Overcrowding in jails remained a severe problem in the province, with facilities overcrowded by almost 75 percent.
- In January, the Sindh High Court ordered the provincial home department to pay compensation to the families of missing persons: as of November, 12 families were to receive one-time compensation. Nonetheless, enforced disappearances of journalists and other activists continued to be reported across the province.
- At least 20 cases involving allegations that Hindu girls had been forcibly converted were reported. In one case, Pooja Kumari Odh was gunned down by the man who reportedly wished to marry her after conversion.
- Journalists remained a soft target for supporters of political parties, with several incidents reported of journalists having been physically attacked by party supporters.
- The Jamshoro police registered two separate cases of sedition against over 60 Sindhi nationalists for allegedly raising anti-state slogans at an event in Sann to mark the birth anniversary of G. M. Syed.
- Despite the Sindh government's evident ambivalence regarding local government elections in the province, the first phase of local government elections was held in June in 14 districts.
- The year brought no respite for women in Sindh who remained vulnerable to murder, rape and other forms of gender-based violence. The brutal rape and murder of a Hindu widow, Daya Bheel, in Sanghar drew widespread condemnation.

- Despite provisions in the law, only 14 district vigilance committees were constituted in 2022 to monitor the incidence of bonded labour; even these were largely ineffective and dysfunctional.
- The Sindh Assembly unanimously passed the Sindh Students Union Act 2019 and lifted the ban on student unions, although there has been negligible progress on implementing this legislation.
- Demolitions continued unabated in different parts of Karachi. Parts of the city’s Mujahid Colony were razed to the ground in what authorities termed an ‘anti-encroachment’ drive. The government did not share any rehabilitation plan with the displaced communities.



While the entire country faced heavy rains and floods during the monsoon, Sindh was the worst-hit province as rains caused flash floods and inundated most of its western districts. Floods in districts on the Indus River's right bank—such as Qambar-Shahdaddock, Larkana, Dadu and Jamshoro—destroyed countless human settlements and displaced millions. Major cities in the district of Dadu, including Khairpur Nathan Shah and Mehar, were inundated by water for months, while the areas surrounding towns such as Dadu, Bhaan Saeedabad, Johi and Sehwan remained submerged even at the end of the year.

According to National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) data and World Bank estimates, the floods destroyed over 2 million homes, while more than 1,700 people lost their lives across the country. Flood-related deaths in Sindh were estimated to be 823.¹ Data from the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) indicates that over 12 million people—or 2 million families—were affected, whereas 82,000 people were displaced. About 737,000 homes were damaged completely and 1 million damaged partially. An estimated 437,000 livestock heads were lost and 3.78 million acres of crop area damaged. The World Bank approved USD 1.692 billion in financing for five projects to support people living in the flood-affected areas of Sindh.²

According to UNICEF, by the end of 2022, as many as 4 million children were still living near contaminated and stagnant floodwater. Already physically weaker, most of these children face diseases such as diarrhoea, malaria, dengue fever, typhoid, acute respiratory infections, and painful skin conditions.³

Despite government claims of providing relief to flood-affected people through its resources, many complained of not having received any support. The federal government, through the Benazir Income Support Programme, provided PKR 25,000 to each flood-affected family under a cash programme. Another PKR 300,000 per family was to have been provided for the reconstruction of houses by the provincial government.⁴

The Sindh government remained committed to tackling the Covid-19 pandemic in 2022. It held a vaccination campaign for children aged 5–11 and launched a door-to-door campaign to administer the vaccine to people left behind, especially women at home. Sindh also made the commendable decision to lift the four-decade-old ban on student unions, although implementation of the decision remains to be monitored.

Although the provincial government passed the Sindh Katchi Abadis (Amendment) Act 2022 to regularise settlements in various parts of Larkana, it ignored the pleas of residents of the Gujjar and Orangi nullahs and Mujahid Colony in Karachi, who were displaced after their homes were destroyed. Several anti-encroachment drives were carried out across the city without paying attention to the issues raised by residents and civil society.



Laws and law-making

At least 17 bills were passed by the Sindh Assembly in 2022. One noteworthy amendment was the Sindh Katchi Abadis (Amendment) Act 2022 (passed in July), which aimed at regularising illegal settlements in various parts of the province. The first phase of the campaign dealt with regularising 6,500 plots in 11 Larkana settlements.⁵ Those who had lived in *katchi abadis* [irregular settlements] for more than 40 years were to be given ownership rights. The assembly also passed the Sindh Social Protection Authority Act for the wellbeing of the vulnerable and underprivileged.⁶ The Sindh government was to have set up a competent authority to oversee people's problems in this context, but although the bill was approved in July, no such authority had been set up as of end-December.



The Sindh Katchi Abadis (Amendment) Act 2022, which aimed at regularising illegal settlements in various parts of the province, was passed this year.

The Sindh Assembly also passed two resolutions on the reconstitution of the Reko Diq mining project.⁷ Other laws passed included the Sindh Public Service Commission Act 2022, the Ibn-e-Sina University, Mirpurkhas Act 2021, the Sindh Civil Servants (Amendment) Act 2021, the Sindh Public Procurement (Amendment) Act 2021, the Sindh Land Revenue (Amendment) Act 2021, the Sindh Textbook Board (Amendment) Act 2022; the Sindh Companies Profits (Workers' Participation) (Amendment) Act 2021, the Sindh Workers Welfare Fund (Amendment) Act 2021, the DOW University of Health Sciences (Amendment) Act 2022, the Sindh Healthcare Service Providers and

Facilities (Prevention of Violence and Damage to Property) Act 2021, the Sindh Reproductive Healthcare Rights (Amendment) Act 2022, and the Al Ghazali University, Karachi Act 2022.

In 2022, Sindh became the first province to lift the decades-old ban on student unions.⁸ The Sindh Students Union Act 2019 was passed unanimously in February 2022 by the Sindh Assembly. Under this Act, universities and colleges in the province are supposed to establish norms and procedures for the functioning of student unions, but it is unclear why this has not yet occurred. Moreover, every educational institution was expected to organize student unions within two months, but nothing concrete has happened on this front either.⁹

Administration of justice

New appointments to the Supreme Court of Pakistan stirred controversies regarding the neglect of two provinces – Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Sindh’s concern was that the senior-most judges of the Sindh High Court (SHC) were neglected during judges’ elevation and out-of-turn appointments were made from the SHC to the Supreme Court. The Sindh High Court Bar Association issued a strong statement on 30 October, stating that the Judicial Commission of Pakistan had appointed two junior judges from Sindh for three vacancies without following the seniority principle. SHC Chief Justice Ahmed Ali M. Sheikh too was ignored in the appointments.¹⁰



Law and order

Resurgence of terrorism. Karachi witnessed the return of terrorism in 2022. On 26 April, a suicide bombing at the University of Karachi’s Confucius Institute led to the deaths of three Chinese academics and their Pakistani driver. Subsequently, the city’s bustling Kharadar area became a target of terror attacks,¹¹ reportedly targeting Chinese-origin Pakistani dentists. Dr Richard Hu and his wife Phen Teyin were injured in firing, while their assistant Ronald Raymond Chou died on the spot.



On 26 April, a suicide bombing at the University of Karachi’s Confucius Institute led to the deaths of three Chinese academics and their Pakistani driver.

Worsening law and order. Sindh’s rural and urban areas faced deteriorating law and order during the year (Table 1). A record 2,544 police encounters were also reported to have occurred. HRCP’s own data, based on media reports, indicates at least 32 instances of police excesses (in custody as well as in public places).

Dacoities and kidnapping for ransom, especially in upper Sindh, were rampant. In one major incident, over 150 armed dacoits attacked a police camp in Ghotki district on 7 November, killing a deputy superintendent of police (DSP), two station house officers (SHOs) and two constables, and injuring three others.¹² The police party had launched an operation in the riverine area of Ghotki after three people were kidnapped on 30 October.

Table 1: Crime statistics for Sindh in 2022

Offense	Number of victims
Rape	140
Gang-rape	9
Murder	125
Honour killings	98
Domestic violence against women	161
Acid crimes	2
Blasphemy cases	6
Harassment at the workplace	57
Police encounters	2,544

Source: Sindh Police, in response to HRCP’s request for information

According to data from the Sindh police, the province’s police force comprised 118,170 officers, including 2,865 women.

In July, the killing of a young Sindhi man in a brawl over a hotel bill near the Hyderabad bypass led to ethnic tension. The man was shot dead allegedly by the Pashtun hotel owners who were of Afghan-origin, leading to a severe backlash against Afghan refugees and residents in the province. The death of the man triggered a protest in Larkana as well as protests in Karachi’s Sohrab Goth area.¹³

Rising street crime. Karachi faced an alarming uptick in street crime (Table 2). According to one press report, Karachi witnessed a 10 percent increase in crime in 2022, with a total of 85,948 crimes reported.¹⁴ Numerous cases of citizens being killed while resisting mugging attempts were reported in the city.

According to data compiled by the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee, 28,561 mobile-snatching incidents were reported from 1 January to 31 December; 51,901 two-wheelers and 2,105 four-wheelers were stolen, while 4,971 bikes and 161 four-wheelers were snatched during this period. The police were able to recover 3,182 two-wheelers and 634 four-wheelers.¹⁵

Table 2: Street crime in Karachi, 2021 and 2022

Crime	2021	2022
Street crime	56,891	60,580
Murder/injury during robbery	393	367
House robberies	410	324
Mobile phone snatching	17,249	20,406
Car snatching	167	118
Car theft	1,254	1,451
Bike snatching	3,215	3,242
Bike theft	34,203	34,672

Note: The data covers the period 1 Jan–15 Sep for both years.

Source: Karachi police.

Jails and prisoners

Overcrowding in jails remained a severe problem in the province, with reports showing that Sindh jails housed around 10,111 additional prisoners.¹⁶ According to data from the provincial prisons department, Sindh has a total of 23 jails and a total prison population of 23,649 as against a total capacity of 13,538, implying overcrowding by almost 75 percent. The three main women’s jails in Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur house 463 female inmates, while the three juvenile jails (in these three cities) hold 373 inmates; 176 children were living with their mothers in jail. Under-trial prisoners (18,083) far outnumbered convicted prisoners (4,870) at a ratio of 3.7 to 1. The data also indicates that 121 prisoners were on death row, almost all of them for murder. The annual budget for the department was recorded at PKR 5,551,238,000.

Karachi’s District Jail Malir has a capacity of 1,800 prisoners, but has 7,000 inmates while Central Jail Karachi, which can hold 2,400 prisoners, houses more than 6,000 inmates.¹⁷ During a power breakdown in October, press reports said that the condition of inmates in overcrowded jails became even worse.¹⁸ Three new jails were being built in Malir, Thatta and Shaheed Benazirabad. The Shahrukh Jatoi case resurfaced in 2022, with reports in January that he had been moved from prison to a private hospital where he had stayed for several months. He was moved back to prison after the Sindh government ordered an inquiry.¹⁹

After a photograph went viral on social media in December, purportedly showing Afghan women and children incarcerated in Sindh jails, Sindh Information Minister Sharjeel Memon said that 129 Afghan female illegal immigrants were jailed in the province, with 178 children. He insisted, however, that the children were not under arrest.²⁰



Sindh Information Minister Sharjeel Memon said that 129 Afghan female illegal immigrants were jailed in the province, with 178 children.

Enforced disappearances

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED) reported receiving 67 cases of enforced disappearance from Sindh in 2022. The official data indicates that, since the COIED's inception in 2011, of 1,757 cases received as of end-December 2022, 758 persons had returned home, 41 were traced to internment centres and 264 to prisons, while 61 dead bodies were located over the course of 11 years. At the end of the year, the COIED still had a balance of 174 cases of enforced disappearance from the province.

Despite strict orders by the SHC, cases of enforced disappearance remained on the rise in the province. Early in 2022, a division bench of the SHC headed by Justice Mohammad Iqbal Kalhoro asked the Sindh government to constitute an enforced disappearance taskforce to focus exclusively on such cases. The court further ordered that the taskforce must have officers not below the rank of DSP in every district of the metropolis for the recovery of missing persons.²¹ In a subsequent hearing, the same bench specifically asked the government to constitute an independent cell to investigate and locate missing persons.

In January, the SHC ordered the provincial home department to pay compensation to the families of missing persons.²² The SHC was informed on 23 November that a total of 12 enforced disappearances had been confirmed or identified and each family would receive PKR 500,000 as one-time compensation.²³

Death penalty

While no executions are reported to have taken place in Sindh in 2022, the death penalty was handed down in at least 14 cases during the year, according to HRCP's own data, based on media reports.



Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

There was little respite in cases of forced conversion in Sindh. At least 20 cases involving allegations that Hindu girls had been forcibly converted were reported in local newspapers and on social media platforms during 2022, based on HRCP's own data.

A 13-year-old Hindu girl, Bindya Meghwar, was abducted, forcibly converted and married in Kumb in district Khairpur on 17 March 2022. According to social media reports, the girl was married to her abductor, Ijaz Ahmed, and given the name 'Fatima'. No media outlet reported the incident and no action had been taken as of end-2022 by the Khairpur police, despite complaints from the family.

An 18-year-old Hindu girl, Pooja Kumari Odh, was gunned down on 21 March near the Chhuahra Mandi area of Sukkur as she tried to save herself from being kidnapped. According to the police, the assailant, Wahid Bux Lashari, a member of the influential Lashari tribe, and his two accomplices entered the girl's house and opened fire. Police officials said that Lashari had wanted to marry the teenager, but she had refused.²⁴

The murder led to widespread condemnation online and by political party leaders. A Twitter trend, #JusticeForPoojaKumari, forced political leaders Bilawal Bhutto, Shehbaz Sharif and Imran Khan to condemn the incident online.

In March, reports emerged that an underage girl, Anita Meghwar, had been forcibly converted and married to one Sikandar Jarwar. The case was reported in Tando Jan Mohammad.²⁵

In October, a 15-year-old Hindu girl, Chanda Mehraj, was kidnapped in Hyderabad within the limits of the SITE police station. According to the first information report (FIR), she had been on her way home from the factory where she worked. The victim's mother said that she had approached multiple police departments, including high-ranking officials, with her complaint, but no one had paid heed. The mother blamed one Shaman Magsi for having abducted her daughter with the help of accomplices.²⁶

The girl was recovered from Gulshan-e-Hadeed in Karachi. While the police failed to arrest the accused, when the girl was produced in a local court in Hyderabad, she claimed to have married of her own free will. She also claimed to be 19 years old. The court ordered that she be sent to a safe house and a medical examination conducted to ascertain her age.²⁷

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression remained under assault in 2022 – from physical attacks on journalists to disappearances and abductions to arbitrary legal challenges. A long-entrenched culture of impunity for perpetrators continued. Of the six journalists killed across Pakistan in 2022, one was from Sindh. Ishtiaq Sodharo from Khairpur’s Kumb area was fatally shot on 1 July.²⁸ Even though his family accused a police officer of having carried out the attack, the motive of the murder remained unknown. Sodharo’s family held a protest in Ranipur, demanding that the main accused be arrested, but the police officer in question remained at large.²⁹

Numerous cases of threats to journalists surfaced in Sindh. In June, Nafees Naeem, an assignment editor at Aaj TV, was picked up by men in plainclothes near his residence in Karachi’s Nazimabad.³⁰ CCTV footage showed that the suspects were in a Vigo. The journalist was released within 24 hours. Attacks occurred from various quarters. Journalist Zamzama Saeed, a reporter at Samaa TV, for instance, was attacked by several Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) supporters while covering a PTI protest near Numaish Chowranghi in Karachi in May.³¹ The journalist had also been assaulted at a PTI rally held in Bagh-e-Jinnah in Karachi earlier in April. Another journalist, Adia Naz from 24News, was also attacked at the rally.³²

In September, journalist Nasrullah Gaddani was booked in an extortion case by the Sindh police after an altercation with a police team.³³ The incident occurred when Gaddani was covering the eviction of several flood-hit victims from a relief camp in Ghotki. The victims belonged to the Hindu community. The journalist was arrested and sent on physical remand. A day later, he apologised for his conduct and was released.

Freelance journalist Arsalan Khan was abducted from his home in Karachi’s Clifton area on 24 June.³⁴ Khan’s wife shared a video statement, saying that around 14–15 Rangers personnel had entered their house and held the family at gunpoint. When she asked why her husband was being picked up, she was told that Khan was ‘vocal’ on social media. On 26 August 2022, Faheem Baloch, editor of the online news site Sada-e-Balochistan, was abducted by men in plainclothes in Karachi. An FIR was registered against his kidnapping.³⁵

In October, the Nazim Jokhio case took a new turn when his visibly dejected mother, Jamiat Khatoon, reached an out-of-court settlement and forgave the six accused³⁶ including Jam Awais, a provincial assembly member from the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), without accepting any *diyat* [‘blood money’ or compensation payable to victims].

Jokhio, a social media activist from Malir, was killed in November 2021 allegedly at the behest of PPP legislators Jam Abdul Karim Bijar and Jam Awais.

Jokhio had posted a video about illegal hunting trips for Arab dignitaries. The case had led to outrage over the consistent impunity accorded to the privileged. It was also seen as yet another example of threats to journalists, including citizen journalists.

Freedom of assembly

Use of excessive force. The Karachi police has over the years resorted to violence during protests in what the government says are ‘Red Zone’ areas—where the Governor House, Chief Minister House and other such offices are located. In May 2022, the Sindh police detained 18 people—mostly family members of Baloch missing persons—who were protesting against unabated enforced disappearances. In June, peaceful protesters again gathered in front of the Sindh Assembly to demand information on the whereabouts of two Baloch students—Doda Baloch and Ghamshad Baloch—who were allegedly abducted from the Karachi University campus. Police officials used force against the protesters in a bid to disperse the crowd.³⁷ Protests in Karachi’s Mauripur area turned violent after the police clashed with protesters. Several citizens and a police officer were injured. A 60-year-old woman also died during the protest,³⁸ although the police claimed that her death was not caused by the shelling or baton charge.

Political protests. In November, Karachi’s main artery Shahrah-e-Faisal turned into a battle zone when PTI protesters took to the streets after a lone man fired shots at the Imran Khan-led long march in Gujranwala in which Khan was injured. The protesters wanted to move towards the Red Zone but were confronted by the police near the FTC Flyover. The police resorted to teargas shelling and a baton charge to stop the protesters. The road remained blocked for several hours.³⁹

On 26 January, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (P) (MQM-P) tried to hold a demonstration outside the Chief Minister House in Karachi against amendments to the Sindh Local Government Act. A march was organised from the FTC bridge towards the Karachi Press Club, but the MQM-P altered the plan without warning and managed to reach the PIDC roundabout near the Chief Minister House. Senior police officers tried to negotiate with MQM-P leaders, but when the latter did not agree, the police resorted to baton-charging and teargassing the protestors. One MQM-P worker was killed and many others, including MQM-P provincial assembly member Sadaqat Husain and a policeman, were injured.⁴⁰

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (L) (MQM-L), which still considers the London-based Altaf Hussain its leader, is banned. MQM-L workers faced police violence in Karachi when they held a protest outside the Karachi Press Club, demanding the release of missing party workers on 14 August. Police arrested former provincial assembly member Nisar Panhwar, who was leading the demonstration, and 16 others. According to the police, carrying portraits of Altaf Hussain was illegal.⁴¹

Police action against schoolteachers. A large number of schoolteachers from various districts of Sindh staged a prolonged sit-in outside the Karachi Press Club, demanding appointment letters as they had passed the NTS test in 2013. On 30 May, the teachers tried to march from the press club towards the Chief Minister House. The police tried to stop them and arrested 40 protestors.⁴² Later, on 4 July, in a similar incident, the police resorted to baton-charging protesting teachers and detained 40 of them for staging a sit-in near the Sindh Assembly. The teachers were demanding confirmation of their services.⁴³



Police baton-charged protesting teachers and detained 40 of them for staging a sit-in near the Sindh Assembly.

Protests against shortage of irrigation water. A little before the heavy monsoon rains in July, protests were held in several parts of Sindh against the shortage of irrigation water in canals of the Indus River during May and June. Even drinking water was not available in these irrigation canals. Located at the tail-end of the Indus, Sindh faced a shortage of water during April-June. The Sindh government wrote to the Indus River System Authority in early June, complaining of the acute shortage of water in the province. The letter pointed out that the *kharif* [summer to autumn] season crops were being damaged as a result.⁴⁴

Farmers in Dadu district protested along the main Indus Highway on 18 June against the unavailability of irrigation water to their lands in the tail-end of the Dadu Canal and Rice Canal. A clash occurred when police tried to disperse the farmers. At least 25 people, including five policemen, were injured in an hours-long clash between the two sides at Kolachi Mori near Khairpur Nathan Shah town.⁴⁵

In another incident, members of civil society and activists of several political parties observed a strike for several days in Dadu on 10 April against civic agencies for the shortage of drinking water.⁴⁶

Protests for housing rights and trans rights. The rights movement Karachi Bachao Tehreek organised a protest outside the Karachi Press Club in November and called out the provincial government for its apathy towards the victims of the Gujjar Nullah and Orangi Nullah demolitions. Participants criticised the authorities for not rehabilitating the displaced communities.

In November, Sindh observed its first-ever Moorat March⁴⁷ at Frere Hall in Karachi, led by the *khawajasira* [transgender] community to voice its demands for equality, due rights and protection. Transgender activists spoke out against the growing transphobia in the country.

Students' protests. Students held a protest outside the DOW University of Health Sciences in November and blamed the institution for adding out-of-syllabus questions in the medical and dental college admission test for 2022.⁴⁸ This happened a day after the Pakistan Medical Commission announced the test results.

Senior politician and former MQM leader Dr Farooq Sattar also joined the protesting students. While the situation became tense when Dr Sattar and students climbed up the university's boundary wall, Dr Sattar negotiated with the administration, which then decided to recheck the papers.

Freedom of association

At least twice a year, the security establishment takes action against Sindhi nationalists and their political parties – on the birth anniversary of the founder of the Jeay Sindh Movement, G. M. Syed on 17 January, and on Independence Day (14 August). A few days before, police arrest key leaders of various factions of the Jeay Sindh Students Federation and release them after several days' detention, often also registering FIRs against these workers.

On 17 January, a large number of followers of G. M. Syed gathered in Sann town in Jamshoro district near the latter's residence. Just after the programme, the local police booked key speakers for 'seditious' speeches. Subsequently, the Jamshoro police registered two separate cases of sedition against over 60 Sindhi nationalists for allegedly raising anti-state slogans in Sann on the occasion of Syed's 118th birth anniversary. The political workers in question belonged to the Jeay Sindh Tehreek and Jeay Sindh Mahaz.⁴⁹



Local government elections. The Sindh government showed an ambivalence regarding the local government elections in the province. In February, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) launched a preliminary report on delimitation in the province.⁵⁰ The report received intense criticism from different quarters. The ECP asked stakeholders to file their objections with the regional election commissioner and the ECP. Within a month, in March, around 267 objections had been filed.⁵¹

In October, the Sindh government wrote to the ECP, asking for the local government elections to be postponed over inadequate security.⁵² Before this, the elections in Karachi and Hyderabad divisions were postponed due to rains. The first phase of local government elections was held on 24 June in 14 districts of Sindh.⁵³

The ECP also agreed that Karachi was likely to witness rain on the election days.⁵⁴ The second phase of local body elections could not be held in 2022. Political parties also remained divided over the issue of delimitation. The MQM-P said that any local government elections held without resolving the delimitation issue would be 'useless'.⁵⁵

Right to responsive representatives. The tenure of Sindh's local governments ended on 31 August 2020 and since then, government-appointed administrators (mostly deputy commissioners of districts) have been running affairs.⁵⁶ The lack of interest in holding local bodies elections drew criticism from a broad spectrum, including political parties in Sindh as well as political observers, all of whom pointed out that denying citizens their right to local government also took away their right to representatives who would be most responsive to their needs.



Women

Gender-based violence. The year 2022 brought no respite for women in the country who remained vulnerable to murder, rape and other forms of gender-based violence. The provincial government did not introduce any meaningful steps to provide security and safety to women who remained unsafe at workplaces and inside their homes. According to press reports, Sindh saw a 200 percent increase in rape cases;⁵⁷ around 414 sexual assault cases were reported. The conviction rate, however, remained less than 1 percent. Of the 414 cases, the highest number was reported from Karachi East – 185 rape cases. Larkana city had the highest number of *karo kari* [honour killing] cases in 2022, totalling 132 out of a total of 215 cases, although the official data provided by the Sindh police puts this figure at 98. *See also Law and order*

The problem of domestic violence against women also remained unresolved, with around 161 cases registered, according to the Sindh police. Cases of violence against women also continued to be reported by the press. In July, a woman's body was found inside a large steel pot boiling in water. The woman's limbs had been separated from her body but placed inside the same pot. The 36-year-old victim was identified as Nargis and had been killed by her husband; she had six children. Her body was found at a private school in the city's Gulshan-e-Iqbal area.⁵⁸

A month before, in June, a two-year-old girl became the prime witness in a murder case.⁵⁹ The toddler witnessed the murder of her mother at an abandoned place – the latter was killed some time in the evening – and stayed with the lifeless body until the morning after, when they were found. The suspects confirmed that the girl was with them and that they had abandoned her away from the crime scene. However, the young girl had found her mother and stayed with her, and later recorded her statement.

Women remained unsafe in their homes as well. In Karachi's Malir Shamsi Society, a man killed his wife and three daughters on 29 November over a trivial argument.⁶⁰ The man also tried to take his life but survived.

The mysterious drowning of a woman in her twenties at the Karachi Beach in January was finally categorised as a murder case⁶¹. The woman, who was working at a veterinary clinic, had gone missing for several days. The police registered an abduction case against the owner of the clinic. Days later, her body was found floating in the sea. Investigations revealed that she had been murdered before being dumped into the sea. A veterinary doctor and staff nurse were accused in the FIR filed by the victim's family.

Another murder victim was the mother of a four-year-old and wife of a security guard who reportedly killed her over a missing PKR 300 around December. The suspect gave PKR 1,500 to his deceased wife in the morning: when he asked for the money that night, she handed back only PKR 1,200, after which he pushed her from a fourth-floor balcony. The woman died on the spot.

In December, a woman from the Bheel community in Sindh, Daya Bheel, was brutally raped and murdered and her body dumped in the fields near Sanghar. Her tortured body was found decapitated, her breasts and other organs cut off.⁶²

Violence against girls. Two young girls were raped and murdered in two separate incidents four months apart in Karachi's Korangi area and Gulshan-e-Iqbal. The girl killed in Gulshan-e-Iqbal in April was 14 years old and the suspect was said to be an influential person. He and his accomplices threatened the victim's family after they registered the case.⁶³ A six-year-old Afghan migrant girl was also killed after being raped in December.⁶⁴ In the same month, a 12-year-old girl was raped and killed by her paternal uncle.⁶⁵ The crime took place in Karachi's Jacob Lines. Girls and women displaced by the 2022 floods were also vulnerable to crimes against their person. In October, two men were found guilty of raping an underage girl whose family had recently found shelter in Karachi after being displaced by the floods.

Pooja Kumari, a teenage Hindu girl, was killed in March during an abduction attempt in Rohri town in Sukkur district. The 18-year-old was being harassed by Wahid Bux Lashari, a member of the influential Lashari tribe. Pooja's family later claimed that Wahid had wanted to convert her forcibly so that he could marry her.⁶⁶ *See also Freedom of thought, conscience and religion*

Transgender persons

Positive legislation. Sindh passed two noteworthy bills for the protection of transgender persons in the province. According to the 2017 census (a census which was also rejected by the country's transgender community), Sindh has the second highest population of transgender persons—25 percent or 2,527 persons. The Sindh government fixed a 0.5 percent job quota for trans persons and vowed to ensure that the policy was implemented in both the public and private sectors.⁶⁷ Through the Local Government (Amendment) Act, the Sindh government reserved 1 percent of all seats for the transgender community, allowing them to participate in local governance and decision-making. In January, rights activist Sarah Gill became the first transgender doctor in the country after graduating from Karachi's Jinnah Medical and Dental College.

In April, the education minister Syed Sardar Shah met a delegation of representatives of Sindh's transgender community and decided to draft an education policy for trans persons in the province, including them in

the province-backed Alternative Learning Pathway programme that allows out-of-school children to cover the curriculum from kindergarten to Grade 5 in 2.5 years at nonformal learning centres.

Violence against trans persons. Despite these positive developments, violence against trans persons continued in 2022. In Karachi's Shershah area, a 34-year-old transgender person was stabbed to death on 1 September.

Earlier, in another incident on 8 January, a young trans person was found strangled to death off the Superhighway within the remit of the Malir Cantonment police station.⁶⁸ Many members of the community reported that the harassment of trans persons increased⁶⁹ after Jamaat-e-Islami leaders started a campaign against the progressive Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018.⁷⁰

Children

The Sindh government signed an agreement with UNICEF to conduct a child labour survey in the province in 2022. Under the agreement, the survey was to be completed by the end of the year. However, due to the catastrophic floods that occurred in July and August and the displacement of a large number of people in flood-hit areas, the survey could not be completed on time. The Sindh government's labour department, in collaboration with UNICEF, has initiated the survey and the process is underway.

Sindh saw various cases of violence against children, including kidnapping and abuse, during the year. A 10-year-old girl was kidnapped and sexually assaulted in Karachi and later dumped within the jurisdiction of the Boat Basin police station on 23 October. The victim had been living with her mother on a footpath near the shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi in Clifton. The Karachi police claimed to have arrested two men over their alleged involvement in kidnapping the girl. The incident earned the Sindh government strong criticism on social media, forcing Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah to take notice of it and order the arrest of the culprits.⁷¹

The Dua Zehra case. Fourteen-year-old Dua Zehra went missing from her home in the Al-Falah area of Karachi in April. An FIR was registered on 16 April by her parents, stating that their daughter had been kidnapped and forcibly married.

On 26 April, the teenage girl was recovered from Okara in Punjab. In a video statement, Dua said that she had not been kidnapped and had married Zaheer of her 'free will'. Dua also claimed that her parents were lying about her age as she was 18 years old. The couple later approached a Lahore district and sessions court for their safety. However, Dua's parents were adamant that their daughter had been forced to give the statement.



Fourteen-year-old Dua Zehra went missing from her home in April. An FIR was registered on 16 April by her parents, stating that their daughter had been kidnapped and forcibly married.

The teenager's father Mehdi Ali Kazmi had also approached the SHC in May with a plea against a district court in Punjab that allowed the couple to live together. The father stated that, as per her educational certificates, birth certificate and other records, Dua's age was 13 and under the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013, it was illegal to marry a minor.⁷² On 6 June, the SHC ordered a medical examination to determine her age. The court also ordered them to send Dua to a shelter home for the time being after she refused to meet her parents.

Two days later, the court ruled that the teenager was at liberty to decide whom she wanted to live with. During the hearing, the investigation officer filed his report, along with an age certificate issued by the office of the police surgeon, which stated that, in the opinion of doctors and the Civil Hospital's department of radiology, the bone age of the alleged abductee was between 16 and 17 years.

Dua's father challenged the SHC verdict in the Supreme Court. Subsequently, a judicial magistrate in Karachi ordered the constitution of another board to determine Dua's age. On 4 July, the medical board concluded that Dua was between 15 and 16 years old.

On 16 July, the police informed a sessions court in Karachi that 24 persons, including Zaheer, had been found involved in abducting her from Karachi and shifting her to Punjab, and then orchestrating the illegal child marriage.

Following this, Dua approached a Lahore court on 19 July, requesting to be sent to a *dar-ul-aman* [shelter], citing 'constant threats' from her

parents while also underlining that she was ‘not on good terms’ with Zaheer. The court accepted her application and she was shifted to the shelter home, where she remained as of end-2022.

Labour

Bonded labour. In Sindh, the incidence of bonded labour remained a challenge in 2022. Most bonded labour is reported in the agricultural sector. According to rights activists, floods hit agricultural workers very hard; according to the Hari Welfare Association, an estimated 1,200 bonded labourers were freed through the courts during 2022.⁷³ It also pointed out that, under the Sindh Bonded Labour System Abolition Act 2015, only 14 district vigilance committees were constituted in 2022. Even these were largely ineffective and dysfunctional. Thus, there was no monitoring of the implementation of the anti-bonded labour law.⁷⁴

Minimum wage. Sindh’s minimum wage crisis settled down in 2022; it had started the previous year when the provincial government increased the minimum wage for unskilled workers from PKR 17,500 to PKR 25,000. However, employers refused to accept the raise and challenged it in the SHC. In October 2021, the court upheld the provincial government’s decision. However, employers challenged the SHC’s decision in the Supreme Court.

On 28 March 2022, the apex court cancelled the provincial government’s notification fixing PKR 25,000 as the minimum wage for unskilled workers, thus annulling the SHC’s order as well. The Supreme Court asked the provincial government to recalculate the minimum wage and then notify the rates. For the interim period from 2 July 2021 to 31 May 2022, the Supreme Court asked the Sindh government to ensure payment of PKR 19,000 as the minimum wage for unskilled workers.

The Punjab government as well as the federal government announced a raise in minimum wages to PKR 25,000 in April. On 21 June, the Sindh government again issued a fresh notification on 7 July to raise the minimum wage to PKR 25,000 with effect from 1 June. Although the government has to announce the minimum wage every year when the budget is passed in June, this time the raise was delayed. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, no raise was announced in 2021.

Home-based workers. Despite the passage of the Home-Based Workers Act in 2018, the Sindh government has failed to implement it effectively, even while claiming that Sindh was the first province to have passed such a law for home-based workers in the informal sector. The Sindh government had announced in 2020 that it would register all home-based workers; this was started in 2021 but could not be completed as of the end of 2022. Home-based workers’ unions demanded the registration of home-based workers with the Sindh Employees Social Security Institution to provide them with the same health and other facilities available to formal workers.⁷⁵

Coal mining accidents. Like coal miners in Balochistan, workers in coal mines in Sindh also face a high risk of death or injury due to sorely inadequate occupational safety and health facilities onsite—otherwise the responsibility of mine owners and the provincial labour department. According to the Pakistan Central Mines Labour Federation, out of a total of 278 mine workers killed in all provinces, the number of miners killed in Sindh was 18 in 2022.

At least eight coal miners died due to rain-induced flooding in a coal mine in Jhimpir, Thatta, on 5 July. The site, located around 8 km from the Meting railway station in Thatta district, was deluged when water entered the mine while miners were still inside.⁷⁶ According to the area's deputy commissioner, about 40 workers were involved in mining work there despite the rainy season.⁷⁷

The elderly

On the occasion of World Senior Citizens Day, the Sindh government announced it would amend the Sindh Senior Citizens Welfare Act 2014. In this regard, the government has signed an agreement with the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) to issue special cards to senior citizens to help them avail certain facilities.⁷⁸

The provincial government also announced it would build shelter homes for senior citizens (aged 60 and above) in 13 districts of the province, where they would be provided basic facilities. The government has reportedly allocated land for the construction of these homes.⁷⁹

During the 2022 floods, senior citizens remained particularly vulnerable. A survey carried out by the organisation Helpage in flood-affected areas of Pakistan—including Jacobabad, Khairpur, Shikarpur and Dadu districts in Sindh—found that 69 percent of the elderly reported not having access to shelter. This varied between locations: those interviewed in Sindh were significantly less likely to have shelter (85 percent) compared to those interviewed in Balochistan (39 percent) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (8 percent). This is unsurprising, given that Sindh was the worst affected region; over 2 million homes were damaged or destroyed by the floods, of which 88 percent were in Sindh.⁸⁰

People living with disabilities

In December, the Sindh government fixed a 5 percent employment quota in the private sector for differently abled people. The provincial authorities decided to set up the Special Persons Protection Authority to ensure the professional wellbeing of people living with disabilities (PLWDs). The government also directed autonomous institutions, companies and multinationals to comply with the government's orders and generate job opportunities for PLWDs.⁸¹

During a ceremony held to observe International Day of Persons with Disabilities in December, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said that his government was committed to working with nongovernment organisations (NGOs) on the needs of PLWDs. He added that the provincial government would establish campuses of the Sindh Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Centre in all divisional headquarters. Earlier in June, Sindh had allocated PKR 400 million to the centre in the provincial budget presented to the assembly. However, Sindh has failed to implement its policies, especially in terms of providing job opportunities to PLWDs.

PLWDs also remained a target for regressive forces. In Ghotki district, 36-year-old Abbas Kalwar died⁸² after he was doused with petrol and set on fire over allegations of blasphemy. Kalwar was born without arms and would often pray in the graveyard—an act considered ‘sinful’ by conservative Muslims. He was killed after he ignored warnings by extremist elements to stop doing so.

Refugees and internally displaced persons

Impact of floods. The super-floods in Sindh displaced thousands of people, who took shelter in government-run tent camps, government schools and relief camps set up by NGOs. The provincial government claimed to have provided shelter to 500,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in about 2,000 relief camps set up across the province. About 15,000 IDPs were housed in 38 government facilities temporarily established in six of the seven districts of Karachi.⁸³

Afghan refugees. The Sindh government came under severe criticism in December when a picture of Afghan children behind bars was circulated on social media. Information Minister Sharjeel Memon clarified at a press conference in Karachi on 30 December that the children were accompanied by their mothers at the city court lock-up where their Afghan parents had to appear in cases of illegal immigration. Memon said that a total of 129 Afghan female illegal immigrants were in Sindh’s jails, along with 178 children. He insisted that the minors were not under arrest⁸⁴ and that if any child was under the age of seven, they were allowed to stay with their mothers in jail.

Sindh, especially Karachi, has witnessed a fresh influx of Afghan refugees after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in 2021. Many Afghan families were arrested while attempting to enter Karachi. Sindhi nationalist parties continued to protest against what they saw as the ‘unchecked’ influx of Afghans in Sindh, particularly in Karachi.⁸⁵



Education

Heavy monsoon rains and floods in July and August destroyed a significant portion of Sindh's civic infrastructure: thousands of school buildings were damaged in flood-hit districts, thereby affecting children's access to schooling. According to provincial government data, 20,602 school buildings were damaged in the province.⁸⁶ According to UNICEF, 47 percent of a total of 44,219 government-run schools in Sindh were either partially damaged or destroyed by the floods and heavy rains.⁸⁷ UNICEF officials said that the education sector in Sindh had suffered damage worth USD 1 billion due as a result.

The government used the remaining school buildings to set up relief camps where IDPs were provided shelter and food. This exercise also damaged school buildings and furniture. According to estimates, about 5,500 school buildings were used to house children and families displaced by the floods. According to reports, the World Bank has agreed to provide USD 5 million under the Global Partnership for Education for the rehabilitation of schools affected by floods in the province.⁸⁸

The catastrophe affected the education of around 2.5 million children in Sindh. The provincial government claimed to have set up 15,000 temporary classrooms and tent schools in flood-affected areas as repair work on these schools could take up to two or three years.

A startling report indicated that, of the 150 illegally operating private universities in the country, 35 were in Sindh, mostly in Karachi.⁸⁹

Health

Covid-19. The Sindh government launched the first-of-its-kind door-to-door Covid-19 vaccination campaign⁹⁰ for people who had missed getting vaccinated in February. The campaign specifically targeted women at home and was started with help from lady health workers. A parallel campaign for booster shots was also started in an attempt to make Pakistan Covid-free. The government launched a vaccination campaign for children aged 5–11 in September.⁹¹ The first phase of the drive targeted 2.4 million children in Karachi and Hyderabad.

Healthcare workers took to the streets in November to demand the government restore their Covid-19 risk allowance, but they were met with violence as the police used water cannons and baton-charged them.⁹² The Sindh health department worked with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to screen inmates in 22 prisons⁹³ across the province for Hepatitis B and C, HIV and tuberculosis February onwards. The plan was to detect the disease and start treatment in time.

Healthcare governance problems. Overall, Sindh's healthcare received more bad news than good in 2022. Government policies and incompetence played a role in creating problems for the sector. In February, after the government had announced a sales tax on the import of auto-disable syringes, manufacturers protested that the country could face a shortage if the tax was not withdrawn. The government's reluctance to increase the prices of various brands of paracetamol also created problems for the healthcare sector. Later in March, dozens of surgeries were delayed at the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre after the facility did not receive its supply of clean water for more than 48 hours.⁹⁴

In April, around 70 percent of the 242 haemophilia patients who were screened for hepatitis in Karachi were found to be infected with Hepatitis C, highlighting how unsafe blood transfusions were playing havoc with the lives of people.⁹⁵ A World Health Organization survey confirmed that the prevalence of Hepatitis C had increased to 6.1 percent in the province from the previous 5 percent in 2008.⁹⁶

Another example of poor governance in the healthcare sector was that, while the number of voluntary blood donors increased in the province – around 60,000–70,000 people donate blood in the province voluntarily – a shortage of collection bags in blood banks led collection centres to turn away hundreds of volunteers.⁹⁷

In April, the country, including Sindh, faced a morphine crisis where the unavailability of pain relief medicines prescribed to cancer patients caused great misery. The worst affected by the shortage were child patients. A lone case from Sindh⁹⁸ where a peasant from the small town of Sakrand was made to run from pillar to post to obtain treatment called for the need to offer affordable treatment to terminally ill cancer patients.

Some good news emerged in June when the chief minister announced that child mortality in the province had dropped from 104 to 46 per 1,000 live births over five years.⁹⁹

Impact of floods. The second half of the year remained affected by heavy rains in Karachi and flash floods in Sindh. After the rains, several waterborne diseases surfaced,¹⁰⁰ adding to the burden on the already fragile healthcare sector. In September, 137,000 diarrhoea cases, 10,000 dysentery cases, and 4,000 malaria cases were reported in the province. The dengue outbreak in Pakistan also had harmful effects in Sindh. Around 62 people out of the total 149 lives lost to dengue were from Sindh. The provincial government started a fumigation campaign¹⁰¹ in areas that were hotspots to tackle the crisis to some degree. The province also suffered an acute shortage of mosquito nets due to a sudden increase in demand,¹⁰² which exacerbated the problem. Flood-affected rural areas in Sindh saw the emergence of 'monster' mosquitoes in various parts, leading to a health crisis.

Polio. In September, an environmental sample collected from Karachi's Landhi neighbourhood, tested at the Pakistan National Polio Laboratory,

detected the wild poliovirus Type-1 for the first time in 14 months. In November, the chief minister said that, even though several environmental samples had detected the presence of the virus in Karachi, there had been no reported polio case in the province.

Suicide. The province also reported 386 suicides, raising alarm bells for medical practitioners who had earlier reported that the coronavirus pandemic had led to an increase in mental health disorders among people.

Women and children's health. Lack of healthcare for women with cervical cancer proved fatal for most women. According to data shared by the Karachi Institute of Radiotherapy and Nuclear Medicine, 60–70 percent of women suffering from cervical cancer¹⁰³ die partly because they visit hospitals when it is too late.

Pregnant women across the province continued to receive unsatisfactory care. Officials from the Karachi Medical and Dental College said that around 80 percent of pregnant women who were treated at public hospitals were anaemic. Pregnant women in Jacobabad – the hottest city in Sindh – were exposed to great risk. According to health experts, exposure to prolonged periods of intense risk can cause complications, resulting in premature deliveries.

Paediatric care in Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas divisions called for the immediate attention of the Sindh healthcare department as public hospitals in these two areas lacked ventilators for babies.

Housing and public amenities

Demolitions. The Sindh government, in the guise of following court orders, largely stayed quiet over the demolition of Karachi's Nasla Tower, a multi-storey residential building that was finally demolished in February. The building was situated near Shahrah-e-Faisal.

In October, authorities demolished houses in Mujahid Colony – a middle-class neighbourhood – displacing thousands of people. Demolitions in Gujjar Nullah,¹⁰⁴ started in 2021, led to broken and unsafe infrastructure. The provincial government ignored repeated requests by residents and did not carry out the necessary repair work. When the city braced for heavy rains, the 27-kilometre-long channel on both sides of the nullah overflowed and rainwater started entering people's homes. At least two people, including a child, drowned in the ditch. The collapse of a roof in the area resulted in the death of an elderly woman. The house had been damaged partially during the previous year's demolitions.

Public infrastructure. The overall condition of public infrastructure remained poor during 2022. Health experts said that frequent travel on

Karachi's broken roads was the leading cause of permanent disabilities among young motorcyclists and people commuting by three-wheeler rickshaws.¹⁰⁵ Not only did broken roads and under-construction projects damage commuters' vertebrae in the form of chronic backaches, an under-construction drain in Karachi's Shadman Town¹⁰⁶ also claimed the lives of a woman and an infant. While the body of the deceased woman was recovered, the unfortunate man who was travelling with his wife and children could not recover the body of his infant.

Karachi received PKR 1.5 billion for road repairs. The damaged Jahangir Road in Karachi was finally repaired in October. However, a few weeks later, the road was damaged once again, revealing negligence in repair work.

To its credit, the PPP government launched a public bus service called the People's Bus Service in Karachi, Larkana and Hyderabad¹⁰⁷ to provide decent and affordable transport to the cities' residents. It also launched the first electric bus service on a specific route in Karachi.

Environment

Super-floods. The flash floods caused by heavy monsoon rains in western Sindh inundated most of the districts in the province, particularly Dadu. The rains in August and September also affected other districts on the left of the Indus. Khairpur, Naushahro Feroze, Sanghar, Nawabshah and Mirpurkhas were hit when the Left Bank Outfall Drain (LBOD) overflowed. According to the PDMA's report, the province received 426 percent more (or 703.2 mm above) than normal rainfall during the monsoon season.¹⁰⁸

Sindh's Padidan area in Naushahro Feroze district received the highest rainfall of 1,763.9 mm. Experts have called these floods an impact of climate change. However, this was compounded by Sindh's ineffective drainage system. On the left side of the Indus, the LBOD is the only main drainage canal, whereas the project for the Right Bank Outfall Drain has lain incomplete since 2010.

Poor waste management. Despite the presence of the independent Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), an estimated 90 percent of untreated industrial wastewater flows into the sea. Virtually no treatment plant is functioning in the province. According to SEPA officials, domestic sewage, toxic industrial effluent, port-related waste, solid waste, cow dung from cattle colonies and effluents from slaughterhouses are disposed of directly into the sea, playing havoc with the marine environment.

No combined effluent treatment plant in Sindh is working properly, including one for tanneries in Korangi in Karachi and one in Kotri. The

now-defunct Water Commission set up under Supreme Court orders had recommended that at least five treatment plants be functional in Karachi, but no step has yet been taken in this direction.¹⁰⁹ As a result, tannery waste containing hazardous materials, heavy metals and oil is discharged into rivers and creeks and the already polluted harbour.

SEPA claimed to have filed 152 cases against industrial units violating environmental laws in the tribunal and 384 cases before judicial magistrates. The latter convicted 149 violators, collecting PKR 19.5 million in fines.

Air quality. Air quality in Karachi dipped to its worst levels in 2022 with the air quality index registering 250 (deemed 'harmful to health').

Heat wave. Jacobabad continued to hold its title of one of the hottest cities on earth. Karachi saw a severe heatwave when the temperature crossed the 40 degree Celsius mark.¹¹⁰ Another hotspot in Sindh is Dadu district, where the temperature often exceeds 50 degrees Celsius in summer. According to one report, at least three children died because of severe heat in the Kaccho region in Dadu district in May, when the mercury crossed 50 degrees in most parts of upper Sindh.¹¹¹

Opposition to the Malir Expressway¹¹² grew as residents of the area protested in March at a public hearing on the environmental impact of the project and claimed that the provincial government's justifications for the project were unsatisfactory. According to local activists, the Malir Expressway will destroy at least 21 villages.¹¹³



Jacobabad continued to hold its title of one of the hottest cities on earth.

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KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA





- The overall number of deaths from violence, including terrorism, increased by 59 percent from 2021. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) witnessed 221 incidents of terrorism—the highest number of such occurrences in Pakistan in the year.
- The government’s response to the rising tide of terrorism was indecisive: initially, it denied reports that militant organisations were regrouping in several districts of the province, despite widespread demonstrations by citizens calling for militancy to be uprooted.
- Around 30,000 candidates took part in the second phase of local government elections held in 18 districts of KP on 31 March. The Election Commission of Pakistan identified numerous violations of its code of conduct during the campaigns.
- Women’s participation as voters in the local government polls remained far below that of men.
- Flash floods affected the northern and southern parts of the province, displacing more than 600,000 people, damaging 76,700 houses, killing 13,228 cattle and destroying crops across 60,752 acres of land.
- The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances reported receiving 202 cases of enforced disappearance from KP in 2022. KP continued to account for the largest number of missing persons traced to internment centres.
- Legislative activity in the KP Assembly remained lacklustre throughout 2022 in the wake of Imran Khan’s removal as prime minister through a no-confidence vote in April. However, the Child Protection and Welfare (Amendment) Act provided for stricter punishments for such crimes against children as sexual abuse, pornography, organ trade and trafficking.
- Polio cases continued to surface in the tribal districts where resistance to polio vaccination was strong and widespread.
- Violating women’s freedom of movement, an all-male *jirga* in Bajaur banned local women from visiting picnic spots, while hundreds of religious activists in Bannu demanded that the government shut down a family park to prevent couples from visiting it.
- The monthly minimum wage was raised to PKR 26,000—higher than anywhere else in the country.

- Three Sikhs and a Christian priest died in armed attacks targeting religious minorities in the provincial capital of Peshawar.
- Transgender persons were targeted in several deadly attacks, particularly in the central and northern parts of the province.



Overview

In many ways, 2022 bore grim echoes of the province's past, particularly in the political sphere. It was, for instance, ruled by a party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which lost power at the federal level to the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PMLN) and its allies in April when the prime minister Imran Khan was ousted through a no-confidence vote in the National Assembly. The consequences of this change became apparent in the second phase of local government elections in the province, which took place when the PTI's federal government was facing its terminal decline. These elections became a battlefield in which each side employed every tactic possible to outsmart the other. This tug of war continued even after the local government elections, as the provincial government did whatever it could to prevent the administrative and financial empowerment of the newly elected local government representatives.

The frequency and intensity of attacks by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State and other extremist groups increased in the year. The main target of their attacks were the police, whom the TTP had earlier pushed out of several areas, including Swat. Many political activists, tribal elders and even independent observers pointed out that this resurgence of terrorism was a direct outcome of the PTI's policy of 'appeasement' towards fighters associated with the TTP who were allowed to return home in KP from Afghanistan after the Afghan Taliban took over power in their own country in August 2021. The army also engaged with the TTP in dialogue – just as it had done in the 2000s – to secure peace but without involving the residents and elected representatives of the terrorism-affected areas. There was also an increase in opposition to polio vaccination and attacks on government workers engaged in polio vaccination campaigns.

In yet another worrisome reminder from the past, floods wreaked havoc in many parts of KP – just as they had done in 2010. Experts warned that such devastating floods could become routine due to climate change such as increases in average temperatures, shifts in rainfall and snowfall patterns and melting of glaciers as well as administrative mismanagement leading to deforestation, encroachments on waterways, lack of implementation of building regulations, and the degradation of rescue and rehabilitation services.



Laws and law-making

The KP Assembly could not pass much legislation in 2022 because of the continuing political crisis that started early in the year with Imran Khan's removal as prime minister in a no-confidence vote and subsequent resignations by PTI members of the National Assembly. He announced that the PTI's provincial assembly members, too, could resign on short notice to force an early general election. This announcement effectively halted legislative activity in the KP legislature. Before this hiatus, however, the KP Assembly had passed some welcome and some questionable legislation, mostly in haste and without any serious debate. These included the following:

- The Child Protection and Welfare (Amendment) Act in June, providing for stricter punishments for such crimes against children as sexual abuse, pornography, organ trade and trafficking.
- An increase in the monthly minimum wage to PKR 26,000—the highest in Pakistan.
- The KP Universal Health Coverage Act to provide legal cover to the provincial government's flagship Sehat Insaaf Card, which covers 7.4 million families across the province.
- The KP Fiscal Responsibility Act to provide for sound fiscal risk management, sustainable public debt and transparency in the government's data related to tax collection and public debt
- The Local Government Amendment Act, widely criticised by opposition parties for taking away some important fiscal and administrative powers from the newly elected local governments in the province.
- The Resolution of Commercial Disputes Act to provide for the establishment of special courts for swift resolution and disposal of commercial disputes in order to strengthen contract enforcement and remove barriers to ease of doing business.

The provincial assembly also passed a resolution in August, asking the federal authorities to ensure that the residents of Shivah tehsil in Bannu district received the right to use the natural gas discovered in their area.¹ Moved by a PTI member of the provincial assembly, the resolution pointed out that local residents were resisting the laying of a pipeline to take the newly found gas to other parts of the country because they believed that their right of first use was being violated.

Later, in mid-December, the provincial assembly amended the Ministers (Salaries, Allowance and Privileges) Act amid strong resistance by the

opposition, which alleged that the act had been passed by the ruling PTI to provide 'blanket immunity' to those who used the provincial government's helicopters unlawfully.²

Administration of justice

The Peshawar High Court took up several high-profile cases throughout 2022 as it went on to adjudicate on such administrative affairs as petroleum exploration, road construction, supply of gas to the cement sector, designated parks, bans on TikTok and suspending the addition of a fuel price adjustment to electricity bills.

In May, the Peshawar High Court scrapped a parliamentary committee's refusal to endorse the elevation of three district and sessions judges from KP to the provincial high court.³ Made in line with multiple other judgments over the Parliament's role in judicial appointments, the verdict stated that parliamentarians did not have the constitutional power to reject anyone recommended by the Judicial Commission of Pakistan, headed by the chief justice of Pakistan, for appointment as a judge to the Supreme Court and the high courts.

A month earlier in April, the Peshawar High Court had directed the city's district administration to designate a place for protests to prevent traffic jams.⁴ The court heard a similar petition filed by a senior journalist seeking a ban on political and other protests that led to the blocking of roads and disruptions to people's movement.⁵ At the same time, the high court gave several judgments to protect fundamental rights. In January, it ruled that the deputy commissioner of Lower Dir district had illegally detained 24 people under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance (MPO) 1960 for running stone-crushing plants without the government's permission.⁶ The court said the detained people should have been dealt with under the relevant laws, not under the MPO, if they were involved in any illegal activity.

In February, it ruled against discrimination in the payment of compensation to the heirs of a dead Christian policeman who had been employed on special contract and was killed during a terrorist attack on Peshawar's All Saints Church on 22 September 2013.⁷

In a salient judgment issued in August, the Peshawar High Court set aside a provincial government notification that had empowered Dera Ismail Khan's district administration to register criminal cases against individuals identified by federal minister Ali Amin Gandapur to have committed offences against the state and/or incited armed forces personnel to mutiny.⁸ The court ruled the notification had no legal or constitutional validity. A month later, the Abbottabad Circuit Bench ordered the release of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) (JUI-F) leader Mufti Kifayatullah, his two sons and a driver arrested under the MPO 1960 for protesting against the electrocution of a baker during a government crackdown against the use of polythene bags.⁹

The Peshawar High Court took up several other issues of public interest as well. In April, it ruled that a dual national could not be barred from contesting local government elections.¹⁰ The case came up for hearing after an Australian-Pakistani Sardar Shuja Nabi had won as Abbottabad's mayor on 31 March.

In May, the high court vacated its own stay order against the actions of the provincial Environmental Protection Agency and directed brick kiln owners to ensure early conversion of their conventional kilns to environment-friendly zigzag technology.¹¹ The judges said they could not allow brick kilns to pollute the atmosphere just because their owners could not afford to make the technological switch. In August, the court rejected the bail application of 29 people charged with lynching a murder suspect and vandalising a police station in Bajaur district two months earlier.¹²



The high court directed brick kiln owners to ensure early conversion of their conventional kilns to environment-friendly zigzag technology.

In March, the Peshawar High Court ordered the compulsory retirement of a senior civil judge after he was found guilty of assaulting a woman at his official residence in Lower Dir district.¹³ The order was issued after an inquiry team found the judge to have breached his office's code of conduct.

One of the biggest challenges to the administration of justice in KP originated outside the court when lawyers and civil servants observed a token strike for several days in June after an altercation. The dispute began with the arrest of Peshawar-based lawyer Syed Ghufuranullah Shah, who had allegedly stopped an additional assistant commissioner from conducting a raid at a petrol station. The police alleged that many lawyers had later hurled bricks at the main entrance of the deputy commissioner's office.¹⁴ In October, the high court quashed the police case against lawyers for the attack.¹⁵



Law and order

Rising militancy. The year 2022 began with news of four military officials killed in a clash with militants in the North Waziristan district.¹⁶ The TTP accepted responsibility for the killings. A few weeks later, on 4 March, a suicide bomber exploded himself amid worshippers gathered for Friday prayers inside a Shia mosque in Peshawar's Koocha Risaldar neighbourhood, killing 56 people and injuring many others.¹⁷ The Islamic State later claimed that the bomber was associated with it.

Acts of terrorism, particularly attacks on law enforcement agencies, reached their climax in the latter half of December when 33 militants being interrogated inside a Counter-Terrorism Department building in the southern city of Bannu overpowered their guards and took them hostage, seeking safe passage to Afghanistan.¹⁸ It took security forces three days to regain control of the building.

There was an overall spike in violence in KP in 2022. A report prepared by an Islamabad-based think-tank stated that 633 people lost their lives in KP to various incidents of violence in 2022. This represented a 59 percent jump in such deaths since 2021.¹⁹ When compared to other provinces, these incidents paint a grim picture of law and order in KP.

Faltering government response to militancy. The government's response to the rising tide of terrorism, however, was both indecisive and ineffective. Initially, it denied reports that militant organisations were regrouping in several districts of the province, including Swat. In October, for instance, the inspector general of police Moazzam Jah Ansari told the media that there were no terrorists in Swat and the situation in the district was under control.²⁰

Local residents in several districts, on the other hand, had been protesting for the past five months against targeted killings and extortion due to the increased presence of TTP associates in those districts. Some provincial ministers had also received demands for protection money.²¹ In October, thousands of residents of Swat and Shangla took to the streets to protest militant attacks on multiple occasions.²²

The government announced it would engage with the TTP in dialogue to secure peace during the Islamic month of Ramzan; in June, the army-led dialogue floundered after the TTP's extraordinary demand for the merger of the former tribal agencies with KP to be reversed.²³ Subsequently, the government intensified the presence of law enforcement agencies in various districts. According to the provincial police chief, in Swat alone the police were establishing at least 18 check-posts in the mountains to monitor the movement of suspected external elements.

Public response. The people of KP, however, were not satisfied with these government actions. They held several demonstrations in Swat, North Waziristan and other parts of the province. The mothers of five students and teachers who had been killed in the Army Public School attack in December 2014 also moved the Peshawar High Court in July against what they called the government's desire for 'reconciliation with terrorists' without taking the victims into confidence.²⁴



The people of KP held several demonstrations in Swat, North Waziristan and other parts of the province to protest the rise of militancy.

In late October, a grand *jirga* of eminent local residents and politicians from Malakand division declared they would 'neither form a peace force' to combat militants nor 'support any military operation' in their area.²⁵

Attacks by militants. Two leaders of the Awami National Party (ANP), a PTI member of the provincial assembly,²⁶ a senator associated with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)²⁷ and the deputy speaker of the KP Assembly all suffered deadly attacks by militants and were lucky to survive. Two senior leaders of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (F) (JUI-F) in Bajaur district²⁸ and several peace activists in North Waziristan, however, succumbed to separate targeted attacks.²⁹ TTP militants also kidnapped three employees of a phone company in Swat, hit two industrial units and a government hospital and attacked at least five check-posts of law enforcement agencies.

Crime and police excesses. Data from the KP police indicates that at least 3,345 people were murdered in 2022, while 103 honour killings and 277 rapes were registered as crimes (Table 1). The number of police encounters documented was 108.

Table 1: Crime statistics for KP in 2022

Offense	Number of victims
Rape	277
Gang-rape	2
Murder	3,345
Honour killings	103
Domestic violence against women	465
Acid crimes	0
Blasphemy cases	47
Law enforcement personnel killed in the line of duty	187
Police encounters	108

Source: KP Police, in response to HRCP's request for information

Jails and prisoners

Prison capacity. Data from the KP Prisons Department indicates that, as against a sanctioned capacity of 13,106 inmates, the province's 38 jails held 14,079 prisoners, implying overcrowding by 7 percent. Under-trial prisoners far outnumbered convicted prisoners at a ratio of 4.4 to 1. Table 2 gives additional data on the prison population in KP.

Table 2: Prisons data for KP in 2022

Total number of male inmates	13,394
Total number of female inmates	171
Total number of juvenile inmates	514
Total number of under-trial prisoners	11,034
Total number of convicted prisoners	2,513
Number of children living with their mothers in jail	33
Number of persons on death row	152

Source: KP Prisons Department, in response to HRCP's request for information

Online court hearings. In the latter half of 2022, the Peshawar High Court ordered a district and sessions judge to visit the prisons in the city to see if online judicial proceedings could be conducted for those prisoners who needed to make only routine appearances in court. A subsequent government statement said that around 280 prisoners were taken every weekday from jail to the district and sessions court to participate in their hearings; their transportation created several

problems, including their security and the financial and administrative resources required to move them between the jail and the court.³⁰

The first experimental online hearing also took place in October when 20 prisoners were produced before district and sessions judge Ashfaq Taj and judicial magistrate Hassan Mehboob via a video link.³¹

Enforced disappearances

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED) reported receiving 202 cases of enforced disappearance from KP in 2022. The official data indicates that, since the COIED's inception in 2011, of 3,369 cases received as of end-December 2022, 595 persons had returned home, 818 were traced to internment centres and 119 to prisons, while 66 dead bodies were located over the course of 11 years.

At the end of the year, the COIED still had a balance of 1,334 cases of enforced disappearance from the province.

Death penalty

While no executions are reported to have taken place in KP in 2022, the death penalty was handed down in at least 11 cases during the year, according to HRCP's own data, based on media reports.



Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Life for KP's small non-Muslim population has always been precarious but was even more so in 2022, as a result of faith-based violence. The first such incident occurred in late January when a Christian priest, William Siraj, was gunned down; the attack also left another priest injured.³² A Sikh man was shot dead in Peshawar the same day.

In March, an Ahmadi doctor's clinic was attacked in the city's Scheme Chowk area.³³ He was not at the clinic at the time but a Muslim patient was killed while another sustained injuries. In April, police in Swat district recovered a Sikh boy who had been kidnapped by a self-professed Muslim spiritual healer based in Lahore.³⁴ He had kept the boy in captivity for five months and did not set him free even after receiving PKR 5.5 million from the latter's father as ransom. A month later, in May, two members of Peshawar's Sikh community were killed after unidentified gunmen opened fire on them in their spice shops.³⁵

Freedom of expression

Curbs on press freedom. Freedom of expression remained under pressure in various parts of KP throughout the year. In the second week of May, a journalist, Khadim Afridi, was picked up by Counter-Terrorism Department officials from the Bara area of Khyber district on his way home from a local press club. He was accused of involvement in the decade-old murder of a police officer. A court later released him on bail.³⁶

In October, officials of the police's elite force in Lower Dir district tried to snatch the camera and mobile phone of a local journalist, Ihsanullah Shakir, who was filming action against students protesting over what they called the unfair marking of their examination papers.³⁷

Digital rights. In mid-May, residents of Bajaur district took out a protest rally to demand the restoration of internet services, suspended in their area two months earlier ostensibly for security reasons.³⁸

In June, the Peshawar High Court was informed by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) that its order to remove objectionable content from the social media app TikTok had been complied with. The PTA also told the court that it was in constant contact with the company that ran TikTok and had devised a mechanism for suspending those accounts that shared 'immoral' content and subsequently blocking them.³⁹

Human rights defender Professor M. Ismail and his wife continued to face fabricated cases on charges of hate speech and cyber-terrorism, with a local court indicting him on these charges in December.⁴⁰

Freedom of assembly

In August, police in Swat lodged a case against several peace protestors for allegedly chanting slogans against security forces.⁴¹ In late October, people in South Waziristan district protested against the absence of 3-G and 4-G internet services in their area. They threatened to boycott the government's polio vaccination campaign if they were not given access to faster internet facilities. The police later arrested 19 people on charges of refusing to vaccinate their children against polio.⁴²

State violence against protestors. While freedom of assembly remained under stress in the province, public opinion as well as the authorities remained divided over its judicious use. As some sections of society blocked access to thoroughfares to protest on various issues, others found their protests to be a public nuisance. Government officials, for their part, often used force to disperse protestors and reopen blocked roads. In the second week of May, police in Peshawar arrested 19 employees of the Workers' Welfare Board after baton-charging and tear-gassing them outside the provincial assembly's building where they were protesting along with 300 or so colleagues—including some women—to seek the regularisation of their jobs.⁴³ The police accused them of having blocked access to roads illegally.

In August, police in Peshawar used teargas and batons to disperse the protesting secretaries of village and neighbourhood councils, injuring scores of them because they had reportedly blocked roads and caused traffic jams.⁴⁴ The police also arrested 30 protestors who were demanding that the provincial government upgrade their pay scale.

In early October, police in Lower Dir district fired in the air and used batons to end a protest by local students who had blocked the roads after obtaining low marks in their intermediate examination.⁴⁵ In late October, police in Peshawar arrested dozens of schoolteachers after using batons and teargas to disperse a rally taken out to demand their pay scales be upgraded and allowances restored.⁴⁶ The Primary School Teachers Association later closed around 15,000 government primary schools for boys for a day across the province in protest against the police action.

Designated space for protests. The complexity of the problem forced the administrative and judicial authorities to devise a solution that would allow protestors to raise their voices without causing problems for the public. In April, therefore, the district administration designated Peshawar's historic Jinnah Park for public protests.⁴⁷

The order to do so came from the Peshawar High Court, moved by several citizens, including a senior journalist, to disallow protests on the city's busy roads and commercial areas. The solution proved impractical because it was restricted to Peshawar and because the district administrations had neither the training nor the ability to keep public protests within legal limits and handle them peacefully.

Violence by protestors. Mobs instigated over real or imagined religious insults – often violating their right to freedom of peaceful assembly – were another key problem that the administrations failed to address during the year. A shopkeeper accused one of his customers of having made sacrilegious remarks during a dispute between the two in Kurram district.⁴⁸ The accusation caused a mob to gather, bent on killing the customer who had by then been taken into protective custody by law enforcement agencies. The mob then attacked a police station and ransacked some government offices so violently that paramilitary forces had to fire gunshots to disperse the crowd, resulting in the deaths of two people.

Police in Haripur district registered anti-terrorism cases against 80 people associated with the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) in October allegedly for having injured 33 police officers and damaged public and private property.⁴⁹ The incident occurred when the police tried to stop a TLP-led religious procession from proceeding to a place where such processions had been banned.

Security as a pretext for curbs. Freedom of peaceful assembly also often come into conflict with supposed or actual threats to national security. This was the reason the provincial government imposed Section 144 in the Wana subdivision of South Waziristan district for ten days, banning all public meetings and processions.⁵⁰ The authorities also closed a local border crossing, Angoor Adda, to stop all human movement between South Waziristan and Afghanistan. All these actions were taken following an attack on a security post in which an army major and a soldier were killed.⁵¹



Political participation

Several by-elections were held in KP during 2022 and PTI chairman Imran Khan contested all but one. He won in all three constituencies – NA-22 (Mardan), NA-24 (Charsadda) and NA-31 (Peshawar) – where elections were held on 16 October. He also emerged victorious in the fourth, NA-45 Kurram, where the election had been postponed due to poor law and order. A worrying factor in these elections was the lack of interest among voters. Turnout in any of the constituencies mentioned above did not exceed 20 percent.⁵² The same trend was witnessed in a by-poll held in Swat district for a provincial assembly constituency, where voter turnout remained as low as 17 percent.

Another controversy surrounding the by-elections for the National Assembly constituencies in KP was the blatant violation of the electoral code of conduct, which led the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to impose a PKR 50,000 fine each on Imran Khan, KP Chief Minister Mahmood Khan and several members of the provincial cabinet.

Local government

Local government polls. The second phase of local government elections took place in KP on 31 March. This phase covered 65 tehsils in 18 districts of the province where around 29,338 candidates took part. The ECP stated that 3,201 women and 107 non-Muslims also took part in the second phase of the elections. Poll data collected by the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), on the other hand, shows that no candidates filed nomination papers for almost 10 percent of all seats available in this phase. Of these uncontested seats, 351 were general, 533 were reserved for women, 151 were allocated to peasants/workers, 233 were meant for youth and 50 were assigned to non-Muslims.

Violations of ECP code of conduct. Worryingly, certain actions taken by the ECP suggest that the electoral process was marred by serious irregularities. The commission warned Lower Dir's district administration in early January that it should not allow the PTI to hold an election gathering to be addressed by then Prime Minister Imran Khan since such a gathering would be a violation of the electoral code of conduct. The election authorities also turned down a request by Chief Minister Mahmood Khan to visit Upper Dir district for campaigning.⁵³ The ECP also asked the provincial government to take disciplinary action against Zia-ur-Rehman, the younger brother of JUI-F chief Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, for taking part in electioneering despite being a government servant.⁵⁴

Dera Ismail Khan's district returning officer sent a notice to a JUI-F

member of the National Assembly, Mohammad Jamal-ud-Din, for having addressed a press conference as part of his party's election campaign.⁵⁵ The commission imposed a fine of PKR 50,000 on federal railways minister Azam Khan Swati for running the election campaign of Kamal Saleem Swati, a candidate of the ruling PTI in Mansehra district.⁵⁶ The provincial election authorities also wrote to the ECP headquarters to take action against Azam Khan Swati over his repeated violations of the electoral code of conduct.

The ECP imposed a fine of PKR 50,000 each on then Prime Minister Imran Khan, KP Chief Minister Mahmood Khan, federal ministers Murad Saeed and Ali Haider Zaidi, and provincial minister Shakeel Khan for addressing a public meeting in Malakand in violation of the electoral code of conduct.⁵⁷

Earlier, during a by-election for local government held in January, the ECP had directed the KP chief secretary and inspector general of police to 'forcibly' expel the federal minister for Kashmir Affairs, Ali Amin Gandapur, from Dera Ismail Khan district over his repeated violations of the electoral code of conduct.⁵⁸ He was accused of participating in the election campaign of his brother, Umar Amin Gandapur, a candidate for Dera Ismail Khan's mayor, and for announcing development schemes in the area. He had earlier been fined PKR 50,000 for similar violations.⁵⁹ The ECP also disqualified Umar Amin Gandapur from contesting the election because he was found to be using the provincial government's influence in his favour. The superior courts, however, later allowed him to run for the seat.⁶⁰

Changes to local government law. The aftermath of the local government elections did not bode well for the devolution of power in the province. While the ruling PTI won more seats than any other party in the second phase—in contrast with its performance in the first phase—it tried to retain financial and administrative control of local governments by making some major changes in the relevant law.

In June, the newly elected mayor of Mardan city, Himayatullah Mayar of the ANP, moved the Peshawar High Court against amendments to the law. He informed the court that the KP Local Government Act 2013 clearly laid down the powers and responsibilities of local governments, but held that the recent amendments had made the exercise of those powers and discharge of those responsibilities subservient to the rules the provincial government would make.⁶¹

In April, a report stated that the provincial government had 'failed to frame rules of business' in the last three years for running the 'two-tier new local government system' in the province. These rules defined the procedures and processes through which elected representatives were supposed to exercise their powers and discharge their responsibilities.⁶²



Women

Low political participation. The plight of women in KP was no different in 2022 than in the preceding year. Of the 3,000 women participating as candidates in the second phase of the local government elections on 31 March, only 33 vied for general seats. The rest contested reserved seats, on 533 of which, not a single female candidate filed her nomination papers.

Women's participation as voters in the polls remained far below that of men. News reports suggest that very few women left their homes to vote in several districts in the central and northern parts of the province. Polling data collected by FAFEN from the by-elections held in the province in October shows that the turnout of women voters remained below 10 percent at 43 female polling stations in NA-31 (Peshawar), at nine female polling stations in NA-24 (Charsadda) and at three female polling stations in NA-22 (Mardan). At one female polling station set up in the Government Girls High School Aslam Killi in NA-22 (Mardan), none of the 1,348 registered voters turned out to vote.

Restricted access to public spaces. Women's lack of participation in the electoral process was not the only negative indicator of their poor visibility in the public sphere. Men sought to impose serious restrictions even on their right to freedom of movement. In one instance, an all-male council (*jirga*) of local tribal elders in Salarzai tehsil in Bajaur district in mid-July banned local women from visiting picnic spots.⁶³ They vowed to implement the ban themselves if the government failed to do so within a day. The *jirga* was organised by the local chapter of the JUI-F, which was part of the ruling coalition at the federal level. In the second instance, less than a month later, hundreds of religious activists marched in Bannu city, demanding that the government shut down a family park set up in the city's garrison area.⁶⁴ They were enraged that thousands of couples had visited the park on 14 August, which they saw as anathema to local traditions.

Violence against women. As early as 22 January, the Peshawar High Court ordered the provincial government to provide security to a woman and her husband from Kurram district because her male relatives had hired assassins to kill her for marrying of her own choice.⁶⁵ Both the local police and tribal elders had refused to take responsibility for her security the whole year, forcing her to live in a shelter home.

Violence against women continued unabated in the province. In February, a woman and her alleged lover were killed in the Bakakhel area of Bannu district by her brother-in-law.⁶⁶ In August, three women, including two sisters, were killed in the name of honour by their brother in Peshawar's Daudzai area.⁶⁷

In September, a 24-year-old female seminary teacher went missing from her home in Peshawar's Badhaber area and was later found murdered; local police said she had been killed for 'honour' by her male relatives.⁶⁸

In September, a pregnant woman was tortured to death by her husband and father-in-law in Razaar tehsil of Swabi district in a domestic quarrel.⁶⁹ In October, the police recovered the body of a woman buried in the front yard of her house after she was killed by her husband and mother-in-law in Charsadda district.⁷⁰ Later in the same month, a woman and her daughter were killed by her husband and in-laws in Charsadda district for having 'damaged' the family's honour.⁷¹

Transgender persons

Alarming levels of violence. March was a litany of violence for transgender persons in KP. On 13 March, five transgender persons were injured when a disgruntled ex-lover opened fire on them in Mansehra.⁷² One of the injured persons died a few days later in a hospital. On 17 March, a trans woman, Chaand, was shot dead in Mardan, while another, Honey, was injured when a former intimate partner opened fire on them.⁷³ A transgender person, Sadiq alias Coconut, was shot dead and another, Salman alias Wara, was injured when unknown motorcyclists opened fire on their car on Charsadda Road in Mardan on the night between 25 and 26 March.⁷⁴ On 25 March, a trans woman, Mano, was killed by her friend Sanaullah when she asked him to return some money he had borrowed from her.⁷⁵ In the same month, the police arrested five people for trying to abduct a transgender person within the jurisdiction of Peshawar's Chamkani police station.



The month of March was a litany of violence for transgender persons in KP.

A transgender person was shot dead in Peshawar's Dalazak Road area late in July.⁷⁶ Subsequently, three transgender persons and their driver were injured in an armed attack near Peshawar's Pahari Pura police station in September.⁷⁷ A fact-finding mission conducted by HRCP found that the incident was a consequence of a personal dispute between one of the injured persons, Naina, and the accused, who had been demanding that she let him have a relationship with a junior team member.⁷⁸

The scale of violence was not ignored: several trans rights activists addressed a press conference in Peshawar on 29 March, expressing shock at the growing number of attacks against members of the trans community. They also demanded that the government take tangible steps for their protection.⁷⁹

Backlash against transgender rights law. Human rights activists have pointed out that one of the key reasons for high levels of violence against transgender persons in KP is that the province does not have a specific law to protect and promote their rights. HRCP has also noted that certain 'religious political parties' have made the federal Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 controversial by 'spreading disinformation' about the law and thus contributing to the climate of impunity for perpetrators of violence against trans persons.

Children

Legislation against sexual abuse. In June, the KP Assembly passed the KP Child Protection and Welfare (Amendment) Act 2022.⁸⁰ Initiated in the wake of the rape and murder of a minor girl in Nowshera district in 2020, changes suggested in the amended act had been under discussion at multiple forums, including civil society groups and a special committee of the provincial assembly. The Act penalises those who trade in children's organs, are involved in child pornography and child trafficking, induce a child into a sexual act, or are involved in child sexual abuse. The law also provides for the maintenance of a register of sexual offenders and makes it a punishable offence to employ registered offenders. It also bars registered offenders from using public transport.

Continuing violence against minors. Despite these stringent changes, there was little difference in the plight of KP's children as cases of physical and sexual abuse continued to be reported throughout 2022. In April, a minor girl was assaulted by a man in Swat's Rahimabad area; local civil society later held protests against the police's failure to arrest the culprit.⁸¹ In July, the body of a four-year-old girl was found dumped on the banks of the Jindi River in Charsadda district; she had gone missing a day earlier from her home.⁸² In late July, police in Peshawar arrested a young man for having sexually assaulted three minor girls and killed two of them.⁸³ The body of a seven-year-old girl was found on a garbage heap in Charsadda district in September; she had gone missing a few days earlier.⁸⁴

Cases of violence against boys also surfaced in 2022. In September, an 11-year-old boy from Charsadda district was assaulted in Abbottabad by his neighbour, who had taken him there on the pretext of providing him work and education.⁸⁵ Later in the same month, the police arrested three *madrassah* [seminary] teachers from Kohat city after a video went viral on social media showing they had chained and tortured three minor students.⁸⁶ In late October, police in Kohat district claimed to have arrested a man who had killed a six-year-old boy after sexually assaulting him; the boy's body was recovered from a well in the Talab Banda area.⁸⁷

Judicial response. Some important judgments were announced during the year in relation to punishing perpetrators of violence against children. In July, an additional district and sessions judge in Haripur district convicted six teachers for negligence and ordered them to compensate a student who had lost an arm and a leg after suffering an electric shock during a morning assembly at a school in Ghazi town seven years ago.⁸⁸ The student had been told by his teachers to erect an iron pole to hoist the national flag, but the pole had grazed high-tension electricity wires overhead. The resulting explosion killed him on the spot and caused severe burns to eight others. In July again, an additional district and sessions judge in Kohat district sentenced a man to death for sexually assaulting his 14-year-old daughter. The case was registered in December 2020.⁸⁹ In August, an additional district and sessions judge in Nowshera district gave a life imprisonment sentence to a seminary teacher for sexually assaulting one of his students in December 2019.⁹⁰

Similarly, in a move to ensure the safety of homeless children, the Peshawar High Court ordered the KP Social Welfare Department in March to investigate why drug addiction was increasing among such children.⁹¹ The court also told the department to provide details of different shelter homes and the number of street children living there so that steps could be taken to improve their living conditions.

Labour

Minimum wage raised. In 2022, KP took the lead over other provinces in announcing the highest minimum wage for labourers. As part of the provincial budget proposals for 2022/23, the provincial government set the monthly minimum wage at PKR 26,000 – increasing it by PKR 5,000 in one go.⁹² Although Chief Minister Mahmood Khan announced that the increase would be implemented immediately, reports suggest that commercial and industrial concerns in KP continued to pay less than the minimum wage to their employees.

Mining accidents. As labour rights activists have continued to point out, lack of government monitoring is a primary reason that workplaces across Pakistan remain highly hazardous for labourers. This problem came to light in an accident in the Darra Adamkhel subdivision of Kohat district in October when a fire erupted in a mine due to the absence of legally required safety measures, causing severe burn injuries to three

coal miners.⁹³ A similar accident claimed nine lives in November in the province's Lower Orakzai area after a gas build-up in a mine shaft caused an explosion.⁹⁴

Internally displaced persons

Zarb-e-Azb, an anti-militancy security operation launched in 2015, has resulted in the displacement of more than a million people in western parts of KP. While most of them have returned home, thousands have been unable to do so. In June 2022, for instance, more than 5,000 families from the Sipah tribe started returning to their native Tirah valley in Khyber district, but found that armed militants still inhabited the area.⁹⁵ Many of them also complained that they could not resettle in their villages because the houses and businesses there had been completely destroyed. Consequently, the provincial government allocated PKR 40 million in July for the rehabilitation of these families and promised them that the irrigation and education infrastructure in their valley would be restored urgently.⁹⁶ These assurances convinced many of them to agree to repatriation.

In September, however, the army ordered the residents of two areas in Tirah valley to vacate their houses so that an anti-militancy operation could be launched there.⁹⁷ Several families that had returned home only recently had no option but to comply.



Education

A 2022 government survey carried out by the Benazir Income Support Programme revealed that 4.7 million of KP's 11.7 million children (aged 5–16) were out of school. One million such children lived in the tribal districts. To overcome this problem, the government needs to establish over 15,000 additional schools whereas it has the financial capacity to set up only 300 schools a year. This implies that it will take 50 years to build all the schools needed to educate all children currently out of school in KP.

The higher education sector saw its share of controversies, the most notable of which occurred at Dera Ismail Khan's Gomal University where the vice-chancellor, Iftikhar Ahmed, alleged in September that he had received death threats from federal minister Ali Amin Gandapur.⁹⁸ The allegations came in the wake of protests by students who had been expelled from the university hostels. While Gandapur did not want the university to proceed with the expulsions, the vice-chancellor insisted that the protesting students had already completed their education and therefore could not be allowed to stay on campus. The dispute also led to the closure of the university for several days.

Health

Re-emergence of polio. In May, the district of North Waziristan came under the global spotlight when two polio cases were detected only a week apart. The cases surfaced 15 months after the last polio case had been detected in Pakistan in early 2021. Both children infected were residents of adjoining union councils and neither had ever received a polio vaccine. More new polio cases were detected in the same district subsequently, with a total number as high as 16.⁹⁹

A news report cited local health officials as saying that many parents in North Waziristan were resisting the administration of polio vaccines to their children. Another major hurdle to vaccination was the lack of security in the area, which was still reportedly infested by militants affiliated with the TTP.¹⁰⁰ While only 2,000 vaccine refusals had been recorded, officials said that the actual number of refusals was much higher because the government staff assigned to administer polio vaccines avoided recording all vaccinations for fear of violence. The security threats faced by this staff were underscored by the abduction of a doctor affiliated with anti-polio programmes when he was visiting a village in Mirali tehsil.¹⁰¹ He was recovered by law enforcement agencies a week later.

Another blow to polio vaccination was dealt by an unexpected quarter when, in July, the Peshawar High Court stopped the government from

employing teachers to administer polio vaccines.¹⁰² The court gave its ruling on a petition filed by 42 male and female schoolteachers working in the Mohmand district. The teachers were of the view that the health department could not order them to administer polio drops to children. The court ruling is likely to have a negative impact on polio vaccinations in remote villages where schoolteachers are the only government employees available to carry these out.

Dengue. Polio was not the only threat to public health. Dengue fever flourished in the aftermath of the monsoon floods in the province. A report prepared by the Integrated Vector Control Programme of the health department in September showed that 3,693 dengue cases were recorded in KP in the first nine months of 2022, whereas the total number of dengue cases recorded in 2021 stood at 1,952.¹⁰³ The report revealed that 4,819 cases of malaria had also been recorded in districts hit by the floods.

HIV. In another troubling revelation, health authorities disclosed that around 25 percent of more than 800 drug addicts they had tested in Peshawar in May were infected with HIV.¹⁰⁴ The infected addicts also included a number of women.

Government response. Despite these problems, the provincial and federal governments continued to engage in a turf war over who should do what to provide healthcare to residents of the province. In one glaring manifestation of this conflict, the federal government stopped funding the free treatment of residents of the former tribal districts in July and asked the provincial government to fund their treatment from its own resources.¹⁰⁵ The provincial government said it needed an increase in its share of funds from the federal divisible pool to offer free healthcare in these districts.

Environment

Flood destruction. As in other parts of the country, the monsoon-induced floods wrought significant destruction in KP. In July and August, extensive monsoon rains in Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Kohistan, Charsadda, Dera Ismail Khan and Tank led to widespread destruction, when flash floods led to the deaths of at least 289 people.¹⁰⁶

Government reports later claimed that this natural disaster had killed 13,228 cattle, inundated 60,752 acres of cultivated land, destroyed crops that could have yielded 97,063 metric tons of food-grains and other agricultural commodities, and displaced over 600,000 people.¹⁰⁷

The floods are also reported to have damaged or destroyed 2,248 watercourses and water storage tanks, three agricultural research stations and 477 irrigation structures, 90 schools completely and another 1,096 partially, 91 health facilities (including 52 basic health units and 37 dispensaries), over 1,455 km of roads, 73 bridges and 76,700 houses (of



Extensive monsoon rains in Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Kohistan, Charsadda, Dera Ismail Khan and Tank led to widespread destruction.

which 65,165 were in Dera Ismail Khan district alone). The provincial government estimated that the total financial loss caused by the floods amounted to PKR 68 billion.

Poor air quality. In mid-January, the federal Environmental Protection Agency made the worrying revelation that air quality in some parts of Peshawar was injurious to human health because it contained more particulate matter (PM 2.5) than the permissible national limit.¹⁰⁸ The agency monitored the city's air quality from 29 December 2021 to 2 January 2022. A subsequent study by the Peshawar Clean Air Alliance, a civil society-led network, showed in April that residents of Peshawar risked losing 2.3 years of their lives due to the high levels of PM 2.5 in the city's atmosphere.

In a move aimed at rectifying the problem, the KP transport and mass transit department increased the number of parameters for checking vehicular emissions from three to six.¹⁰⁹ These parameters were last revised in 1994. Another move by the government to improve the province's environment through afforestation was, however, found to be producing less-than-desired results. In a report submitted to the KP Assembly in March, the provincial forestry department said that the success rate of plantation carried out on the outskirts of Peshawar under the Billion Tree Tsunami afforestation project was just 58 percent. The department said the main cause of this low success rate was water shortage.

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BALUCHISTAN





- Heavy rains and floods devastated large parts of Balochistan, with 32 of the province's 34 districts declared calamity-stricken. The disaster destroyed thousands of acres of cultivated land and claimed over 300 lives.
- The organisation Voice for Baloch Missing Persons registered 257 cases of enforced disappearance in Balochistan. According to Defence for Human Rights, an organisation working on enforced disappearances out of Islamabad, Balochistan has the highest proportion of people who are 'still disappeared' (have not returned home), at over 75 percent.
- Overall, attacks by armed Baloch militant groups increased significantly, including attacks on law enforcement agencies. This also included a suicide attack by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) (Majeed Brigade), carried out by a female suicide bomber at Karachi University's Confucius Institute.
- Gulzar Imam, the leader of the Baloch Nationalist Army (BNA), was arrested from Turkey reportedly in early May. His group had been responsible for numerous attacks in Balochistan, including one on 20 January in a crowded market in Lahore, killing at least two.
- Islamist militants, including the Pakistani Taliban, increased their footprint in Balochistan, carrying out more attacks on security forces.
- Law enforcement agencies, including the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD), continued to pick up young Baloch persons, including women. Baloch rights activists reported more killings of suspected militants by the CTD in alleged 'fake encounters'.
- Missing persons' families held a 50-day protest in Quetta's Red Zone to demand action against enforced disappearances. Gulzar Dost and several other members of civil society in Turbat led a barefoot march from Turbat to Quetta to demand an end to enforced disappearances in February.
- The Haq Do Tehreek, which began in Gwadar in 2021, continued in 2022, with thousands of people taking to the streets to protest against the excessive number of paramilitary check-posts in the Makran region, severe shortages of water and electricity, and threats to their traditional source of livelihood—fishing—in the form of deep-sea trawlers run by large companies. A case was lodged against the movement's leader, Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman, and his supporters for allegedly killing a police constable.

- With the provincial government inking a deal with Canadian-based mining corporation Barrick Gold, nationalist parties, including the Balochistan National Party (Mengal) (BNP-M) and National Party, protested against the deal for not considering Baloch aspirations.
- Significant political developments took place, marking a major change in the political landscape. Prominent Baloch leaders, including former Chief Minister Nawab Aslam Raisani, joined the Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI-F) while other leaders joined the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP).
- HRCP’s Quetta office recorded 24 mining incidents during 2022 in which 71 workers were killed and 25 injured in Balochistan.



Like the rest of the country, Balochistan experienced devastating floods during July to September. No fewer than 32 of the province's 34 districts were declared calamity-stricken. The disaster destroyed houses, thousands of acres of cultivated land and claimed over 300 lives. The bulk of livestock destroyed was in Balochistan, thereby affecting thousands of livelihoods. The floods brought to the forefront the province's fragile healthcare and education systems.

The year was marked by constant tension between Baloch nationalists and Islamabad. Enforced disappearances continued unabated in the province, targeting young Baloch and Pashtun activists, including those based in other provinces.

Towards the end of the year, there was a violent crackdown on peaceful protesters in the coastal town of Gwadar, a key site for the multi-billion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) infrastructure projects. The provincial government imposed Article 144 and disrupted the town's internet supply for ten days. Protests in Gwadar for economic rights and civil liberties remained a chronic bone of contention between the provincial government and residents of Gwadar throughout the year.

The Pakistan army, paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) and CTD claimed to have killed dozens of militants in Balochistan in 2022. The militant BNA, which claimed responsibility for a bombing in Lahore's Anarkali Bazaar at the start of 2022, killing at least two and injuring 20, admitted that the group had suffered heavy losses in 2022. Thirty-four of its members were killed while its founding leader, Gulzar Imam, a student-turned-militant leader, was arrested. The BLA suffered similar losses.

Balochistan also witnessed a number of deadly attacks, including IED blasts targeting law enforcement agencies, hand grenades hurled at settlers and targeted attacks against civilians and alleged members of state-backed militias, often referred to as 'death squads' in Balochistan. A veteran judge and former chief justice of the Balochistan High Court, Justice (Retd) Noor Muhammad Meskanzai was shot dead in October in his native Kharan district.

Earlier in February, Balochistan witnessed unprecedented suicide bombings in Panjgur and Nushki targeting paramilitary Frontier Corps camps. In April, a dangerous new dimension to emerge in the strategy of Baloch militants was the use of a female suicide bomber in Karachi to target the Confucius Institute. Baloch militants also adopted tactics once widely used by Islamist militants, such as kidnapping key government and army officials, which occurred in Ziarat and Harnai in July and September. Most attacks on law enforcement agencies were claimed by banned outfits such as the BLA, Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) and Tehreek-i- Taliban Pakistan.



Laws and law-making

A number of bills were passed by the Balochistan Assembly, including the Home Based Workers Bill to protect the rights of women and others involved in cottage industries in Balochistan.¹ The Balochistan University Draft Bill 2022 provided for the chief minister to appoint vice-chancellors of government-run varsities instead of the governor.

The opposition, however, protested at many bills having been passed hurriedly and without taking opposition members on board. For instance, the government adopted a bill on the regulation of mines and oil fields and mineral development in the same session of the assembly as in which it was presented; this was the case for a number of other such bills.²

The Balochistan Assembly adopted a resolution on the Reko Diq project, meeting a pre-condition for the settlement agreement between Pakistan and mining company Barrick Gold to proceed, despite protests by the political opposition. BNP-M leader Akhtar Hussain Longove termed it 'an attempt to usurp the resources of Balochistan'.³ This was a consistent critique of nationalist parties around the lack of sovereign control over Balochistan's natural resources.

Law and order

Law and order in the province remained far from satisfactory. The year began with a bomb blast in Quetta in January in which six people lost their lives.⁴ In the same month, security personnel claimed to have arrested three suspected militants in the eastern districts of Dera Murad Jamali and Sibi. However, another attack in Sibi killed three and injured five, including the younger brother of Balochistan's former caretaker chief minister, Nawab Ghous Bakhsh Barozai, on 10 January.⁵

On 10 January, the CTD reportedly killed six men belonging to the Islamic State in the provincial capital.⁶ A week later, a bomb blast in Sibi derailed four bogies of the Jaffer Express, which injured six passengers. The attack was claimed by the BLA.⁷ Twin blasts in Sui in Dera Bugti district at the end of January killed Senator Sarfraz Bugti's cousin Sain Bakhsh, along with three levies personnel.⁸

Attacks against security and law enforcement personnel. Baloch militant groups continued to strike in the province throughout 2022. A major attack was carried out against security personnel by the BLF on a check-post in Kech district. As a result, ten security personnel lost their lives on 27 January.⁹ The BLA (Majeed Brigade) carried out intensive attacks against security forces. One of the two attacks carried out took place in a single day in two different towns, against FC camps in Nushki and Panjgur. January ended with a grenade attack in Jafferabad district, in which two police officers and 17 people were injured on 31 January.¹⁰



The year began with a bomb blast in Quetta in January in which six people lost their lives.

On 2 February, militants from a banned BLA outfit entered FC camps in Nushki and Panjgur, where they battled FC personnel for three days, particularly in the Panjgur camp.¹¹ Thirteen Baloch militants, seven security personnel and an army officer were killed during the attacks.¹² Unfortunately, the near-absence of independent journalism in the province has made it difficult to ascertain what exactly transpires in such cases.

Following the attacks on the camps, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) claimed that three Baloch militants linked to the Panjgur attack were killed in a follow-up operation in the Balgatar area of Kech district on 5 February.¹³

On 25 December, Balochistan was rocked by militant attacks carried out by the BLA, in which six security personnel, including a captain from the Pakistan army, were killed while 17 others were injured in different incidents in the province.¹⁴

Law enforcement officials also suffered heavy losses of life. A CTD officer in Kharan, Eid Mohammad, was gunned down by an unknown assailant on his way to work on 16 July.¹⁵ In another incident, the *najib tehsildar* of Killa Abdullah, Abdul Sattar, was gunned down on Quetta's Sariab Road on 21 June.¹⁶ A levies official, Mohammad Hamza, was killed in Kalat while patrolling on 19 July.¹⁷ In Chaman, a levies guard, Habib-ur-Rehman, who was escorting a polio team, was gunned down in October.

Civilian casualties. Civilians too bore the brunt of violence during the year. In a single day, a professor, Mohammad Ali Nasar, was shot dead in Quetta, while the dead body of a missing lawyer was found in Pishin in a separate incident on 17 August.¹⁸

Religious minorities and women were also targeted. Nargis Mengal, a PTI leader from Quetta, was killed in broad daylight on 22 August.¹⁹ Earlier, a Christian man, Wilson Masih, was killed in a gun attack on 11 August.²⁰ On 15 October, former Federal Shariat Court judge and Balochistan High Court chief justice Mohammad Noor Miskanzai was assassinated in a mosque in Kharan. The attack was claimed by the BLA.²¹

Jails and prisoners

Prison capacity. Data from the Balochistan Prisons Department indicates that, as against a sanctioned capacity of 2,764 inmates, the province's 12 jails held 2,760 prisoners, making it the only province in which jails are not overcrowded. Under-trial prisoners outnumbered convicted prisoners at a ratio of 1.4 to 1.

The annual budget for the department was recorded at PKR 1,935,196,000. Table 1 gives additional data on the prison population in Balochistan.

Table 1: Prisons data for Balochistan in 2022

Total number of male inmates	2,694
Total number of female inmates	53
Total number of juvenile inmates	13
Total number of under-trial prisoners	1,614
Total number of convicted prisoners	1,146
Number of children living with their mothers in jail	9
Number of persons on death row	62

Source: Balochistan Prisons Department, in response to HRCP's request for information

Jail reforms. Blood screening was made mandatory for prisoners across the province. According to the parliamentary secretary for law and parliamentary affairs, Dr Rubaba Khan Buledi, there are testing laboratories in the Quetta and Mach jails, while laboratories are being established in nine other jails in the province.

The home minister, Mir Ziaullah Langove, while addressing the media after visiting Quetta District Jail in November, told reporters that the government was working on a plan to provide better facilities to local and foreign prisoners.²²

Enforced disappearances

The unlawful disappearance of people, especially of political activists, by state agencies continued with impunity through the year.²³ Baloch students based in other provinces were also forcibly disappeared even as families gathered to protest.²⁴ Despite repeated protests, many families expressed the concern that their missing relatives were at risk of being killed in 'fake encounters' by the CTD.²⁵

Alleged extrajudicial killings of missing persons. Following the killing of a retired lieutenant colonel, Laiq Baig Mirza, along with his cousin Umar Javed, by the BLA in July, the ISPR claimed that nine BLA militants had been killed in a security operation in Ziarat.²⁶ However, after protests by the relatives of missing persons in Quetta, it emerged that five people of those killed were forcibly disappeared persons and not militants.²⁷ Similarly, in October, the CTD claimed to have killed three BLA militants in Kharan district. However, Voice for Baloch Missing Persons chairperson Nasrullah Baloch alleged that it had been a 'staged encounter', identifying those killed as forcibly disappeared persons.²⁸ Throughout 2022, cases continued to emerge of the CTD's involvement in alleged fake encounters in which disappeared Baloch—already in detention centres run by security agencies—were killed. Many of the victims, who were accused of having links to militants, turned out to be political activists or students.²⁹

Civil society response. After taking office in 2022, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif claimed he would raise the issue of Baloch missing persons with ‘powerful quarters’.³⁰ Among others, rights activist Sammi Deen Baloch, the daughter of Dr Deen Mohammad (who has been missing since mid-2009), was not optimistic about these assurances,³¹ having spent the last 15 years raising her voice for her missing father and others. Following the Ziarat incident, Sammi and other family members of missing persons, held a 50-day-long protest on the issue outside the Governor House at a time when the province was badly hit by floods.³² They ended their protest only after the federal interior minister, Rana Sanaullah, assured them their loved ones would be recovered.³³

In February, a barefoot march led by Gulzar Dost, convener of Turbat Civil Society, covered the 750 km from Turbat to Quetta to protest against the enforced disappearance of Baloch people. The march was modelled on rights activist Mama Qadeer’s 2013 march on the same issue.³⁴

Government response. The devastating floods provided no respite. Even as Balochistan and other provinces were in the throes of torrential rains, security forces forcibly disappeared Lala Fahim Baloch—a publisher and rights activist—in broad daylight from his bookshop in Karachi.³⁵ Unlike other missing persons, he was released after a few months.³⁶ In September, Dr Abdul Malik Baloch, former chief minister and National Party leader, was compelled to raise the issue of Baloch missing persons along with the problems wrought by the floods in Balochistan with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Quetta.³⁷

Commission after commission has been constituted to address the issue, but have not yielded any results. In August, the provincial cabinet gave the go-ahead for a commission on missing persons, to be headed by the provincial home minister Ziaullah Langove.³⁸ In November, a commission formed by the court and headed by BNP-M chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal visited Quetta and met the relatives of missing persons, but produced no substantial results.³⁹ Rights activists continued to criticise the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances as ‘a toothless tiger’.⁴⁰

Death penalty

While no executions are reported to have taken place in Balochistan in 2022, the death penalty was handed down in at least four cases during the year, according to HRCP’s own data, based on media reports.



Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Balochistan is home to a sizeable population of Hindus who have been settled here for centuries. In March, amid tight security, thousands of Baloch Hindus gathered at the ancient Hinglaj Mata temple in Lasbela district to observe a three-day festival, which they had been unable to do since 2020 owing to the Covid-19 crisis. Hundreds of police, levies and FC personnel were deputed to safeguard participants from any untoward incidents.⁴¹

Cases involving rights violations against religious minorities occurred from time to time through the year. In Kalat, the remains of a Hindu woman's body were desecrated in the cemetery. The Hindu community protested against the local administration on 3 October.⁴² Meanwhile, a key concern of Quetta's Christian community was that Christians of Punjabi origin, but now having lived in Balochistan for decades, were unable to relocate their domicile to Balochistan. Additionally, they alleged that the Christian community were invariably seen as 'outsiders' unlike the ethnic Baloch, Pashtun and Hazara population.⁴³

According to data received from the Balochistan police, nine cases were registered against the blasphemy laws.

Freedom of expression

Although in December, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that Pakistan had become the first country in Asia to legislate on the safety of journalists in Sindh as well as at the federal level and that he would support similar legislation in other provinces, including Balochistan,⁴⁴ press freedom remained sorely restricted through the year.

Most journalists and the vernacular press said that they were still compelled to tow the government line and could not report independently for fear of reprisal by state and nonstate actors—or simply because certain issues were not deemed important enough, especially by privately run media houses. As a result, Balochistan's problems received negligible coverage in the mainstream media, especially on private TV news channels. This was especially true of issues such as the ongoing conflict between the state and Baloch militants, grievous human rights violations such as enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, poor governance, and even economic and social concerns.

In August a Gwadar-based journalist, Haji Obaidullah, working for the Karachi-based newspaper *Jasarat* was arrested in a late-night raid by the CTD at his home in Gwadar, allegedly for having reported on the ongoing protests there. He remained behind bars for several days and was released only after the Balochistan Union of Journalists and local

journalists in Gwadar protested against his arrest. Earlier in March, journalist Farooq Jatoi from Bolan district was arrested by the CTD and then released. Such assaults on press freedom remain common but are rarely reported in the mainstream media.

Freedom of assembly

Haq Do Tehreek. Notably, the Gwadar-based Haq Do Tehreek, a rights movement led by local Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) leader Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman, continued in 2022 even as the protestors' negotiations with the provincial government faltered.⁴⁵ The government resorted to violence in December to put an end to the two-month-long protest, using teargas and arresting over a dozen protestors in Gwadar.⁴⁶ An FIR was registered against Rehman and his supporters, holding them responsible for the death of a police constable during the protests.⁴⁷ Earlier in January, Rehman had strongly criticised the authorities for not implementing the Gwadar agreement, under which protestors had demanded an end to illegal deep-sea trawling (which had affected their traditional source of livelihood, fishing), a reduction in the number of paramilitary check-posts, access to water and electricity, and easier border trade.⁴⁸

Protests in Quetta. In January, 20 doctors and paramedics were arrested after clashing with police in Quetta during a protest in which 16 people on both sides were injured.⁴⁹ Three medical students, who had gone on hunger strike, were shifted to a hospital on 15 February.⁵⁰ They had been protesting against the Pakistan Medical Commission's decision to issue fresh tests for enrolment in medical colleges.

Protests in the province. In several cases, demonstrators—including government employees—blocked local highways in protest against the provincial government. On 17 January, residents of the area bordering Taftan in Chaghi district blocked the main highway to protest against the prolonged suspension of electricity to their towns.⁵¹ Similarly, protestors blocked the Quetta-Sukkur highway in Kachhi district after three PTI workers were killed and two others injured over a land dispute on 18 February.⁵² Locals from Dera Bugti's Pir Koh town protested against the absence of clean drinking water and cholera outbreaks on 15 May.⁵³ Engineers employed by Radio Pakistan also held a protest against out-of-turn promotions on 31 October.⁵⁴

Some protests were more fruitful than others. On 7 May, the FC arrested a student, offloading him from a bus on the Panjgur road, following which his fellow passengers protested and blocked the Panjgur highway until the FC had handed the student, Shah Baig, over to the police.⁵⁵



Political participation

Of the Baloch nationalist parties in opposition, the BNP-M remained on somewhat better terms with the provincial government, reaping benefits from the chief minister, Qudoos Bizenjo.⁵⁶ With elections due in 2023, the party continued in protest mode, especially over the Reko Diq project, despite being part of the government in the centre as well as in the Balochistan Assembly.⁵⁷ The second-largest nationalist party, the National Party, led by Dr Abdul Malik Baloch was, however, fairly critical of the government on issues affecting Balochistan. In September, it advised Baloch militants and the government to hold talks to resolve their issues. The party was also scathing in its criticism of the government over mega-projects such as those in Reko Diq, Saindak and Sui on the grounds that the interests and aspirations of the Baloch people were barely reflected in these projects.⁵⁸

The Balochistan Awami Party (BAP), cobbled together by the establishment in 2018, showed signs of weakening as several leaders joined the PPP, including three provincial assembly members, Zahoor Buledi, Saleem Khosa and Arif Muhammad Hassani.⁵⁹

Politics in Gwadar was dominated by JI leader Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman, who led a two-month-long protest, the Haq Do Tehreek, in the area and was arrested along with over 100 workers in December.⁶⁰ After the protest, he won a majority in the local government elections. Some observers commented that the protest itself may have been motivated by Rehman's stake in the upcoming general elections in 2023.⁶¹ *See Freedom of assembly*

Local government

Local government elections were held in the province in May, marked by sporadic violence. Most of the seats were clinched by independent candidates (1,182 out of the 4,456 seats), while the JUI-F and BAP clinched 469 and 303 seats, respectively, on 31 May.⁶² The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) stated in its initial report that the first phase of the local government elections had been 'controversy-free and orderly' despite sporadic irregularities, which boded well for the democratic process in the province and country.⁶³

Other than a scuffle between rival candidates' supporters, there was only one violent incident—a bomb blast in Nushki district outside a polling station, in which no one was harmed.⁶⁴ However, allegations of political manipulation by the establishment continued to surface, including the claim that certain parties, such as the BAP, had far more freedom to campaign than others.



Women

Women remained acutely marginalised through the year and vulnerable to discrimination and violence. According to police data, there were 40 reported cases of rape, 35 cases of honour killings (with more than half estimated to be female victims) and 157 cases of domestic violence against women. These figures likely underrepresent the situation significantly, given that numerous cases of gender-based violence go unreported (see also Table 2).

Table 2: Statistics on gender-based violence in Balochistan in 2022

<i>Offense</i>	<i>Number of victims</i>
Rape	40
Gang-rape	0
Honour killings	35
Domestic violence against women	157
Acid crimes	0

Source: Balochistan Police, in response to HRCP’s request for information

At the same time, women remained politically active and closely involved in local rights movements, with thousands of women taking part in the Gwadar-based Haq Do Tehreek that began in 2021 and continued through 2022. Baloch women continued to organise the annual Aurat March, with economic rights as a key demand. Women also played an active role in student-run organisations in universities, lobbying for lower tuition fees and protesting against harassment. Above all, young women remained much of the driving force behind the movement against enforced disappearances, taking part in street protests, lobbying with the media, government and civil society, appearing before courts and in police stations, and demanding the return of loved ones as well as accountability for perpetrators of state-sanctioned disappearances.

Transgender persons

Like elsewhere in the country, Balochistan’s small transgender population was deprived of most of their fundamental rights through the year, with their problems receiving scant coverage in the press.

Instead of safeguarding trans rights in Balochistan, the provincial assembly adopted a unanimous resolution calling on the provincial government to repeal the federal Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018.⁶⁵

Children

Balochistan’s schooling indicators remained alarmingly low during the year, with an estimated literacy rate of only 28 percent among boys, while 83 percent of girls were deprived of basic education.⁶⁶ Not only is the number of schools insufficient, but they also tend to be at great distances from the province’s scattered population. The catastrophic floods also affected children in Balochistan, with at least 32 killed as a result, some of them under the rubble of damaged houses.⁶⁷

An increasing number of underage children were reported to be working in the automobile, construction and coal mining sectors, indicating that the provincial government has not done enough to address the incidence of child labour. On World Day Against Child Labour, it was revealed that over 15,000 children in Balochistan were involved in child labour, most of them either orphans or belonging to poor families.⁶⁸

Cases of child marriage continued to be reported in the province.⁶⁹ The Federal Shariat Court took suo motu notice of the forced marriage of a six-year old girl in Balochistan. In spite of such cases, Balochistan’s child marriage bill remained in limbo although it has already been submitted to the Cabinet.⁷⁰

Labour

Coal miners continued to suffer injuries and lose their lives in lethal mining accidents in Balochistan during the year. According to HRCP’s records, there were 24 incidents in 2022 in which 71 workers were killed and 25 injured in Balochistan. Table 3 presents a breakdown of these statistics.

Table 3: Mining accidents in Balochistan in 2022

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place of incident</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>
1 January	Dukki	4	2
1 January	Dukki	5	-
6 February	Quetta	4	4
10 February	Harnai	3	1
22 February	Dukki	4	-
8 March	Gadani	2	2
15 March	Quetta	3	-
21 March	Dukki	3	-
22 March	Chamalang	7	6
7 June	Details unknown	2	-
1 August	Mach	3	3
16 August	Quetta	4	-

6 September	Harnai	5	-
19 September	Dukki	2	-
2 October	Dukki	4	2
4 October	Mach	1	2
1 November	Dukki	6	-
2 November	Chamalang	2	-
3 November	Dukki	-	-
7 November	Dukki	-	1
13 November	Dukki	4	1
18 November	Dukki	-	1
11 November	Dukki	1	-
19 November	Harnai	2	-

Source: HRCP media monitoring cell

The constant trend of deaths of coal miners is a grave human rights violation in the province. Poor working conditions have been a critical issue for coal miners, aggravated by a persistent lack of training and availability of safety equipment.

Refugees

Afghan refugees have constituted the bulk of Balochistan's refugee population since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. According to UNHCR, there are about 300,000 people in refugee camps in Balochistan, out of the 1.4 million registered refugees in the country. Many Afghan refugees have contributed to the agricultural sector in Balochistan.⁷¹

Since the fall of the Kabul government on 15 August 2021 and the Afghan Taliban takeover, some reports have suggested that many Afghan refugees migrated to Balochistan due to the lack of economic opportunities. However, UNHCR claims that, contrary to expectations, a large number of Afghan refugees did not come to Pakistan.⁷² Nonetheless, Afghan refugees already present in the province still contend with lack of access to basic facilities, such as education and healthcare.

Many Afghan refugees settled in districts of Balochistan were badly affected by the 2022 floods, especially those living in mud houses that were washed away.⁷³ UNHCR estimates suggest that about 800,000 refugees were living in the 45 'calamity-hit' districts out of 80 affected locations. Four of the worst-hit districts in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh host the highest number of refugees.⁷⁴



Education

Of the 22.8 million children estimated to be out of school in Pakistan, Balochistan accounts for at least 1 million.⁷⁵ The catastrophic floods of July and August compounded the lack of access to education in Balochistan in 2022. About 3,000 schools—mostly run by the government of Balochistan—hosting hundreds of thousands of students were destroyed in the floods,⁷⁶ in addition to 147 privately run schools (out of 2,583), thereby affecting the enrolment of some 11,121 students, particularly in the Nasirabad division.⁷⁷

Independent sources claim that the number of schools and students affected is even higher.⁷⁸ According to one official claim, 386,000 students were affected.⁷⁹ It will take a long time to rebuild these schools because the provincial government appears keen to implement its own schemes under the Public Sector Development Programme for 2022/23 and may not pay heed to the loss of education goals.⁸⁰ As of October, many schools unaffected by the floods were still being used to shelter flood-affected people.⁸¹

Health

Access to adequate healthcare remained elusive in 2022, to the extent that an increasing number of hospitals in Quetta were unable to offer treatment in many cases because most doctors prefer to run private clinics.⁸² Given the acute lack of doctors and health facilities in the rest of Balochistan, however, Quetta remained the only option available to most patients, belying the government's claim that healthcare provision was its first priority.⁸³

Like education, the already compromised health sector was adversely affected by the floods, with repeated outbreaks of disease. As of September, there were 38,476 cases of malaria, skin disease, acute respiratory infection, cholera and eye infections across the province, while the World Health Organization warned that a 'full-scale operation' was needed to stem the tide.⁸⁴ The Young Doctors Association warned of rising deaths if authorities failed to take immediate action to prevent waterborne diseases in flood-affected areas.⁸⁵ The warning fell on deaf ears and four people died of malaria in Jafferabad district on 22 September.⁸⁶

The floods also destroyed over 700 basic health units and rural health centres, which are the rural population's main port of call for access to healthcare.⁸⁷ Additionally, more than one in nine children under the age of five, admitted to health facilities in the flood-affected areas, were found to be suffering from severe malnutrition.⁸⁸

Balochistan has still not eradicated polio. The situation is compounded by the fact that polio workers have to conduct anti-polio drives amid tight security.⁸⁹

Environment

In the wake of devastating floods during July and August, 32 out of the 34 districts in Balochistan were declared calamity-hit, with at least 300 lives lost.⁹⁰ Balochistan witnessed record rains⁹¹ and the ensuing floods wrought significant damage to the province's already poor infrastructure.⁹² Quetta remained cut off from other towns for much of this period as a result of destroyed or blocked road and rail links.⁹³ The province itself was disconnected from the rest of the country during this time, making it difficult to access humanitarian aid.⁹⁴

Pir Koh town in Dera Bugti district was left without water as a result of the floods and its residents were compelled to drink contaminated water, leading to several deaths in August.⁹⁵ In some places, the flood had inundated entire towns, leaving no room for people to escape. Under such circumstances, cuts were made to drain the water in some places. One such town was Usta Mohammad.⁹⁶



Pir Koh was left without water as a result of the floods and its residents were compelled to drink contaminated water, leading to several deaths in August.

Other ongoing and often ignored environmental issues in the province included the environmental impact of the construction of Gwadar Port and the public health impact of gas extraction in Dera Bugti.

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ISLAMABAD CAPITAL TERRITORY





- Both the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) governments continued to ignore parliamentary procedure, with dismal participation of lawmakers and ministers, as well as blatant disregard of rules of business.
- The conflict within the Supreme Court over judges' selection criteria continued throughout the year. On the flip side, the apex court saw the first female judge being appointed to the bench in the country's history.
- Use of draconian sedition laws to arrest and harass opposition members was unfortunately practiced by all parties when in power, along with the harassment of journalists for 'defaming state institutions'.
- Media houses seemingly allied with the PTI faced constant disruption to their broadcasts for being on the wrong side of the establishment and ruling party.
- Repeated protests by PTI workers saw daily life disrupted for the capital's citizens as the government went into overdrive attempting to block the marchers.
- While people continued to be picked up and disappeared in mysterious circumstances, the prime minister personally assured the Islamabad High Court (IHC) in September of ending enforced disappearances.
- Local government elections could not be held in 2022 as both the PTI and PDM governments used delaying tactics, making it clear once more that grassroots democracy exists only on paper.
- While calls to ban Aurat March were unsuccessfully raised once again, women's rights were advanced by various legal measures, such as the Supreme Court reiterating their right to bail and the PTI government passing an enhanced version of the workplace harassment law.
- Rights granted to trans persons in the 2018 law came under attack and resulted in a proposed amendment rolling back various freedoms, including change of gender.
- Catastrophic floods affected much of the country during July and August. When the full scale of the disaster unfolded, and the human impact became apparent, government agencies especially set up for the purpose were found wanting.
- Green activists won a notable victory when the IHC ruled against the military's illegal encroachment into Margalla Hills National Park.



The year 2022 was a politically extraordinary one, presenting a constitutional crisis when the PDM coalition attempted to and successfully overthrew the government with a no-confidence vote, and the ruling PTI used controversial delaying tactics. As the seat of Parliament and Supreme Court, it was in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) where the year's most heated political and legal battles played out. Once more, issues that should have been resolved in Parliament were left for judges to decide on, reversing the country's democratic advancements. Lawmakers appeared nonserious in their roles, as the lack of quorum remained notoriously recurrent the whole year.

The increasing political polarisation resulted in high-handed tactics by both sides, most recently by the PDM-led government which saw the detention of lawmakers, party workers and journalists on questionable charges, as well as the closure of channels broadcasting the opposition's narrative. While the establishment claimed 'neutrality' in politics after having supported the PTI government, the alleged torture of PTI leaders and journalists was blamed on military agencies.

Nevertheless, there were several welcome developments, such as the criminalisation of custodial torture and the de-criminalisation of suicide. Similarly, the IHC's ruling against the allotment of subsidised plots to members of the government and judiciary was a landmark ruling laying bare the elite's capture of public land.

Another reassuring outcome was the Supreme Court's declaration that the mere use of Islamic texts by the Ahmadi community did not automatically warrant charges of blasphemy against the already-persecuted minority. A number of other judgments solidified the rights of women, such as one by the Supreme Court declaring that a woman's second marriage did not automatically deny her custody rights of children from the first marriage, as well as the IHC ruling forbidding marriages under the age of 18.



Laws and law-making

Several significant laws were enacted in 2022:

The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, which marks enforced disappearances as a ‘heinous crime’, was passed in the National Assembly in November 2021 but went ‘missing’ for a while before it could be passed by the Senate with some amendments in October 2022.¹ Following that, it returned to the National Assembly, which then amended it further. This led to a constitutional conundrum as the National Assembly is supposed to pass returned amended bills from the Senate or send them to a joint sitting of the Parliament; it cannot make further amendments. When this was highlighted, it only delayed the law’s enactment.

The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Bill was approved by the president in November.² It outlawed custodial death, rape and torture—occurrences that gained prominence after the PTI accused state agencies of torturing its leaders.

The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Amendment Bill became law in January.³ The amendment removed earlier lacunas and increased the law’s ambit, adding several informal and formal professions that had been missing.⁴

The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, which de-criminalised suicide by repealing Section 325 of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860, became law in December.⁵ The amendment highlights the need to treat suicide through a mental health lens instead of as a punishable offence.

The Access to the Media (Deaf and Dumb) Persons Act became law in December. It directs television channels across Pakistan to incorporate sign language in their programming.⁶

Administration of justice

IHC and lower judiciary. The IHC decided 11,271 cases in 2022, but with 10,267 fresh petitions filed, the number of pending cases stood at 17,054 in the beginning of January 2023.⁷ In the district courts, the total pending cases stood at 50,000 on June 1, 2022.⁸ In October, after a delay of four years, the law ministry notified two juvenile justice committees for Islamabad to dispose of cases against juvenile offenders through various noncustodial measures.⁹ The following month, the government designated two special human rights courts to provide speedy justice.¹⁰

Supreme Court cases. The number of pending cases in the Supreme

Court decreased by 2,653 (until 16 December 2022), reportedly marking the first time since computerised records began in 2013 that the number of cases instituted was lower than that disposed in a single year.¹¹

Live proceedings. At a conference in May, senior judges agreed that the only solution to clear the backlog of over 2 million cases in the country and provide swift and inexpensive justice to litigants was technological transformation. IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah revealed that his was the first court to livestream proceedings and introduce video conferencing for out-of-station lawyers.¹²

Overseas judiciary. In February, the cabinet approved a separate judicial system in Islamabad for swift disposal of cases pertaining to nonresident Pakistanis.¹³ In December, the new government reiterated the plan.¹⁴

Chief justice's powers. Controversy pertaining to the selection of superior court judges remained at the fore throughout the year, as did calls to regulate the chief justice of Pakistan's discretionary powers, especially the unfettered authority to constitute benches, assign cases, initiate suo motu hearings and, as head of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan and Supreme Judicial Council, appoint and remove judges. The issue resulted in public disagreements among Supreme Court judges and increasing external pressure on the chief justice to formulate clear rules in this regard.

First woman Supreme Court judge. The Lahore High Court's Justice Ayesha Malik was appointed the Supreme Court's first woman judge in January, though her appointment was made controversial as she was selected over several senior judges.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the move was historic, with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) stating that a 'more gender-diverse judiciary... will have far-reaching effects on people's access to and the quality of justice.'



Law and order

Criminal cases. A news report, citing police records, stated that 10,695 cases were registered in the capital in 2022 (until 25 December). The cases included 3,166 cases of motorcycle theft, 644 cases of luxury cars being stolen, 38 cases of armed robbery and theft, and 5,600 cases of mobile phone snatching.¹⁶ Table 1 gives statistics for crimes against the person.

At least six police officials lost their lives in the line of duty in 2022, including in the only suicide bombing in the capital in December.¹⁷ Moreover, 164 people were killed during the outgoing year in the capital, according to the report.¹⁸

Table 1: Crime statistics for ICT in 2022

Offense	Number of victims
Rape	60
Gang-rape	5
Murder	177
Honour killings	0
Domestic violence against women	9
Acid crimes	0
Blasphemy cases	9
Police encounters	0

Source: ICT Police, in response to HRCP's request for information

Rape cases. In June, the police revealed that only three rapists had been convicted out of the 235 rape cases registered in the last five years. The police also informed the Senate of its resultant special measures, including directing station house officers (SHOs) to register first investigation reports (FIRs) without delay, establishing a special Sexual Offence Investigation Unit, a Gender Protection Unit and a dedicated helpline, 1815.¹⁹

Malpractice. The Industrial Area SHO was suspended after a man was arrested illegally and asked to pay PKR 60 million for his release. Similarly, the Karachi Company Police SHO was suspended for taking a bribe and torturing a man in custody.²⁰ In November, the National Commission on the Rights of the Child found the G-9 Markaz SHO guilty of custodial torture of two minor boys.²¹

Special measures. In October, it was reported that the Islamabad Police

had divided its force into smaller specialised operational units for more effective functioning.²² A news report quoting a police spokesperson stated that 500 new Safe City cameras were installed in the capital in 2022, after which their total increased to 2,400.²³

In December, while expressing concern over rising crime and insecurity in the country, the Supreme Court barred provincial governments from prematurely posting and transferring police officers and directed officials to enforce the Police Order 2002 in letter and spirit.²⁴ The same month, the Islamabad Police claimed to have finally implemented the Police Order 2002. The capital's police had until then been functioning under the Police Act 1861.²⁵ In response to HRCP's request for information, the capital police reported that the force comprised 9,389 male police officers and 344 female police officers.

Controversial cases. In March, the police registered a case against Baloch students in Islamabad and human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari after they had set up a protest camp against the disappearance of a fellow student in Balochistan and their continuing harassment by state authorities. HRCP termed the incident a 'travesty' and 'a grim sign that we are inching closer to the makings of a police state.' The IHC later quashed the FIR and condemned the police's high-handedness.

In May, the PDM-led Punjab government arrested PTI leader and former human rights minister Shireen Mazari from Islamabad in what HRCP said appeared to be a case of political victimisation. Reacting to the controversial arrest, her daughter, Imaan Mazari, laid the blame on the army chief, which resulted in the registration of an FIR for defaming state institutions. HRCP condemned the case and stated that Imaan Mazari was being 'targeted for her bold views on the role of state agencies in muzzling political dissent and using enforced disappearances to intimidate students, journalists and human rights defenders.' Later, the IHC struck down the FIR. Shireen Mazari, too, was released immediately after the incident, following a major public backlash.²⁶

Political arrests. The year saw excessive registration of cases against politicians and lawmakers of opposition parties. In February, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested media owner Mohsin Baig during a raid after a case was registered against him for making 'derogatory' remarks against a PTI minister on TV. He was also booked on terrorism charges after the raid resulted in a scuffle with the authorities but was later released on bail.²⁷

In March, the police raided the Parliament Lodges and arrested several Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) workers and leaders for breaching the red zone's security guidelines.²⁸ In April, the police arrested two PTI lawmakers for leading a horde of supporters to attack the Sindh House a month earlier before the no-confidence vote against their government.²⁹ Similarly, in October, a terrorism case was registered against a PTI member of the National Assembly (MNA) for protesting against the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)'s disqualification of Imran Khan.

The most notable arrests were those of the PTI's Shahbaz Gill in August and Senator Azam Swati thereafter on charges of sedition and defaming state institutions. The cases reeked of political victimisation and high-handedness of state agencies, especially after claims of physical and mental torture and sexual abuse in custody by the defendants.



The most notable arrests were those of the PTI's Shahbaz Gill in August and Senator Azam Swati in October.

Arrests of lawmakers. In October, the National Assembly made it mandatory for authorities to obtain prior approval from the speaker to arrest a lawmaker, and empowered the speaker to declare any premises in the capital as a sub-jail for an arrested MNA. Lawmakers also amended the rules to forbid the arrest of an MNA from the National Assembly's premises. Moreover, the National Assembly ended the discretionary powers of the speaker and chairpersons of committees to issue production orders for an arrested lawmaker, thereby ensuring any arrested lawmaker could attend the assembly's sessions.³⁰ Later, a similar bill was approved in the Senate.³¹

Jails and prisoners

Incomplete prison. The capital's long-awaited prison remained incomplete in 2022, continuing its contribution to severe overcrowding at neighbouring Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail – currently housing prisoners at over three times its capacity. In June, the prime minister reprimanded the city administration over the delay in the capital's 'model prison'.³²

Torture of prisoners. In September, the IHC chief justice visited Adiala Jail following a report by the National Commission of Human Rights (NCHR) confirmed inhumane treatment of prisoners³³ and later termed prisoners' maltreatment a 'grave violation of human rights'. The court also ordered that a complaints centre be set up in jail to record such violations.

In June, the NCHR hailed the district judiciary's decision of accepting the Islamabad Police's plea to produce under-trial prisoners in court via video link.³⁴

Death penalty

Even though no executions occurred in the country in 2022, courts continued to hand down death sentences, including in Islamabad.³⁵ According to HRCP's own data, based on media reports, the death penalty was handed down in five cases during the year. In November, Pakistan voted against a United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for the abolition of the death penalty.³⁶ In August, the Control of Narcotics Substances Act 1997 and Railways Act 1890 were amended to replace punishments of death with life imprisonment. However, the Pakistan Penal Code still contains around 30 offenses that are punishable by death.

Enforced disappearances

People continued to disappear in the federal capital in 2022, and after warnings of dire consequences by the IHC to civil and military officials, some were produced in the court (see Table 2).

Table 2: Enforced disappearances reported during 2011–22

Province	Number of cases reported since 2011	Disposal of cases up to 31 December 2022							Pending cases as of 31 Dec 2022
		Returned home	Internment centres	Prisons	Dead bodies found	Traced	Deleted*	Total cases disposed of since 2011	
Punjab	1,551	772	91	172	68	1,103	191	1,294	257
Sindh	1,757	758	41	264	61	1,124	459	1,583	174
KP	3,369	595	818	119	66	1,598	437	2,035	1,334
Balochistan	2,115	1,477	2	18	35	1,532	208	1,740	375
Islamabad	338	167	21	34	9	231	59	290	48
AJK	64	11	3	13	2	29	24	53	11
GB	9	-	1	-	-	1	5	6	3
Total	9,203	3,780	977	620	241	5,618	1,383	7,001	2,202

* Cases closed because they (a) were established as not being cases of enforced disappearance, (b) provided incomplete addresses or (c) were withdrawn by the complainants.

Source: Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances.

Failed commission. The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances informed the IHC in March that, of the 8,463 citizens reported missing since March 2011, it had disposed of cases of 6,214, of which 3,284 had returned, and 2,249 were still under investigation. It stated that detainees in 550 cases were not produced by the relevant authorities. It added that 228 people were 'reported to be dead in encounters', while 946 were 'reported to be confined in internment centres'. A total of 584 people were reported as under-trial prisoners on various criminal charges, including terrorism. The report also noted that 1,178 cases were 'not of enforced disappearances'. The IHC chief justice remarked that initial evidence suggested the commission had failed to perform its responsibility of advising the federal government to help end such disappearances and take action against those responsible.³⁷

In May, the IHC directed the federal government to serve notices on past rulers for following an 'undeclared tacit approval of the policy regarding enforced disappearances'.³⁸ HRCP welcomed the order, saying that, if implemented, it 'may go some way in compensating for the commission's failure to hold perpetrators accountable'. In September, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif appeared before the IHC and vowed to resolve the issue of enforced disappearances after the chief justice declared that persons going missing without a trace was a grave violation of the Constitution.³⁹ The same month, HRCP said the commission 'remains a painfully inadequate mechanism for ensuring that victims receive justice'.



Freedom of movement

As 2022 began, rising coronavirus cases resulted in temporary sealing of several streets as per the government's 'smart lockdown' policy.⁴⁰

High-profile events. International Test matches in Rawalpindi in March and December led to complete and partial closures of several key routes of the twin cities during the teams' movements.⁴¹ Similarly, the capital's residents were subjected to severe traffic disruptions owing to the Pakistan Day parade.⁴²

Political gatherings and protests continued to disrupt citizens' right to free movement throughout the year,⁴³ especially the PTI's 'long march' in May which saw the capital effectively cut off from the rest of the country due to stringent security measures.⁴⁴

No-fly list. The misuse of the Exit Control List (ECL) to bar foreign travel of political opponents continued throughout the year.⁴⁵ Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah in April vowed to streamline ECL rules and disclosed that 4,863 people were currently on the ECL, along with 30,000 people on the 'black list' and FIA-supervised Provisional National Identification List.⁴⁶

In November, government-allied lawmaker Mohsin Dawar was prevented by the FIA from travelling to Tajikistan despite his name having reportedly been removed from the ECL.⁴⁷ HRCP deplored the incident, stating that the North Waziristan MNA's 'right to freedom of movement should not be arbitrarily curtailed' and authorities 'must be held to account'.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Ending religious discrimination. In February, the human rights ministry directed the federal and provincial governments to cease discriminatory advertising and hiring of sanitary workers only from minority religions.⁴⁸ In August, the education ministry approved the much-delayed curriculum for seven minority communities of the capital.⁴⁹

Misuse of blasphemy laws. In a significant ruling regarding the misuse of blasphemy laws against the persecuted Ahmadiyya community, the Supreme Court stated in March that to 'deprive a non-Muslim (minority) of our country from holding his religious beliefs, to obstruct him from professing and practicing his religion within the four walls of his place of worship is against the grain of our democratic Constitution and repugnant to the spirit and character of our Islamic Republic'. The court held that, even though the Constitution declared Ahmadis non-Muslims,

it did not disown them as citizens nor deprive them of fundamental rights. It observed that employing Sections 295-B and C had to be corroborated by hard evidence reflecting ill intent, and that the mere reading of Quranic verses by a non-Muslim/Ahmadi would not automatically constitute a punishable offence, as had transpired in the case before it.⁵⁰

In May, the IHC ruled against the application of blasphemy laws in cases against PTI leaders over the heckling of government members in Medina, observing that the state is obligated to take appropriate measures to ensure that religion is not allowed to be exploited and used for personal or political gain, putting innocent lives at risk.⁵¹

Freedom of expression

Criminalising criticism. In February, HRCP deplored a proposed ordinance by the PTI government making online criticism of state institutions a nonbailable offence with increased jail terms. Similarly, in April, HRCP condemned the new government's detention and harassment of PTI workers for criticising state institutions, saying that 'all citizens, regardless of their political affiliation, enjoy the right to freedom of expression and opinion'.

The same month, the IHC asserted that the 'criminalisation of defamation and its abuse, prima facie, appears to be in violation of the Constitution' and the 'threat to free speech... cannot be tolerated in a democratic society governed under the Constitution'.⁵²



The change of government followed intimidation of TV journalists seen as PTI sympathisers.

In September, the court observed that, regarding criticism of judgments, courts must ‘exercise restraint and uphold the right of freedom of speech so that the law of contempt operates in a manner least restrictive of the freedom guaranteed by Article 19 of the Constitution’.⁵³

End of PMDA. In April, the new government categorically ended the controversial Pakistan Media Development Authority (PMDA) proposed by the PTI government, stating that no law restricting people’s constitutional right to freedom of expression would be enacted. It also vowed to review the controversial Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act 2016 to ensure it did not violate fundamental rights.⁵⁴

Censorship. In February, TV channel News One was taken off air by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) for airing remarks by a talk show guest against a PTI minister.⁵⁵ In May, as PTI leaders cried foul over the removal of their government, PEMRA twice directed news channels not to air content casting aspersions on the judiciary and army.⁵⁶

In August, the IHC revoked a PEMRA ban on Imran Khan’s live speeches after the PTI leader made threatening remarks against police and judiciary high-ups.⁵⁷ The court observed that PEMRA had violated the Constitution’s free speech guarantees.

The seemingly pro-PTI ARY News was taken off air on 8 August after it broadcast a PTI leader’s remarks alleging internal disagreements within the army.⁵⁸ In September, its transmission was restored after the IHC warned PEMRA of ‘consequences’.⁵⁹ However, PEMRA’s actions against ARY News and Bol News, another channel purportedly supportive of PTI, continued, with intermittent suspensions overturned in courts.⁶⁰ Attempts to censor PTI leader Imran Khan’s speeches also included internet disruptions and the blocking of YouTube during the party’s rallies throughout the year.⁶¹

Targeting journalists. The change of government followed intimidation of TV journalists seen as PTI sympathisers. The tragic and mysterious assassination of journalist Arshad Sharif in October in Kenya, to where he had reportedly fled after sedition cases were filed against him in Pakistan, has been seen in this context.

In July, news anchor Imran Riaz Khan was arrested in a treason case⁶² while in August, TV anchor Jameel Farooqui was arrested over defamatory remarks against the Islamabad Police.⁶³ Both were later released on bail.

Freedom of assembly

Throughout the year, both the PTI and PDM governments employed the controversial law, Section 144, barring the assembly of more than five persons to discourage protests and arrest violators. The law was also

used by the city administration to ban pillion riding during the two days of Ashura as well as on New Year's Eve.⁶⁴ Moreover, in October, the interior ministry extended the capital's red zone limits in anticipation of the PTI's planned march to seemingly make it easier to ban the assembly of people.⁶⁵

Freedom of association

In April, in light of the prevailing political climate, the IHC directed the FIA not to harass PTI workers and activists,⁶⁶ whereas in May, the NCHR expressed concern over police raids to arrest PTI workers, stating that all citizens were entitled to equal protection under the Constitution.⁶⁷



Political participation

No-confidence vote. In March, the opposition submitted a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly.⁶⁸ When the vote was belatedly held in April, the deputy speaker sprang a surprise by dismissing the opposition’s motion deeming it against national integrity and sovereignty and dissolved the assembly, triggering a constitutional crisis.⁶⁹

A few days later, the Supreme Court unanimously declared the assembly’s dissolution unconstitutional and directed the no-confidence vote to proceed.⁷⁰ HRCP welcomed the decision, saying it would ‘have a long-term effect in terms of strengthening constitutional democracy’. Resultantly, PTI lawmakers resigned en masse – the acceptance of which remained unsettled throughout 2022 – and the opposition parties elected a new prime minister.⁷¹

Election rules. The PTI’s decision to use electronic voting machines and internet voting for overseas Pakistanis was rolled back by the new government in May, which instead directed phased pilot testing of the new measures. However, the decision was challenged in the Supreme Court.⁷² In March, the ECP barred public office holders from partaking in electoral activities while allowing national and provincial lawmakers to do so.⁷³

Voters and constituencies. In October, the ECP announced the deletion of 2.55 million dead voters’ names from the electoral rolls, bringing the total number of registered voters in the country to 122.19 million, including 66.40 million men and 55.78 million women. In June, after reports of wrongful assigning of addresses on voters’ lists, the ECP reaffirmed that only addresses (temporary and permanent) mentioned on voters’ identity cards would be used to register voters and assign polling stations.⁷⁴ In August, the ECP issued revised lists of national and provincial assembly constituencies, which saw the strength of the National Assembly come down from 342 to 336 seats due to the merger of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.⁷⁵

Census. The seventh population and housing census, to be undertaken digitally, kept seeing delays throughout the year.⁷⁶ The next general elections, scheduled after August 2023, are supposed to be held under the new census after the previous exercise in 2017 was deemed controversial by several political parties.

In December, the planning minister directed the timely completion of the PKR 34 billion exercise and assured that the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics would hand over the census results to the ECP on 30 April, after which fresh delimitations of constituencies could take place.⁷⁷

Local government

In March, the IHC struck down the Islamabad Capital Territory Local Government Ordinance 2021, under which the PTI government was planning to hold mayoral elections.⁷⁸ The court observed that the PTI government had been trying to delay the local government polls under cover of the ordinance.⁷⁹ Later, when the ECP issued the election schedule for local government polls in 50 union councils for 31 July, the PDM government issued a notification increasing the capital's union councils to 101, forcing the ECP to delay the polls.⁸⁰ The ECP's new schedule marked 31 December as polling day, but less than two weeks before, the federal cabinet again increased the number of union councils, making it impossible for the ECP to conduct the polls on time, especially after forcing the related legislation through Parliament. The PTI accused the ruling party of delaying tactics,⁸¹ while the government claimed it was making the process more transparent and inclusive.⁸² Resultantly, the ECP postponed the polls and denied Islamabad's citizens the right to a local government.

Shrinking spaces and role of assemblies

Undemocratic moves. The Senate, early on in the year, passed a resolution against the 'systematic campaign' being run in social and political circles, calling for a presidential system of government. Senators warned that such a move would have 'disastrous consequences' for the federation.⁸³ Another proposition that kept cropping up was the imposition of a 'technocratic setup' to take 'difficult' economic decisions without fear of the political costs.⁸⁴ The PTI's decision to resign from the National Assembly after its ouster – a move it appeared to be turning back on as the year ended – also did not help the cause of democracy.⁸⁵

Establishment's role. In June, HRCP expressed deep concern at the prime minister's plans for the military-run spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), to screen civil servants, terming the practice 'against democratic norms'. It added that the 'role of the military in civilian affairs needs to recede if Pakistan is to move forward as a democracy'.

Ordinances. The PTI government's frequent use of ordinances, as opposed to legislating through Parliament, was exposed when, in December, the parliamentary affairs secretary said that 77 ordinances had been enacted by the PTI between August 2018 and April 2022.⁸⁶

Defecting lawmakers. In May, the Supreme Court ruled that the votes of defecting lawmakers could not be counted in the four instances mentioned under Article 63-A of the Constitution: elections of prime minister and chief minister, a vote of confidence or no-confidence, a constitutional amendment bill, and a money bill. As per earlier interpretations, such defecting lawmakers were de-seated but after their vote had been counted. The 3–2 decision was criticised as 'rewriting of the Constitution' and taking away a lawmaker's right to dissent from the party line.⁸⁷



Women

Access to custody of children. In July, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) chairman declared a new policy to register children with a single parent so that single mothers could acquire identity cards for their children without the father's identity card.⁸⁸

Violence against women. In October, the human rights minister informed the National Assembly that 63,367 cases of violence against women had been registered in the country during the last three years. Sharing police statistics for 2019–21, the minister stated that 3,987 women were murdered in this period. Moreover, 34,376 cases of kidnapping, 11,160 of rape, 5,171 of physical violence, 103 of acid throwing and 77 cases of incest were filed in this period.⁸⁹

In February, Zahir Jaffer was sentenced to death for the gruesome murder of Noor Mukaddam in July 2021.⁹⁰ In March, appeals were filed in the IHC by Jaffer against his sentence, as well as by the victim's family for the acquittal of several co-accused.⁹¹ In December, the IHC reserved its verdict on the appeals.⁹² In March, five people, including primary accused Usman Mirza, were awarded life imprisonment in an infamous sexual assault and harassment case from July 2021. The sentences were later challenged in the IHC.⁹³ The same month, the government challenged in the Supreme Court the acquittal by the Lahore High Court of Mohammad Waseem, the brother of Qandeel Baloch who was sentenced to life for the well-known model's murder in 2016.⁹⁴

Aurat March. In February, the religious affairs minister asked the prime minister to declare International Women's Day 'International Hijab Day', claiming that Aurat March rallies held across the country to mark the day deviated from Islamic principles.⁹⁵ After severe backlash from rights groups and politicians, the minister clarified he was referring to the 'obscenity' displayed during the marches, referring to slogans and posters.⁹⁶ Regardless of the habitual controversy, a public gathering, the Aurat Azadi Jalsa, was held on 6 March in F-9 Park to commemorate International Women's Day.⁹⁷

Legal cover. In August, the Supreme Court held that, barring exceptional circumstances, women were entitled to bail even in cases which were nonbailable under the relevant laws.⁹⁸ In September, while hearing an appeal in a workplace sexual harassment case, the Supreme Court observed that it was 'a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners'. The court held that the right to a safe working environment free of harassment, abuse and intimidation was a constitutionally protected right of all genders.⁹⁹

In October, the Supreme Court ruled that a mother's second marriage

could not be considered the sole reason disqualifying her from custodial rights. In her judgment, Justice Ayesha Malik observed that the court had repeatedly held that a minor's welfare was paramount when deciding custody cases.¹⁰⁰

Harassment. In its annual report published in September, the Federal Ombudsperson Secretariat for Protection against Harassment revealed that it had received 5,008 complaints during 2018–22, of which 4,733 cases had been successfully closed.¹⁰¹

In September, a cabinet subcommittee headed by the law minister announced an in-camera session to probe the sexual harassment allegations against the former head of the National Accountability Bureau and current chairman of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, former Supreme Court justice Javed Iqbal.¹⁰²

A woman who approached the commission in a missing person's case had claimed she was harassed by the former justice. HRCP demanded the 'allegations be investigated with transparency and independence'.

Transgender persons

In July, the NCHR stated that the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences had undertaken to prioritise fair and prompt treatment of transgender persons at the capital's largest public hospital with the establishment of separate counters and dedicated rooms.¹⁰³ In October, the federal government launched a 24-hour helpline (1099) so that trans persons' complaints against harassment and other crimes could be swiftly registered and resolved.¹⁰⁴

Legal rollback. Around September, a controversy was conjured up against the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 over claims that it promoted homosexuality and was against the country's culture and norms. The law sets out legal recognition and further protections for the third gender, and has been widely hailed as the most progressive legislation on this subject in the region. The furore led to the law being challenged in the Federal Shariat Court.¹⁰⁵ Responding to the controversy, including from allied religious parties, the federal government termed baseless the objections to the law but said it awaited the court's decision.¹⁰⁶

Later, an amendment to the 2018 law was tabled in the Senate, with some lawmakers implying that the current law was anti-Islam. The amendment seeks an end to using self-perceived identity for changing one's gender.¹⁰⁷

The Council of Islamic Ideology also formed a committee to review the 2018 law after observing that certain clauses were incompatible with Shariah and needed amendments.¹⁰⁸ The move was widely criticised by trans rights activists and human rights observers.

Children

Abuse. In May, child rights organisation Sahil revealed Rawalpindi and Islamabad as having the second and third highest numbers of child abuse cases in 2021 at 292 and 247, respectively.¹⁰⁹ The head of the FIA shared in July that, of millions of incidents of child exploitation uploaded on social media in recent years, only 343 cases had been reported to the agency, highlighting the need for people to report such violations.¹¹⁰

Early marriage. In March, the IHC declared marriages under the age of 18 illegal, observing that a girl under 18 cannot marry of her own will, nor can her relatives proceed with such an arrangement.¹¹¹ The Council of Islamic Ideology opposed the IHC's ruling on religious grounds.¹¹² In November, the Federal Shariat Court termed child marriage a 'cruel, un-Islamic and [a] heartless ritual'.¹¹³

Labour

Observing Labour Day, union leaders in Islamabad demanded the application of the International Labour Organization's conventions to ensure workers' rights are protected and deplored that only 9 million out of 60 million informal workers of the country worked under labour protection laws.¹¹⁴ In October, the president ratified the Islamabad Domestic Workers Bill 2022, which regulates the employment of, and protects the rights of, the capital's domestic workers, such as determining working hours, minimum remuneration and leave entitlement.¹¹⁵

The elderly

In March, the Senate Standing Committee on Law and Justice, while deliberating on the Protection of Parents Bill 2022, agreed that safeguarding parents was necessary and they should have the right to evict an adult child from a house they own.¹¹⁶ The proposed national law builds on previous legislation protecting parents' rights within the capital's limits. In December, a joint sitting of Parliament was to finally pass the bill, but it was deferred, citing the need for further deliberation.¹¹⁷

People living with disabilities

In May, the human rights ministry directed 29 federal ministries and divisions to ensure implementation of the 2 percent quota for employing people living with disabilities in accordance with the ICT Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2020.¹¹⁸ In October, the president signed the Dyslexia Special Measures Bill, which calls for creating in the capital's schools a more enabling environment for children suffering from the common learning disorder. It states that no child with dyslexia or an associated disorder shall be excluded from the city's education system.¹¹⁹

Refugees

In September, the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights directed the capital's police to facilitate rather than harass the Afghan refugees currently residing in various parks and open spaces of the city.¹²⁰ That same month, the Public Accounts Committee directed the government to deport unregistered Afghan refugees and shift registered ones to camps. The committee's chair criticised Afghan refugees for residing in Pakistan for years and doing business but not paying taxes.¹²¹ Such divisive rhetoric, along with reports that the government would be deporting Afghan refugees with expired visas after the year's end, stoked fear among the Afghan diaspora.¹²² However, it was later clarified that no such deportations would take place, although other punitive measures were not ruled out.¹²³



The National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights directed the capital's police to facilitate rather than harass the Afghan refugees currently residing in various parks and open spaces of the city.

As of end-December, there were 1,316,257 registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan, according to the UN Refugee Agency.¹²⁴ However, administrative hurdles to obtaining identification documents or renewing visas meant that many Afghan refugees remained at risk of arrest under the Foreigners Act 1946. In the same month, Amnesty International issued an open letter to the prime minister, reporting that Ahmed Zia Faiz and Syed Manoor Kazemi, both of Afghan origin, had been imprisoned in Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi since June for having protested the ongoing discrimination against Afghan refugees.¹²⁵ Despite the situation of refugees in the country, Pakistan has still not acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, or passed national and domestic legislation in light of these obligations.



Education

In July, the education ministry renamed the controversial Single National Curriculum introduced by the PTI government in 2021 as the 'National Curriculum of Pakistan' and claimed it would reform the curriculum and the overall education system of the country by being more inclusive and consultative.¹²⁶

Deficiencies. Released in March 2022, the Annual Status of Education Report for 2021 revealed that 45 percent of fifth-graders across the country could not read a sentence in Urdu and their regional languages, while 44 percent could not read sentences in English. Moreover, the report noted that 19 percent of children were reported to be out of school – an increase of 2 percent from 2019.¹²⁷

Closures. Academic activities in public schools were adversely affected throughout the year due to a teachers' protest as well as Covid-19 closures early on, as well as the severe heatwave in the summer.¹²⁸

Students' welfare. In February, the government inaugurated a free lunch programme in 100 of the capital's 191 primary schools in collaboration with the Allah Walay Trust.¹²⁹ Similarly, in August, the Federal Directorate of Education extended its pilot bag-free policy to over 100 primary schools, where students would now be taking only two notebooks and a diary instead of lugging heavy backpacks.¹³⁰

Higher education. In May, it was reported that around 1,000 university students who had returned to Pakistan from Ukraine after the Russian invasion were stuck in limbo as they could not resume their studies in Ukraine and complained of not being accommodated by educational institutions in Pakistan.¹³¹

Health

Covid-19. The spread of the Omicron variant resulted in increased coronavirus cases at the start of the year, leading the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) to recommend mini-lockdowns and further restrictions in areas with high positivity rates.¹³² Simultaneously, vaccinations also continued to increase, presenting the best counter to the virus spreading. In March, with case numbers coming down and 70 percent of the eligible population fully vaccinated, the NCOC announced an end to restrictions except for those on unvaccinated persons, after two years of battling the virus which infected over 1.5 million people and claimed over 30,000 lives.¹³³

Public health. In January, the health ministry announced a complete ban on conventional disposable syringes across the country, saying they

had been replaced with auto-disable syringes that became unusable after first use.¹³⁴ In November, it was reported that over 5,000 people had been infected with dengue in the capital in the 2022 season, whereas 11 lost their lives to the virus.¹³⁵

Housing and public amenities

In February, the IHC declared illegal the allotment of subsidised plots to senior judges, lawyers and bureaucrats by the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority. The court stated that the project, the registration process of which lacked transparency, cost the public an estimated PKR 1 trillion and was a violation of their fundamental rights.¹³⁶ The ruling was challenged in the Supreme Court.¹³⁷



Officials of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) reportedly destroyed over 100 makeshift homes in a slum colony housing Christians in Sector H-9 of the capital.

In December, officials of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) reportedly destroyed over 100 makeshift homes in a slum colony housing Christians in Sector H-9 of the capital.¹³⁸

Environment

Floods. Catastrophic floods affected much of the country during July and August. According to the country's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), a total of 1,739 lives were lost, 12,867 people were injured and over 33 million people were affected.¹³⁹ Over 1.7 million

houses were destroyed by torrential rains, glacial lake outburst floods and the flooding of the Indus River and its tributaries.¹⁴⁰ While the meteorology and geology departments played their part, the initial response was slow because the damage was indiscriminate and accessibility difficult due to the collapsed infrastructure. However, when the full scale of the disaster unfolded, and the human impact became apparent, government agencies especially set up for the purpose, such as the NDMA, were found wanting.

Deforestation. Concerns continued throughout the year over the cutting of trees to make way for development projects.¹⁴¹ Many schemes were initiated without taking the environment protection authorities on board,¹⁴² while some included construction on protected park land.¹⁴³ With regard to the Bhara Kahu bypass project, whose environmental impact assessment was obtained after construction work had begun, the IHC in December directed the federal ombudsman to initiate proceedings against the CDA and Environment Protection Agency.¹⁴⁴

Protecting the Margallas. In January, the IHC, in a series of judgments, declared illegal the Pakistan Navy's sailing club at Lake View Park, farmhouses near Bhara Kahu and a golf course in Sector E-8 for violating land use laws. Moreover, the court ordered the sealing of the Monal restaurant in the Margalla Hills for the same reasons and dismissed the military's claim of ownership of over 8,000 acres of park land in the area.¹⁴⁵ However, most of the sites in question, including the restaurant and the golf course, continued to operate on the basis of stay orders.

Cultural rights

Film ban. The question of what constitutes Pakistan's culture was raised in November when the federal government banned the release of the censor board-approved film *Joyland*, the first Pakistani film to be shown at the Cannes Film Festival and the country's official entry for the Academy Awards.¹⁴⁶ The film depicts the story of a man and a transgender dancer—a subject seemingly too controversial for Pakistani cinema-goers. HRCP condemned the ban on 'flimsy grounds of "decency and morality"' and termed it 'rabidly transphobic'. Shortly thereafter, the federal government reversed the ban.¹⁴⁷

Endnotes

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AZAD JAMMU AND KASHMIR





- On the direction of the AJK Supreme Court, local bodies elections were conducted in AJK after almost 32 years. The government and major political parties tried several delaying tactics, but failed to postpone the elections.
- In three phases of the local bodies polls, the ruling PTI party emerged the winner with 830 members in civic bodies, followed by 697 independent candidates.
- Political parties supporting the idea of an independent state of Jammu and Kashmir remained excluded from the electoral process, with the election commission rejecting nomination papers of candidates who did not support the idea of the disputed region's accession to Pakistan.
- After functioning with only one judge instead of nine, the AJK High Court finally appointed six judges after the federal and AJK governments agreed on the appointment procedure.
- The government cracked down upon activists from nationalist parties. These activists had protested against the hike in food and electricity prices, and against a bid to bring controversial amendments to the AJK Interim Constitution 1974 to change the constitutional status of AJK.
- AJK remained the target of natural calamities throughout the year, including heavy snowfall, torrential rains, and devastating floods which claimed around 84 lives and damaged a significant amount of public infrastructure and private properties.
- The government back-tracked on the establishment of a military-inclusive tourism development authority after prolonged protests by political parties and the civil society took place.
- The PTI tabled a motion of no-confidence against their own elected prime minister Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi, and elected Sardar Tanveer Ilyas as successor after Niazi resigned.
- The AJK Assembly conducted 20 sessions throughout the year and remained in session for 72 days, but passed only two bills except for budget and monetary bills during the years.
- The government revoked the law passed by the previous government to regulate the services of around 4,300 ad-hoc government employees. As a result, these employees were terminated from their jobs.

- The police reported an overall decline in crime rates as 8,578 cases were registered this year compared to 8,985 during the previous year. Rape and sexual harassment remained a threat to women and children, and the majority of rape cases went unreported in 2022, especially in rural areas.
- During the summer season, a wildfire erupted in different parts of AJK and approximately 3 million trees and many species of wildlife were affected.
- Massive deforestation in Neelum Valley under government supervision remained a challenge this year. Several inquiries against officials involved are yet to complete.



Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is an autonomous region administered by Pakistan and part of the larger disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. During the year 2022, no significant change in AJK's interim constitutions or laws was witnessed. However, the region saw some remarkable political developments in 2022: despite several objections raised by political leaders, the election commission of AJK managed to conduct local bodies polls in AJK under the Supreme Court's directions.

AJK is also one of the regions of Pakistan most vulnerable to climate change. Considered Pakistan's most disaster-prone area, with frequent natural disasters such as earthquakes, flash floods, glaciers, landslides, and conflagration, this year was no exception. Catastrophic floods, snowfall, and wildfire took place, but the death toll remained lower compared to other regions. A large number of public and private properties and infrastructure were also damaged during the mid-year flash floods.



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Laws and law-making

During 2022, the AJK assembly conducted 20 sessions and remained in session for 72 days,¹ but only two acts were passed throughout the year according to the AJK assembly and law department's record.²

The controversial Azad Jammu and Kashmir Regulation of the Services of Certain Categories of Contractual, Ad Hoc or Temporary Government Employment (Term and Conditions) Act 2021 aimed to regulate ad-hoc and temporary government employees from grade 1 to 18, but this act was revoked by the assembly. Consequently, around 4,300 employees, who were mostly appointed by the previous government on a political basis, lost their jobs without any due process. However, the act was once again adopted with some amendments after a prolonged protest by the sacked employees took place.

The government and opposition parties tabled bills in the house on local bodies elections and privileges related to members of the legislative assembly, but these were later withdrawn. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) also tabled a no-confidence motion against their own elected Prime Minister Sardar Qayyum Niazi less than a year after he took office. After he tendered his resignation, Sardar Tanveer Ilyas was elected the new prime minister.

Administration of justice

On 8 January, the newly elected PTI-led government appointed six new judges in the AJK High Court after consultation with the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan. The newly appointed judges included the brother of AJK's prime minister, Sardar Qayyum Niazi. This appointment triggered criticism over the conduct of the newly elected prime minister, but he categorically denied influencing the appointment of his brother and claimed that the appointment was initiated before he took office.

After the appointment of new judges in the high court, the number of pending cases, especially those related to marriages and family matters, dropped as many cases were disposed of. According to high court records, 21,369 cases were heard and 8,116 were disposed of. The lower courts heard 98,512 cases and 56,184 cases were disposed of.



Law and order

According to the AJK police’s records, there is also a clear decline in the total number of cases registered during the year as it dropped to 8,578 compared to 8,985 in 2021. However, it is believed that this is due to people’s reluctance to register cases with the police, especially for crimes against women, for instance cases of rape, attempted rape, and harassment. The police also hesitated to share data on crimes against women and children, and cases of workplace harassment that are often reported in local newspapers were not reflected in police records.

The number of cases involving murder, violence against women, rape, burglary, and narcotics remained higher this year: 89 cases of murder were reported this year compared to 74 last year; 14 rape cases and 320 cases of abduction followed by *zina* [adultery] were also reported this year (Table 1).

Table 1: Crime statistics for AJK for 2022 and 2021

Offense	Years	Total cases
Murder	2022	89
	2021	74
Dacoity	2022	5
	2021	3
Robbery	2022	63
	2021	57
Gang-rape	2022	0
	2021	1
Rape	2022	21
	2021	14
Kidnapping	2022	21
	2021	14
Kidnapping for ransom	2022	1
	2021	1
Abduction/ <i>zina</i>	2022	320
	2021	281

Offense	Years	Total cases
Burglary	2022	280
	2021	260
Theft	2022	597
	2021	491
Trespass	2022	487
	2021	473
Hurt	2022	365
	2021	401

Source: AJK police.

In a notable incident on 6 September, the police arrested a man impersonating a police officer in Neelum Valley who was involved in cases of harassment, fake raids, and torture. During the investigation, the accused identified some top officials of the police department as his accomplices; however, only seven constables and head constables were sacked and arrested for their involvement in such crimes.

Besides the traditional system of registering first information reports (FIRs), the AJK Police started using social media to receive complaints from citizens during 2022. Around 8,000 cases were solved this way without registering an FIR.

The Line of Control (LOC) remained peaceful since February 2021 after India and Pakistan had agreed to restore the 2003 ceasefire agreement. However, landmines and cluster bombs spread all over and near the LOC remained a challenge for citizens; several villagers living near the LOC died or were severely injured in ‘mysterious blasts’ every year that were later attributed to these landmines and cluster bombs. On 28 March, a boy was killed and six people injured after a toy-shaped bomb exploded in Leepa Valley.³ On 19 September, two brothers were killed in Athmuqam, Neelum Valley, in a mysterious blast. Initially, their cause of death was determined to be a leopard attack, but later during the post-mortem, police found splinters of a bomb in their bodies. They were also killed by a toy bomb or landmine near the LOC.⁴

Jails and prisoners

The infrastructure of prisons in AJK remains inadequate, with reconstruction of the central jails in Muzaffarabad and the district jails of Bagh, Rawalakot, and Plandri still pending after their destruction in the 2005 earthquake. These jails are in makeshift buildings while the rest of the region’s jails are in old buildings, with insufficient space allocated for prisoners inside. Three districts of AJK—Neelum, Jehlum Valley,

and Haveli – do not have district jails, so prisoners there are either kept in judicial lockups or shifted to the nearest jails. Currently, juvenile offenders are kept in the same premises as adult prisoners as well which is against the law.

As of 31 December, 816 people were imprisoned in AJK's prisons, of which 16 were juveniles and 21 were women, with three infants accompanying their mothers. 65 prisoners, including three women prisoners, were awarded the death penalty. However, none of the prisoners in AJK on death row have been executed in the past four years.

On 16 June, the police launched an operation in Central Jail Muzaffarbad after receiving reports of a narcotics racket being run from the jail. A clash between police and prisoners erupted in which at least six policemen and two inmates were injured. After the incident, the prisoners staged a hunger strike and alleged that the police were torturing inmates.⁵ On 3 August, the minister for education in AJK, Malik Zafar Iqbal, was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of a young boy committed 19 years ago.⁶ While imprisoned, he kept the charge of the ministry and continued to run his office from Central Jail Kotli for four months until he was acquitted by the AJK Supreme Court.



Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

In recent years, a few cases of mob lynching on charges of blasphemy took place in the region's southern districts, especially Mirpur and Bhimber. Blasphemy charges are also registered in some instances, especially during the Islamic months of Muharram and Rabi-ul-Awal. In Kotli, the district in general and the city in particular, there have also been some incidents of persecution of the Ahmadiyya community, but most of these incidents go unnoticed as neither the police register these cases nor are they highlighted in media reports.

On 25 June, a court in the Bagh district of AJK awarded a death sentence to a mentally ill person, Muhammad Shafeeq, on allegedly committing blasphemy on Facebook.⁷ The case was registered on the application of a local imam. The family of the accused presented his medical record, however the court disregarded it and sentenced the accused to death.

On 28 July, a young person by the name of Sufian was killed by a mob of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) members on charges of blasphemy. After killing Sufian, the mob walked to the nearest police station and recorded a collective statement accepting responsibility for the murder.⁸ According to news reports, his burial was not allowed in the local graveyard, and he was instead buried inside his native house without a funeral prayer.

Freedom of expression

Curbs on freedom of expression persisted in AJK with an environment of invisible censorship suppressing opposing viewpoints, especially those related to the disputed region's accession to Pakistan. Local media outlets mainly covered the political activities of mainstream parties that supported the idea of the region's accession to Pakistan, with rallies and protests from nationalist parties and groups supporting complete independence missing from national and local media coverage. These protests could only be seen on social media.

On 10 June, the spokesperson for the Prime Minister of AJK threatened to lodge an FIR against two journalists, Haris Qadeer and Asif Ashraf from Rawalakot, for their alleged involvement in a smear campaign against the prime minister when these journalists had reported a security breach at the prime minister's house.⁹ An application was filed at the police station, but no FIR was registered after the media organisation got involved.

On 13 December, journalist Naeem Chughtai and two other journalists were attacked by the employees and officers of the Press Information Department outside the office of the Director General.¹⁰ The three

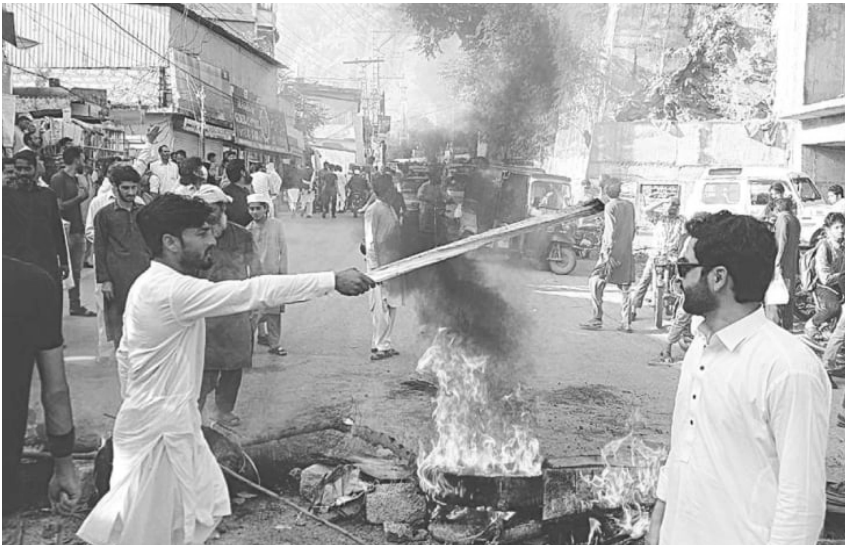
journalists were there to protest against alleged discrimination by the department for selecting only certain journalists to report on government activities. The police initially refused to register an FIR despite significant injuries confirmed in a medico-legal report, but later registered an FIR against the government employees as well as the journalists.¹¹

On September 25, a magistrate along with police personal raided a book fair in Rawalakot's public college and confiscated several books, including two penned by Maqbool Butt, a Kashmiri leader hanged in India's Tihar Jail.¹² The two books are among 34 books banned by AJK government for being 'contradictory to the ideology of Kashmir's accession to Pakistan'.

Freedom of assembly

AJK's civil society and political parties continued to face police brutality for protesting on civic issues, with numerous incidents of clashes and police crackdowns on civil society protests reported during the year.

In August, a widespread protest campaign was launched by AJK's civil society against proposed controversial amendments in the AJK Interim Constitution 1974 to partially revoke the 13th amendment that empowers the region through devolution of power. A parallel campaign was also launched against a controversial and military-controlled tourism authority to launch large-scale tourism projects that threatened the local community's ownership rights to pastures and grazing fields. Later, the campaign also included a demand to reduce electricity and food prices that had been increased.



In August, a widespread protest campaign was launched by AJK's civil society against proposed controversial amendments in the AJK Interim Constitution 1974.

These demonstrators and police clashed in many parts of AJK and the police reportedly tortured activists in their custody. This led to further protests in the region, with three districts of Muzaffarabad observing a wheel-jam strike against the custodial torture of activists on 12 August. The police registered nine FIRs in different police stations nominating at least 400 activists – most of these activists belonged to the AJK prime minister’s native town and were members of nationalist parties.¹³ However, there have been allegations of the prime minister using the police to suppress political opponents, especially those supporting the idea of independence for Jammu and Kashmir. This allegation remained un-investigated.



Local government

After almost 31 years, local bodies elections were conducted in AJK despite several delaying attempts by the ruling and opposition political parties. The Election Commission of AJK conducted the elections in three phases under the directions of the Supreme Court of AJK after the federal government refused to provide security and deploy the required forces to conduct elections on the same day. A total of 13,000 candidates – most of them young and quite a few being women – filed nomination papers, and 10,813 out of them contested the elections for 2,614 seats in district councils, union councils, municipal corporations, municipal committees, and town committees. The PTI secured a clear victory by winning 830 seats in all 10 districts, followed by 697 independent candidates. The PML-N bagged 497 seats, while the PPP won 460 general seats in direct elections.

The overall elections process, including the election campaigns, remained peaceful. Only a few incidents of violence were reported during the elections in which around six security personnel and four civilians were injured according to media reports. While political and legal hurdles to devolving powers to newly elected public representatives still remain, the elections of the local bodies were widely appreciated by the public at large.

The local bodies polls also opened new venues for younger candidates and female candidates to participate in political activities. Out of 13,000 candidates who filed nomination papers, the majority of them were young as political parties chose to issue tickets to younger persons and grassroots political leaders and workers rather than family members of the political parties' leaders. As a result, a new generation of political leaders emerged from the local councils which will gradually get involved in governance, policymaking, and decision-making.

Besides general seats in local bodies, 12.5 percent of the seats were reserved for women and 12.5 percent for younger candidates to enhance their participation in decision-making. These newly-elected young representatives are expected to play a crucial role in the development of AJK through innovative ideas rather than waiting for government support.

However, similar to the general elections, the local bodies elections excluded nationalist parties and candidates who had dissenting ideologies. Before filing nomination papers, candidates had to sign a bond affirming their belief in the ideology of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan. Those candidates who did not sign this bond were expelled from the election process by rejecting their nomination papers. Zulfiqar Haider Raja, a candidate for the Bagh Municipal Corporation, took his case to the district returning office after his nomination was rejected on these grounds, but his case was dismissed from there too.



Women and children

Cases of sexual harassment and rape that were often reported in local media outlets remained missing from official records. No incident of gang rape was reported this year, while 14 cases of rape and 320 cases of *zina* were reported in the entire region. The police were often blamed for registering rape cases under *zina* sections to allow for out-of-court settlements between parties. It is believed that the majority of victims of harassment and rape avoided reporting such cases due to cultural barriers such as victim-blaming and lack of trust in redressal systems.

Certain incidents of violence against women and children created unrest in AJK. For instance, on 27 March, a member of the TLP slaughtered his six-month-old niece after a failed murder attempt on her mother and sister-in-law. The perpetrator took refuge in a local mosque after the murder and, in a police statement, admitted that he wanted to kill his mother and sister-in-law for being insolent.¹⁴ On 19 April, a court in Mirpur awarded a death sentence to a man who raped and brutally killed an 11-year-old Kanwal Matloob and dumped her body in a jungle in December 2021.¹⁵ The case created unrest across AJK and protests erupted when the body was found. In June 2022, a hospital guard raped a six-year-old girl in a public hospital in Muzaffarabad. Police arrested the guard and registered an FIR against him.¹⁶

On a positive note, it was reported on 11 May that the AJK Medical College in Muzaffarabad refused to restore the service contract of an admin officer who was dismissed on charges of rape and harassment, despite pressure from the minister for health to do so.

Environment

In June, a wildfire erupted in different parts of AJK and spread over thousands of acres of jungle. While the exact cause of the conflagration and figures of losses remain undetermined, it is estimated that around 70 percent of the jungle was affected by the fire and more than 3 million trees were reduced to ashes.

On 10 June, the fire that had broken out in the jungles of Naseerabad engulfed a zoo. The wildlife department later claimed that all the birds and animals were rescued, however the fire damaged some parts of the zoo badly. On 11 June, seven employees of the forest department deputed to control the wildfire were caught in a blaze in the Kotli district and sustained serious burn injuries.¹⁷ Two of them later succumbed to their injuries in the hospital.¹⁸



In June, a wildfire erupted in different parts of AJK and spread over thousands of acres of jungle.

In the Neelum Valley region, deforestation under government supervision remained a huge challenge. Local communities and media outlets continuously raised their voices against such rampant deforestation. In response, the forest department dismissed around 17 officers and employees from their services on 5 August,¹⁹ but the illegal cutting and transportation of timber out of Neelum Valley, as well as some other parts of AJK, still continued to take place.²⁰

Certain species of wildlife were injured or killed during the year as well. On 23 January, wildlife guards evacuated a seriously injured leopard from Noseri which had been shot by a hunter and shifted it to a

rehabilitation centre in Muzaffarabad. The leopard later died in Muzaffarabad, and the police arrested the hunter.²¹ On 9 February, another leopard was stoned and strangled to death by angry villagers after it injured at least three people, including a woman, in the Jhelum valley district. On 4 September, around a 15-foot-long Indian python was killed by villagers in a suburban area of Mirpur after it tried to swallow a goat.²² Three days later, another python of almost the same size was killed in the nearest village.

Wild animals have been frequently caught in the crossfire on the LOC as well, killed either by soldiers or by mines spread over the area. On 24 January, a female Sambar deer wandered across the LOC into the Kotli district. Fortunately, it was rescued and released into its natural habitat.²³

AJK is an area prone to natural disasters and accidents associated with glaciers, floods, and landslides. The year started with heavy snowfall, and then in the summer, some of the worst torrential rainfall and floods in recent decades took place.

According to figures issued by the State Disaster Management Authority, 84 people died and around 168 were injured during the year in natural calamities including floods, landslides and snowfall. On 9 January, at least three people, including a child, were killed and one injured in rain-related incidents in Kotli and Haveli districts. On 24 March, two labourers were killed after being trapped in a landslide while working in the Gojra area of Muzaffarabad.

On 8 August, heavy rains wiped out a portion of the Azad Pattan road along the Jhelum River, suspending vehicular traffic connecting the Poonch, Haveli, and Sudhnoti districts to Rawalpindi and Islamabad. On 2 August, 10 members of a family were killed and four wounded when the roof of their mud house caved in due to heavy rainfall in the Tahli Khakhriyali village of the Hajira subdivision in the Poonch district. On 28 August, three people died in rain-related incidents in Neelum Valley after flash floods and rainfall hit several areas. On 30 December, around 200 tourists, including women and children, were trapped in heavy snowfall in Pirchanasi near Muzaffarabad; the police managed to safely evacuate them to Muzaffarabad.

The floods also damaged infrastructure and property, destroyed crops and fruits, and severely disrupted the emerging tourism industry in the Neelum Valley area. Most flood victims, especially those who incurred property and financial losses, did not receive any compensation from the government.

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GILGIT-BALTISTAN





- Climate-induced floods hit Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), resulting in 17 deaths and six injured, damaging 640 houses completely and 450 partially, and displacing thousands of people who await their complete rehabilitation.
- Elections for local bodies have not been held in GB for the past 14 years.
- Several protests took place across GB throughout 2022 against land grabbing, cuts in subsidised wheat and long load-shedding hours.
- Dozens of protestors were booked on anti-terrorism charges, including 11 persons booked in Minawar, Gilgit, for protesting against land grabbing.
- Three pro-human rights laws were passed by the GB assembly in 2022 including the GB Commission on the Status of Women Act, the GB Senior Citizens Welfare Act and the GB Food Act.
- The government introduced education reforms focusing on girls' education, such as introducing a separate pink bus service for women and establishing the first-ever women's sports complex in Gilgit.
- A shelter home for women has remained under construction in Gilgit for the past several years, and the bill against domestic violence has remained pending for the last year.
- Mental health services were found wanting in GB. Though they were shifted from Jotial to the provincial headquarter hospital in Gilgit, locals have demanded a full-fledged mental health facility. There is no forensic lab or medico-legal expert to deal with criminal cases such as suicides, honour crimes, murders or violence against women.
- The total number of crimes that took place in GB during 2022 is 2,185, and the total number of pending cases in the GB chief court is 1,796.
- Work on a model village for flood-affected IDPs is under process in the village Buber, Ghizer. This was approved by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif after his visit to Buber on 2 September, which was the worst affected village in GB.
- 29 cases of suicides were reported in GB in 2022, with 20 of these reported in Ghizer. After a police investigation in Ghizer, five of them were identified as cases of murder.

- The GB government banned the manufacture, import, use, and purchase of polythene bags in GB under its plastic-free GB project. Directives were issued to the Environmental Protection Agency for the implementation of the project on 14 December.
- Land disputes regarding the GB-KP boundaries in Shandur, Babuser and Basha remained unresolved in 2022.



GB remained affected by the year's devastating floods from June to September. According to the Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority (GBDMA), 17 people died and six others were injured in these floods while PKR 7,406 million in losses occurred across GB. Moreover, 22 powerhouses, 49 roads, 78 drinking water supplies, 500 irrigation channels and 56 bridges were damaged.¹

Thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) await complete rehabilitation, except IDPs from the village of Buber where the prime minister approved the allocation of community land as a model village for IDPs—Buber was the worst flood-affected village in GB with 65 completely damaged houses and nine deaths.

Another significant rights violation that was noticeable in 2022 was land grabbing. While this has been a continuous issue in GB for several years, protests erupted across the region in December regarding land disputes between the government and local communities.² Protestors were especially concerned about *khalisa* land—a term used in GB for barren land that was part of the former Kashmir state—and natural resources.

Meanwhile, the GB government formed a committee under the supervision of the chief minister on 12 December and assured the public that land reforms would be introduced before the end of March 2023 after consulting with local communities across GB.³ However, the region's nationalist and progressive parties rejected this and instead demanded the restoration of state-subject rule (which was enacted in the former state of Kashmir and is still in place in AJK).



Laws and law-making

As per information collected from the GB Assembly secretariat, seven important acts were passed during the year by the GB Legislative Assembly (GBLA), out of which three pertained to human rights. These were the Gilgit-Baltistan Commission on the Status of Women Act, the Gilgit-Baltistan Senior Citizens Welfare Act, and the Gilgit-Baltistan Food Act.

Information from the Social Welfare Department GB indicates that the rules for key human rights legislation and policies were also approved by the GB cabinet on 18 November: the Gilgit-Baltistan Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, the Gilgit-Baltistan Child Protection and Response Act, the Gilgit-Baltistan Human Rights Policy, and the Gilgit-Baltistan Social Protection Policy.

Administration of justice

A judicial crisis emerged when GB Chief Minister Khalid Khursheed Khan challenged the appointment of the GB chief court's Judges before the Supreme Court of Pakistan on 28 September, contending that these had been made in violation of the GB Order 2018 and Rules of Business 2009.⁴

On 6 September, the Bar Council said that the Supreme Appellate Court of GB had been kept incomplete for many years, which was tantamount to depriving the region of recourse to justice and basic human rights. The Bar Council demanded that Justice Shakeel be appointed chief justice of the court and two lawyers should be appointed judges to complete the court. The Bar Council also demanded the permanent appointment of the current chief court Judges to avoid a future crisis.⁵ However, the Supreme Appellate Court remained vacant from May to November, with only a single judge, Justice Shakeel Ahmed, as acting chief judge.

In 2022, a number of initiatives were introduced to improve GB citizens' access to justice, such as the establishment of a circuit bench in Chilas on 14 May, which had been a longstanding demand of the local legal fraternity. A digital court was also installed at the principal seat of the GB chief court on 19 May, a first in the region's history. This digital court aims to help lawyers across the country and in different parts of GB to pursue their cases in the chief court.

On 16 June, the Legal Aid Society and GB chief court signed an MOU for the design of a training curriculum on alternative dispute resolution for at least 28 judges across GB. Moreover, a copy-scanning branch in the GB chief court was set up on 30 August. This branch aims to facilitate citizens by allowing them to access their case records remotely.⁶



A digital court was also installed at the principal seat of the GB chief court on 19 May, a first in the region's history.

Data collected from the chief court GB indicates that 3,646 cases were instituted in 2022 and 3,499 were disposed of, with 1,707 pending from 2021, thus yielding a balance of 1,796 as of end-December.

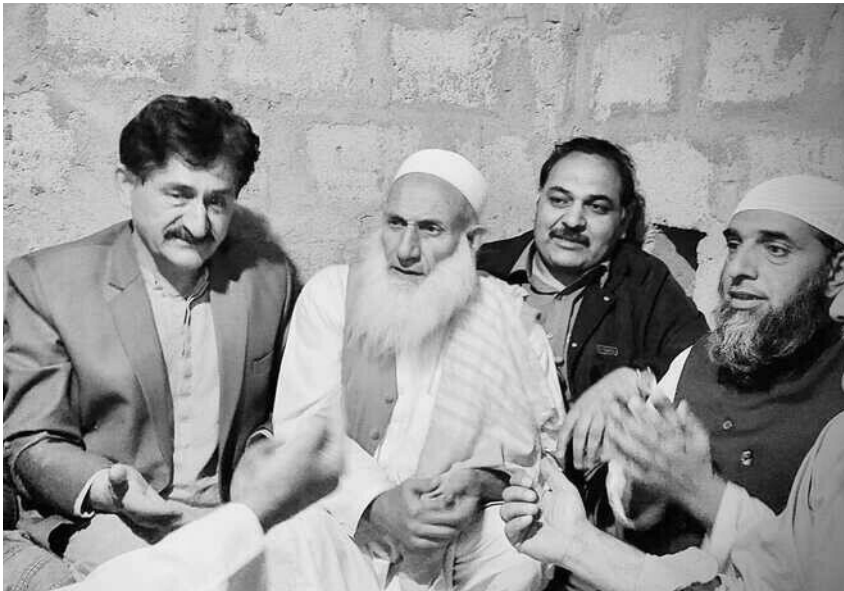
An anti-terrorism court in Gilgit sentenced a person to death on 31 August for abusing and murdering a 14-year-old girl in June 2021 in the Koshded Ishkoman village, Ghizer. According to news reports, no other death penalties were awarded during the year.

On 11 November, a two-member bench issued orders to the GB governor to call a session of the assembly for the promulgation and implementation of the Gilgit-Baltistan Service Tribunal Act (Amended) 2022; the appointment of the chairman and members of this tribunal was pending due to a delay in the promulgation of the said act.



Law and order

On 8 October, a group of militants led by militant commander Abdul Hameed took GB minister of social welfare, human rights and women’s development Ubaidullah Baig and dozens of other passengers in Babusar, Diامر, hostage while protesting and blocking the main road in Babusar which connects GB with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). They demanded that their 10 companions in different jails be released – these people had been arrested in high-profile cases, including the murder of nine foreigners in Nanga Parbat in Diامر in 2013. They also demanded instituting a ban on sports for GB’s women. The GB government acceded to these demands after negotiations, and the minister along with other hostages were released.⁷



A group of militants took GB minister Ubaidullah Baig hostage and demanded that their 10 companions in different jails be released.

Cases of excesses by law enforcement authorities were reported during the year. For instance, on 16 April, personnel from the Frontier Works Organisation allegedly manhandled GB’s minister for tourism, Raja Nasir, on the Skardu-Gilgit road. In another case, Frontier Corps personnel allegedly opened fire on a car at Raikot bridge, Chilas, on 18 April when the car did not stop at a check-post – the family in the car was unharmed.

Muhammad Qasim, a Chilas-based senior journalist, highlighted the case on social media. Both matters were resolved after a patch-up between the parties. A press conference on 23 January also highlighted the alleged harassment of local community elders by the SHO of Juglot.

The number of cases registered for total crimes recorded during the year have increased since 2021 by almost 17 percent. The breakdown of crime statistics is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Crime statistics for GB for 2022

<i>Offense</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>
Murder	62
Attempted murder	121
Hurt	145
Rioting	91
Assault on the public	43
Rape	5
Kidnapping or abduction	44
Suicide	29
Attempted suicide	11
Highway dacoity	2
Other dacoities	6
Other robberies	14
Burglary	141
Cattle theft	34
Motor vehicle theft and snatching	139
Other theft	174
Total PPC crimes	1,722
Violations of the Arms Act	270
Prohibition orders	162
Violations of local special laws	1

Source: Central Police Office GB.

Twenty-nine cases of suicide were reported in GB, with the highest incidence (20) taking place in Ghizer. Five of these were declared cases of murder after a

police investigation was conducted in Ghizer. HRCP's Gilgit office conducted a dialogue with stakeholders on 30 July in Ghizer, including the district administration, to prepare a pilot suicide prevention plan in Ghizer. This plan was submitted to GB's ministry of social welfare and human rights; however, the GB government has yet to implement it. A committee has been formed on the subject, but civil society groups are not part of the said committee.

Cybercrime continues to be a serious problem in GB. However, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)'s cyber response wing in Gilgit has been unable to address these cases properly due to the lack of human and financial resources. Table 2 shows the top ten most reported cybercrime cases received by the FIA wing in GB during 2022.

Table 2: Data on cybercrime in GB in 2022

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Type of cybercrime</i>	<i>Number of reported cases</i>
1	Electronic fraud	225
2	Unauthorised use of identity information	202
3	Offences against the dignity of a person	201
4	Cases pending before 2022	36
5	Cyberstalking	21
6	Hate speech	11
7	Unauthorised access to information system or data	10
8	Unauthorised access to critical infrastructure information system data	9
9	Offences against the modesty of a person or minor	8
10	Unauthorised interception	8
	Total	731

Source: FIA cyber response wing, Gilgit.

Jails and prisoners

Prisoners in GB continue to suffer from a lack of adequate nutrition, recreational activities and access to medical facilities for physical and mental health. There are six jails in GB – a central jail, four district jails and one sub-jail – with a total sanctioned capacity of 697 prisoners. Table 3 provides information on the type of prisoners currently incarcerated in GB for 2022.

Table 3: Prison statistics for GB for 2022

Under-trial prisoners	241
Convicted prisoners	129
Prisoners on death row	2
Total number of prisoners	370
Male inmates	360
Female inmates	1
Juveniles	9

Source: Inspector general of prisons GB.

Two prisoners from Indian-occupied Kashmir, Noor Muhammad Wani and Feroz Ahmed, have been incarcerated in Gilgit Jail since 2021 as they allegedly crossed the Line of Control. In spite of orders for their release issued by the local court, they remained in jail in 2022, as per a report from HRCF's Complaints Cell.

On 19 May, an inmate of Central Jail Minawar Gilgit, Afraz Hussain, who had been jailed in April 2018 on murder charges, allegedly jumped off the roof of the prison and died.⁸ A police report has claimed that the inmate was not of sound mental health. Later, Hussain's relatives staged a sit-in outside the chief minister's office, alleging that the jail officials had not allowed him treatment in spite of repeated requests. Eventually, the GB chief court ordered an inquiry into the matter.



Freedom of movement

Freedom of movement was barred for a number of political and social workers after they were placed on the schedule four list of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) 1997. Although the number of persons on this list has decreased to 36, some political workers and nationalists have not been removed, including GBLA member Aga Shezad and political activists Manzoor Parvana, Yawar, Shabir Mayar and Syed Ali Rizvi. These people allege (in a speech in the GB assembly by Aga Shezad) that the act has been misused since religious extremists have not been placed on the list as per the aim of this list when it was first introduced. In one notable instance, Mubashir Hussain, a social media activist from Diamer who was released on 20 January 2022, was again arrested on 19 December 2022 under the ATA section 11EE and PPC section 124A, as highlighted on social media.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

2022 was a tumultuous year for freedom of religion or belief in GB. When Muharram started in August, a clash between two religious groups erupted when a prominent local Shia leader, Agha Rahat Hussain Al-Hussaini, attempted to hoist a religious flag at Khomar Chowk in Gilgit. Two people were killed and 17 others were injured during clashes at the nearby Yadgar Chowk in Gilgit.⁹

Blasphemy cases were also registered during the year. For instance, on 20 January, Qasimo, a 30-year-old resident of Sherqilla Punial District Ghizer, was arrested in Ghizer on blasphemy and anti-terrorism charges for allegedly disrespecting a mosque in the Sherqilla village of Ghizer. A village committee (Sherqilla awami committee) had unanimously agreed to charge Qasimo despite the fact that he was afflicted with mental health issues. In another instance on 8 October, an FIR application was submitted against Fida Ali Shah, a journalist with the *Phander Times*, by a local religious group in Ghizer for allegedly violating the sanctity of a worship place. This issue, brought to the notice of HRCP's Complaints Cell, was later resolved through the intervention of local political leaders and administration officials.

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression continued to be repressed in GB during 2022 with several instances of arbitrary arrests and harassment of journalists and activists. As per the FIR, social activist Ahmed Shigri was booked for raising his voice against Shiger's superintendent of police when the latter stopped an ambulance conveying a dead body in Baltistan on 20 January. On 5 April, senior journalists Shabbir Mir and Abdul Rehman

Bukhari alleged that the chief minister had lied about his academic credentials, following which they were allegedly subjected to threats and a harassment campaign by the ruling PTI party; the two journalists shared this on their Facebook post.

Sultan Madad and Hasnain Ramal were arrested on 2 August under section 16 of the MPO for criticising on social media the government's policies regarding sectarian issues in GB. Journalist Mehtab Ur Rehman was allegedly tortured by police in Gilgit in the same month on his way to his office. The victim provided this information to the Gilgit Press Club. On 26 August, a journalist from Ghanche Muhammad Ali Alam allegedly faced intimidation and threats from the police for highlighting human rights violations.

Ali Mujeeb, the head of local digital media house Ibex Media Network, narrowly escaped a kidnapping and murder attempt on 8 October. However, the culprits have not yet been arrested. On 26 October, social media activist Shaheen Shah from Gupis, Ghizer, was booked for allegedly criticising the armed forces and maligning the state on social media. Liaqat Ali Khan, a social media activist from Iskoman, was also booked on the same charges on 12 November. An Astore-based journalist by the name of Shams Ur Rehman was booked under false allegations on 5 December.

Freedom of assembly

Mass protests were carried out by the Awami Action Committee (an alliance of political parties, religious parties, and civil society organisations, which raises its voice for the rights of local people) and civil society groups across GB throughout the year against the imposition of taxes, a cut in wheat subsidies, increase in load-shedding hours during the winter and price hikes. A number of these protestors were booked in different cases, including 25 protesters in Hilal Abad, Kharmang, for demanding an increase in the quota of wheat for their area, according to Shabir Mayar, a local social and political activist.

Such cases indicate repression of GB citizens' right to freedom of assembly. This trend is evident in other cases as well, such as a protest against load-shedding that was staged by people from several villages – Goher Abad, Gitch, Singul and Thingdas in Singul – from 9 to 16 January. An FIR was registered against seven persons leading this protest under sections of the ATA. Later, the FIR was withdrawn due to public outrage. The president of Thore Youth, Khunu Alam, and social activists Samee and Chodari Jaffer were also booked for advocating for the rights of affectees of the Basha Dam incident on 20 April.

In another instance, 25 protestors were booked in Ghakuch, Ghizer, in July for protesting against the harassment of women in a local park. Later, the GB chief court quashed the FIR. On 1 October, the police resorted to baton-charging women and residents of Shigar who were

demonstrating against the forced acquisition of land for a hospital. Eleven of these demonstrators were arrested, but were later released. On 21 December, the local people of Minawar, Gilgit, staged a protest against the assistant commissioner of Gilgit for alleged land occupation. They later submitted an FIR against the assistant commissioner as well. However, 11 of these demonstrators were reportedly booked under the ATA for allegedly threatening the local administration.

Another protest took place on 7 April by the residents of Aliabad, Hunza, against the allegedly illegal acquisition of their land by the local administration. On 8 April, civil society groups in Baltistan protested against the vice-chancellor of Baltistan University for his alleged involvement in the sexual harassment of two students. However, instead of any action against him, he was again appointed acting vice-chancellor after his tenure ended. Female students from Karakoram International University (KIU), Gilgit, protested against the lack of separate transport arrangements for female students on 13 April.

Candidates for vacancies in the health department also protested against unfair test interviews conducted by the said department, which were then cancelled on 30 July. In another case, the GB government had advertised over 600 temporary posts for lady health workers in the national program for family planning and primary healthcare in ten districts of GB. Following tests and interviews, a notification for appointment was issued on 30 November which was put into abeyance by Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid Khan on 12 December. The chief minister also constituted an inquiry committee to probe irregularities during the appointments. The association of lady health workers protested and blamed the government for mishandling the issue and succumbing to pressure imposed by the failed candidates.¹⁰



Political participation

Deprived of the right to representation in Pakistan's policymaking institutions, including the Parliament, GB's political status remained in limbo throughout 2022 despite pledges made by the previous PTI government after the elections and by the federal PML-N government. Women's rights activists also expressed concern on the lack of women's representation in the GB cabinet and council.

Local government

GB has been deprived of local bodies for the past 14 years. A local bodies act was passed by the GBLA in 2014 but elections were not held. The sitting government has also introduced new local bodies. Elections have not been held yet in spite of a strong demand for polls among civil society.

Shrinking spaces and the role of assemblies

The GBLA has highlighted shrinking spaces and lack of powers since its inception in 2009. The existing GBLA passed a resolution on 9 March 2021 demanding that GB be made a provisional province of Pakistan, while previous assemblies passed several resolutions demanding the integration of GB into the Constitution of Pakistan. However, the federation did not heed these demands.

On the other hand, GB-based nationalists and some progressive groups have rejected the demand of the GBLA while calling members of the assembly supporters of their 'colonial masters'. Instead, they have demanded that the issue of GB be resolved as per the resolutions of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan and the aspirations of the local people without damaging the identity of the area.

A number of members, while addressing the assembly, complained that the role of the GBLA in the promulgation of laws and accountabilities was denied by different power centres in GB. While addressing the GBLA session on 30 September, the only nationalist member of the assembly, Nawaz Khan Naji, criticised the shrinking role of the assembly and stated that the assembly was bound and had zero powers. He further stated that the bureaucracy, judiciary and religious segments were more powerful than the GBLA.



Women

Violence against women persisted in GB, with cases often underreported. Such cases include honour killings, domestic violence and harassment at the workplace. Unfortunately, protection and redressal mechanisms for women are slow to be implemented in GB, with shelter homes for women having been under construction for the last five years, and the draft bill for the protection of women against domestic violence pending for the last year.

HRCP's Gilgit office received over 25 complaints related to gender-based violence in 2022, with women comprising the majority of victims. In two cases of domestic violence, as per complaints received by HRCP, a woman from Yaseen committed suicide on 24 May and left a written note in which she accused her in-laws of domestic violence. Another woman from Chipurson, Gojal, was found to have been homeless for the last six years due to domestic violence by her in-laws and brothers.

In crimes related to honour, which have been on the rise in GB for the past five years, a man named Ummer Khan killed his wife and a policeman in Asumber on 25 February.¹¹ Later, a young boy killed a van driver of a local college in Yaseen. HRCP's Gilgit office also received a complaint related to honour crime: in one case, a complainant said that a young boy and a married girl from Thor valley, Diamer, had been killed on 20 September by the girl's husband as the victims had allegedly committed adultery. HRCP's Gilgit office also received a number of complaints related to cyber-harassment of women.

A campaign was launched by women and human rights activists in GB on International Women's Day, 8 March, to highlight how women in the region are continuously deprived of their inheritance and property rights. According to women activists, this economic dependency is a major cause of violence against women in the region.

Women in GB continue to suffer from harassment at the workplace, with most cases going unreported due to lack of hope for redressal. The law against workplace harassment in GB that was passed in 2013 is yet to be implemented properly; the code of conduct of the said law has yet to be displayed in workplaces.

Alarmingly, access to public spaces and recreational activities for women were also threatened in 2022 when religious groups in Gilgit protested against a women's sports gala which had been announced by the chief secretary. Instead of standing firm against these demands, the government negotiated with the protestors and the sports gala was renamed to a 'meena bazar' which was held on 5 October.

Transgender persons

The rights of transgender persons continue to be denied in GB. According to local activists, the transgender community hides their identity due to social pressure and out of fear of reprisal. A transgender woman from Gupis escaped her home due to domestic violence in September; she was shifted back by the police, irrespective of the fact that it was an unsafe place for her.

HRCP's Gilgit office received a complaint regarding a trans person who had gone into hiding after receiving threats from various groups, including the religious clergy, for dancing at a festival in Astore on 20 July. She also received death threats on social media.

Children

According to surveys carried out by the Benazir Income Support Programme and UNICEF, 20–30 percent of children in GB are out of school. Some of the reasons behind this figure include corporal punishment at schools, gender disparity, poverty and long distances from homes to schools.

Incidents of violence against children also took place in 2022. On 8 June, a young girl was killed by her father in Chachi, Ghizer – the father later confessed to the police at the Phander Police Station that it was part of the training that he was receiving from a militant group. The sexual abuse of a seven-year-old child in Shiger was reported on 22 July. The offender was arrested and the case is under trial. On 2 October, a six-year-old boy was sexually abused in Skardu, according to local human rights activists. The offender in this case was also arrested. In December, GB chief court Judge Ali Baig took suo moto notice of a case involving the sexual assault of a young college student by a gang near the KIU campus in Gilgit. The police were ordered to arrest the perpetrators and produce them in court. The offenders were arrested following these orders.¹² On 29 December, a child by the name of Rondu Tormik was sexually abused by eight people. Local human rights activists confirm that the accused were arrested under ATA charges, and the case is under trial in Gilgit's ATC.

Labour

GB's labour department remained nonfunctional in 2022 due to lack of resources and capacity. As a result, there is little awareness of existing labour laws and labour rights in GB, and labour exploitation has become a major issue in the region. In one incident, a labourer was physically tortured by his employer in Skardu, Baltistan, on 8 September, according to information from a local police station in Skardu.

The elderly

Despite the passage of the Gilgit-Baltistan Senior Citizens' Welfare Act in 2022, the implementation of this act is pending and there is a serious lack of facilities for senior citizens in GB.

People living with disabilities

Despite a job quota fixed for persons living with disabilities (PLWDs) in the public sector, violations of this quota persist and many cases involving such violations are under trial. PLWDs with mental health issues are particularly afflicted by a lack of accessible healthcare facilities; while psychiatric services were shifted from the remote area of Jotial, Gilgit, to the provincial headquarter hospital in Gilgit for better accessibility, locals demand that a full-fledged mental health facility should be set up in the region.

PLWDs have also demanded reserved seats in GB as the issues they face continue to be sidelined in the GBLA. According to Irshad Kazmi, president of the Association of Persons with Disabilities GB, PLWDs account for 10 percent of GB's society and thus must be adequately represented in the assembly.

On 20 January, a person with mental health issues, Galaya Ustad, was tortured by local police in Juglot, Gilgit. The DIG of the Gilgit region took notice and local police then apologised to the victim. On the same day, another person with mental health issues, Qasimo, was arrested in Ghizer on blasphemy and anti-terrorism charges for allegedly disrespecting a mosque in the Sherqilla village of Ghizer. *See Freedom of thought, conscience and religion*

Cases concerning the rights of PLWDs remained in limbo during 2022. For instance, a hostel intended for use by PLWDs as a special education complex continued to be illegally occupied by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) despite the GB chief court issuing orders for its evacuation. Special provisions for remissions in registration and tuition fees, as well as transport and accommodations for PLWDs, have also not been implemented in KIU along the lines of HEC policy.

Internally displaced persons

IDPs from Rondu and Attabad continued to face hurdles in their rehabilitation, education of their children and access to healthcare. The 2022 floods unfortunately led to an increase in the number of IDPs awaiting rehabilitation and resettlement.

Protests by flood-affected people also took place in November in which demonstrators claimed that the authorities had not paid heed to their rehabilitation and access to healthcare. This was reported by Fida



IDPs from Rondu and Attabad continued to face hurdles in their rehabilitation, education of their children and access to healthcare.

Hussain, a social activist from Rondu. Those affected by the Kargil war also await their rehabilitation—they can neither return to their villages near the Pakistan-India border due to landmines, nor have they been given appropriate compensation.

In welcome news, work on a model village for IDPs of the 2022 floods is under process in Buber. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved this on 2 September after his visit to Buber, a village badly affected by the floods.



Land rights

While land disputes between the government and local communities have been a persistent issue over the past five years, these disputes resurfaced during 2022 amid the absence of land reforms or policies enacted in GB regarding barren land.

A clash occurred between residents of Nagar colony, Konodas, and the residents of Gilgit after the GB government issued a notification banning land acquisition by non-locals on 28 January. After the clash in Nagar colony, the local magistrate confiscated the land on 31 January.

A dispute on Dong Das between Nagar and Ganish, Hunza, became critical when a mob from Nagar attacked the funeral procession of a notable person from Ganish in Dong Das on 28 March. The dead body, which had been buried in a Ganish-owned graveyard in Dong Das, was allegedly thrown onto the road.

An FIR was registered against ten religious and political leaders from Nagar in Aliabad police station, but no arrests were made. The residents of Ganish protested on the Karakoram Highway for 24 hours with the dead body, only ending their protest when a prominent religious leader from Gilgit intervened. This incident was brought to HRCP's notice through a complaint as well in a fact-finding mission in Aliabad in June.

A longstanding border dispute between KP and GB at Basha re-emerged on 10 August, six months after it was resolved, following a demarcation of the land by the Kohistan local administration and a jirga. One of the parties to the dispute, the Thor tribe from Diamer, came forward to reject this demarcation on the grounds that they were not taken into confidence.¹³ Boundary issues at Shandur and Babuser between GB and KP also remained unresolved in 2022.

Other land disputes in Sakwar (Gilgit), Chilmish Das (Gilgit), Maqpoon Das (Gilgit), Konodas (Gilgit), Barmus (Gilgit), and in some parts of Diamer and Baltistan remain in the courts.

Education

On 7 November at midnight, a girls' school in Darel Barogi, a remote area in Diamer, was burnt down. An FIR was registered against unknown persons but the culprits were not arrested.¹⁴ Otherwise, girls' education has seen significant improvement in GB, with new reforms introduced by the government such as the establishment of libraries and computer laboratories in girls' schools, a separate pink bus service for women, and the establishment of a women's sports complex in Gilgit.

Health

There is a shortage of specialist doctors and medical equipment in GB, due to which people are forced to seek medical treatment outside the region. Access to mental healthcare is even more scarce since there is no fully-fledged mental health facility in the region. There is also no forensic lab or medico-legal expert available which hinders the processing of medical evidence for crimes.

Drug trafficking has also increased in GB, but no concrete steps for rehabilitation have been taken by the government, barring some initiatives taken by local police. According to one survey conducted by locals in the Ishkoman valley of Ghizer, there are 144 addicts in the valley. These locals have demanded a rehabilitation centre be built in Ishkoman, but to no avail. In fact, the entire region of GB does not have any rehabilitation or treatment centres for addicts.

Housing and public amenities

The number of unregistered settlement in GB is increasing, particularly on the peripheries of the river belt, in the upper areas of Gilgit and Skardu, and in other towns of GB including Ghakuch, Chilas. This can be attributed to the increase in the number of IDPs in 2022 as a result of the Rondu earthquake and the floods.

Environment

The adverse effects of climate change were keenly felt in GB during 2022. Already vulnerable to climate-induced disasters, GB experienced a significant increase in glacial lake outburst floods, landslides and earthquakes which impacted people's rights to life, livelihood, housing, food and health.

According to the GBDMA, the floods from June to August damaged 640 houses completely and 450 partially, and vastly damaged infrastructure and agricultural land. Seventeen people died and six people were reportedly injured. Apart from economic losses, these disasters also affected mental health, particularly of vulnerable groups such as women, children, PLWDs and elderly citizens. The disaster also displaced many people, worsening GB's already existing IDP issue.

In the last week of September, underground soundwaves in Gulmit, Gojal, were detected by local people – the same geological activities had been detected before the 2010 Attabad disaster. However, the government has yet to conduct any geological survey to identify the cause of these activities.

Environmental pollution also remains a significant issue in GB. The government had banned construction on the river belt, but illegal

construction in that area has led to water pollution, particularly in Gilgit, Phander, Astore, Diamer, Skardu and other parts of GB. A lack of effective laws and policies for responsible tourism has also contributed to rampant pollution of lakes and rivers.

On 14 December, the GB government banned the manufacture, import, use and purchase of polythene bags under its plastic-free GB project. Directives were also issued to the Environmental Protection Agency for the implementation of this project.

Culture

GB has a rich diversity of cultures with seven languages spoken in different parts. However, attempts to promote and preserve these cultures and languages were scarce. Notably, the culture department of GB remained dysfunctional in 2022, and an academy for the promotion of local languages announced by the previous government also remained pending during the year. A member of the committee has said that the development of curriculums in local languages has made significant progress, which is welcome news.

Endnotes

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Human rights legislation in 2022

This appendix outlines selected laws passed in 2022 that pertain to human rights.

Ordinances

- The Elections (Amendment) Ordinance 2022 provides ample opportunities to parties to project their manifestos and exercise freedom of expression.

Federal legislation

- The Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2022 provides protection against harassment, gender discrimination and hostile workplace environments for women.
- The Juvenile Justice System (Amendment) Act 2022 amends the Juvenile Justice System Act 2018.
- The Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection (Amendment) Act 2022 amends the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Act 2018.
- The National Commission on the Rights of Child (Amendment) Act 2022 amends the National Commission on the Rights of Child Act 2017.
- The Allied Health Council Act 2022 makes provisions for the establishment of the Allied Health Professionals Council.
- The Elections (Amendment) Act 2022 further amends the Elections Act 2017 to assess the feasibility of overseas and electronic voting.
- The National Accountability (Amendment) Act 2022 further amends the National Accountability Ordinance 1999.
- The International Institute of Science, Arts and Technology Act 2022 provides for the establishment of the Institute of Science, Arts and Technology.
- The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act 2022 omits Section 325 from the Pakistan Penal Code 1860, effectively abolishing punishment for attempted suicide.

- The Children (Pledging of Labour) (Amendment) Act 2022 amends the Children (Pledging of Labour) Act 1933, to enhance the punishment for parents and guardians who pledge a child’s labour and employers that hire them.
- The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act 2022 prevents and criminalises custodial torture and death in line with Pakistan’s obligations under the United Nations Convention Against Torture.
- The Dyslexia Special Measures Act 2022 provides special measures for the education of children suffering from dyslexia and/or associated disorders.
- The Islamabad Capital Territory Domestic Workers Act 2022 regulates the employment of domestic workers in Islamabad by prohibiting underage employment, ensuring the minimum wage and ensuring minimum health standards.
- The Railways (Amendment) Act 2022 removes the death penalty as a prescribed punishment for ‘sabotage of the railways’.
- The Control of Narcotic Substances (Amendment) Act 2022 removes the death penalty as a prescribed punishment for drug-related offences.

Provincial legislation

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act 2022 provides for the protection of children from trafficking and sexual abuse.
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Fortification Act 2022 addresses and alleviates nutritional deficiencies through food fortification.
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Universal Health Coverage Act 2022 provides health facilities to all residents of the province.
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Control of Narcotics Substances (Amendment) Act 2022 further amends the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Control of Narcotic Substances Act 2019.
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Deserving Artists Welfare Fund Act 2022 provides funds to artists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for the promotion of arts.
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Urban Areas Development Authorities (Amendment) Act 2022 further amends the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Urban Areas Development Authorities Act 2020.

- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Occupational Safety and Health Act 2022 promotes safe and healthy working environments by protecting workers from the risks of occupational hazards.
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Environmental Protection (Amendment) Act 2022 introduces a ban on certain plastic products, changes the functioning of environmental protection tribunals and amends punishments.
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Forest (Amendment) Act 2022 inserts new clauses around conservation management and sustainable forestry in the province.

Sindh

- The Sindh Students Union Act 2022 activates an effective system to provide for the establishment of students unions and regulating them in Sindh.
- The Sindh Public Service Commission Act 2022 repeals, with certain modifications, and re-enacts the Sindh Act 1989.
- The Sindh Reproductive Healthcare Rights (Amendment) Act 2022 amends the earlier 2019 act and enhances reproductive healthcare provision by introducing marital counselling, telehealth and greater information dissemination.
- The Sindh Healthcare Service Providers and Facilities (Prevention of Violence and Damage to Property) Act 2021 (tabled in 2021, passed in August 2022) provides protection to and prohibits violence against healthcare service providers, and prevents damage or loss to property in healthcare service facilities or to those mandated for the provision of healthcare services.
- The Sindh Civil Servants (Amendment) Act 2021 (tabled in 2021, passed in July 2022) introduces a 0.5 percent employment quota for transgender persons at pay scale 15 and below.

Balochistan

- The Balochistan Home Based Workers Act 2022 formulates a law for the protection of home-based workers' rights and gives equal treatment to home-based workers at the workplace and their dependents in the event of sickness, maternity, employment, injury or death.
- The Balochistan Workers Welfare Fund Act 2022 provides for the execution of workers' welfare schemes. The fund will provide for workers' housing, education, skill development and loans.

- The Balochistan Maternity Benefit Act 2022 provides safeguards to working women during maternity with cash maternity benefits and employment security.
- The Balochistan Forest Act 2022 provides for the protection, conservation, management and sustainable development of forests, rangelands and other renewable natural resources in Balochistan.
- The Bibi Asmat Malik Memorial Hospital Khudabadan, Panjgur Act 2022 provides for the establishment of an effective system of service delivery at the Bibi Asmat Malik Memorial Hospital Khudabadan in Panjgur for the provision of secondary healthcare services.
- The Shaheed Nawabzada Sikandar Jan Zehri Memorial Hospital Act 2022 provides for the establishment of the Shaheed Nawabzada Sikandar Jan Zehri Memorial Hospital in Zehri for the provision of basic healthcare services to the people of the area.
- The Balochistan Charities Registration, Regulation and Facilitation (Amendment) Act 2022 amends the Balochistan Charities Registration, Regulation and Facilitation Act 2019.
- The University of Makran Act 2022 provides for the establishment of the University of Panjgur for dissemination of knowledge.
- The Balochistan Universities Act 2022 establishes and restructures public sector universities of Balochistan.
- The Balochistan Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2022 further amends the Balochistan Sea Fisheries Ordinance 1971.
- The Regulation of Mines and Oilfields and Mineral Development (Government Control) Amendment Act 2022 amends the Regulation of Mines and Oilfields and Mineral Development (Government Control) Act 1948.
- The Balochistan Arms Act 2022 regulates the manufacture, conversion, sale, transportation, bearing or possession of arms or ammunition in Balochistan.
- The Balochistan Companies Profits (Workers Participation) Act 2022 provides for the participation of workers in the profits of companies.
- The Balochistan Occupational Safety and Health Act 2022 makes provisions for occupational safety and health at all workplaces for the protection of persons at work against risk of injury arising out of activities at workplaces and for the promotion of safe, healthy and decent working environments.

- The Balochistan Workers Compensation Act 2022 provides for the payment by certain classes of employers to their workers of compensation for injury or death by accident.
- The Balochistan Employees’ Social Security Act 2022 introduces a scheme of social security for providing benefits to certain employees or their dependents in the event of sickness, maternity, employment, injury or death.

Punjab

- The Punjab Local Government Act 2022 reconstitutes local governments in Punjab and consolidates laws relating to the powers and functions of local governments.
- The Punjab Ehsaas Program Act 2022 provides for the establishment of the Punjab Ehsaas Programme as a new umbrella social protection and poverty alleviation programme to develop new programmes and reform, reorganise and consolidate existing initiatives for poverty alleviation and social protection in Punjab.
- The University of Kamalia Act 2022 provides for the establishment of the said university.
- The Salar International University Act 2021 (tabled in 2021, passed in January 2022) provides for the establishment of the said university.
- The University of Arts and Sciences Act 2021 (tabled in 2021, passed in January 2022) provides for the establishment of the said university in the private sector.

Legislation by administrative regions

Azad Jammu and Kashmir

- The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Regulation of the Services of Certain Categories of Contractual, Ad-hoc or Temporary Government Employment (Terms and Conditions) (Repeal) Act 2022 repeals the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Regulations of the Services of Certain Categories of Contractual, Ad-Hoc and Temporary Employment Act 2021.

Gilgit-Baltistan

- The Gilgit Baltistan Commission on the Status of Women Act 2021 (tabled in 2021, passed in June 2022) provides for the constitution of the Commission on the Status of Women in Gilgit-Baltistan.

- The Gilgit-Baltistan Senior Citizens Welfare Act 2021 (tabled in 2021, passed in June 2022) makes provisions for the welfare of senior citizens of Gilgit-Baltistan.
- The Gilgit-Baltistan Food Act 2022 recognises the right to and regulates provisions for access to food.



HRCP activities

Workshops, seminars, meetings and press briefings

January

- 5 January, Peshawar: One-day training workshop on access to citizenship for itinerant workers.
- 5 January, Karachi: Meeting with print and electronic media editors on promoting inclusive reporting trends in the media.
- 6 January, Lahore: Mobilisation meeting on the government's response to the smog crisis in Punjab.
- 7 January, Lahore: Training workshop for journalists on access to citizenship.
- 9 January, Lahore: Mobilisation meeting of student activists on the role of social media as a tool for furthering collective action.
- 15 January, Karachi: Training session on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a means of local community outreach in Malir.
- 24 January, Lahore: National conference held online on access to citizenship for itinerant workers.
- 29 January, Hyderabad: Consultation with transgender persons, persons with disabilities and representatives of religious minorities on participation in local government.

February

- 7-9 February, Karachi: Training session on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a means of local community outreach in District East.
- 15 February, Lahore: Launch of I. A. Rehman Research Grant report titled *Rethinking PECA: How cybercrime laws are weaponized against women*.
- 25 February, Islamabad: Meeting of HRCP's working group on freedom of peaceful assembly.

March

- 2 March, Karachi: Roundtable on the crises in higher education and the way forward at the University of Karachi.
- 4 March, Karachi: Meeting on the Sindh Local Government Act 2013, with women and youth from Kemari.

- 4 March, Islamabad: Presentation by HRCP member Amjad Nazeer on key findings of an analysis of the Single National Curriculum.
- 5 March, Quetta: Workshop on the Transgender Persons (Protection and Rights) Act 2018 and its implementation in Balochistan.
- 8 March, Hyderabad: Meeting on the marginalisation and vulnerability of women from religious minorities and the role of human rights defenders in addressing this challenge.
- 8 March, Turbat: To mark International Women's Day, HRCP Turbat collaborated with various civil society organisations to arrange a seminar at Mullah Fazil Hall.
- 8 March, Gilgit: Joint charter of demands for equality presented to the Gilgit-Baltistan government on International Women's day in conjunction with the Soni Jawari Center for Public Policy.
- 8 March, Gilgit: Awareness session on the rights of women living with disabilities in collaboration with the Coalition for Inclusive Pakistan.
- 8 March, Multan: Seminar on International Women's Day in collaboration with Bahauddin Zakariya University.
- 8 March, Multan: Press conference at Multan Press Club on the state of human rights in South Punjab.
- 11 March, Lahore: Condolence reference for former chairperson Dr Mehdi Hassan.
- 28 March, Gilgit: Group discussion conducted by Legal Aid Society in collaboration with civil society and HRCP GB. Participants discussed alternate dispute resolution, existing practices, venues and future opportunities.
- 29 March, Karachi: Book launch ceremony of *Marxism or Aaj ki Duniya*.

April

- 1 April, Hyderabad: Condolence reference for former chairperson Dr Mehdi Hassan.
- 8 April, Karachi: Consultative meeting with civil society organisations, labour unions, academia, students and journalists to discuss the socio-political situation of the state and the way forward.
- 12 April, Lahore: Memorial reference on the death anniversary of I.A. Rehman.

May

- 28 May, Multan: Discussion with the transgender community on the 2018 Transgender Rights Protection Act.

- 31 May, Hyderabad: Memorial reference for senior member Lala Abdul Haleem Shaikh.

June

- 6 June, Gilgit: Awareness session on labour rights was conducted in Sost, Hunza.
- 6 June, Lahore: Preliminary meeting of HRCF's freedom of assembly working group with bar councils and key activists.
- 7 June, Islamabad: Meeting on engagement and dialogue with vulnerable labour groups, trade unions and associations.
- 13 June, Karachi: Policy dialogue with legislators, government officials and law enforcement officials on upholding the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- 16 June, Quetta: Outreach meeting on lack of implementation of the Balochistan Child Protection Act 2016 and the way forward.
- 20 June, Islamabad: Policy dialogue on upholding the right to freedom of peaceful assembly with HRCF's working group. This was followed by a press conference to launch a mapping study titled *Freedom of Peaceful Assembly in Pakistan: A Legislative Review*.
- 22 June 2022, Hyderabad: Civil society dialogue on water scarcity and other issues facing farmers in Sindh.
- 24 June, Quetta: Consultation to mark International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.
- 25 June, Gilgit: Policy dialogue on climate governance in GB was conducted.
- 25 June, Multan: Meeting with female teachers from private schools to discuss their issues.
- 26 June, Gilgit: Consultative meeting to mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture was conducted.
- 26 June, Islamabad: Meeting and discussion on the implementation of the UN Convention Against Torture to mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.
- 26 June, Peshawar: Meeting held to discuss and observe the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.
- 27 June, Lahore: Policy dialogue with members of civil society organisations, legislators and law enforcement officials on upholding the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- 29 June, Lahore: Awards ceremony to honour the winners of HRCF's photo-essay competition on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

- 29 June, Multan: Consultation in Vehari on harmful customary practices in South Punjab.
- 30 June, Gilgit: Consultative session on the increasing rate of suicides in Ghizer, in which an intervention action plan was designed and sent to the GB government.

July

- 7 July, Peshawar: Policy dialogue on violence against transgender persons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

August

- 1-3 August, Peshawar: Session in Swat on gender-based violence and meetings with different stakeholders.
- 5 August, Karachi: Reference for Council member Akhtar Baloch in collaboration with the Karachi Union of Journalists.
- 11 August, Islamabad: Stakeholder consultation on a draft provincial bill for transgender rights with transgender activists.
- 12 August, Gilgit: Youth Day was celebrated in collaboration with the Rahnuma Family Program.
- 17 August, Lahore: Awareness session in Sargodha on fundamental human rights.
- 21 August, Karachi: Outreach meeting with coastal communities in Korangi.
- 22 August, Faisalabad: Awareness session on the right to freedom of association.
- 27 August, Multan: Press conference to launch HRCP's fact-finding report titled South Punjab: Excluded, Exploited.
- 29 August, Islamabad: Consultation on the issue of enforced disappearances in Pakistan to mark the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances.
- 30 August, Gilgit: Consultative meeting to mark the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances.
- 30 August, Quetta: Civil society meeting to mark International Day against Enforced Disappearances.
- 30 August, Turbat: Event to mark the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances.
- 30 August, Peshawar: Session to observe the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances.

- 30 August, Karachi: Meeting on the plight of women in families affected by enforced disappearances to commemorate the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances.
- 31 August, Islamabad: National conference titled ‘Electoral Reforms: Making Elections Credible’.

September

- 1 September, Multan: Press conference to condemn public hospitals for depriving flood victims of proper medical treatment.
- 2 September, Lahore: Public meeting with civil society on Pakistan’s political, economic and climate crises.
- 15 September, Islamabad: Meeting between Society for Human Rights and Prisoners’ Aid (SHARP) and Afghan refugees regarding the challenges refugees face in the registration process with SHARP and UNHCR.
- 18 September, Gilgit: Awareness session in Skardu on the role of civil society in the promotion of human rights.
- 19 September, Gilgit: Awareness session in Khaplu on the role of civil society in the promotion of human rights.
- 21 September, Lahore: Awareness session in Sialkot on fundamental human rights.
- 22 September, Islamabad: Awareness session on labour rights of media workers.
- 26 September, Quetta: Mobilisation meeting to discuss the vulnerability of poor and marginalised communities during natural disasters.
- 27 September, Bahawalpur: Mobilisation meeting with human rights defenders in Bahawalpur to discuss vulnerability in the aftermath of floods in South Punjab.
- 27 September, Islamabad: Dialogue with vulnerable labour groups, trade unions and associations in ICT.
- 27 September, Hyderabad: Discussion on the floods crisis in Sindh held at the Hyderabad Press Club.
- 28 September, Multan: Mobilisation meeting with transgender activists to discuss rights violations against transgender persons.
- 30 September, Gilgit: Awareness session was conducted on the role of civil society in the promotion of human rights.
- 30 September, Islamabad: Mobilisation and engagement with HRDs through outreach at Rawalpindi press club to raise awareness of GBV and human rights.

October

- 1 October, Hyderabad: Awareness-raising discussion on rights violations against women, peasants and religious minorities in Matiari.
- 1 October, Multan: Joint press conference with transgender activists in Multan Press Club to discuss the disinformation campaign regarding the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018.
- 3 October, Peshawar: Mobilisation meetings in Mardan on challenges to human rights defenders.
- 5 October, Lahore: Mobilisation meeting in Faisalabad to discuss challenges to human rights defenders.
- 6 October, Hyderabad: Mobilisation meeting on the impact of the floods on women held in Nawabshah.
- 7 October, Lahore: Policy dialogue with transgender activists, legislators and civil society organisation representatives to discuss provincial transgender rights legislation.
- 10 October, Quetta: Consultation to mark World Day against the Death Penalty.
- 10 October, Turbat: Event and a demonstration to mark World Day Against the Death Penalty.
- 10 October, Islamabad: Meeting to mark World Day Against the Death Penalty at HRCP office.
- 10 October, Gilgit: Consultative session to mark World Day Against the Death Penalty.
- 10 October, Multan: Discussion with members from civil society to mark World Day Against the Death Penalty.
- 10 October, Karachi: Meeting with human rights defenders to mark World Day Against the Death Penalty.
- 10 October, Hyderabad: Discussion at regional office and demonstration to mark World Day Against the Death Penalty at Hyderabad Press Club.
- 11 October, Karachi: Mobilisation meeting with human rights defenders to discuss the impact of the floods crisis on women in Sindh.
- 11 October, Lahore: Workshop on fact-finding mission protocols with HRCP chairperson Hina Jilani.
- 13 October, Islamabad: Roundtable discussion on the issues faced by Afghan refugees/ migrants living in Pakistan.
- 15 October, Karachi: Consultation in Badin on charting a way forward after the floods crisis in Sindh.

- 31 October, Gilgit: Outreach meeting on land rights in Gilgit Baltistan was conducted with more than 26 stakeholders, including affectees of development projects.

November

- 2 November, Islamabad: Lobbying meeting and consultative dialogue among members of civil society and subject experts regarding the social media rules 2020.
- 8 November, Karachi: Consultation meeting for restoration of student unions at Karachi Press Club.
- 10 November, Gilgit: Consultation on rehabilitation of flood-affected persons in Gilgit-Baltistan.
- 10 November, Khuzdar: Outreach meeting on farmer’s issues at Khuzdar Press Club.
- 10 November, Lahore: Meeting with student activists for the Students Solidarity March.
- 14 November, Hyderabad: Consultation on public health challenges and food security threats in flood affected areas in Sukkur division at Sukkur Press Club.
- 15 November, Peshawar: Consultation on the challenges to securing trans rights in KP.
- 15 November, Karachi: Outreach meeting with women fisherfolk at Mahigeer Vocational Centre.
- 16 November, Multan: Consultation on the role of law enforcement agencies in curbing GBV in South Punjab, held in D G Khan.
- 16 November, Hyderabad: Consultation on the rehabilitation of flood-affected persons in Sindh at Hyderabad Press Club.
- 19 November, Peshawar: Consultation on World Children’s Day.
- 21 November, Gilgit: Consultation in connection with World Children’s Day.
- 21 November, Quetta: Meeting to mark World Children’s Day.
- 21 November, Lahore: Consultation on World Children’s Day.
- 21 November, Multan: Consultation on World Children’s Day.
- 21 November, Karachi: Consultation on World Children’s Day.
- 21 November, Hyderabad: Consultation on World Children’s Day.

- 23 November, Islamabad: National conference titled 'Local Government: The challenges to devolution and a way forward'.
- 24 November, Quetta: Press conference to launch the fact-finding Report 'Beneath the Surface: Rights Violations in Balochistan Coal Mines at Quetta Press Club'.
- 28 November, Karachi: Awareness session on GBV for female college students.
- 29 November, Quetta: Policy dialogue on rights violations in Balochistan's coal mines held at Quetta Serena Hotel.
- 30 November, Gilgit: Awareness session on GBV in Fatima Jinnah Girls Degree college Gilgit in connection with 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. More than 200 students attended the event.
- 30 November, Lahore: Awareness session on GBV for female college students.

December

- 1-2 December, Karachi: Workshop on human rights and advocacy for human rights defenders.
- 3 December, Islamabad: Event organised in partnership with the Potohar Mental Health Association to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities, titled 'Transformative Solutions for Inclusive Development'.
- 3 December, Quetta: Awareness session on GBV at Government Girls College Jinnah Town Quetta as part of a campaign for 16 days of activism against GBV.
- 5 December, Islamabad: Awareness session at Islamic International University Islamabad as part of a campaign for 16 days of activism against GBV.
- 5 December, Peshawar: Awareness session on GBV for female college students
- 7 December, Islamabad: National roundtable on climate justice titled 'Building a New Social Contract in the Aftermath of the 2022 Floods'.
- 10 December, Karachi: Seminar celebrating 74 years of the UDHR.
- 12-13 December, Quetta: Training workshop at Quetta Press Club on fact-finding methods, advocacy and security of human rights defenders from Turbat, Khuzdar, Loralai, Nushki, Killa Siah Ullah and Quetta.
- 14 December, Islamabad: Outreach meeting on GBV with Islamabad based lawyers and members of the local bar association at Islamabad Hotel.
- 15 December. Quetta: Outreach meeting in Nushki on women's participation in the political process at Nushki Press Club.

- 16 December, Karachi: Consultation on the Sindh Students Union Act.
- 17-18 December, Lahore: National workshop for human rights defenders in Dorab Patel Auditorium.
- 19-20 December, Lahore: Workshop on human rights and advocacy for human rights defenders.
- 22-23 December, Islamabad: Training workshop on fact-finding methods, advocacy and security of human rights defenders from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Skardu, Gilgit, Mardan and Peshawar.
- 26-27 December, Lahore: Workshop on human rights and advocacy for civil society groups.
- 28 December, Peshawar: Awareness session on women's right to inheritance in DI Khan.
- 29-30 December, Islamabad: Training workshop at Islamabad hotel on advocacy and security for civil society members from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Skardu, Gilgit, Mardan, Peshawar and Swabi.
- 30 December, Lahore: Training-of-trainers workshop for the Punjab police on principles of human rights.

Fact-finding missions and observation missions

- 14 February: Observation mission to assess the state of freedom of assembly at the Kissan Ittehad Rally.
- 3 March: Observation mission on the state of freedom of assembly at the all-Pakistan WAPDA Hydro Electric Workers Union's (CBA) protest.
- 4 March Fact-finding mission on textile workers in South Punjab.
- 8 March, Islamabad: Observation mission on the situation of freedom of assembly at a march rally by PPP against the incompetence of the incumbent government and its policies that resulted in the economic crisis in the country.
- 11 March, Peshawar: Observation mission on the state of freedom of assembly at a protest in response to the deadly attack against the Shia community at their mosque in a congested neighbourhood in central Peshawar.
- 27 March, Islamabad: Observation mission on the situation of freedom of assembly at the PTI rally at parade ground Islamabad to highlight their performance and achievements in their present government.
- 28 March, Islamabad: Observation mission on the situation of freedom of assembly at the Mehngai March by political opposition parties.

- 19 April, Karachi: Observation mission on the situation of freedom of assembly for a civil society protest demanding justice for Nazim Jokhio at Karachi press club.
- 11 May, Hyderabad: Observation mission on the state of freedom of assembly at a protest land occupation by a nexus of land grabbers and law enforcement agencies.
- 4-9 June, Gilgit: Fact-finding mission to assess the overall human rights situation in GB.
- 16 July, Hyderabad: Fact-finding mission to investigate the murder of Bilal Kaka in Hyderabad, which subsequently stoked ethnic conflict.
- 15-20 September, Peshawar: Reactive fact-finding mission on the attack on transgender persons in Peshawar.
- 10 October, Gilgit: Case-study interview conducted for a fact-finding mission on the floods crisis of a young woman who was internally displaced due to the disaster.
- 10-16 October, Turbat: Fact-finding mission to Gwadar, Turbat, Panjgur and Quetta to assess the overall human rights situation.

Demonstrations, rallies and visits in solidarity

January

- 18 January, Turbat 2022: Protest organised by the Justice for Shahina Shaheen Committee that comprised HRCP Regional Office Turbat, Haq Do Tehreek District Ketch, BSO and BSO Pujar.
- 24 January, Karachi: Demonstration to urge the local authorities to resolve water theft and shortages in Orangi Town.
- 28 January, Karachi: An HRCP delegation visited the missing persons camp held to protest the alleged abduction of Rahmat Ullah Pitafi.

February

- 5 February, Karachi: Visited Bishop Fredric John of Trinity Church to show solidarity after the Peshawar bomb blast and discuss the state of minorities in Sindh.
- 12 February, Hyderabad: Visit to Sikandar Abad District Jamshoro for plantation.
- 14 February, Hyderabad: Demonstration against murder of Nawab Wali Muhammad in Nawab shah.

- 16 February, Hyderabad: Field visit at Hoosri Hari Camp, District Hyderabad
- 21 February, Hyderabad: Visit to Sikandar Abad District Jamshoro for land mafia.
- 26 February, Hyderabad: Visit to Sikandar Abad Hari Camp Kotri District Jamshoro
- 28 February, Hyderabad: Demonstration with community-based organisation Pireh Tarqiati Tanzeem at Hyderabad's rural areas.
- 28 February, Hyderabad: Protest against women's rights violations at Hyderabad organised by Rapid Response Network Hyderabad.

March

- 8 March, Hyderabad: Participation in Aurat March 2022 joint rally with Women's Action Forum.
- 18 March, Karachi: Participated in the Holi festival to show solidarity with the Hindu community at Soldier Bazar Mandir.

April

- 19 April, Turbat: Participated in the protest rally organised by Haq Do Tehreek-e-Balochistan (Movement for Rights of Balochistan) against the closure of the Pak-Iran border and the Chaghi incident, in which seven persons, including the driver, were martyred and eight others were seriously injured due to the firing of the security forces.
- 20 April, Turbat: HRCP delegation participated in the protest rally against the Chaghi incident.
- 20 April, Turbat: HRCP delegation participated in a protest held in front of Press Club Turbat in collaboration with National Party and BSO Pujar against the Chaghi incident.

May

- 3 May, Turbat: On the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, a rally under the auspices of Baloch Solidarity Committee for the recovery of missing persons was taken out from Press Club Turbat.
- 18 May, Turbat: HRCP Turbat participated in a protest rally organised by different sections of civil society against the forcible abduction of Noor Jan Fazl and registration of antiterrorism charges.

June

- 18 June, Turbat: An HRCP delegation participated in a protest against the continued practice of enforced disappearances in Balochistan.
- 26 June, Karachi: Demonstration in front of Karachi Press Club to commemorate International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.
- 26 June, Karachi: An HRCP delegation met families of missing MQM workers to express solidarity.
- 26 June, Turbat: On the eve of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, a meeting and a demonstration to condemn the ongoing torture of detainees during detention and to demand legal action against those state officials found involved in this heinous offence.
- 26 June, Hyderabad: Discussion and demonstration to mark International Day in Support of Victims of Torture held at Hyderabad Press Club.
- 26 June, Multan: Demonstration in front of Multan Press Club to mark International Day in Support of Victims of Torture
- 28 June, Turbat: Protest rally at Turbat Chowk against enforced disappearances and to demand the safe recovery of those who were picked up.

July

- 2 July, Turbat: An HRCP delegation visited Kech Culture Center, Turbat, and received briefings about ongoing art-related activities in the centre.
- 3 July, Karachi: An HRCP delegation met nine families of Shia missing persons at Rizvia Colony to express solidarity.
- 13 July, Turbat: Protest rally for the safe recovery of Dr Jamil Baloch who was forcibly disappeared from Barkhan.
- 14 July, Karachi: An HRCP delegation met Pashtun activists and former MNA Ali Wazir to express solidarity.
- 16 July, Turbat: A demonstration rally was held to protest shelling by the Frontier Corps in Tump, in which several women and children were injured.
- 23 July, Turbat: An HRCP delegation participated in a protest rally which was held to condemn the killings of nine Baloch in a suspicious encounter in Ziarat.

August

- 30 August, Multan: Demonstration in front of Multan Press Club to mark International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances.
- 30 August, Karachi: Meeting on the plight of women in families affected by enforced disappearances to commemorate the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances. Protest in collaboration with Voice of Missing Persons, Voice of Baloch Missing Persons, Shia Missing Persons, Karachi Baloch Yakjehti Committee and Sindh Sujagi Forum.
- 30 August, Hyderabad: Discussion and demonstration to mark International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances at Hyderabad Press Club.

September

- 21 September, Quetta: Rally to mark International Day of Peace in front of Quetta Press Club.
- 26 September, Karachi: An HRCP delegation met Karachi's administrator and visited a flood rehabilitation camp at SFE School, Sabzi Mandi, to address issues faced by flood victims.

October

- 2 October, Turbat: Rally and public meeting on the first death anniversary of Rameez Khalil who was killed one year ago during an illegal operation of security forces.
- 8 October, Turbat: An HRCP delegation, along with several political leaders and journalists, visited the Balochistan Academy to express solidarity over a land dispute.



HRCP stands

Social media

Rule of law

16 April: Today's outbreak of violence in the Punjab Assembly was an affront to democracy, decency and the decorum that voters expect from the people they elect. HRCP strongly condemns all those who assaulted the speaker and other members of the assembly, and who incited violence from the wings. This must never be repeated on any political forums.

25 July: HRCP supports the Supreme Court Bar Association's demand for the Supreme Court of Pakistan to constitute a full bench to hear its review petition concerning Article 63A. It is critical for Pakistan that the court not be seen as anything less than nonpartisan and impartial.

Enforcement of law

4 January: HRCP welcomes the Supreme Court's recent direction instructing the inspector general of police in Sindh to submit a report on a 23-year-old case filed by bonded labour activist Munnu Bheel, whose parents, wife and four children were abducted in 1998, allegedly by a local landlord in an attempt to coerce him into silence. Munnu Bheel's missing family members were never recovered and the case has lain dormant since 2015. The Suddle Commission, on whose request the direction was issued, has also asked for a detailed report on the matter. Munnu Bheel remains a staunch activist against bonded labour and deserves answers. HRCP also urges the Sindh government to take note of this case and initiate progressive schemes that empower Scheduled Castes economically as well as politically.

8 January: HRCP mourns the deaths of at least 22 tourists, including 10 children, after they were stranded in heavy snowfall in Murree in the absence of an early warning system and subsequent traffic regulation by the authorities. That the government failed to rescue them in time reflects poor governance and warrants an immediate inquiry.

26 January: We welcome the Lahore High Court's judgement declaring the Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project unlawful on the grounds that it has violated the Land Acquisition Act 1893. The civil society actors who challenged this project in the court and – along with HRCP – argued that the project would deprive local farmers of their land and livelihood, have served the public interest well.

We hope this sets a precedent for ensuring that people's fundamental rights are not violated in the interests of questionable development projects.

29 January: Rehmat-ul-Allah Patafi, a student at Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto University of Law in Karachi, was abducted from his home on 24 January by law

enforcement personnel. His whereabouts remain unknown. There are disturbing reports that he has been detained arbitrarily for speaking up against extrajudicial killings on social media. Mr Patafi must be released immediately.

11 February: HRCP condemns the attack against progressive political leader Tariq Shehzad in Okara, several of whose relatives were badly injured during the assault. Mr Shehzad has also been falsely implicated in several cases as a means of intimidation by his attackers allegedly over a property dispute. We urge the Okara police to investigate immediately and provide Mr Shehzad and his family with protection.

13 February: HRCP is outraged to learn that six people, including a police officer, were killed and at least eight badly injured in Shaheed Benazirabad when members of the Zardari clan allegedly opened fire on members of the Bhand clan over an ongoing land dispute. The case is in court and such violent tactics are intolerable. The Sindh government must hold a high-level enquiry to publicly identify and punish the perpetrators in accordance with the law.

4 March: The cases lodged against elected MNA Mohsin Dawar, lawyer Imaan Mazari-Hazir and scores of Baloch students and supporters—reportedly on grounds of criminal conspiracy, rioting and sedition—are a **travesty**. Many of the protestors were also assaulted by the police at the site. It is unfathomable that the state chooses to persecute with impunity those who are asking for nothing more than the truth about enforced disappearances: a grim sign that we are inching closer to the makings of a police state.

4 March: HRCP condemns in the strongest possible terms today's suicide blast at a Peshawar mosque, in which at least 30 persons were killed. The assault was clearly intended to target Shia worshippers and bears the hallmarks of sectarian outfits that have been allowed to run amok in recent years. Every concession—political or otherwise—made to religious or sectarian extremism emboldens perpetrators for whom the right to life (much less the right to freedom of religion or belief) holds no meaning. We express our deepest condolences to all those who have lost family and friends in this attack.

8 March: HRCP demands the immediate and safe recovery of Kaleemullah Cheema, an activist of the Punjab National Movement, who was disappeared on 27 February 2022 from Bahria Town, Lahore, by unknown people. Enforced disappearances of political workers and dissenters must stop immediately.

1 April: HRCP welcomes the remarks made by the IHC CJ on enforced disappearances. Hearing journalist Mudassar Naru's case, he observed that enforced disappearances amount to treason and are not acceptable in a country that follows the Constitution. HRCP demands that the authorities immediately recover all missing persons from across Pakistan and put an end to this inhuman and illegal practice.

3 April: HRCP strongly warns the federal government to refrain from resorting to any unconstitutional measures to prevent members of Parliament from attending Sunday's National Assembly session at which a no confidence motion against the Prime Minister is expected to be held. Equally, state institutions have no right to interfere in what is a parliamentary process. In neither case have such moves resolved or even allayed Pakistan's chronic troubles as a fledgling democracy. The media must remain free to report and analyse the proceedings

fairly and independently. We also condemn threats to journalists who have commented - as is their job - on the questionable behavior of Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government in recent days.

7 April: HRCP welcomes the unanimous Supreme Court judgment restoring the national assembly and calling for the vote of no confidence to be held. It was critical for the court not to compromise on any aspect of respect for, and compliance with, the Constitution. This decision will have a long-term effect in terms of strengthening constitutional democracy. Equally, we urge all political actors, and especially the restored federal government, to renew their commitment to democratic values and to put the needs and rights of ordinary citizens before narrow political interests.

15 May: HRCP strongly condemns the murder of two Sikh men, who were gunned down in Peshawar. This is not the first time that the Sikh community in KP has been targeted and we demand that the KP police identify and arrest the perpetrators promptly. The government must make it clear that violence against religious minorities will not be tolerated.

21 May: HRCP condemns the arrest and manhandling of senior PTI leader Shireen Mazari. Her arrest smacks of political victimisation, which has regrettably become an entrenched practice and is deplorable no matter which party is the perpetrator. Dr Mazari is entitled to due process and the incident must be investigated immediately.

24 May: HRCP is gravely concerned by the escalating political polarisation in the country, particularly in Punjab. To have raided the homes of PTI leaders and supporters early this morning, including a raid on the home of retired justice Nasira Iqbal – merely because her son is a PTI senator – was deplorable. HRCP strongly condemns the murder of a police constable at a PTI activist's home in Lahore during a similar operation. Any incitement to violence in the name of freedom of assembly or movement is equally intolerable. More than ever, Pakistan's people need political negotiation, not toxic narratives, if they are to get through this difficult time.

25 May: HRCP is deeply concerned at the highhandedness of law enforcement agencies in disrupting the PTI's march to Islamabad. We believe that all citizens and all political parties have every right to assemble and protest peacefully. The state's overreaction has triggered, more than it has prevented, violence on the streets. The onus is on the government and opposition leadership to adopt a mature, democratic response and immediately begin a dialogue to end the impasse.

4 June: HRCP is deeply concerned by the prime minister's decision to task the ISI officially with screening civil servants before inductions, appointments and postings. Even if this practice was already in place, it goes against democratic norms. The role of the military in civilian affairs needs to recede if Pakistan is to move forward as a democracy.

13 June: HRCP strongly condemns the forcible disappearance of Aaj News correspondent Nafees Naem by plainclothes men in Nazimabad, and demands his immediate release. Journalists must not be threatened or harmed for discharging their duties, and the perpetrators must be held accountable.

20 June: HRCP condemns the recent spate of violence that has left six people dead in North Waziristan, including four young activists of an organisation that advocates peace in the region, and another two gunned down in South Waziristan. We demand that the KP government bring the culprits to justice promptly and restore peace to the restive newly merged districts.

25 June: HRCP demands the immediate release of activist Arsalan Khan who was allegedly picked up by the Rangers in Karachi. His whereabouts are presently unknown. Such illegal abductions and detentions are condemnable. The state must end the practice of enforced disappearances. This incident follows upon the activist's support for the families of missing MQM party workers in Karachi who have been demanding the recovery of their loved ones. HRCP demands that the state also release the missing party workers and hold all perpetrators accountable.

8 August: HRCP is alarmed by the rise in incidents of terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in which precious lives have been lost and communities left traumatized. The state must align its actual policy with its stated policy of curbing terrorism. The government must act decisively to ensure the right to life and liberty of all citizens.

17 August: HRCP is concerned at the decision to send PTI leader Shahbaz Gill to physical remand in what is effectively a political case. Any allegations that he was mistreated while on remand should also be investigated fairly and transparently.

8 September: The arbitrary detention and alleged custodial torture of a man and his teenage son by the Sindh Police – merely for having taken part in a residents' protest in North Nazimabad – must be roundly condemned. HRCP demands that the police officials concerned be held accountable.

9 September: The assault on HRCP member Jowdud Syed allegedly by Jamiat students at Bahauddin Zakariya University must be strongly condemned. Universities should be nurtured as spaces for critical thinking and peaceful dissent. We urge the administration to investigate this incident and hold the perpetrators accountable.

14 September: HRCP is alarmed by the discovery of three dead bodies of MQM political workers, found in different parts of Sindh over the last two days. Allegedly, all three were forcibly disappeared more than five years ago. The failure of the state to protect their right to life and to due process must be strongly condemned. Any disappearances and extrajudicial killings anywhere in Pakistan must cease immediately and the perpetrators brought to book.

17 September: The fresh wave of militancy in Swat is cause for serious concern. With at least 8 people killed allegedly by the TTP in the last week alone. Swat's residents have rightly demanded that the state take immediate steps to restore peace in the region. Law Enforcement Personnel must be properly equipped to tackle militant threats. At the same time, the state must implement the National Action Plan as KP's residents have borne the brunt of militancy long enough. Swat's residents have rightly demanded that the state take immediate steps to restore peace in the region. Law Enforcement Personnel must be properly equipped to tackle militant threats.

25 September: The continued judicial harassment of activist Prof. M. Ismail and his wife is a travesty. For over three years, they have been subjected to raids of their home, fabricated cases and restrictions on their freedom of movement with the elderly Prof. Ismail forced to serve jail time despite ill health. The state must stop this persecution immediately and guarantee their safety and constitutional freedoms.

30 September: HRCF is alarmed to learn that former MQM MPA Nisar Panhwar has still not been produced in front of a court (after he was taken into custody by the Rangers on 30 August) despite a petition filed in the Sindh High Court. We remain concerned for his safety while in custody, given the dubious record of security agencies, and demand that Mr Panhwar be produced in front of the court without further delay.

10 October: HRCF strongly condemns the terrorist attack on a school bus in Swat, in which the driver was killed and a young girl injured. Swat's residents are right to hold the security forces responsible for failing to enforce the writ of the state. It was callous and short-sighted to have downplayed the threat from militants, given residents' growing protests and calls for security. While the perpetrators must be brought to book promptly, the state must also stop ceding space to extremists - a lesson it has consistently failed to learn at the expense of its people.

3 November: The attack on PTI chief Imran Khan in Wazirabad – which has also left several others injured – must be unequivocally condemned. All political parties have the right to hold peaceful assemblies and to expect security from the state when doing so. The incident must be investigated swiftly and transparently, and the perpetrators brought to book. It is also vital that this incident not be allowed to derail the democratic process at a time when the country so desperately needs political certainty.

3 November: HRCF is alarmed by the instigations to mob violence following the attack on PTI chief Imran Khan. Calls for revenge and 'war' by senior PTI leaders serve no purpose and contravene democratic processes and the rule of law. All political leaders and workers must remain calm and rational, and allow the law to take its course.

10 November: HRCF is alarmed to hear that a young PTI worker was reportedly killed and his brother injured over political differences in Mardan. In a protest against the incident, the residents of Siar Dara have called for the immediate arrest of the perpetrators. HRCF calls for a swift, impartial investigation into the matter.

20 November: HRCF strongly condemns the targeted attacks on two lawyers in KP in the last several days. Advocate Razaullah was shot at point-blank range in Peshawar on 16 November and seriously injured, while Sajid Wasim Khattak was gunned down by unidentified persons near a police check post in Chapri Jalwazai on his way back from court. The perpetrators must be brought to book swiftly. We express our condolences with the lawyers' families and with KP's legal community.

30 November: HRCF strongly condemns the blast in Quetta, which has left at least

3 people dead, including a child, and 23 injured. It is unacceptable for nonstate actors to continue targeting civilians and law enforcement personnel with impunity. The state must take swift and concerted action.

30 November: HRCP is alarmed to learn that KP Assembly MPA Sardar Hussain Babak has received death threats from militants in the area. With the TTP's announcement of an end to the ceasefire, HRCP is now seriously concerned about the prospects for peace in the country. Ordinary citizens will bear the brunt of the fallout. The government must provide its lawmakers with security and double its efforts to suppress militancy while ensuring that this does not become grounds for extralegal measures.

30 December: HRCP is concerned to learn that the government has not yet announced compensation for the families of 19 people killed in a gas cylinder explosion in Lasbela on 19 December. The fact that most of the victims were reportedly young unemployed people makes it imperative that their families receive immediate assistance. Moreover, rules preventing gas cylinder shops to be located in densely populated areas must be enforced.

Fundamental freedoms

17 January: HRCP strongly opposes the imposition of Section 144 in Sann, in the district of Jamshoro, to prevent people from gathering to mark Sindhi nationalist leader G M Syed's birth anniversary today. Characteristically, the authorities have resorted to 'anti-state' labels to justify this decision. Moreover, the prevention of Covid-19, while undoubtedly critical, continues to be used arbitrarily to curb freedom of peaceful assembly.

19 January: The cases registered against over 50 Sindhi nationalists who had gathered in Sann, Jamshoro, to commemorate G M Syed's birth anniversary are yet another sign of a state that cannot bear any form of dissent. Once again, the 'anti-state' card has been played. Among those charged with sedition is Sarang Joyo, who was forcibly disappeared in 2020. HRCP condemns this move and demands the charges be dropped immediately.

24 January: HRCP condemns the assassination of Capital TV journalist Hasnain Shah, who was killed in broad daylight on Davis Road, Lahore. This is yet another testament to the failing law-and-order situation and the increased vulnerability of journalists. We demand an immediate inquiry into the incident and stand in solidarity with the media community. We share the grief of Mr Shah's family and friends.

4 February: The ten-year-ban imposed by the Pakistan Hockey Federation on Olympian Rashid-ul-Hasan on the grounds that he had used 'abusive language' against the Prime Minister is absurd and unjust. Mr Hasan, who says he merely criticized the Prime Minister on a WhatsApp group, has broken no laws. Absurd as the ban is, it is yet another sign of increasing intolerance for freedom of expression and opinion.

7 February: HRCP is appalled to learn that some 45 Ahmadiyya graves were desecrated allegedly by the Hafizabad police in Premkot on 4 and 5 February, following complaints from a local resident who objected to the community's use of holy verses on its tombstones. Worryingly, such acts are becoming almost routine, leaving members of the Ahmadiyya community as beleaguered in death

as they are in life. The desecration of graves is an affront to human dignity and must not be permitted. If the government is sincere in its bid to make Pakistan a more inclusive society, it must counter and punish all such acts.

10 February: HRCP wholeheartedly supports the ongoing students' sit-in outside the Punjab Assembly and calls on the government to lift the ban on student unions immediately. Every student has the right to engage in peaceful political activity and it is unconstitutional, not to mention absurd, that students should have to sign affidavits to the contrary. We are also gravely concerned at recent incidents involving the enforced disappearance of several Baloch and Pashtun students, all of whom must be recovered promptly and the perpetrators held to account.

13 February: The ruthlessness with which the Mian Channu mob lynched its hapless victim—which included wresting him away from police custody—illustrates all too well that allegations of blasphemy have long gone beyond a law and order problem. It is simply not enough to say that the government has a 'zero-tolerance' policy towards such perpetrators when its own minister brushed aside a similar incident as a case of 'high emotions'. The state has consistently pandered to political and religious groups that have never had any qualms about encouraging religious fanaticism. HRCP notes with grave concern a seeming uptick in mob vigilantism and warns the government that, if it does not push back against fanaticism on all fronts, it is ordinary citizens who will continue to pay the price.

14 February: HRCP welcomes the passage of the Sindh Students Union Bill which, after almost 40 years, will restore the constitutional right to freedom of association for students across the province. Having been denied this right for decades has hampered students' freedom of expression and opinion and created tightly controlled campuses to the detriment of critical thinking. We congratulate the Sindh government and provincial assembly and, above all, the thousands of students who have fought long and hard for the revival of student unions. We also urge the other provincial governments to follow this example.

20 February: HRCP deplores the proposed laws that will increase the jail term for online criticism of the state by citizens from two to five years, and make it a non-bailable offence. Not only is this legislation undemocratic, but it will also inevitably be used to clamp down on dissenters and critics of the government and state institutions. All government and state functionaries are reminded that they are accountable to citizens as elected representatives and public servants, respectively. It is their job to heed criticism. With other problematic laws in place to counter defamation, the proposed ordinance must be rolled back immediately.

6 March: HRCP is appalled to learn that the Lahore city administration has refused to provide security to this year's Aurat March, knowing perfectly well that participants and organisers alike remain targets of violence. Indeed, the state's failure to eliminate violence against women and trans persons is one of the many reasons to hold the march itself. The marchers' right to freedom of peaceful assembly is one that the state is constitutionally bound to protect and promote. They must be provided the security they need.

17 March: HRCP is revolted by politician Shahbaz Gill's crass choice of words for his colleague Ramesh Kumar on national television. What should have been a

civilised debate on a politically critical issue crumbled into a litany of abuse. This in no way represents freedom of expression and anchor Kamran Shahid should not have brushed the abuse aside as 'Mr Gill's temper'. With the media already hemmed in on so many fronts, we cannot afford to let the office of the editor and anchor become bait rather than direction.

30 March: HRCP is horrified by the cold-blooded murder of a woman by 3 female seminary colleagues in D I Khan on allegations of blasphemy. That the accused claim their allegations and subsequent action were based on a 13-year-old cousin's 'dream' is both frightening and incomprehensible. Both the federal and provincial governments need to acknowledge and tackle the recent increase in vigilante-led violence in the name of religion by taking a harder line against perpetrators and ceasing to internalise 'threats to faith' in their own political and social narratives

6 April: HRCP supports the ongoing protest of the Punjab Professors and Lecturers Association and demands that their terms of pay and service be restored and protected in accordance with the notification issued in 2009 and subsequent court rulings.

13 April: The recent wave of arrests and harassment of PTI supporters, allegedly for having been part of a 'smear' campaign against state institutions, must be condemned in no uncertain terms. All citizens, regardless of their political affiliation, enjoy the right to freedom of expression and opinion. The new government must not follow in the footsteps of the previous one and should ensure that entrenched curbs on this fundamental right are dissolved once and for all.

19 April: HRCP welcomes the government's decision to suspend the establishment of the controversial Pakistan Media Development Authority, disband the problematic Digital Media Wing, and carry out a review of PECA. The review must be done in consultation with all stakeholders and with a view to protecting and promoting freedom of expression, including, importantly, the right to dissent and the right to information.

25 April: The political narrative should centre on protecting people's civil, economic and social rights and ensuring vastly better service delivery. HRCP deplores the weaponisation of religion in political discourse. Former human rights minister Shireen Mazari's comments accusing finance advisor Miftah Ismail of 'trying to ridicule basic Islamic concepts' was neither warranted nor constructive and tantamount to inciting violence, given unfortunate ground realities.

1 May: The cases registered against senior PTI leaders under S. 295-A must be withdrawn immediately. No government or political party can afford to allow allegations of blasphemy to be weaponised against its rivals.

18 May: The brutal murder of an Ahmadi man in Okara, who was reportedly stabbed to death by a seminary student, serves to remind us just how precarious the lives of religious minorities have become. Until the rising tide of religiosity is stemmed and better protection mechanisms put in place, they will remain lesser citizens. This is unacceptable and the perpetrators must be brought to book.

25 May: HRCP is seriously concerned by the continuing harassment of Baloch students and activists—including women—in Karachi, following the suicide attack by a Baloch woman last month. We continue to receive reports of Baloch students being illegally detained without charge for days at a time, their whereabouts undisclosed to friends and family. Students have complained about being harassed continually by state agencies, their possessions confiscated and their right to protest denied. HRCP reiterates strongly that the legitimate grievances of the Baloch people cannot be addressed by continuing to make them feel like aliens in their own country.

31 May: HRCP is deeply concerned by a statement issued by the Islamabad Bar Association dissociating itself from lawyer Imaan Mazari-Hazir after an FIR was registered against her on the grounds of ‘defaming’ the military. We condemn the FIR because we believe Ms Mazari-Hazir is being targeted for her bold views on the role of state agencies in muzzling political dissent and using enforced disappearances to intimidate students, journalists and human rights defenders. Her work as a human rights lawyer and activist is hardly anti-state ‘incitement’, it is simply what human rights lawyers and activists do. The FIR against Ms Mazari-Hazir must be withdrawn immediately.

1 July: HRCP condemns the assault on senior journalist and former parliamentarian Ayaz Amir by unknown persons. We see it as another cowardly act intended to silence independent voices. HRCP demands an investigation and those found responsible for this act must be brought to book.

4 July: HRCP condemns the police raid on journalist Rana Abrar Khalid’s home in Rajanpur, following his investigation last year into former prime minister Imran Khan’s use of public funds and tosha khana. Both the federal and Punjab governments must take serious note of this incident and desist from intimidating journalists through such means.

24 July: HRCP is perturbed by the seeming rise in mob-led violence, with a suspected robber recently beaten by a crowd in Karachi and then shot dead. While this is symptomatic of the increasing brutalization of society and easy availability of firearms, it is also underpinned by spiralling poverty and people’s disillusionment with the rule of law. We urge the provincial and federal governments and police to take special measures, including strategic deployment of trained personnel, to ensure that such incidents do not recur.

29 July: HRCP stands in solidarity with rain and flood victims across Pakistan amid the loss of life and property of the most vulnerable citizens. The absence of an early warning system, the authorities’ apathy and the limited effectiveness of the NDMA and PDMA is a major cause for concern. The victims should be immediately rehabilitated and compensated for their losses.

1 August: HRCP strongly opposes the Punjab government’s move to update Form II of the *nikah nama*, making it compulsory for couples to sign a declaration of their belief in the finality of Prophethood. Such a declaration is already mandatory when acquiring identity documents and should not be necessary at this stage. HRCP is also concerned that such a provision panders to the right wing and could be used to incite violence against religious minorities if misused. The practical purpose of a *nikah nama* is to establish that both parties are

contracting a marriage freely and to protect women's right to divorce. It is not to establish an individual's religious beliefs, which are a private matter and protected by Article 20 of the constitution.

1 August: HRCP strongly condemns a PML-Q leader's call to have the local Ahmadiyya community evicted from Khushab and their security withdrawn on the grounds that they should be restricted to Chenab Nagar. The ghettoisation of this long-persecuted community must cease immediately. No authority has the right to dictate where any citizen chooses to live. The state is under a constitutional responsibility to protect the Ahmadiyya community's right to life, to live where they choose and to profess their faith safely. Of equal concern is the incitement to violence implicit in the PML-Q leader's demand. He must withdraw this notice immediately.

9 August: HRCP strongly opposes the disruptions to ARY News. PEMRA must refrain from arbitrarily taking channels off the air and protect all media houses' right to freedom of expression, responsibly exercised.

11 August: On National Minorities Day, HRCP demands that the state protect all religious minorities from extremism and implement the 2014 Supreme Court Jilani judgement. Lynchings, forced conversions and misuse of the blasphemy laws persist. The state must pay heed to acts of violence against religious minorities and act now – and decisively.

20 August: The Ahmadiyya community continues to be targeted with ferocious regularity. A man was stabbed and killed at a bus stop in Rabwah allegedly for not raising a religious slogan. In another incident in Sahiwal, an Ahmadi man was assaulted reportedly because the plaque outside his home commemorating his soldier father read 'shaheed'. HRCP strongly condemns these incidents and demands not only that the perpetrators be held accountable, but also that the state roll back the right-wing religiosity that has gripped Pakistan - and is responsible for such violence - before it is too late.

1 September: HRCP supports the striking teachers in Quetta and their demand for a government notification to be issued regularising their employment. Many of them have been on a hunger strike outside the press club for the last 30 days; several have been hospitalised. Their demands must be given a fair hearing, especially given the economic crisis in the country and spiralling inflation.

11 September: HRCP demands the immediate release of ailing political prisoner and sitting MNA Ali Wazir, who has been incarcerated for almost two years. We also urge National Assembly speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf to intervene to ensure that Mr Wazir is provided appropriate medical treatment without any further delay.

14 September: The charges filed against senior journalist Waqar Satti under the blasphemy and defamation laws are a means of intimidating him – and, by extension, other journalists – into silence. The Punjab government has abused its authority by allowing the complainant, who is associated with PTI minister Muhammad Basharat Raja, to file this FIR, knowing full well that such charges can incite violence. This is especially problematic given that the PTI has recently accused its political rivals of using 'the religion card' against its leader Imran Khan. The FIR against Mr Satti must be withdrawn and he should be allowed to carry out his professional duties safely.

30 September: HRCP condemns the continued harassment of Dawn journalist Mohammad Hussain Khan, who has been publicly vilified in Hyderabad for reporting on alleged irregularities in the Liaquat University Hospital administration (currently under investigation by the Sindh government). Journalists must not be intimidated into silence for doing their jobs. HRCP reiterates that press freedom must be respected at all times.

7 October: HRCP condemns the police brutality against protesting government school teachers in front of the KP provincial assembly in Peshawar yesterday. Tear-gassed and baton-charged, the protesters were merely demanding pay-scale upgrades and better pensions - labour rights too often ignored in this sector. The FIRs registered against the protestors must be revoked, and their demands must be heard fairly.

24 October: A long, grim record of violent tactics to silence journalists explain why the reported murder of journalist Arshad Sharif in Kenya has sent shock waves through the journalist community. The govt must pursue an immediate, transparent inquiry into the circumstances of his death. We express our condolences to his family, friends and colleagues.

25 October: HRCP condemns the FIR filed against PTM chief Manzoor Pashteen and 20 other unidentified persons on charges of sedition and terrorism, after he criticised the military during a speech at the Asma Jahangir Conference in Lahore. The timing of this FIR suggests that it is an attempt to warn others against holding state agencies accountable for their transgressions. This is cause for concern: HRCP believes that all citizens have the right to express their opinions and demand answers from any institution or agency accused of human rights violations. The FIR must be withdrawn immediately and the use of this tactic stopped.

7 November: HRCP takes strong exception to the FIR registered against four student rights' activists on grounds of abetting mutiny and inciting mob violence, after a rally organised by the Progressive Youth Alliance in Karachi on 2 November. This appears to be a disproportionate response on the part of law enforcement personnel. The FIR should be withdrawn promptly. Moreover, Sections 131 and 153 of the PPC must not be arbitrarily applied to prevent people from assembling peacefully and exercising their right to freedom of expression.

11 November: HRCP condemns the use of force against protesting health workers, incl. women, in Karachi, who were reportedly manhandled and detained by the police. The detained protestors must be released immediately and the health minister must heed their demand for a health risk allowance.

13 November: HRCP condemns the government's decision to withdraw its certification of the film *Joyland* a week before the film was due to be released in Pakistan. To do so on flimsy grounds of 'decency and morality' given the film's subject, is not only rabidly transphobic, but also violates the film producers' right to freedom of expression. Pakistan's audiences have the right to decide what they will watch. This is not for the government to determine.

14 November: HRCP condemns the State Bank of Pakistan's alleged harassment of workers, especially members of the SBP officers' association. In a seeming attempt to undermine workers' right to unionise, members of the association

have been arbitrarily transferred, dismissed and issued show-cause notices. HRCP demands an impartial inquiry into the matter. The SBP must respect and uphold its employees' constitutional right to freedom of association.

28 November: HRCP deplors the FIA's refusal to let MNA Mohsin Dawar travel to Tajikistan for a security dialogue even though his name was removed from the ECL in October. Mr Dawar is a citizen and an elected parliamentarian whose right to freedom of movement should not be arbitrarily curtailed. The FIA must be held to account and Mr Dawar allowed to travel overseas unhindered.

11 December: The recent desecration of an Ahmadi worship place in Gujranwala by law enforcement personnel, according to the Ahmadiyya community, is not only a grave violation of their fundamental rights but also contravenes the very spirit of the Supreme Court's 2014 Tasadduq Jilani judgement. The state's failure to protect its Ahmadi citizens from persecution is no less concerning. Its participation and complicity in this persecution demands an immediate inquiry followed by redressal.

Rights of the disadvantaged

10 February: While we welcome the Sindh High Court's direction summoning the Mirpurkhas police on the alleged kidnapping and gang-rape of two young women (one of them a minor) by a rival clan, we would remind the Sindh government that such violence is a pattern, not an isolated incident, and warrants far greater attention to women's security. That the incident was reportedly triggered by a clan feud and the perpetrators included no fewer than 20 men, is a stark reminder that women remain easy targets of collective reprisal.

15 March: HRCP strongly condemns the malevolent attack on five trans persons in Mansehra, four of whom remain critically injured. Although the attacker who opened fire on them has since been arrested, we need to ask why - as a trans representative reportedly said - KP seems to have become a 'red zone' for trans persons. The KP government's recently announced trans rights policy needs to start by securing the community's right to life and security.

21 May: Imran Khan's vile remarks about Maryam Nawaz Sharif at the PTI's Multan rally have plumbed the depths of misogyny. It is simply unacceptable that the political narrative should crumble into such glaring intolerance and sexism. Mr Khan is a national leader. He must learn to conduct national conversations with his political rivals. He owes an apology not just to Ms Sharif but to all women.

31 May: HRCP is concerned to learn that four Afghan nationals have been arrested by the KP police under the Foreigners Act 1946; the court has ordered they be deported. We have reason to believe that these people - all four of them artists - face significant threats from the Taliban government in Kabul. We urge the Foreign Office and UNHCR to take up their case and issue them the documents needed to remain in Pakistan.

25 June: HRCP is shocked to learn about the vile treatment meted out to trans rights activist Nayyab Ali by Ramna police station officers. HRCP urges the state to provide protection for Nayyab, who has already suffered attempts on her life before, and hold the perpetrators accountable.

8 July: The recent deaths of at least eight miners in Jhimpir, Thatta, who were killed as a result of rain-induced flooding onsite, is a grim reminder of the vulnerability of labour in this sector. Tragically, these appear to have been avoidable deaths. The Sindh government as well as the mine owner and contractor must be held to account for not implementing occupational health and safety standards as required by law.

16 July: A jirga in Salarzai, Bajaur, has banned women from visiting tourist sites and generally being seen in the company of men. It has also warned the administration that, if the latter does not enforce the ban, the jirga will. We strongly condemn this decision. Not only does it violate women's constitutional right to freedom of movement, but it also shows that male-centric jirgas continue to control every aspect of women's lives in many parts of Pakistan. The district administration must hold its ground and ensure that anyone caught attempting to restrict women's movement is brought to book.

3 December: On International Day of Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWDs), HRCP calls on the state to strengthen measures to integrate them with the mainstream population. This includes conducting a countrywide census of PLWDs, better budgetary allocations for their welfare, due representation in legislative and policymaking bodies, accessible buildings and access to digital information.

27 December: HRCP is appalled to learn that a Peshawar High Court bench has acquitted a man convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for life for having raped a vocally and hearing-impaired woman. The acquittal was announced last week on the basis of a 'compromise' marriage between the two. Rape is a non-compoundable offence that cannot be resolved through any such feeble compromise; the verdict is therefore a gross violation of law and a miscarriage of justice. HRCP urges the state to appeal the ruling and uphold its commitment to women's rights.

Social and economic rights

12 May: HRCP expresses grave concern at the unfolding water crisis in Cholistan, Sukkur and Pirkoh, Dera Bugti, where the lack of potable water has put thousands of lives and livelihoods at risk. While the government must provide immediate relief in these areas, it is now critical that the right to clean water be recognised and protected by tackling the climate emergency at every level of government and society.

9 July: HRCP congratulates Farida Shaheed on being appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. In an area sorely neglected by states, particularly in the Global South, she brings decades of experience and insight to the role.

1 October: HRCP stands in solidarity with farmers and supports their demand for rationalising prices of power and agriculture inputs on the eve of the Rabi cropping season. Pakistan is on the verge of a major food crisis after the devastating floods. If farmers are not supported and incentivised by the government, the situation will further deteriorate.

18 October: HRCP is alarmed by the incessant harassment of Baloch and Pashtun

students at Punjab University. PEDM chair Riaz Khan, who was taken into custody arbitrarily (allegedly for having tried to organize a Pashtun cultural event) must be released immediately. Not only must law enforcement and state agencies cease this ethnic profiling, but the university authorities - who have a duty of care to their students - must also support the student body and protect their right to education in a secure environment that is conducive to learning amid diversity.

20 October: HRCF notes with concern that certain educational institutions continue to prohibit their students from speaking in their mother tongue on campus, including, most recently, a school in Akora Khattak, which has prohibited its students from speaking Pashto. This attitude to language is a colonial hangover and infringes on people's right to participate freely in the cultural life of their community under Art. 27 of the UDHR. HRCF stands for accepting mother tongues as national languages and using them as mediums of instruction in schools.

10 November: HRCF is shocked by the recent arson attack on a girls' school in Diامر. Noting that this tactic has been used by extremist elements before, we urge the federal and Gilgit-Baltistan governments to ensure that every child's right to education is protected by providing security where required in the short term, investing in school premises, facilities and trained teachers, and taking every measure to curb extremist elements threatening not only girls' education but also women's freedom of expression and assembly.

Loss of fellow human rights defenders

11 February: On her fourth death anniversary, we at HRCF remember our co-founder Asma Jahangir not just for her courage and prescience as a tireless defender of human rights, but also for her irrepressible spirit, her mirth and her boundless empathy. It is this that renews our commitment to carrying forward her legacy as we strive to reclaim our space as citizens, women, students, peasants, workers, and all those relegated to the margins.

17 March: HRCF is saddened to learn that former AGP Qazi Muhammad Jamil, who also served as our second vice-chair in KP, passed away in Lahore on Tuesday. An upright judge and fine lawyer, his dignity, intelligence and grace of character shall be missed.

15 April: The loss of Bilqis Edhi will be felt keenly by all those in Pakistan who value compassion and humanity over differences in class, gender and faith. Her services gave the most vulnerable women and children in Pakistan what the state and society did not -- a second chance.

25 May: HRCF is deeply saddened to hear that senior journalist Talat Aslam has passed away. He will be remembered for his wit and warmth, and for mentoring scores of young journalists. Our deepest condolences to his family, friends and The News International colleagues.

23 June: HRCF mourns the passing of Noor Naz Agha, its former council member, leading human rights defender and lawyer. It is yet another loss to the rights movement, particularly in Sindh. We share the grief of her family and friends.

25 July: HRCP mourns the loss of political activist Tahir Khan Hazara who passed away on Sunday. His tireless efforts to uplift the Hazaras and other marginalized communities, and his legacy of speaking truth to power will continue to inspire generations of activists.

31 July: HRCP is deeply grieved to have lost its Council member Akhtar Baloch earlier today. He was a highly respected journalist and writer and an authority on Karachi's political dynamics and cultural heritage. A long-time activist, Mr Baloch was a coordinator for HRCP's network of core human rights defenders in Sindh. His funeral prayers will be held after zuhr at Faqeer Masjid, Garden West, Karachi. Our deepest condolences to his family and numerous friends.

29 September: In the passing of AWP president Yousaf Masti Khan, the country has lost not only a veteran political leader, but also an unwavering human rights defender who was not afraid to hold the state accountable for its transgressions, especially in Balochistan. Mr Khan, who was also an active HRCP volunteer, was an important part of national left-wing politics and used this platform to demand that people's civil, political and economic rights be protected, most recently as part of the popular protests in Gwadar last year.

International peace and human rights

10 May: HRCP extends its warmest congratulations to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), which turned 100 today. As a long-standing member, we are proud to have partnered with FIDH on key fact-finding missions, research and advocacy in Pakistan. We have also built valuable human rights connections across Asia through the organisation's federative model and remain committed to its ideals of dignity, liberty and justice for all.

29 May: HRCP strongly urges the NCHR and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to pursue the case of Mohammad Waris, a Pakistani national who, after spending 19 years in an Indian prison, was acquitted on all but one charge, and officially released. However, he has spent another three years in a police lockup, waiting to be repatriated and now faces a new trial. This is a gross miscarriage of justice. Mr Waris is especially vulnerable as a foreign national and clearly meets the criteria for repatriation. He must be released and sent back to Pakistan immediately. HRCP urges both the Indian and Pakistani governments to work towards a fairer mechanism for providing cross-border prisoners quicker access to consular services and repatriation in accordance with their 2008 agreement.

19 August: HRCP stands in solidarity with Al-Haq and five other Palestinian rights groups whose offices in Ramallah were stormed by Israeli forces yesterday. This is a blatant attempt to clamp down on independent voices where they are needed most. We strongly condemn this suppression.

Press statements

Rule of law

Government reference on 63-A seeks to manipulate constitutional process

25 March 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is deeply

concerned by the situation that has developed in the wake of the no-confidence motion moved by the opposition parties against the Prime Minister. It is regrettable that a process that is well within the ambit of the Constitution—and clearly defined in it—has been made controversial and the basis for greater political polarisation in an attempt to trigger a constitutional crisis in the country.

HRCF firmly believes in constitutionalism and the primacy of the Parliament in undertaking processes within their domain. Measures to obstruct parliamentary functions and the smooth conclusion of a constitutional process are no less than attempts to derail the democratic process and deny people the benefit of their right to representative government. Both the government and the opposition are obliged to adhere to the rule of law defined by the Constitution.

Neither taking matters to be settled in Parliament to the streets, nor seeking the intervention of other institutions to determine the fate of a process that is within the parliamentary domain can be in the public interest. It is certainly no way of showing the respect that the institution of Parliament merits in a democratic dispensation. A show of disdain for parliamentary action permitted by the Constitution itself would be a measure for assessing any chief executive's commitment to democratic rule.

The consequence of defection of a member of the ruling party in the National Assembly is clearly spelt out in Article 63-A of the Constitution. Yet the government has sought interpretation of this constitutional clause in a reference submitted in the Supreme Court. In consonance with the position on the issue taken by most legal experts, HRCF believes that the legislature's intention in adding Article 63-A was to provide a specific consequence of defection—the loss of that parliamentarian's seat, not disqualification for life or indeed any other consequence that might jeopardise respect for the constitution, the supremacy of parliament and the fundamental rights of parliamentarians as elected members of the House. Any attempt to read more into the consequence of defection in the context of Article 63-A would be no less than rewriting the constitutional provision.

HRCF acknowledges and fully respects the mandate and authority of the Supreme Court to interpret constitutional provisions. It is also confident that the Court is able to discern an attempt by anyone to abuse the process of the Court and will effectively defeat any move intended to involve the Court in political controversies designed to obstruct a constitutional process.

Civil society remains indispensable to the democratic dispensation. It cannot be a silent spectator of events that could result in regressive long-term constitutional effects. HRCF is, therefore, under an obligation to draw public attention to the apprehensions foretold by the emerging crisis that threatens democracy, the rule of law and a peaceful political environment in the country, even if the success of the no-confidence move is dependent on the defection of people from the ruling party.

Federation must end GB's constitutional, political and economic deprivations: HRCP concludes fact-finding mission

8 June 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has concluded a high-profile fact-finding mission to Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), comprising Council members Salima Hashmi and Muzaffar Hussain, senior journalist Ghazi Salahuddin, and HRCP regional coordinator Israruddin. During its five-day visit to GB, the mission found that the human rights situation in the region had deteriorated, with political workers, rights activists, the legal fraternity and religious leadership expressing their disappointment at the federation's failure to integrate GB with the rest of the country. The groups that the mission consulted were of the view that GB should, at the very least, be granted provisional provincial status or, as a last option, granted a governance system similar to that of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

The political leadership that met the mission also demanded that GB be made part of the electoral reforms process being undertaken to ensure free and fair elections in this region. In addition, the fact that appointments to the higher judiciary are made by the prime minister puts a question mark over the independence, integrity and impartiality of the GB judiciary, eroding public confidence in the institution.

It is a matter of great concern that freedom of expression and peaceful assembly remain under threat in GB: rights campaigners, political workers and students continue to be charged under anti-terrorism and cybercrime laws, particularly Schedule IV.

Based on the evidence, the mission believes that the abolition of State Subject Rule has paved the way for exploitation of local natural resources by external private corporations and individuals not resident in GB. This has led to demographic changes in the region, to the consternation of residents, who also feel that GB is being excluded from development projects, primarily those being launched under CPEC. The mission is especially alarmed by the apparent surge in suicide cases in various parts of GB, particularly in district Ghizer. A large number of these victims comprise women and the mission has reason to believe that some cases of honour killings have been labelled suicide and thus 'forgotten'.

The mission is gravely concerned to learn that the victims of the 2010 Attabad Lake disaster have still not been compensated or rehabilitated. The glacial lake outburst floods that occurred recently on the Shishpar glacier have also uprooted over a dozen families with worrying allegations that a state-owned organisation may have diverted the flow of water towards the village to protect a resort.

During meetings with people affected by the Kargil War, the mission learnt that they had still not been compensated for the loss of their homes and livelihoods. Respondents alleged that the civilian and military authorities continued to shift responsibility onto each other for the redressal of their grievances. The victims also claimed that security forces had laid landmines in their area, preventing them from returning home.

A detailed report documenting the mission's findings and recommendations will be released as soon as possible.

HRCP calls for end to impunity for torture

25 June 2022: On this International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) reiterates its call upon the state to criminalise torture which is obligatory after the country's ratification of the Convention Against Torture in 2010. Neither a state of war, nor political instability nor an order from a superior authority justifies torture which hurts the very foundation of the rule of law.

While the Senate had passed the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Bill in 2021, HRCP regrets the fact that the bill has yet to be passed by the National Assembly. Such a marked delay in turning this bill into an act of legislation only sets us back further since the bill not only provides a comprehensive definition of torture that is lacking in the Pakistan Penal Code, but also empowers the National Commission for Human Rights to investigate cases of torture.

HRCP urges that the petition against internment centres, pending since 2019, be heard by the Supreme Court on priority basis, and that such legal systems that enable torture be dismantled and transformed. Allegations of custodial killings and torture in detention centres, police lockups and prisons abound; yet unfortunately, most instances of torture remain invisible. Torture is not only underreported but also difficult to prove in medical reports as has been noted in various credible studies carried out on the subject. Hence the complete impunity for torture.

Torture diminishes the victims, the system that allows it and ultimately the state itself. HRCP stands with the victims of torture, demands that the state provide reparations to them and hold the perpetrators strictly accountable to end this culture of torture and renew the trust between law enforcement agencies and citizens.

Pakistan must affirm its commitment to ending enforced disappearances

30 August 2022: On this International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) calls on the federal government to ensure that civil society stakeholders—especially from Balochistan, Sindh, South Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—are consulted while the Senate deliberates on the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill 2022. Any ambiguities that might make victims' families reluctant to report cases must be removed, including the provision that people found guilty of filing 'fake' petitions will be imprisoned for up to five years.

Additionally, there is a strong case to be made for introducing civilian oversight of the state agencies that are regularly implicated in cases of enforced disappearance. The Islamabad High Court has already stated in June 2022 that the state is obligated to trace missing persons once there is sufficient evidence, *prima facie*, to establish a case of enforced disappearance. The court has also held that the public functionaries responsible for protecting and tracing missing persons must be held accountable if they have failed in this duty.

This should underscore the gravity of the situation and the painfully slow progress Pakistan has made in redressing what is internationally considered a

crime against humanity. Pakistan must thus affirm its commitment to ending enforced disappearances by ratifying the Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Most recently, Faheem Baloch, a Karachi-based publisher and writer, was allegedly detained by uniformed police as well as ‘unidentified’ persons, with his family claiming that his whereabouts are still unknown. We demand that he be released immediately and his right to due process protected.

Capital punishment in Pakistan amounts to torture

10 October 2022: On this year’s World Day against the Death Penalty, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) reiterates its stance against capital punishment, not only on the grounds that the state’s duty is to protect the right to life, but also that the death penalty is incompatible with Pakistan’s international obligation to prohibit torture and the use of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

In a briefing note co-authored with the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), HRCP observes that the use of torture exists at all stages of the death penalty process: from the practice of custodial torture to coerce confessions from persons accused of capital crimes, to squalid conditions on death row – including the mental anguish of anticipating execution – to the act of execution by hanging itself. HRCP also notes that there is no official data on the incidence of botched executions in Pakistan and therefore no accountability. This represents a serious flaw in the criminal justice system.

Despite a welcome drop in the number of executions and death sentences since 2020, poor and vulnerable prisoners remain disproportionately likely to be sentenced to death. It is also a matter of grave concern that a wide range of offences that do not meet the threshold of ‘the most serious crimes’ still carry the death sentence.

HRCP demands that the state immediately establishes an official moratorium on executions and ensure that law enforcement who rely on torture to obtain evidence are held strictly accountable. The right to fair trial for those accused of capital crimes must also be respected, while conditions on death row, especially for persons accused of blasphemy, must be improved. HRCP also urges the government to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

HRCP has reservations about enforced disappearances bill

24 October 2022. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expresses reservations concerning the recently passed Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill 2022. While the amendment acknowledges the crime of enforced disappearance and defines this as the ‘unlawful or illegal deprivation of liberty by an agent of the state’, it does not address the need for a new legal architecture extending civilian oversight to these very agents. Such a provision is central to any effective legislation to curb enforced disappearances, given the thousands of allegations and testimonies that hold state agencies responsible for this practice.

Legislation to determine the mandate of state agencies such as the ISI is also necessary, given that it has claimed in front of the superior courts to have had 'lawful' authority to arrest persons accused of 'anti-state activities.' Additionally, the bill does not address the question of reparations to victims and their families nor does it address the accountability of perpetrators.

Enforced disappearances must be treated as a separate, autonomous crime. Any legislation to curb this practice must provide guarantees that anyone deprived of their liberty is kept in a fully authorised place of detention and victims, their families and witnesses provided protection in case of reprisals. Pakistan must also sign and ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

HRCP also believes that laws allowing the military to investigate and try civilians should be amended. It is no mere coincidence that human rights defender Idris Khattak—who was disappeared for eight months and then acknowledged by security agencies to be in their custody—was convicted under the Army Act 1952.

HRCP conference calls for constitutional amendment to protect local governments

23 November 2022: A national conference held by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in partnership with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF), has called for a constitutional amendment to protect the form and tenure of local governments and to ensure that fiscal decentralisation enables local bodies to carry out their functions effectively.

Introducing the conference, Birgit Lamm, head of the Pakistan office at FNF, said that local governments were 'schools of democracy'. HRCP's secretary-general Harris Khalique said that a strong democracy warranted effective, well-resourced local governments.

In the first session, Dr Umair Javed, assistant professor of politics and sociology at LUMS, explained that Article 140-A was an inadequate safeguard for local governments, adding that provincial governments' municipal and legislative responsibilities should be delinked. Lawyer Hamid Khan said that MPAs and MNAs had become 'unnecessary rivals' to local governments and recommended that development funds be given only to local bodies.

Fauzia Viqar, former chairperson of the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, emphasised that women's participation in local governments should not be tokenised. Dr Aziz Ahmad, professor of economics at BUITEMS, pointed to the 'asymmetry' between political and fiscal decentralisation, saying that the latter would help reduce gender and income disparities.

Speaking at the second session, Zafarullah Khan, chief executive of Ideas for Vision 2047, said that local governments should be able to make their own rules of business. Qazi Khizar, vice-chair of HRCP's Sindh chapter, said that marginalised groups such as trans persons and religious minorities should not be barred from direct election to local governments, even though the law provided for reserved seats.

PPP KP Assembly member Ahmad Kundi suggested introducing constitutional courts as a way to safeguard local governments. Supreme Court advocate

Mubeen Uddin Qazi underscored the need for a constitutional structure to protect their continuity, while Dr Nasrullah Khan, chief executive of the Centre for Peace and Development, said that a mechanism to oversee local governments' financial accountability and capacity building of local representatives was necessary.

Speaking at the third session, Attaullah Tarar, special assistant to the prime minister (PML-N), recommended legislation to ensure that all local government laws required a two-thirds majority in the provincial government so that local bodies were not easily suspended. ANP KP Assembly member Samar Haroon Bilour recommended that local elections should be held on a party basis so that constituents were aware of the broader political values of the representatives they were voting for.

Sibtal Haider Bukhari, in-charge of the PPP central secretariat, said that accurate voter lists were essential. MQM Sindh Assembly member Ali Khurshidi agreed, adding that the census should be rectified so that voter lists and delimitations were more accurate. Fatima Haider, a PTI party election committee member, said that constitutional cover was needed to prevent provincial assemblies from encroaching on local governments' functions.

Enforcement of law

Pashtun workers forcibly disappeared, HRCP demands release

2 February 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan is seriously concerned to learn that at least four Pashtun workers have been forcibly disappeared following the bomb blast that occurred in Anarkali, Lahore, on 20 January.

According to HRCP's sources, two persons were disappeared from near Lahore Railway Station on 22 January – it has taken almost ten days for their families or friends to file an FIR against the incident. Another Pashtun worker was disappeared after persons in civilian clothes raided his flat in the early hours of 26 January. Yet another Pashtun worker was forced to exit the rickshaw he was traveling in and taken away, again by persons in civilian clothing. No arrest warrants were issued and their friends and relatives have been unable to establish their whereabouts. In the latter two cases, the police have refused to issue an FIR.

This has become a worryingly familiar pattern, with four Baloch students similarly detained without charge during raids on 22 January in connection with the Anarkali blast and then released. We demand that all four be located and their right to physical integrity and dignity of person guaranteed. If they – or indeed anyone – are to be detained at all, then law enforcement personnel are duty-bound to follow procedure and clearly indicate on what charge they have been detained and where they are being held.

HRCP sounds alarm over enforced disappearances

17 February 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is alarmed by reports of a fresh wave of enforced disappearances in Balochistan and the rest of the country, including most recently, Hafeez Baloch, a

postgraduate student at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad. Mr Baloch was allegedly disappeared while in Khuzdar, where he volunteers at a local school. Reports suggest that he was abducted in front of his students. The sheer brazenness of this act underscores the increasing impunity accorded to perpetrators. Mr Baloch must be recovered immediately and the perpetrators identified and held accountable.

Regrettably, the government's earlier pledge to criminalise enforced disappearances continues to ring hollow. Two students at Balochistan University were allegedly disappeared last November, but an extended sit-in by students at the university was met with little more than vague assurances that they would be recovered.

HRCP is particularly concerned by the continuing shroud of silence over enforced disappearances in the province, which remains deliberately cut off from the mainstream media. The state must understand that it cannot expect to resolve the legitimate grievances of the Baloch people if it is not prepared to let these grievances see the light of day.

Sindh government must pursue Jokhio case

14 April 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expresses grave concern over the decision to exclude two sitting PPP lawmakers from the list of accused in the murder of Nazim Jokhio on grounds of lack of evidence. HRCP observes that this development follows closely on the heels of the pressure and isolation that Shireen Jokhio has cited as her reasons for 'forgiving' those accused of brutally torturing and murdering her husband last November. This seems an unlikely coincidence.

HRCP believes that Ms Jokhio's decision was certainly not voluntary and should not be considered legally acceptable. In the present political situation, this should be a test case for the Sindh government to show that it will put human rights and justice before short-term political interests. HRCP, which has been monitoring the Jokhio case closely, considers Nazim Jokhio a human rights defender (HRD) and insists that there should be no impunity for harm to any HRD in any circumstances.

HRCP slams security forces for treatment of drivers in Chagai

16 April 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is alarmed to learn that a driver was killed allegedly by security forces in Chagai near the Pakistan-Afghan border while attempting to speed away in his vehicle when told to stop. Extrajudicial killings are unacceptable regardless of the circumstances and the perpetrators must be identified and held accountable.

Additionally, scores of drivers transporting goods across the border were reportedly deprived of their vehicles by security forces and left to fend for themselves in the desert. Many of them have still not been accounted for. The incident reflects a coldblooded disdain for basic humanity and the right to life.

In a province that has been sorely neglected for decades, the callousness displayed by security forces towards residents continues unchecked. We strongly urge the provincial government to investigate this incident and ensure it does not recur.

IHC ruling, enforced disappearances committee positive steps

31 May 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) welcomes the Islamabad High Court's order holding previous and incumbent chief executives accountable for what the court has termed a 'tacit approval of the policy regarding enforced disappearances.'

It is critical—based on the overwhelming evidence—to expressly articulate the role of security agencies in using this practice to quell political dissent, deny ordinary citizens the right to due process, and generally build a climate of fear in the name of 'national security'. The court's order, if implemented in letter and spirit, may go some way in compensating for the failure of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED) to hold perpetrators accountable.

While the government's constitution of a seven-member committee to deliberate on a policy on enforced disappearances is also a positive step, any such policy must institute protection and compensation mechanisms for victims and their families. It must also clarify the mandate of security agencies, and commit to closing down internment centres and revoking the arbitrary powers available to state agencies under the KP Action (in Aid of Civil Powers) Ordinance 2019.

The 'missing' bill on enforced disappearances should be resurrected and deliberated on further, and the COIED replaced with a judicial commission with an effective and reputable chair. The committee must also lobby strongly for Pakistan to sign the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

HRCP stands with Baloch students and demands accountability

14 June 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) strongly condemns the recent cycle of abductions and manhandling of Baloch students from Karachi University. These students are allegedly being picked up by law enforcement personnel, and those who demand their release are roughed up and arrested. In the case of two students who have just been released after pressure from their kin and civil society, it is noteworthy that their whereabouts remained unknown until the time of their release. Such enforced disappearances are not only illegal but inhuman.

HRCP also expresses grave concern over the excessive use of force on 13 June by the Sindh police against the relatives, activists and friends of the disappeared students. These peaceful protesters, which included women and children, had gathered outside the Sindh assembly to demand the safe recovery of their loved ones, but were met with violence and forcibly dispersed by the police.

We reiterate our demand that enforced disappearances must be criminalised in line with International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Not only must this heinous practice be recognised as a distinct, autonomous offence and the perpetrators held strictly accountable, but the victims and their families must also be compensated for all they have suffered.

COIED chairperson must be removed if allegations proved

8 July 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) takes serious note of the allegation of sexual harassment against Justice (Retired) Javed Iqbal – chairman of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED) and former chairman of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) – as well as other NAB officials.

It is of grave concern to HRCP that these allegations were levelled by a woman who had approached Justice (Retired) Iqbal in his capacity as COIED chairman – a position in which he was responsible for protecting Ms Gul’s testimony and securing her right to seek justice for a missing relative.

Not only has Justice (Retired) Iqbal allegedly abused his office in two capacities, but he has also failed to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to answer these charges. The allegations against him and other public officials must be investigated with transparency and independence, and he should be removed from office if these allegations are proved. HRCP shall follow up this demand for investigation and the process in the Public Accounts Committee.

HRCP calls for end to ethnic tension in Sindh

15 July 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is increasingly concerned by the escalation in ethnic and political tension in Sindh, after a man was killed in Hyderabad following an altercation at a hotel.

HRCP calls for the murder to be investigated fairly and transparently and for the Sindh government to take steps to control crime and violence in the province. At the same time, it falls to the authorities as well as to all progressive voices in Pakistan to shun divisive or racist rhetoric. HRCP intends to conduct a fact-finding mission to ascertain the evidence surrounding the murder of Bilal Kaka and ensuing ethnic tension.

Concrete action needed to eradicate enforced disappearances

8 September 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) welcomes the recent meeting between the families of forcibly disappeared persons and interior minister, Rana Sanaullah, law minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, and poverty alleviation minister, Shazia Marri, in Quetta. While this was a positive development, HRCP firmly believes that expressions of solidarity alone can be no substitute for concrete action towards safely recovering victims of enforced disappearances. Such action, in turn, requires that the perpetrators be identified and held responsible through a transparent and effective mechanism.

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances remains a painfully inadequate mechanism for ensuring that victims receive justice. Given the poor record and controversies that dog its current chairman, HRCP demands that he be removed and the commission’s mandate strengthened to ensure its independence and integrity.

The Cabinet’s subcommittee on missing persons must make good on its promises and act swiftly to eradicate what is recognised internationally as a crime against humanity, in the first instance, by criminalising enforced disappearances.

HRCP dissatisfied with court ruling in Perveen Rehman case

21 November 2022. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expresses its dissatisfaction over the acquittal of all five persons accused of the murder of Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) director Perveen Rehman. Given the gravity of the crime and the substantial evidence on record, including an admissible confession by the principal accused, we believe that justice was not done.

HRCP is also concerned that the accused, once released, will pose a grave and imminent threat to Ms Rehman's family and her colleagues at OPP. We urge the Sindh government to detain the accused under the relevant laws and to provide her family, colleagues and legal team adequate security.

Ms Rehman's murder was the product of a system in which the rule of law is easily subverted and human rights defenders must risk their lives to merely do their jobs. Her family has waited over nine years to get justice. The Sindh government must file an immediate appeal against the honourable court's judgment, while the state as a whole should reflect on its ability to provide justice to victims of violence.

HRCP also expresses its continuing solidarity with Ms Rehman's family as they proceed to appeal against the verdict before the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Democratic participation

Foundation of electoral reforms should be right to participation

31 August 2022. A national conference held by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in partnership with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) has underscored the need for electoral reforms that protect the interests of vulnerable and marginalised groups while ensuring credible, transparent elections. Birgit Lamm, Pakistan head of FNF, said that citizens should be informed of their electoral rights and responsibilities, while HRCP secretary-general Harris Khalique pointed out that 'federalism and equal citizenship are key parts of the democratic process.'

Former PPP senator Farhatullah Babar felt that the credibility of elections had always been suspect because of the role of intelligence agencies, which 'should be brought within the ambit of the law and held accountable for transgressions.' Arshad Dad, former secretary-general of PTI, said it was important to move beyond 'the influence of money and biraderi in electoral politics.' Responding to his comment that voters should be 'educated' for the democratic process to be more effective, NDM chairman Mohsin Dawar contended that 'illiterate voters often have more political wisdom than those who hold PhDs.'

As part of the panel examining polling procedures and voter enfranchisement, NADRA chairperson Tariq Malik said that, even though NADRA had achieved over 96 percent registration, it was necessary to capture all remaining missing voters. PPP leader Taj Haider suggested that returning officers should post images of Form 45 to the ECP website for greater transparency of results.

Former NCSW chairperson Khawar Mumtaz recommended a 20 percent minimum requirement for women voters' turnout to give parties a greater stake in pushing for women's registration. Rashid Chaudhry of FAFEN said that polling stations should be no more than 1 kilometre from voters' area of residence. HRCPC Council member Husain Naqi added that no fair election could occur without an accurate census.

Analysing the quota system for vulnerable groups, former PCSW chairperson Fauzia Viqar said that 'affirmative action should be translated into mainstream participation.' Romana Bashir of the Peace and Development Foundation concurred, saying that religious minorities should have greater representation on parties' core committees. Information commissioner Zahid Abdullah underscored the need for an 'organic movement' to mainstream the electoral participation of persons living with disabilities.

Speaking on the electoral process in the context of 'fake news', senior journalist Suhail Warraich emphasised that reporting should remain bias-free, while former PFUJ president Shahzada Zulfiqar pointed out that, in the race for breaking news, the role of the editor had receded. Digital rights activist Usama Khilji explained that countering disinformation required greater digital literacy, a culture of fact-checking in media houses, and social media codes of conduct for political parties.

HRCPC chairperson Hina Jilani concluded the conference by saying that 'the foundation of electoral reforms should be the right to participation at every stage. However, participation is a means to empowerment, not an end in itself.'

Fundamental freedoms

Murder of Christian pastor in Peshawar act of wanton violence

31 January 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPC) strongly condemns the murder of Pastor William Siraj, who was shot dead in Peshawar on Sunday on his way home from church. Reverend Patrick Naeem was also injured in the attack.

HRCPC sees this as a blatant assault not only on Pakistan's Christian community, but on all religious minorities whose right to life and security of person remains under constant threat. We are especially concerned that, amid signs of growing radicalisation across the country, religious minorities will become increasingly relegated to the margins, and violence against their communities allowed to continue with impunity.

It has been eight years since the Supreme Court judgment handed down by Justice Tassaduq Jilani in 2014 laid down concrete measures for the state to protect the rights of religious minorities. More than ever, the ethos of this judgement must be understood and pursued by all arms of the state—which includes promptly investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of violence against religious minorities—if Pakistan is to roll back the damage done by the rise of the far right.

HRCP releases I A Rehman Research Grant Report on media censorship

7 March 2022. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is proud to release its report, *Truth Comes at a Price: Censorship and the battle for an independent media*. Produced as part of the prestigious I. A. Rehman Research Grant Series, the report was authored by senior journalist Razeshta Sethna and documents the stifling media environment in Pakistan following the 2018 elections, which the author contends has compelled journalists and editors to work at even greater personal risk than before.

Relying on evidence from respondents associated with the print, electronic and digital media, the report documents the frequency and types of attacks on journalists and asks whether such attacks have changed face as journalists increasingly use online platforms to hold power to account.

Sethna finds that the incumbent government has served the interests of the state more than any previous government when it comes to muzzling critical news coverage. She argues that press censorship, regulatory media control mechanisms and intimidatory tactics have worsened as the government and security apparatus subvert freedom of expression and access to public information.

The report demonstrates how the media remains hostage to repressive tactics and documents how women journalists in particular have experienced increased threats and harassment in the line of duty. It also shows how both the government and state have pushed the media into a tight corner, compelling owners and editors to follow certain directives or face the consequences.

Finally, the report pays particular attention to the media landscape in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where threats to journalists and media blackouts have severely compromised the public's access to information.

HRCP calls for revision of laws constraining freedom of assembly

17 March 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has, in partnership with the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), released a study titled *Freedom of Peaceful Assembly in Pakistan: A Legislative Review*.

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

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

The report underscores a massive disconnect between domestic law and

international human rights standards related to freedom of assembly, despite Pakistan's binding legal obligation to bridge these gaps after ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The report recommends reassessing the current legislative framework, which is still deeply rooted in colonial-era policing strategies; creating and enforcing better protocols for law enforcement agencies that involve training in human rights and crowd-management practices, with emphasis on minimal use of force; allowing unrestricted media and digital access to assemblies; and facilitating free speech and movement for all assemblies rather than imposing content-based restrictions or blockading routes.

Provided they are non-violent in action and in speech, assemblies demanding the realisation of fundamental rights and advocating change are essential for a truly democratic society. People's constitutional right to assemble must be actively protected.

Freedom of expression, other rights constricted in 2021

HRCP releases annual report for 2021

29 April 2022: In its flagship annual report, *State of Human Rights in 2021*, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has expressed serious reservations concerning freedom of expression in 2021. In at least nine cases, journalists were intimidated or silenced altogether, whether in the form of assault, enforced disappearance, murder or overt censorship. Additionally, the previous government will be remembered for attempting to impose the draconian Pakistan Media Development Authority Ordinance on the press. With this fundamental right in peril, all other rights too were increasingly constricted.

The state's attempts to expand the scope of restrictions on freedom of expression under Article 19 of the Constitution have emboldened non-state actors to impose their whims – often violently – on those who do not agree with them. The savage murders of a Sri Lankan factory manager in Sialkot by a lynch mob on allegations of blasphemy, and of human rights defender Nazim Jokhio allegedly by PPP lawmakers, are both cases in point.

The report observes that the near-absence of political consensus-building was reflected in the number of presidential ordinances issued by the previous federal government—a record 32 issued in 2021. As of end-December 2021, the long-awaited bill aimed at criminalising enforced disappearance as a separate, autonomous offence, had still not been passed. The highest number of enforced disappearances reported to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances in 2021 was in Balochistan, at 1,108.

Escalating religiosity remained cause for grave concern, given the implications for women and religious minorities. This was evident from the Council of Islamic Ideology's objections to the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Bill 2020 and Prohibition of Forced Conversions Bill 2021. Yet, with 5,279 rapes and 478 honour killings registered in the country and the macabre murder of Noor Mukaddam in Islamabad, women's rights activists rightly spoke of a 'femicide emergency' in Pakistan in 2021.

With the pool of jobless people swelling as companies downsized in 2021, the plight of workers and peasants deteriorated significantly, especially with a mere PKR 2,000 increase in the minimum wage in Punjab and the Supreme Court's decision to stay the Sindh government's move to increase the wage to PKR 25,000.

While the previous government claimed that the Single National Curriculum would reduce educational disparities, it drew strong criticism from education experts and human rights defenders for its lack of inclusivity and poor pedagogy.

Both the National Commission for Human Rights and the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) were made functional and new chairpersons appointed, although regrettably, the NCSW appointment was marred by political controversy. There was a marked fall in the number of death sentences awarded, from at least 177 persons in 2020 to 125 in 2021. No executions were reported to have been carried out, while in a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court commuted the sentences of three mentally disabled prisoners on death row.

The incumbent government must not make the mistake of taking human rights issues lightly during its tenure. It must commit to protecting freedom of expression and the rights of all vulnerable and excluded groups. At the same time, it must not make the mistake of acquiescing to far-right groups such as the TLP, which had no qualms about resorting to violence to further its ends in 2021, or of ignoring citizens' voices – whether of people in Gwadar demanding a stake in the region's economic development, or of tribespeople in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa calling for the state to uphold law and order in the face of increasing militancy.

For over 30 years, HRCP has been the only organisation to have consistently documented the country's human rights situation, providing a unique barometer of human rights and democracy. We earnestly hope that, this time, the state will pay heed.

HRCP demands repeal of colonial laws that curb peaceful assembly

20 June 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) announces the launch of its study titled *Freedom of Peaceful Assembly in Pakistan: A Legislative Review*.

The study proposes to repeal and review many archaic colonial-era laws and discontinue primitive policing strategies. It makes elaborate recommendations to the legislature, executive as well as law enforcement agencies to ensure fulfilment of the right to peaceful assembly as per international human rights law standards. HRCP was assisted by a high-profile working group, including Hina Jilani, Farhatullah Babar, Habib Tahir, Reema Omer and Saroop Ijaz, while the study itself was conducted by Mr Asfand Yar Warraich.

The right to peaceful assembly is a cornerstone of any democratic society. The study provides an analysis of this right as enshrined in Article 16 of Pakistan's constitution as well as offers a review of legal provisions and procedures that impact it.

Moreover, HRCP was able to conduct a detailed mapping of assemblies from

years 2010 to 2020 through this study, to find that disproportionate curbs were placed on at least 392 of the 858 assemblies surveyed; these included excessive use of force, arbitrary and politically motivated arrests and detentions, registration of criminal or terrorism charges, and the imposition of moratoriums on assemblies for extended periods of time for no valid reason.

The study proposes creating and enforcing better protocols for law enforcement agencies that involve training in human rights and crowd-management practices, with an emphasis on minimal use of force; allowing unrestricted media and digital access to assemblies; and facilitating free speech and movement for all assemblies rather than imposing content-based restrictions or blockading routes.

Rights of the disadvantaged

HRCP welcomes appointment of Justice Ayesha Malik to Supreme Court

7 January 2022. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) welcomes the appointment of Justice Ayesha Malik to the Supreme Court of Pakistan. As the first woman judge appointed to the apex court in the country's judicial history, this is an important step towards improving gender diversity in the judiciary, where women reportedly account for only 17 percent of judges overall and just under 4.4 percent in the high courts.

Nonetheless, addressing Pakistan's gender disparity – and indeed other forms of disparity on the grounds of class, ethnicity or religion – on the bench and in the bar warrants a more proactive, long-term approach that tackles structural discrimination and casual sexism in the legal community. This entails appointing competent women – who are certainly not in short supply – to decision-making positions such as the Judicial Commission of Pakistan, and investing resources in making the legal profession, including education, training and other opportunities for professional development, more easily available to women across class and region. Additionally, the nomination and appointment procedure should be made transparent and more democratic to avoid controversies.

A more gender-diverse judiciary will have far-reaching effects on people's access to justice and the quality of justice. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that a greater proportion of women on the bench would make the courts more accessible for litigants and victims from vulnerable groups, in turn improving public confidence in the judiciary itself.

HRCP celebrates women's resilience on National Women's Day

12 February 2022: In commemorating National Women's Day, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is proud to have been part of the women's movement and to have stood shoulder to shoulder with the thousands of women who have defied regressive laws and repressive regimes to claim their rights at work, in the home and in public spaces.

It is a testament to their resilience and spirit that the women's movement in Pakistan now cuts across ethnicity, faith, age, gender identity, disability, and class. If the incidence and scope of violence against women has increased in

recent years—from the brutal murder of Noor Mukaddam in Islamabad to the enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killing of women in Balochistan—so too has their capacity to see justice done.

It is through the tireless advocacy of women and their allies that women are now better protected—at least in law—against violence, harassment and abuse. Nonetheless, HRCP foresees stiffer battles ahead, to which we believe this new generation of women’s rights defenders is more than equal.

HRCP mission to South Punjab finds serious rights violations

8 March 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has concluded a high-profile fact-finding mission to southern Punjab, comprising chairperson Hina Jilani, vice-chair Punjab Raja Ashraf, Council member Nazir Ahmed, and regional coordinator Faisal Tangwani.

The team has noted that women in the tribal areas of Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur remain subject to harmful customary practices, with *karo-kari* and *wani* still entrenched in the fabric of their society—to the extent that even the Border Military Police does not provide the protection that victims are entitled to. Moreover, many women are denied the right to citizenship documents by male members of their families and, as a result, have no political voice.

Of particular concern is the situation of religious minorities in the province: the blasphemy laws are commonly used to intimidate Hindu and Christian families for purposes of land grabbing. Forced conversions remain common: in one case brought to the team’s attention, a landlord forcibly married the daughter of a Hindu tenant.

HRCP is alarmed to learn that the district vigilance committees that were set up to monitor and report the use of bonded labour remain non-functional. The restoration of the *peshgi* system by the Punjab government, amending the Punjab Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1992, is deplorable and must be rolled back immediately. It is also of grave concern that, according to the bonded labourers HRCP spoke to, they receive a daily wage of PKR 800 while the minimum wage is PKR 1,300. Additionally, in the power loom industry, workers allege that they are compelled to work 16-hour days and have no recourse to social security or compensation in case of accidental death or injury.

A serious allegation made by residents of Cholistan is that their applications for allotment of the land they have been settled on for centuries remain pending, with reports that the military have taken over large areas of this land. In addition, the severe scarcity of water and lack of schools for residents needs to be addressed.

The team has also noted that lady health workers have continued to struggle without adequate security during their work, often putting their lives at risk in the line of duty and with negligible benefits to compensate them.

HRCP is also greatly concerned to find that cultivable land in Multan is being allocated to defence housing associations, with reports of local residents being harassed if they refuse to sell.

HRCP urges the Punjab government to take serious note of human rights violations in southern Punjab and take concrete and transparent steps to improve the situation.

Modern slavery: HRCP report on trafficking in women and girls

9 March 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has released a study titled *Modern slavery: Trafficking in women and girls in Pakistan*, which identifies Pakistan as a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking. Although it is difficult to determine the magnitude of the crime – given lack of reliable data – HRCP is particularly concerned by the network of trafficking that exists internally, spanning sex trafficking, forced child labour, bonded labour, forced begging and forced marriage. Economically vulnerable women and under-age girls are targeted in particular.

The study explains why it is difficult to address trafficking compared to other human rights violations – from the dearth of reliable data on trafficking and constant underreporting to lack of implementation of existing anti-trafficking legislation. Moreover, the pervasive lack of awareness of the various dimensions of trafficking, and gaps in coordination among stakeholders such as the FIA and law enforcement agencies, are added challenges.

The report recommends that an effective system to collect, compile and report data on the dimensions of human trafficking be developed as a matter of priority. The capacity of law enforcement agencies to identify and report trafficking must also be strengthened immensely. Finally, the government must allocate adequate resources to implement anti-trafficking laws, encouraging better coordination among stakeholders, with targeted interventions for groups that are specifically vulnerable to trafficking.

HRCP releases report on attack on transgender persons in Peshawar

16 October 2022. A fact-finding mission led by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) to investigate an attack on four transgender persons in Peshawar on 11 September 2022 has concluded that the attack was a result of a personal dispute – one of the victims had refused to allow the accused to conduct a physical relationship with a junior member of her team.

On 11 September 2022, four transgender persons and a man were seriously injured when the accused opened fire on their vehicle. They were returning from a wedding; at which they had been slated to perform. HRCP felt it was necessary to investigate the incident, given the context of violence against transgender persons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

It is the responsibility of the police to arrest the accused as soon as possible and take action according to the law. However, noting the prejudiced attitude of the Peshawar police to the trans community in general, HRCP recommends immediate and effective gender sensitivity training for the police. In addition, any police officers guilty of extorting money from transgender persons should be penalised for doing so.

HRCP also recommends that the KP provincial cabinet pass legislation to address transgender persons' welfare as soon as possible, especially given the malicious disinformation campaign being led by religious political parties

against the federal Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018. Additionally, the KP Child Protection and Welfare Commission should start registering transgender persons below 18 years of age.

HRCP, PMHA call for transformative solutions for inclusive development of PLWDs

3 December 2022: At a policy dialogue held by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and Potohar Mental Health Association, human rights defenders have called for robust legal and administrative measures to ensure the welfare of persons living with disabilities (PLWDs).

Participants called on the government to conduct a countrywide census of PLWDs to ensure that budgetary allocations for their welfare are better targeted. They also criticised the lack of due representation for PLWDs in legislative and policymaking bodies, especially in KP and Balochistan.

Speakers urged both the state and society to look at PLWDs as differently abled persons rather than ‘disabled’ and called on all human rights defenders to launch an organised movement to compel the state to enact better laws for PLWDs’ welfare and devise effective mechanisms that would help them integrate with the mainstream population, whether at home or at educational institutions, or at hospitals, banks and industries. Additionally, buildings in the public and private sectors must be made accessible to PLWDs as a matter of policy and practice and their access to digital information made easier. Several speakers pointed out that early detection and diagnosis of disabilities would enable early treatment, thereby preventing several disabilities. Women living with disabilities face the double burden of gender and ability.

In his concluding remarks, former senator and HRCP Council member Farhatullah Babar said that the widespread trend of using derogatory words for PLWDs must be countered. Unless both the state and society and state are sensitised, mere legislative and administrative measures will remain insufficient, he said, adding that all political parties should ensure that their manifestoes include clear commitments to uplifting PLWDs.

Social and economic rights

Itinerant workers’ rights should be guaranteed: HRCP conference

24 January 2022: At a conference organised online by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), speakers agreed that it was critical to help vulnerable groups such as undocumented seasonal workers and nomadic communities gain access to citizenship documents. HRCP has found that such individuals are largely unable to access healthcare, schooling for their children, social security packages, and Covid-19 vaccination, while many are unaware of the benefits of citizenship documents altogether.

NADRA chairperson Muhammad Tariq Malik said that a social contract between the state and its citizens was only possible if all citizens had a legal identity. ‘If the state cannot count you,’ he explained, ‘you cannot count on the state.’ He said that NADRA had launched its ‘inclusive registration drive’ for precisely this purpose, adding that alternative citizenship identity instruments should be made easily available to vulnerable communities such as seasonal workers in cases where they lacked the documentation needed to apply for a CNIC.

HRCP chairperson Hina Jilani said that, while access to a CNIC may be subject to scrutiny for ‘security reasons’, the state had become ‘security-obsessive’ at the cost of protecting people’s right to citizenship. NADRA should partner with community-based organisations to extend its outreach, she added, while the government in turn should value the work of nongovernment organisations rather than targeting them.

Former senator and HRCP Council member Farhatullah Babar suggested that a Senate Committee of the Whole be established to address the status of undocumented workers and stateless persons, adding that all persons resident in Pakistan should be provided some form of documentation that enabled access to at least some benefits, fundamentally to healthcare.

Punjab Assembly member Bushra Butt, KP Assembly member Ikhtiar Wali Khan, and Sindh Assembly member Rana Ansar agreed that all four provinces should work together to develop recommendations to facilitate people’s access to citizenship documents. Deputy speaker of the Sindh Assembly Rehana Laghari pointed out that the process was especially cumbersome for orphans, children born out of wedlock, and rural women whose mobility was restricted.

Tahera Hasan, director of Imkaan Welfare Organisation, pointed out that frontline workers were often unaware of changes in NADRA policy, such as when documentation requirements were simplified. Activist Usman Ghani explained that, for ethnic minorities such as the Bengali community in Karachi, obtaining a CNIC—even when possible—could take up to two years. Senior journalist Talat Hussain said that people who were not considered ‘relevant’ were not counted in the debate over access to citizenship.

HRCP demands economic stability, political rights

18 June 2022: On concluding its biannual meeting, the governing council of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expressed its concern at the alarming polarization in political discourse, which is detrimental to the cause of democracy, supremacy of parliament and constitutionalism. It is equally concerned about the ensuing economic instability, the runaway inflation and the threat of food insecurity that are disproportionately impacting the working and middle classes. Punjab, the country’s biggest province, stays in a political limbo. HRCP calls for a non-partisan consensus on crucial issues facing the country.

The Council highlighted multiple grave human rights issues being faced by the populace, including the impact of climate change evident in the recent glacial flooding in Gilgit-Baltistan, the ongoing heatwave in Punjab, the acute water shortages in Sindh and Balochistan, leading to provincial conflicts, displacement and loss of livelihoods.

It noted the worsening instances of police brutality against peaceful protestors across Pakistan with arrests of activists and political workers on anti-state charges becoming a common feature. Freedom of press is in continuous stress and journalists have been persistently targeted. The state must uphold people’s rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly instead of retaliating with unwarranted violence.

HRCP brings to the government's notice that there is no letup in cases of enforced disappearances, particularly in Balochistan, Sindh and KP. What is worse is the uptick in enforced disappearances of Baloch and Pashtun students. It reiterates its demand to enact the law that criminalises enforced disappearances and the state must ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Violence against women and transgender persons showed no signs of abating. Religious and sectarian minorities remain vulnerable, with incidents such as the mob lynchings in Sialkot and Mian Channu, the attack against Shia worshippers in Peshawar, and desecration of Ahmadiyya graves, becoming more frequent. HRCP calls on the state to curb the rising tide of religious extremism, and grant the National Commission for Minorities a statutory position in light of the Tassaduq Jilani Supreme Court judgement 2014 so it may fulfil its duties.

HRCP welcomes the passage of the Sindh Student Unions Bill, and the decisions to suspend the PDMA's establishment and carry out a review of PECA. However, seats on various parliamentary committees remain vacant, since the passage of vote of no confidence, while the NCHR and NCSW are under-funded and hence not fully functional. HRCP also questions the Council of Islamic Ideology's statements criticising Islamabad High Court's statements on underage marriage.

The promise to grant Gilgit-Baltistan provincial status must be fulfilled. The Council criticised the 'discreet talks' with militant groups in Afghanistan without taking the parliament into confidence. HRCP also demands that the state accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and pass legislation for refugees' rights

Government and opposition must focus on flood impact, climate justice

22 August 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expresses grave concern at the loss of life and livelihoods wrought by floods across the country, especially in Balochistan, Sindh and southern Punjab. The indifference of the federal and provincial governments and the political opposition is evident from their inability – even amid a growing death toll – to prioritise human life over confrontational politics, palace intrigue and dangerous rhetoric.

The scale of destruction needs to be mapped urgently and affected persons provided access to clean drinking water as well as basic food and medical supplies in the immediate term. The state must prioritise the most vulnerable households and communities in this effort, including women, dependent children, persons living with disabilities, the sick, and the elderly.

Both the government as well as all elected representatives must urgently implement well-conceived, practical measures to counter the food shortages, disease, displacement, and loss of livelihood caused by the floods. However, this year's weather patterns must also serve as an SOS to the state that Pakistan's survival in the long term is incumbent on its ability to begin to deliver climate justice to its people.

State must address South Punjab's long-standing grievances

27 August 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) wishes to express its solidarity with flood affectees in South Punjab. We are aware that the scale of the disaster is unprecedented. At the same time, it is clear that the role of the government and local administration in facilitating and rescuing victims has been disappointing. HRCP is gravely concerned that volunteers and NGOs that have come forward to help in disaster-hit areas are being obstructed by the administration, instead of facilitating their efforts. The current situation has exposed the neglect that the Seraiki waseb has long suffered. HRCP has identified these areas of neglect, which are directly responsible for continued violations of the Seraiki people's political, economic and social rights.

In its fact-finding report titled *South Punjab: Excluded, Exploited*, launched in Multan earlier today, HRCP has underscored women's continuing vulnerability to harmful customary practices, forced conversions among local Hindu communities, the poor working conditions of industrial workers and bonded labourers, and allegations of unfair land allotment in Cholistan – including to the military – at the expense of local communities.

Based on field visits and consultations with government officials and civil society, the report recommends that federal and provincial stakeholders initiate a political dialogue to recognise the Seraiki identity and ensure access to formal and effective policing systems to improve law and order. The state must also institute mechanisms to provide redressal to survivors of gender-based violence and discrimination, such as forced conversion and forced marriage, and protect the rights of transgender persons in South Punjab.

Religious minorities must be protected from grave violations such as land grabbing and malicious use of the blasphemy laws. Workers' rights to adequate wages and social security must be ensured, with district vigilance committees made fully functional to monitor and report the incidence of bonded labour. District-level committees must also be established to redress farmers' grievances. Cholistan must be given special consideration in view of the chronic invisibility of its people, while land in the area should be allotted only to indigenous Cholistanis and without discrimination on the basis of religion.

National human rights institutions such as the National Commission for Human Rights and National Commission on the Status of Women must be involved at every stage to address these rights violations. HRCP reiterates its demand for the establishment of a national commission for minorities' rights with statutory authority. The state must further upgrade the health, education and administrative infrastructure in the region, with sufficient budgetary allocations, particularly in extremely deprived areas such as Cholistan. The need for sustainable infrastructure is especially urgent in light of the devastation caused by recent floods.

HRCP urges all stakeholders to work together and take swift measures to alleviate people's concerns. The neglect of vulnerable communities in South Punjab cannot be allowed to continue.

Civil society indispensable in current crisis

2 September 2022: Amid the political, economic and climate crises enveloping Pakistan, a public meeting held by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has put forward civil society's concerns and a draft charter of demands.

An immediate concern is the devastation caused by the ongoing floods that are a result not only of the climate crisis but also of the Pakistani state's failure to carry out sustainable, pro-poor, pro-people development. Additionally, constant political confrontation continues to undermine democratic values at the expense of ordinary citizens' needs, while decades of elite capture, hyper-securitisation and short-sighted economic planning have pushed daily-wage and fixed-income workers to the brink of survival.

Civil society demands that a national action plan be conceived and implemented jointly by the federal and provincial governments to rescue and provide relief to all those affected by the floods as well as to rehabilitate their lives and livelihoods. The role of local governments is key in this regard: they must be strengthened and given the technical and financial resources and autonomy needed to carry out relief work, climate change-resilient reconstruction and disaster preparedness. At the same time, the state must revise its policies towards civil society: the ousting of international NGOs has only worsened the current crisis.

Pakistan's climate crisis is also political. Civil society demands that the state give all provinces a fair hearing and address the legitimate grievances of all ethnicities—in particular in Balochistan, Sindh, former FATA and the Seraiki waseb—if it expects to put forward a united front to counter the climate emergency. It is equally critical that women be represented equally across all institutional and government tiers. Once national elections take place, they must be held in a free and fair manner that ensures a representative government with the political will to protect the interests of the working classes and marginalised groups.

Speaking at the meeting, senior journalist Imtiaz Alam said that civil society must develop a charter of demands encompassing the protection of all fundamental rights. Human rights defender Tanveer Jehan said that disaster preparedness strategies should include mobile medical units and systems to trace families that had been divided by disasters.

Political economist Dr Fahd Ali said that the IMF deal should be renegotiated because Pakistan now needed the fiscal space to carry out rehabilitation and reconstruction. Defence expenditure, he added, as 'the elephant in the room', should be openly debated. Senior advocate Abid Saqi said that a meaningful political movement—involving labour, women and students—was required to resolve the ongoing crises.

HRCP chairperson Hina Jilani said it was critical for civil society to work in unison against a growing political narrative that did not believe in rule-based order and that valued demagoguery and populism. She said that HRCP would use its convening power to bring together civil society onto one platform, but said it was also critical for civil society 'to prove not only that it is relevant but also that it is indispensable' in the current crisis.

HRCP joins call for reparations, demands environmental justice from the global community

6 September 2022: In light of the devastating floods that have affected at least 30 million people, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) joins the call for immediate reparations from the global community, particularly from high-emitting countries that are directly responsible for the climate crisis.

Already cash-strapped by record-high inflation rates and economic recessions, low-income groups in Pakistan have been pushed to breaking point by unprecedented floods throughout the region—with over 1,000 lives lost, and homes and livelihoods destroyed. Roads and health infrastructure, including basic health units and district hospitals, have also been submerged, posing a threat to those in urgent need of medical aid such as pregnant women, children and the elderly.

While there is much left to be desired in the government's relief and rehabilitation plan for the flood-affected, it is clear that Pakistan is paying the price for a disaster that was preventable and, more importantly, not of its own doing. According to the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, Pakistan has historically accounted for only 0.4% of greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, it is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. This imbalance indicates that all countries must join together and devise not just climate-change solutions, but also climate justice measures that keep the principles of equity and accountability at the forefront.

At present, Pakistan's resources must be used to rehabilitate its people and rebuild its infrastructure, not to pay external debts. Providing climate change reparations is the bare minimum, for which global leaders must be held responsible.

HRCP calls for end to ethnic tension in Sindh

15 July 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is increasingly concerned by the escalation in ethnic and political tension in Sindh, after a man was killed in Hyderabad following an altercation at a hotel. HRCP calls for the murder to be investigated fairly and transparently and for the Sindh government to take steps to control crime and violence in the province. At the same time, it falls to the authorities as well as to all progressive voices in Pakistan to shun divisive or racist rhetoric. HRCP intends to conduct a fact-finding mission to ascertain the evidence surrounding the murder of Bilal Kaka and ensuing ethnic tension.

HRCP calls on state to hasten rehabilitation of flood-affected

30 October 2022: On concluding its 36th Annual General Meeting (AGM), the general body of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has called on the federal and provincial governments to accelerate their efforts to rehabilitate the thousands of people who have lost their homes and livelihoods in the recent floods. While the scale of the disaster was overwhelming, it is now essential to focus on resettling those displaced in habitats that are better adapted to the effects of climate change.

HRCP reiterates its call for urgent land reforms, which are critical not only to reducing poverty and realising rights such as equal access to food and housing, but are also necessary if the state is to rehabilitate vulnerable communities affected by the floods. While Pakistan has every right to demand climate reparations, it must also look within and articulate a strategy to ensure that its most vulnerable groups receive climate justice and to secure all people's right to food, shelter and health amid the economic crisis.

HRCP also expresses its concern over the ongoing political turmoil and reminds both the government and opposition that not only is this harmful for Pakistan's democracy, but it also threatens people's fundamental rights and freedoms.

The continuing impunity for perpetrators of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings remains cause for serious concern. HRCP recalls that it has been two months since one of its own members, Lala Fahim Baloch, was disappeared from Karachi and demands that he be recovered safely.

HRCP notes with alarm an uptick in mob violence, with two men lynched recently in Karachi on groundless suspicions that they were kidnappers. While this is a worrying symptom of an increasingly brutalised society, it also reflects loss of public faith in the state's ability to ensure justice. The state must also heed the demands of people in Swat, who have long warned of the rise in militancy and must not be left to bear the brunt of extremist-fuelled violence.

The deliberate and insidious marginalisation of the Ahmadiyya community—most recently in the shape of declarations of faith being made mandatory to register a marriage—is cause for grave concern. HRCP also calls on the state to ensure that Scheduled Castes in Sindh are given their due representation in government and that their right to freedom from any manner of discrimination is protected. The malicious campaign against the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 must cease and the provincial governments must also enact legislation to protect the rights of transgender persons.

The state must also present and implement a strategy with respect to Afghan refugees that recognises their right to seek asylum in Pakistan and to live in dignity as refugees, while ensuring the political and economic rights of the host communities. Additionally, HRCP demands that all public institutions be made easily accessible for persons living with disabilities. HRCP also believes that all judicial appointments must be made without discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, faith or gender.

Securing all people's right to freedom of expression, assembly and association is vital to strengthening the democratic fabric. HRCP reiterates its condemnation of the FIR lodged against Manzoor Pashteen at the Asma Jahangir Conference. The Commission also calls on the government to ensure that all citizens' right to peaceful protest is protected. Additionally, HRCP takes strong exception to the state's efforts to over-regulate NGOs and civil society organisations, many of which play a key role in providing services in areas neglected by the state itself.

HRCP launches fact-finding report on rights violations in Balochistan's coal mines

24 November 2022: In its fact-finding report titled *Beneath the surface: Rights violations in Balochistan's coal mines*, launched in Quetta earlier today, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has underscored the alarming frequency of mining-related deaths and injuries in the region.

Based on field visits and consultations with coalminers, labour unions and government departments, the report recommends that the number of trained government safety inspectors and the frequency of their inspections be increased to maintain safety standards and reduce the number of mining accidents. Mine owners and contractors must also ensure a functioning ambulance service with onsite emergency health workers and regular internal safety inspections at every mining site. Mining tunnels must be constructed in accordance with the law, and kept well ventilated to allow both the entry of clean air and to avoid methane build-ups. It is imperative that the federal government ratify ILO Convention C-176 so that such minimum standards of occupational safety and health are determined and implemented.

Coal miners must further be registered and made eligible for EOBI social security and Workers' Welfare Fund benefits. The disparity in the treatment of migrant mine workers must be addressed as well by registering them so that they are not underpaid or denied access to healthcare and civic rights.

HRCP urges the government to upgrade the status of the coal mining sector to an industry so that mine owners and contractors who fail to maintain adequate safety standards can be held accountable under the Mines Act 1923. The government must also pay closer attention to technological advancements in mining to give mine operators and owners incentive to upgrade from archaic and dangerous methods of mining.

HRCP concludes national roundtable on climate justice, calls for building a new social contract

7 December 2022: A national roundtable on climate justice held by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has called for building a new social contract rooted in climate justice – the concept that climate change is an ethical, legal and political issue rather than solely environmental.

Inaugurating the roundtable, HRCP's secretary-general Harris Khaliq noted how climate change impacts people's lives and livelihoods. He also underscored the need to include environmental rights in the ambit of human rights, and envision both immediate and long-term solutions to ensure climate justice.

The participants discussed how integral environmental rights are to the realisation of fundamental freedoms, such as the rights to life, livelihood, housing, sanitation, health, food, water and clean air. Former chair of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and national advisor at the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre Lieutenant General (R) Nadeem Ahmad emphasised that the provision of food, shelter, water, sanitation and healthcare must take priority during emergency responses. Seemee Ezdi, the chairperson of the senate's standing committee on climate change, noted that local governance

is essential to affect change at a grassroots level. Shahid Sayeed Khan, the CEO of Indus Earth Trust, highlighted the importance of short-term solutions to address the psychological trauma of affected persons. Academic Brigadier (R) Dr Fiaz Hussain Shah said that strategies for climate change adaptation is needed at every level, with close coordination between the NDMA, the climate change ministry and the planning ministry.

Environmental journalist Afia Salam noted the state's lack of preparedness when the 2022 floods took place, underscoring that the state must work towards disaster risk reduction, not just disaster management. The state must also conduct a vulnerability mapping exercise from a human rights lens and bridge both the gender gap and the youth gap in disaster mitigation efforts. Academic Zaigham Abbas said that indigenous knowledge systems on ecological resilience must be considered, and Saif Jamali from the Jinnah Institute highlighted the need to build on community responses to disasters so that vernacular wisdom is at the forefront.

Sherry Rehman, federal minister for climate change, concluded the roundtable by noting how every crisis affects the vulnerable the most, such as women and children in the recent floods. Science-based expertise must take the lead with policies that connect to on-ground realities, and a national climate adaptation plan must be developed.

Loss of fellow human rights defenders

Dr Mehdi Hasan: A man of unwavering principles

23 February 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is devastated by the loss of Dr Mehdi Hasan, former chairperson and member of the present Council, who passed away earlier today. A veteran journalist, public intellectual and one of Pakistan's foremost media historians, Dr Hasan was twice elected chairperson of HRCP and five times as an office bearer of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists.

As a teacher of journalism at the University of the Punjab and subsequently at Beaconhouse National University, he nurtured several generations of reporters and columnists, always emphasising the integrity of facts and evidence. Underlying his soft-spoken demeanour was a political astuteness that few can lay claim to. It was to Dr Hasan that many leading politicians—his former students—turned for advice. It was advice he gave invariably without fear or favour.

A proudly secular man, Dr Hasan had the courage of his convictions and long warned that Pakistan could not hope to become a true democracy so long as it pandered to religious nationalism. His unwavering commitment to freedom of religion, expression and opinion gave direction to human rights defenders and progressive journalists across Pakistan, scores of whom would congregate at his home in Lahore out of a shared love of poetry and political anecdotes.

Dr Hasan will be sorely missed and we extend our deepest condolences to his family and friends.

Celebrating I A Rehman

12 April 2022. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) remembers I. A. Rehman, the organisation's former honorary spokesperson and secretary-general, on the occasion of his first death anniversary.

Under Mr Rehman's steady leadership, which lasted over 25 years, HRCP grew into an internationally credible human rights organisation and maintained its independence and non-partisanship. In this time, Mr Rehman mentored scores of young human rights defenders across the country, all of whom recall his warmth, perspicacity and unshakeable integrity.

Throughout his life, Mr Rehman championed a wide range of human rights causes. A veteran journalist, he wrote with exceptional clarity to advocate an end to enforced disappearances and the death penalty, while defending constitutionalism, freedom of expression and the rights of religious minorities. He was an integral part of the women's movement and labour rights movement, while his particular affection and concern for Balochistan kept his finger on the pulse of the province for years.

Mr Rehman's activism transcended geographical boundaries and he infused a quiet energy into efforts advocating peace and pluralism in South Asia. Indeed, his vast knowledge was such that Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, at a reference last year, said he wished he had had the chance to spend more time in conversation with Mr Rehman.

Equally at home among political leaders, students, peasants and trade unionists, Mr Rehman remained a moral compass for so many. At HRCP, we celebrate his life even as we remain in his debt.

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