

# STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

in 2025



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# Notes on sources

Sources, where not quoted in the text, include reports in the national and regional press categorized and archived by HRCP's Knowledge Management System, fact-finding reports and communications from volunteers and private citizens, official gazettes, economic and legal documents and other public releases and statements, and publications of international human rights and development agencies.

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Given 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

AAC	Awami Action Committee
AJK	Azad Jammu and Kashmir
ANP	Awami National Party
AQI	air quality index
ATC	anti-terrorism court
BLA	Baloch Liberation Army
BHC	Balochistan High Court
BNP-M	Balochistan National Party (M)
BYC	Baloch Yakjehti Committee
CCD	Crime Control Department
CCI	Council of Common Interests
CDA	Capital Development Authority
COIED	Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances
ECP	Election Commission of Pakistan
FAFEN	Free and Fair Election Network
FIA	Federal Investigation Agency
FIR	first information report
GBLA	Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly
GLOF	glacial lake outburst flood
HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
ICT	Islamabad Capital Territory
IDP	internally displaced person
IHC	Islamabad High Court
JAAC	Joint Awami Action Committee
JUI-F	Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F)
LHC	Lahore High Court
NCCIA	National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency
NGO	nongovernment organisation
NTUF	National Trade Union Federation
PECA	Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act
PERA	Punjab Enforcement and Regulation Authority
PHC	Peshawar High Court
PLWD	person living with a disability(ies)
PMAP	Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League (N)
PPC	Pakistan Penal Code
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
PTM	Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement
SHC	Sindh High Court
SSDO	Sustainable Social Development Organization
TLP	Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan

# Introduction

Pakistan’s human rights landscape in 2025 was marked by a widening gap between constitutional guarantees and lived realities. While some legislative and institutional developments—such as the establishment of the National Commission for Minorities and reductions in case backlogs—suggest incremental progress, these were overshadowed by an increasingly centralised and executive-driven governance framework. The passage of the 27th Constitutional Amendment, alongside expansive preventive detention powers and restrictions on digital expression, raised serious concerns regarding judicial independence, due process, and the shrinking space for dissent. Persistent patterns of enforced disappearances, curbs on peaceful assembly, and the targeting of political activists further underscored the erosion of fundamental freedoms.

At the same time, structural inequalities and vulnerabilities continued to define the everyday experiences of marginalised groups. Women, religious minorities, children, and transgender persons remained vulnerable to violence and discrimination, with gender-based violence and faith-based persecution remaining widespread. Escalating militancy and increased reliance on police encounters point to systemic flaws in law enforcement and accountability mechanisms. Poor socioeconomic indicators—including rising unemployment, widespread noncompliance with minimum wage laws, and limited access to education and healthcare—reflect the state’s failure to uphold people’s economic and social rights.

As HRCP completes 40 years as Pakistan’s leading independent human rights organisation, it is worth reflecting that for all our wins, big and small, we have a long way to go to ensure federal democracy, institutional accountability, and to uphold every person’s right to life lived with dignity. Accordingly, our work in 2025 addressed a range of issues through an extensive programme of monitoring, documentation and advocacy, with particular emphasis on evidence-based interventions.

We carried out fact-finding missions on, among other issues, the environmental impact of illegal construction in the Margalla Hills, land rights in Cholistan, shrinking civic space in Balochistan and Punjab, law-and-order concerns in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the alleged deaths of protestors linked to disputes over water resources. We also undertook rapid-response inquiries into cases involving religious minorities—including displacement, forced conversions and blasphemy-related accusations—as well as incidents of public violence and torture.

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Alongside its investigative work, HRCP convened a number of conferences, consultations and public dialogues that brought together civil society, state institutions and rights defenders. Notable among these was an international conference co-hosted with South Asians for Human Rights titled ‘Bridges, Not Boundaries’, which created space for cross-border solidarity and strategic reflection at a time of increasing restrictions on civic space across the region and acute tension with Pakistan’s neighbours. A conference on decolonising the law was particularly timely, given the persistence of colonial-era legal frameworks that continue to shape policing, criminal justice, and governance structures in the country.

A key highlight of the year was HRCP’s nationwide campaign on the right to a living wage, launched against the backdrop of rising inflation and deepening economic precarity. Through a combination of policy papers, documentary screenings, training workshops and public dialogues held across multiple cities, the campaign sought to build a coherent narrative around fair wages as a fundamental human right. By situating labour rights within the broader socioeconomic crisis, HRCP underscored the urgency of legislative and policy reform to protect workers from exploitation and ensure dignified livelihoods.

HRCP’s Knowledge Management System—comprising human rights-related news reports dating back to 1990, digitised and categorised according to 20 broad themes and 130 subthemes—continued to provide the evidence that supports our interventions and advocacy. Our complaints desks and helplines continued to operate at all the regional offices, helping survivors of rights violations seek support and redress.

We also mourned the loss of many eminent human rights defenders, intellectuals and public figures whose contributions have significantly shaped the rights discourse in the country and the wider region. Among them were independent filmmaker and peace activist Tapan Kumar Bose; Dr Syed Haroon Ahmed, remembered for his unwavering commitment to social justice; and Taj Haider, who consistently championed democratic governance and cultural rights. The passing of Mama Abdul Qadeer, whose tireless campaign against enforced disappearances symbolised resilience and resistance, was keenly felt.

As in previous years, this edition of the *State of Human Rights* series focuses on the four provinces and three federal territories; it also documents HRCP’s institutional positions through the year. The online version provides further details of HRCP’s work in 2025 and useful information on human rights legislation and Pakistan’s progress in the context of international human rights mechanisms.

I would like to acknowledge the effort put into producing this report by our contributors, including, among others, Adnan Rehmat, Alefia T. Hussain, Bilal Abbas, Israruddin Israr, Shujauddin Qureshi, and Sumata Alam. Special thanks are owed to the director Farah Zia, for editing the report, assisted by the senior manager communications and research, Maheen Pracha; to Irfan Khan for providing editorial support; and to Rida Fazal for designing the cover and layout. Our colleagues Adeel Ahmed, Aisha Ayub, Ali Haider, Khushal Khan, Sunny Zia, and Zobia Ameen provided immense support. I am especially grateful to the secretary-general Harris Khaliq for reviewing the report and giving us valuable feedback.

**Asad Iqbal Butt**

Chairperson

# Editor's note

*To accept that certain things cannot be said is to accept that certain forms of power cannot be challenged.*

*– Kenan Malik, writer, lecturer, and broadcaster.*

It is impossible to imagine human rights in the absence of democracy, which in turn is not possible without freedom of expression. In 2025, this freedom was the most suppressed, followed by a squeeze on the rule of law and a marked deterioration in judicial independence.

## Freedom of expression—the textbook definition

The textbook context is important. [Freedom of expression](#) is the foundational right necessary to realise all other human rights. It encompasses the right to speak and be heard, to seek information, to express oneself socially, culturally, and politically, to question the government and hold it accountable, to attend peaceful protests, to engage in dialogue and debate, and to improve society by enhancing public knowledge.

It is a fundamental, but not absolute, right. Therefore, restrictions may be placed on speech that encourages violence and discrimination, but not on speech that challenges the status quo. Since human rights are meant to protect people, not ideas, states, or religions, restrictions on freedom of speech must 'protect people from harm and not governments from criticism.' Those 'with the least power need the most protection.'

## What happened to freedom of expression on the ground?

The expansive scope of freedom of expression made it the most vulnerable right this year. It directly affected the rule of law, as laws and the legal machinery were weaponised to suppress expression and dissent, though not for the first time.

The year began with rights groups still protesting earlier controversial versions of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). Then, an amendment to PECA was hastily passed in Parliament. Experts unanimously said that the amendment violated 'constitutional guarantees and international legal standards concerning human rights, freedom of expression, privacy, and due process.' The worst fears—that it would suppress political dissent and silence journalists—were realised during the year, as many political workers, human rights activists, journalists, and even lawyers were booked under the amended Act.

This report documents how journalists critical of state institutions were accused of spreading false information under this law, their bank accounts frozen, and their freedom of movement restricted.

State control over mainstream media was evident in the financial squeeze on and coercion of critical media houses such as the Dawn Media Group, which were denied advertisements throughout 2025.

Attacks and silencing of those who spoke up for enforced disappearances, including lawyers, and the abduction or disappearance of journalists who tried to report objectively, resulted in less reporting of human rights violations. The controls and repression engendered self-censorship, understandably.

Worst of all, this was done through repressive laws—from anti-terror and sedition statutes to PECA—and a weakened judiciary.

## **Democratic backsliding through a constitutional amendment and other legal instruments**

New laws were enacted and old laws used to curb dissent and achieve favourable political outcomes, sometimes under the pretext of security, other times brazenly. This was accomplished by manipulating the judiciary to obtain favourable judgments and by using the Election Commission of Pakistan to disqualify elected members of parliament.

After the Balochistan Assembly passed an amendment to the anti-terrorism act allowing any law enforcement agency to detain any person for up to three months without charge or judicial oversight (seen as another measure to suppress dissent and legalise enforced disappearances), a similar amendment was passed by the National Assembly. HRCP and other rights groups highlighted the sweeping powers of preventive detention in these amendments and their potential to undermine fundamental rights of liberty, due process, and protection from arbitrary detention.

Two key Supreme Court of Pakistan decisions ceded democratic space and maintained the ruling coalition's hold on power. The first, in May, saw a Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court overturn the court's October 2023 judgment, which had deemed military trials of civilians 'unconstitutional.' The bench allowed the trial under the Pakistan Army Act 1952 of civilians involved in the 9 May 2023 riots, jeopardising all constitutional guarantees of fair trial, due process, and judicial independence. The International Commission of Jurists [denounced](#) this as a 'glaring surrender of human rights.' In June, a Constitutional Bench of the apex court again overturned a full bench's majority judgment from 2024, refusing to acknowledge the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) as a legitimate parliamentary party worthy of reserved seats, thereby granting the ruling coalition a two-thirds majority and increasing its share in the Senate.

The state's willingness to harass those who speak out against state policies was evident when the FIA launched an inquiry into allegations of financial corruption against Farhatullah Babar, a distinguished human rights defender, former senator, and the very definition of integrity.

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However, the biggest and most damaging blow to judicial independence in 2025 was the 27th constitutional amendment, which expanded executive/military power. Pushed through parliament with extraordinary haste and without public debate, the amendment effected monumental changes: it created a new Federal Constitutional Court to operate above the Supreme Court; reconstituted the Judicial Commission of Pakistan so that the power to select members of the higher judiciary now rested with the executive and parliament; enabled the transfer of high court judges from one province to another without their consent, requiring them to face disciplinary action if they refused; and overhauled the military command structure, creating the all-powerful new post of chief of defense forces and providing its holder with lifetime immunity from arrest or prosecution.

Two senior Supreme Court judges, including the senior puisne judge, resigned in protest, terming it an assault on the constitution and democracy. The UN high commissioner for human rights criticised its far-reaching consequences for the rule of law and principles of democracy.

## Federalism under stress

As in the previous year, militancy and the state's response disproportionately impacted two provinces. One report estimates 1,272 terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism operations in 2025, resulting in about 3,417 deaths. Ninety-six percent of these attacks occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa bearing the brunt and losing hundreds of civilians and law enforcement personnel to militancy.

The insurgency in Balochistan took a new turn when the separatist Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) hijacked the Jaffar Express passenger train and took about 400 passengers hostage, including security forces. The United Nations condemned it as a 'heinous terrorist act.' Another disturbing development was the targeting of non-Baloch settlers and workers in as many as 21 lethal attacks by separatist groups. In one attack on a school bus in Khuzdar, eight children died.

With nationalist parties significantly undermined in the 2024 election, Dr Mahrang Baloch and other activists of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), including Gulzadi Baloch and Beebow Baloch, remained in jail since March.

This year, almost all provinces initiated new legislation or amended existing laws on mines and minerals, raising alarm over the provinces' right to their natural resources in the context of federal overreach, driven by the Special Investment Facilitation Council. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the bill, opposed by both the ruling party and the opposition, failed to pass.

## Violations of special concern

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances acknowledged 273 new cases of enforced disappearances in 2025. Allegations of enforced disappearances, including of women in Balochistan, persisted throughout the year. The practice of staging police encounters to control crime continued across the country, gaining new momentum in Punjab, where a specialised Crime Control Department conducted 707 encounters in eight months, resulting in the deaths of 977 suspects.

The Islamabad High Court's order to form a commission to investigate the alleged entrapment of hundreds of individuals in fraudulent online blasphemy cases was overruled by the same court on review. The persecution of the Ahmadiyya community continued unabated. An Ahmadi man was lynched by a Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)-led mob outside a place of worship in Karachi. In Punjab, when police and Rangers launched a midnight operation against the TLP in October, HRCP was one of the few voices to point out the lack of transparency around the operation and called for prompt investigation, while acknowledging the organisation's history of hate speech and incitement to violence.

Women political prisoners, both belonging to the PTI and BYC, remain a matter of utmost concern for the human rights community. Violence against women presented a bleak picture, with the National Police Bureau indicating that at least 470 women fell victim to 'honour' killings and at least 19 transgender persons were killed across the country. Labour remained as vulnerable as ever, with no real policy change in sight to offer the protections needed.

The most worrying fact requiring policymakers' urgent attention is a UNICEF report showing that 10 million children in Pakistan suffer from stunting due to poor diet.

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## Building on positives

An important development this year was the passage of the National Commission for Minorities Act, fulfilling the vision of the landmark 2014 Jilani judgment and a long-standing demand of civil society. Parliament passed the Child Marriage Restraint Act for Islamabad Capital Territory, and it is hoped that provinces without such a law will follow suit. Higher courts issued decisions advancing women's rights on issues like inheritance, dissolution of marriage, and claims on dowry. In Punjab, the government initiated schemes for the welfare of both rural and urban women. Likewise, there were institutional reforms and targeted welfare measures across Pakistan.

## Back to freedom of expression

Given the textbook definition of freedom of expression as the fulcrum of all other rights, and given the state of human rights as portrayed above, there is no question that those with the least power need the most protection.

Little wonder that democracies are built on this foundational right, which allows citizens to demand their basic needs—water, clean air, food, shelter, healthcare, education, employment, and digital rights. It protects citizens from government excesses when they try to hold it to account. If the state of freedom of expression defines the state of democracy, our record is dismal, to say the least.

**Farah Zia**

Director

# Key issues and developments

## Laws and law-making

- The 27th Constitutional Amendment was **passed** in what some characterised as a majoritarian fashion, rather than through a participatory democratic process. The amendment raised serious concerns about judicial independence and executive overreach into the affairs of the higher judiciary.
- Among the **laws** passed was the National Commission for Minorities Act 2025, which established a statutory body to protect the rights of religious minorities.
- The Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Act 2025 set the **minimum** legal age for marriage within the federal capital at 18 years.
- The Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act 2025 authorised law enforcement and armed forces to place suspects in preventive detention for up to three months.
- By the end of 2025, FAFEN **reported** that 41 laws had been enacted after receiving presidential assent. However, the rapid pace of these enactments drew criticism from opposition members and civil society, who characterised the law-making process as ‘executive-driven’.

## Administration of justice

- Pakistan’s performance on the World Justice Project’s rule-of-law index reflected challenges in upholding fundamental rights. The country **scored** 0.37 on fundamental rights, compared to a global average of 0.54, and was ranked 130 out of 143 countries, a slight improvement from 129 in 2024.
- According to the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, pending cases in the Supreme Court **decreased** to 33,787 by the end of 2025—a 40.7 percent reduction from over 57,000 in 2024. Similarly, high court case pendency fell to 212,537 cases—a 39.1 percent decrease from 348,987 in 2024.

## The death penalty

- Press reports tracked by HRCP indicated a significant increase in death sentences in 2025, with at least 225 handed down (primarily by the lower courts), compared to 174 in 2024. At least 15 individuals received the death penalty for blasphemy-related offences.
- Notably, no executions were reportedly carried out during the year, with the de facto moratorium in place since 2020 continuing through 2025.

## Law and order

- The Centre for Research and Security Studies **reported** that approximately 1,272 terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism operations occurred in 2025, resulting in an estimated 3,417 deaths and 2,134 injuries, encompassing civilians, security personnel, and suspects. This represents a 34 percent increase in fatalities compared to 2024.

- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan were disproportionately **affected** by militancy, collectively accounting for 96 percent of all related deaths and 90 percent of related injuries.
- In Balochistan, a 36-hour hostage crisis unfolded in March when BLA militants **bombed** the rail tracks near the Mashkaf Tunnel to hijack the Jaffar Express, taking over 400 passengers captive. A subsequent military operation and exchanges of fire resulted in the deaths of at least 33 militants and 26 passengers.
- In October, the Punjab and federal governments **initiated** a large-scale crackdown against the TLP. This involved sealing offices, mosques, and seminaries in Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad, freezing bank accounts, and registering multiple cases under anti-terrorism laws to prevent planned nationwide protests and the misuse of religious platforms.
- Despite police claims of a decline in overall crime, Karachi experienced over 64,000 street crime **incidents** and more than 70 related deaths in 2025.
- HRCP documented at least nine deaths caused by vigilante mobs, particularly in relation to urban crime, with seven of these deaths occurring in Karachi.
- According to HRCP's media monitoring, a total of 1,696 suspects were killed in 1,155 police encounters throughout the country. The Crime Control Department in Punjab accounted for most of these fatalities, conducting 707 encounters that resulted in the deaths of 977 suspects out of a tracked total of 1,128 deaths in 826 incidents. Additionally, 289 suspects were killed in 162 police encounters and CTD operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while 205 suspects were killed in 137 encounters in Sindh.

## Jails and prisoners

- Data from three provincial prisons departments indicated that as against a sanctioned capacity of 64,550 inmates, jails in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa held 110,402 prisoners, implying an overcrowding rate of about 171 percent—a decrease from 228 percent in 2024.
- A number of women associated with the PTI remained incarcerated on charges related to the 9 May 2023 riots, among them Dr Yasmin Rashid, an elderly cancer survivor, whose health reportedly deteriorated during the year.
- Over 21,600 Pakistani citizens were reportedly **imprisoned** abroad, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Of these, 74 percent were incarcerated in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.
- Approximately 738 Pakistani citizens, including fisherfolk, were **held** in Indian jails.
- According to official **data**, Pakistan held 257 Indian prisoners, comprising 58 civilians and 199 fishermen.

## Enforced disappearances

- The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED) received 273 new cases, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reporting the highest number. The COIED traced 32 missing persons to prisons and 13 to internment centres. Additionally, 230 individuals returned home, and 16 dead bodies were found. However, HRCP maintains that these figures are vastly underreported and has continued to criticise the COIED for failing to hold perpetrators accountable.

## Democratic development

- The [passage](#) of the 27th Amendment significantly restructured Pakistan's governance by establishing the Federal Constitutional Court, which was empowered to override Supreme Court decisions on constitutional matters; by granting the executive direct influence over judicial appointments; and by providing lifetime legal immunity to the president and chief of defence forces.
- Overturning a 2023 Supreme Court verdict that had declared the military trials of civilians unconstitutional, the apex court's Constitutional Bench [restored](#) sections of the Pakistan Army Act 1952 under which civilians could be tried in military courts.
- The Supreme Court's constitutional bench [dismissed](#) the PTI's petitions in the reserved seats case and restored the Peshawar High Court's 2024 ruling. This decision effectively disqualified the party from holding reserved seats for women and minorities in the national and provincial assemblies.
- A [report](#) by PILDAT highlighted the 'normalisation' of hybrid governance in Pakistan, noting that the security establishment's influence had become further entrenched across all governance domains.

## Local government

- Despite the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)'s [announcement](#) that local body elections would be held in Punjab in December, the polls were not conducted as scheduled.
- The Punjab government officially [notified](#) the Punjab Local Government Act 2025, prompting the ECP to restart the delimitation process for upcoming local body elections amid strong criticism that the Act would enable elections on a nonparty basis and empower the bureaucracy and provincial government at the expense of local councillors. The Act was challenged in court on the grounds of undermining the spirit of democracy.
- For the fourth year running, Islamabad Capital Territory [remained](#) without an elected local government.
- Local governments in Sindh continued to operate with [limited](#) fiscal autonomy, affecting service delivery and municipal governance.
- The Peshawar High Court [struck down](#) part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa City/Tehsil Local Government Rules of Business 2022 to the extent that they curtailed the powers of tehsil and city local council heads.
- Local government elections in Quetta were postponed following a Federal Constitutional Court [order](#) three days before polling day after an appeal challenged the delimitation of constituencies conducted on the basis of the 2017 census.
- Local government elections in Gilgit-Baltistan were [postponed](#) and subsequently slated to take place at the same time as the Legislative Assembly elections in 2026.

## Freedom of expression

- The National Assembly's [passage](#) of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2025 raised concerns about its potential to penalise dissent and target journalists, activists, and political workers.

- Pakistan's [ranking](#) on the 2025 World Press Freedom Index fell six places to 158 out of 180 countries. Rights groups attributed this decline to the contentious amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016, systematic censorship, and increased economic and legal pressures on journalists.
- The Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors [reported](#) that five journalists were killed, six faced legal cases, arrests, or other official actions, and three were subjected to harassment or intimidation. It also documented two blocked press conferences and two attacks on media offices.
- Access to X (formerly Twitter) was partially [restored](#) in May after months of restrictions following the February 2024 general elections.

## Freedom of peaceful assembly

- Section 144 was imposed numerous times to curtail assemblies in Punjab throughout 2025, with such instances peaking in [February](#), [August](#), and [October](#), often with multiple extensions. In November and December alone, the ban was extended several times in Rawalpindi and across the province to pre-empt protests.
- Throughout much of 2025, Sindh saw continued public [demonstrations](#) against the planned development of six new Indus River canals. Residents and advocacy groups voiced concerns that these projects would worsen existing water scarcity, especially during critical periods of the farming cycle. At least one protestor was killed and a dozen others, including police officers, injured when a related protest in Moro turned violent.
- The Quetta police dispersed a [sit-in](#) organised by the BYC in March against enforced disappearances, using tear gas, water cannons, and blank shots. The BYC claimed that three protesters were killed and 13 injured, while police reported approximately 10 personnel injured.
- BYC leader Dr Mahrang Baloch and about 150 others were [arrested](#) in March, leading to strikes in Balochistan. BYC leader Sammi Deen Baloch was also detained in Karachi during a related protest. As of the end of the year, at least three women leaders of the BYC (including Mahrang Baloch) were still incarcerated.

## Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

- In April, an Ahmadi man was [lynched](#) by a TLP-led mob outside a place of worship in Karachi. The attack occurred during a protest aimed at obstructing the community's religious rituals, resulting in one death and the emergency evacuation of 40 others by the police.
- The Ahmadiyya community faced continued [persecution](#) in 2025, including 21 attacks on places of worship, the desecration of 381 graves, and 56 arrests on charges of religious offenses. Violence during the year also included at least four faith-based killings and five attempted murders.
- The Christian community in Jaranwala, Punjab, [claimed](#) that they had not received their due compensation even after the passage of two years, following mob-led attacks on their homes and churches in 2023.
- The Punjab prisons department reported that as of June, there were 729 inmates incarcerated on blasphemy-related charges, including 51 women and two juveniles.
- HRCP received at least ten complaints pertaining to cases of allegedly forced conversions involving Hindu girls and one Hindu boy.

## Freedom of movement

- The authorities continued to curtail the movement and civil liberties of political activists, particularly in Balochistan. At least 64 activists in Hub were added to the Fourth Schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997, mandating strict police surveillance and travel limitations, marking a significant expansion of these restrictions.
- The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) [intercepted](#) 8,149 travellers flagged on a consolidated ‘Stop List’ at airports and borders. This measure targeted individuals on criminal and security watchlists to enhance national border control and inter-agency coordination.
- A total of 66,000 passengers were [prevented](#) from travelling abroad, including 51,000 due to insufficient or unverified documentation.

## Freedom of association

- In February, the Balochistan government [cancelled](#) the registration of ten prominent labour unions and associations—which critics described as an attempt to suppress dissent and collective bargaining—bringing the total number of prohibited labour organisations in the province to 63.
- Between September and October, the Joint Awami Action Committee led a large-scale region-wide [strike](#) in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, bringing major districts to a standstill. The mobilisation, demanding governance reforms, resulted in at least nine deaths and over 200 injuries following clashes with the police.
- Following the Pakistani government’s formal ban on the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement in October 2024, an intensified crackdown on its members continued into 2025. In March, the CIVICUS Monitor [added](#) Pakistan to its ‘Watchlist’ due to the arbitrary criminalisation of Pashtun and Baloch activists on terrorism charges.

## Women

- Pakistan was [ranked](#) at 145 out of 148 countries on the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index.
- Data from the NGO Sahil indicated a surge in gender-based violence, with reported incidents increasing by nearly 25 percent in the first 11 months of 2025. A total of 6,543 incidents were reported, with the majority occurring in Punjab (78 percent) and within victims’ homes (60 percent).
- According to data from the National Police Bureau, at least 470 women fell victim to ‘honour’ killings during the year. Of these, 189 cases were reported in Punjab, 126 in Sindh, 116 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 29 in Balochistan, and 10 in Gilgit-Baltistan. Domestic violence accounted for at least 1,332 cases of murder and 2,912 cases of battery.
- Sexual assault cases remained prevalent, with police data indicating 3,815 cases of rape, 983 of gang rape, 69 of custodial sexual assault, and 223 cases of incest-based sexual assault.
- The Digital Rights Foundation received 2,586 reports of cyber-harassment, primarily from women in Punjab.

## Children

- NGO Sahil reported over 3,600 cases of violence against children during the year. These included 2,003 cases of child sexual abuse, 1,107 cases of abduction, 365 cases of missing children, and 53 cases of child marriage.

- Sahil recorded 52 cases of child sexual abuse linked to pornography, indicating a concerning trend.
- The frequent intersection of these incidents with organised crime, such as abduction and gang rape, suggests that this exploitation is often driven by structured criminal networks rather than isolated offenders.

## Transgender persons

- At least 19 transgender individuals were killed and two were subjected to acid attacks. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reported the highest number of killings, with ten such incidents.
- HRCP’s media monitoring revealed that at least 13 transgender persons were victims of sexual violence during the year.

## Labour

- National data indicates that 97 workers were killed or injured in occupational accidents, ranging from industrial explosions to electrocutions. Most of these incidents (73) occurred in Punjab.
- In the absence of adequate occupational safety and health measures for most workers, at least 52 miners and 13 sanitation workers were killed in workplace accidents during the year.
- The monthly minimum **wage** for unskilled workers was set at PKR 40,000 in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while it remained at PKR 37,000 in Balochistan and Islamabad Capital Territory. When juxtaposed against the poverty line set by the World Bank of USD 4.20 per day, this wage range translates into approximately USD 4.40–4.76 per day—leaving millions on or below the poverty line.
- According to the Sindh Assembly’s Public Accounts Committee, over 80 percent of private industrial units **failed** to implement the minimum wage, while trade union leaders estimated that as many as 95 percent of factories did not pay the legal minimum wage.
- Thousands of textiles and power-loom workers held a **rally** in Faisalabad in August to demand an 8.4 percent wage increase and an immediate end to factory lockouts.
- Pakistan’s unemployment rate **rose** to a 21-year high of 7.1 percent, according to the Labour Force Survey for 2024/25. The total number of jobless individuals increased to 5.9 million, with notable regional disparities as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recorded the highest unemployment rate at 9.6 percent.
- Unemployment was most severe among youth (aged 15–24), reaching 12.8 percent; nearly a **million** degree holders remained jobless during the year, signalling a significant mismatch between educational output and market demand.
- While female labour force participation remained **low** at roughly 22.4 percent, the Labour Force Survey revealed a staggering burden of unpaid labour, with an estimated 117.4 million working-age individuals—predominantly women—were engaged in unpaid domestic and care work.
- The International Organization for Migration **reported** that at least 109 Pakistanis died or went missing in 2025 while attempting to migrate illegally, ranking Pakistan third in the Asia-Pacific region for such fatalities.

## Persons living with disabilities

- While the year saw a series of targeted welfare measures for persons living with disabilities, particularly in [Sindh](#) and [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa](#), these remained limited in scale and coverage, underscoring the state's continued reliance on piecemeal assistance rather than comprehensive, rights-based inclusion.
- Amnesty International raised concerns regarding the [detention](#) of Beebarg Zehri, a BYC activist with disabilities. They noted that he was denied necessary medical assistance despite his health 'severely deteriorating' while in custody.

## Refugees and internally displaced persons

- Between January and December, a total of 157,298 Afghan nationals were [arrested](#) and detained in Pakistan.
- UNHCR confirmed that over one million Afghans [returned](#) from Pakistan following the implementation of Phases 2 and 3 of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan. As of November, this left a significant number of vulnerable families in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and protection at border crossings.

## Education

- A report by the Pakistan Institute of Education [revealed](#) that over 25 million children aged 5–16 were out of school.
- The Balochistan chief minister announced the [reopening](#) of 3,200 previously nonfunctional schools across the province within a year, along with the completion of merit-based recruitment for 16,000 teachers.
- The Sindh government [announced](#) an USD 80 million 'Sindh Schools Nourishment Programme' to provide daily nutritious meals and take-home rations to over 200,000 students across 1,400 schools.
- Punjab's education minister [confirmed](#) that floods had destroyed or severely damaged over 3,000 schools in the province, rendering thousands of buildings structurally unsafe or submerged.
- National spending on public education continued to [fall](#) while the country's literacy rate remained stagnant at 60.6 percent.

## Health

- Despite advocacy by rights-based NGOs such as HRCP, the right to health was not recognised as a fundamental right.
- Pakistan's polio eradication programme [reported](#) 31 polio cases—a significant decline from the 74 cases recorded in 2024. Most cases were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (20), followed by Sindh (9), and one each in Punjab and Gilgit-Baltistan.
- UNICEF reported that nearly 10 million Pakistani children suffered from [stunting](#) as a result of poor diet; eight out of ten children did not receive the right type or amount of food, and over half of those under five were deficient in essential vitamins.
- The World Health Organization [stated](#) that approximately 675 newborns and 27 mothers died daily from preventable complications.

## Housing, public amenities, and urbanisation

- Gilgit-Baltistan **faced** 20–22-hour daily power outages and road closures caused by heavy snowfall in early 2025.
- Following a deadly incident on the Swat River that resulted in the deaths of more than a dozen tourists, the authorities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa **launched** large-scale anti-encroachment operations along the riverbank.
- In Lahore, civil society activists and students **protested** the removal and transplantation of 123 trees in the historic Nasir Bagh to make way for an underground parking plaza, arguing that the project would destroy one of the city's few remaining 'green lungs.'
- While the Punjab Enforcement and Regulation Authority functioned as a parallel body with powers of arrest and surveillance to address civic issues such as encroachments, widespread protests by traders and concerns over judicial oversight **suggested** that its enforcement frequently bypassed due process on the pretext of clearing public spaces.
- Karachi **witnessed** over 800 traffic fatalities, which, coupled with widespread injuries, suggested systemic weaknesses in the city's governance and urban management strategies.

## Environment and climate change

- The 2025 monsoon brought about **devastating** consequences, resulting in 1,037 fatalities and 1,067 injuries across Pakistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reported the highest death toll (509), primarily due to cloudbursts and flash floods, while Punjab experienced 322 deaths, mainly attributed to riverine flooding and other monsoon-related incidents in urban areas.
- Severe flash floods in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa **claimed** 323 lives and injured 156, with Buner district suffering 217 fatalities despite over 850 successful rescues.
- Punjab recorded the **highest** number of injuries (665) and displacements, as riverine flooding during the monsoon submerged more than 3,900 villages. Nationwide, property damage included over 229,000 houses and the loss of over 22,000 livestock.
- Approximately 3 million people were **evacuated** or rescued from high-risk areas, with over 152,000 displaced individuals sheltered in relief camps. Punjab saw the largest displacement, with over 2.8 million residents moved, while approximately 183,958 people were evacuated from flood-affected regions in Sindh.
- Extreme heat **records** were broken in Gilgit-Baltistan, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, with Chilas reaching 48.5°C and Bunji hitting 46.1°C.
- In Hunza, a glacial lake outburst flood **damaged** sections of the Karakoram Highway, farmland, and infrastructure, and endangering dozens of nearby homes.
- Pakistan was **ranked** as the world's most polluted country in 2025 by IQAir, with hazardous PM2.5 levels exceeding World Health Organization recommendations by up to 13 times.

## Pakistan and international human rights mechanisms

- In October, the UN General Assembly [elected](#) Pakistan to the Human Rights Council for a three-year term, commencing on 1 January 2026—the sixth time that Pakistan has been chosen for this role.
- Several organisations, including Human Rights Watch, HRCP, and the World Organisation Against Torture, submitted information to the Committee Against Torture for its List of Issues report, identifying the ongoing use of torture and ill-treatment by the police, the use of confessions extracted under torture, and failure to carry out adequate investigations into reports and complaints of abuse.

## National human rights institutions

- Overall, national human rights institutions continued to face structural challenges stemming from opaque appointment processes, insecure tenures, and chronic financial constraints, all of which undermine their independence and effectiveness.
- The National Commission for Human Rights maintained its ‘A’ status accreditation by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, indicating continued adherence to the Paris Principles. However, the Commission faced operational [challenges](#) due to intermittent funding delays and reliance on acting appointments for some key roles.
- The National Commission on the Status of Women was headed by an interim chairperson through the year, with no progress towards appointing a permanent chairperson.
- The National Commission for Minorities Rights Act, passed in December, transformed the body from a ministerial committee into a statutory, independent institution. Despite this progress, civil society organisations raised concerns regarding the exclusion of certain communities on the board.

ISLAMABAD  
CAPITAL  
TERRITORY

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# Overview

As the seat of Parliament, the federal government, and the superior judiciary, Islamabad became ground zero in 2025 for an extensive rollback of judicial independence, the criminalisation of free speech, and the failure of elected officials to safeguard democracy.

In Parliament, the ruling coalition—whose numbers had been boosted by a Supreme Court decision to allocate the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)'s reserved seats to them—bulldozed key pieces of legislation through both houses in violation of established rules and tradition.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act was passed in January, introducing several controversial changes. Following its enactment, hundreds of cases were registered, including against journalists, most notably renowned human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari—one of its most ardent opponents.

Perhaps the most consequential legislation by Parliament in 2025 was the 27th Amendment. This amendment gutted hard-fought judicial independence and undermined the Supreme Court by establishing the Federal Constitutional Court, reconstituting the Judicial Commission of Pakistan in favour of the executive, and permitting the transfer of high court judges among provinces without their consent.

Following the passage of the 26th Amendment in the previous year, a judge was transferred from the Lahore High Court to the Islamabad High Court (IHC). This judge was then placed at the top of the seniority list and appointed chief justice, replacing the senior puisne judge. This led to unprecedented public protests by five justices and an extremely divided high court.

The shake-up of the higher judiciary resulted in the country losing some of its most brilliant jurists, who either resigned in protest or were removed from service.

In a blow to the right to a fair trial, the Supreme Court's Constitutional Bench in May overturned the court's earlier majority decision, ruling that the trial of civilians in military courts was constitutional.

In terms of law and order, the city witnessed horrific incidents of violence against women, such as the murder of 17-year-old social media star Sana Yousaf. There was also continued abuse of power, as those with influence went unpunished in deadly hit-and-run cases.

The illegal practice of abducting and disappearing people at the hands of security agencies also continued unabated. Several journalists and their families went missing for days and weeks as a form of retribution for their work.



*The 17-year-old social media star Sana Yousaf was murdered in Islamabad.*

The state's crackdown against the PTI showed no signs of receding. The party was not only deprived of its share of reserved seats but also lost its leaders of opposition in the Senate and National Assembly after they were de-seated following convictions in the 9 May 2023 riots case. Opposition parties consistently demanded an end to the military's influence in politics and criticised the 'hybrid model' of government.

For the fourth year, the capital remained without an elected local government—a critical feature for deepening democracy and strengthening citizens' participation in governance.

The government's crackdown on Afghan refugees continued, with over a million Afghans leaving Pakistan in 2025.

In a welcome development, the National Commission for Minorities Bill was finally passed into law, with the hope that the commission would be empowered to protect all religious minorities equally.

Similarly, despite considerable opposition, the government increased the minimum age for marriage from 16 to 18 years in Islamabad. This was described as landmark progress for safeguarding children's rights and promoting gender equality.

Women's rights, too, witnessed substantial advancement through several Supreme Court decisions on inheritance, dissolution of marriage, non-dependency on men, and claims on dowry.

# Rule of Law

## Laws and law-making

In 2025, Parliament enacted a total of 41 laws, following their passage by both houses and presidential assent, according to the Free and Fair Election Network. Beyond these statistics, however, parliamentary conduct left much to be desired, marked by significant legislation being bulldozed through Parliament with a troubling disregard for necessary checks and balances. Several proceedings were marred by members' disinterest and/or the government's indifference. On numerous occasions, the PTI-led opposition boycotted proceedings and protested—in one instance even holding a symbolic 'people's assembly' outside Parliament.

While apathy and the flouting of rules have been features of previous governments, this year reached new heights when, in January, a joint session of Parliament [passed](#) a total of four bills in under ten minutes.

Also in January, Parliament hastily passed the controversial Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act. Among other provisions, Section 26A of the Act criminalises the intentional dissemination of fake news, increasing the punishment to imprisonment of up to three years and a fine of up to PKR 2 million. Experts warned that the amendment [violated](#) constitutional guarantees and international legal standards concerning human rights, freedom of expression, privacy and due process. Opposition parties, rights groups, and journalists, including HRCP, [called](#) for the law to be repealed, fearing it would be used to suppress political dissent and public debate, as well as serve as a legal tool for silencing journalists.

In August, Parliament passed the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act, allowing police and security agencies to detain suspects who threaten national security and/or public safety for up to three months in 'preventative custody', and in some cases even longer. This [provision](#) was previously granted for two years following militants' attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in 2014, and the government contended that the current security situation warranted its reintroduction—albeit with a similar three-year sunset clause. While the government assured opposition parties that detainees would be protected under Article 10, which stipulates the right to counsel and production before a magistrate within 24 hours, rights groups, including HRCP, called on legislators to review the changes. In a [statement](#), HRCP said: 'Preventive detention without charge or trial—based on vague criteria—risks undermining due-process guarantees under Articles 10 and 10A of the Constitution and opens the door to abuse.'

In November, the 27th Amendment brought about the most consequential change to the country's constitutional edifice by all but erasing the judiciary's independence. The amendment was pushed through with extraordinary haste and minimal public discussion, moving from a draft approved by the cabinet (whose meeting was chaired by the prime minister whilst on a visit abroad) to Parliament and then presidential assent in a matter of days.

The amendment created a new Federal Constitutional Court to operate above the Supreme Court, holding exclusive jurisdiction over cases of constitutional interpretation and federal-provincial disputes. The changes also handed the power to select higher judiciary judges to the executive and parliament by reconstituting the Judicial Commission of Pakistan. Furthermore, the [amendment](#) enabled the transfer of high court judges among the provinces without their consent, with failure to agree leading to disciplinary action. HRCP expressed deep concern after the amendment's passing, stating it 'undermines judicial independence by expanding executive control'.

The constitutional changes also overhauled the military command structure, creating the all-powerful new post of chief of defence forces. This position would have operational command over the army, navy, and air force, as well as the country's nuclear arsenal. The position, to be filled by the current army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, also features [lifetime immunity](#) from arrest or prosecution for its holder. Similarly, the country's president was granted lifetime immunity from criminal proceedings and arrest.

## Administration of justice

The country's higher judiciary was exhaustively restructured following the 27th Amendment. This led to the establishment of the 13-strong Federal Constitutional Court, with Supreme Court Justice Aminuddin Khan appointed by the government as its first chief justice. In protest, Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, senior puisne judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, and another Supreme Court judge, Justice Athar Minallah, [resigned](#), terming the amendment an assault on the constitution and democracy. Justice Aminuddin Khan had previously headed the Supreme Court's Constitutional Bench, formed after the controversial 26th Amendment in 2024.

The Federal Constitutional Court's composition immediately [raised](#) questions, as the government had selected judges without any clear, uniform standard of eligibility. The UN Human Rights Office [expressed](#) grave concern, stating the amendment risked 'subjugating the judiciary to political interference and executive control'. Similarly, the International Commission of Jurists [warned](#) that the new judicial appointment systems constituted a 'structural assault' on judicial independence.

The government also increased the retirement age for Federal Constitutional Court judges to 68 years, while the limit for Supreme Court justices remained at 65 years.

Following the Federal Constitutional Court's formation, the 18-strong Supreme Court continued to be headed by Justice Yahya Afridi, who retained the title of chief justice of Pakistan after a reported behind-the-scenes tussle. Chief Justice Afridi, who seemingly did not appreciate dissent among his judges in some cases, [failed](#) to unite his court and take a stand against executive interference, despite pleas from several justices.

In December, the Federal Constitutional Court [asserted](#) that all other courts, including the Supreme Court, were required to 'adhere' to its judgments.

In May, the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court overturned the court's October 2023 judgment, which had deemed the military trials of civilians 'unconstitutional'. In a 5-2 judgment authored by Justice Aminuddin Khan, the bench criticised the earlier ruling as 'fatally flawed' and [held](#) that trials of civilians under the Pakistan Army Act 1952 met the requirements of fairness, impartiality, and due process guaranteed under Article 10A of the Constitution.

The IHC also faced a crisis when two judges, including IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq, were elevated to the Supreme Court. Before these elevations, the government had, in February, transferred three high court judges from Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan to the IHC. Among them, Lahore High Court Justice Sarfraz Dogar was surprisingly placed at the top of the seniority list, making him the chief justice-in-waiting and superseding the senior puisne judge IHC Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani. As a result, five IHC judges, including Justice Kayani, [challenged](#) Justice Dogar's appointment for violating judicial rules, but their plea was dismissed by the Supreme Court's Constitutional Bench. In September, after the IHC controversially adopted the Practice and Procedure Rules 2025—which gave the chief justice extensive administrative powers—the internal conflict intensified. The five dissenting judges approached the Supreme Court, [accusing](#) the Chief Justice of having transformed his office into an 'autocracy, in an effort to reduce the judiciary to a regiment'.

Changes to the IHC also included the removal of a judge—one of the dissenting five—over a fake law degree. Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, whose degree question came to light under suspicious circumstances in 2024 and was taken up by the IHC, was removed from service by Chief Justice Dogar in December. Justice Jahangiri had earlier been involved in a tussle with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) as head of the election tribunals hearing challenges from three PTI National Assembly candidates from Islamabad who had alleged rigging.

**Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha case.** Human rights lawyers Imaan Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha (Mazari's spouse), known for defending victims of state violence, were accused of violating the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). The charges stemmed from their criticism of the military's role in human rights violations and alleged glorification of banned militant groups through their support for victims of enforced disappearances, among other cases. As the couple faced the courts in 2025, HRCP criticised the misuse of cybercrime laws and judicial processes to punish legitimate dissent, demanding the withdrawal of the baseless charges against them and an end to their intimidation.



*Human rights lawyers Imaan Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha (Mazari's spouse), known for defending victims of state violence, were accused of violating the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA).*

Regarding pending cases, official data indicated that between January and November, 19,370 new cases were lodged at the Supreme Court, while 20,665 cases were disposed of. Despite disposals marginally exceeding fresh filings, the overall pendency stood at 56,608 cases as of November. However, following the 27th Amendment, 22,910 cases were transferred to the Federal Constitutional Court, reducing the number of [pending cases](#) at the Supreme Court to 33,698.

In December, the IHC [reported](#) that it had resolved 15,805 cases during the year.

# Enforcement of Law

## Law and order

Street crime remained the most commonly reported crime in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) during the year, followed by kidnapping and abduction (Table 1).

Table 1: Crime statistics for ICT in 2025

Crime	No of FIRs	Female victims	Male victims	Transgender victims
Street crime	1409	117	1292	0
Kidnapping/abduction	904	684	224	0
Murder	146	42	111	0
Rape/sexual assault	100	80	20	1
Sexual assault of children	38	9	29	0
Domestic violence	32	31	1	0
Gang rape	14	12	2	0
Physical assault of children	9	2	7	0
Honour killing	3	3	0	0
Blasphemy under various sections of PPC	3	0	2	0
Acid crimes	2	2	0	0
Custodial death	1	1	1	1
Custodial torture	0	0	0	0

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

In April, Iman Afroz, a 22-year-old student at International Islamic University Islamabad, was shot dead inside her hostel. Facing criticism over the delay, the police arrested the accused, Mohammed Feroz, in June. A district and sessions court [indicted](#) him in December, and the case is currently underway.

In a horrific case of domestic violence, Sania Bibi, a 28-year-old mother of an infant, was allegedly set on fire by her husband and his father inside their home on the capital's outskirts in June. Sania remained in hospital for a month before succumbing to her injuries, but had informed the police of the culprits, who claimed the incident resulted from a gas leak. At the last hearing of the case in October, the accused were [denied](#) bail and remain in judicial custody in Adiala Jail.

In June, 17-year-old social media influencer Sana Yousaf was [shot dead](#) inside her home by a man seemingly obsessed with befriending her. Police apprehended the accused, 22-year-old Omar Hayat, a few days later, and he was indicted in September.

In a high-profile hit-and-run case in December, the teenage son of an IHC judge rammed his SUV into two girls travelling on a scooter and then fled the scene. While the suspect was arrested soon after and spent a few days in custody, he

was shortly pardoned by the victims’ heirs, leading to his acquittal. Subsequently, a [complaint](#) alleging abuse of office was filed against the judge at the Supreme Judicial Council.

The influence of the powerful in such cases is not new, as was evidenced in February when a court acquitted the daughter of a Supreme Court judge involved in a similar hit-and-run case in 2022 that resulted in the deaths of two low-wage earners. Having never been in custody or remand for a single day, the accused was [acquitted](#) in February after the case, filed by the father of one victim, was dismissed due to lack of evidence and poor investigation. In May, the father withdrew his appeal against the acquittal from the IHC.

In July, the Supreme Court criticised the delay by police officials in registering first information reports (FIRs), observing that this ‘erodes the confidence of people in the criminal justice system’. While ordering the acquittal of a convict from Umerkot, Sindh, in a 2018 murder case, Justice Athar Minallah [remarked](#) that delays in case registration would be perceived as the capture of the police force and criminal justice system by those who wield power and influence.

In July, the federal government, through a presidential [ordinance](#), transformed the pre-partition Frontier Constabulary, previously based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa along the border with the erstwhile tribal areas, into an expanded, nationwide Federal Constabulary headquartered in Islamabad. The force’s remit now includes riot control, internal security, counterterrorism, and public safety. This expansion has drawn criticism from legal and rights experts regarding the potential for increased detention powers. The PTI-led opposition further [condemned](#) it as a violation of provincial autonomy, fearing its potential to suppress dissent.

According to data from the ICT Police, 35 police encounters occurred during the year in which eight male suspects were killed, 36 male suspects and 4 female suspects were injured and one female police officer was injured; there were no casualties among the police. Only one inquiry was reportedly held under S. 176 of the Criminal Procedure Code, following a police encounter. The ICT Police also reported a strength of 9,957 police officers of which 515 were women.

The newly formed National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) reported 2,104 cases of cybercrime countrywide during the year, including cases of cyber-harassment and child abuse (Table 2).

*Table 2: Cases registered in 2025 under PECA*

Crime	No. of cases	Female victims	Male victims	Transgender victims	Minor victims
Cybercrime (all cases)	2,104	580	1,384	177	66
Cyber-harassment	545	360	110	0	15
Child abuse	58	4	18	0	49

*Source: National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency, in response to HRCP’s request for information.*

## Jails and prisoners

In October, Supreme Court Justice Athar Minallah [observed](#) that ‘enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, custodial torture and murders, and excessive use of force are the most intolerable crimes in a democratic society and the worst forms of violation of the Constitution and fundamental rights.’ Similarly, in November, the Supreme Court [reiterated](#) the state’s duty to protect the ‘right to life’ and prevent custodial violence and killings.

In December, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar [informed](#) the National Assembly that 21,647 Pakistani nationals were currently imprisoned abroad (Table 3).

Table 3: Pakistani prisoners incarcerated overseas

Country	No. of Pakistani prisoners
Saudi Arabia	10,745
UAE	5,297
India	738
China	652
Qatar	599
Oman	578
Malaysia	444
Italy	353
Bahrain	218
Türkiye	190
USA	141
Afghanistan	91

Source: Data presented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Senate in November 2025.

Meanwhile, Islamabad’s only prison, touted as a [model jail](#), was in the final stages of construction and was expected to commence operations in 2026.

## The death penalty

In January, a district and sessions court [sentenced](#) two men to death for sharing religiously offensive content on social media. The accused were found guilty of blasphemy and other charges, including Section 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code, in a case filed by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in 2021.

In May, the Supreme Court [upheld](#) Zahir Jaffer’s death sentence for the brutal murder of Noor Mukadam in Islamabad in 2021, dismissing his appeal. However, the court converted the second death penalty for rape to a life sentence and reduced the jail term for kidnapping. In September, Jaffer filed a review petition against this order. During the May hearing, the bench’s troubling comments—wherein it [questioned](#) why Mukadam had been spending time alone with Jaffer—were criticised by lawyers and activists as ‘victim blaming’.

In September, the Criminal Laws Amendment Act [replaced](#) the death penalty for harbouring hijackers and publicly stripping a woman with life imprisonment. The law aimed to align domestic legislation with Pakistan’s international obligations under the GSP+ trade agreement with the European Union.

In October, the Supreme Court [acquitted](#) a 74-year-old mentally ill Christian man of blasphemy charges, overturning his 2001 death sentence.

## Enforced disappearances

Authorities’ inhumane and illegal practice of abducting people continued unabated in 2025. In March, two brothers of exiled US-based journalist Ahmad Noorani were abducted during a raid by unidentified men on their residence in the dead of night. This occurred a day after Noorani published a story alleging nepotism by the army chief’s family. Their whereabouts remained unknown for weeks, with their family [alleging](#) they had been picked up by security agencies, although defence ministry officials denied this. A month later, the brothers were purportedly [recovered](#) during a police

operation in south Punjab—an oft-used narrative by state agencies in similar cases. The Noorani family’s [difficulties](#) did not end there; the brothers reportedly lost their jobs and were prohibited from travelling abroad, while their and their mother’s bank accounts were frozen without reason.

Also in March, journalist Waheed Murad was abducted by masked men who stormed his residence in the early hours. His whereabouts remained unknown until it was revealed he had been arrested for ‘cyber terrorism’ and disseminating ‘false and fake information’ under PECA. Following [criticism](#) from journalists and rights groups, including HRCP, he was freed on bail.

Saeedullah Baloch, a student of Quaid-e-Azam University, was allegedly abducted by security agencies in July from the Islamabad toll plaza while travelling to Quetta. His whereabouts remain unknown, with fellow students and activists [protesting](#) for his release as late as November; the courts have even failed to issue a production order.

Many other missing persons cases continued to grind through the legal system. The superior courts [chided](#) the government over its failure to recover those abducted, often for decades, yet remained mere spectators on the sidelines, waiting for a resolution.

Law enforcement agencies even used this tactic on one of their own when an NCCIA deputy director went missing for two weeks in October before being [declared](#) in the FIA’s custody on charges of corruption.

In 2025, the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED) registered 273 new cases nationwide. Its records for the year indicate that 33 persons were confirmed to be in various prisons, 13 were traced in internment centres, and 16 missing persons were found to be deceased. The COIED [claims](#) to have disposed of 706 cases during 2025 (see Table 4). Defence of Human Rights, a nongovernment organisation headed by Amina Masood Janjua, the wife of a missing person, which advocates for the recovery of missing persons, criticised the COIED’s disposal of cases, arguing that it fails to determine responsibility or address the crime itself.

*Table 4: Enforced disappearances in 2025*

Province/ territory	Cases registered in 2025	Returned home	Internment centres	Prison	Dead bodies found	Traced persons	Disposed of
Punjab	68	57	2	12	6	77	56
Sindh	28	12	-	4	-	15	46
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	101	31	11	8	3	49	393
Balochistan	56	122	-	6	7	135	184
Islamabad	17	8	-	2	-	10	23
AJK	3	-	-	1	-	1	4
Gilgit-Baltistan	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Total	273	230	13	33	16	287	706

*Source: Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances.*

In January, the federal government appointed former Supreme Court judge Justice Faqir Muhammad Khokhar as the chairman of the COIED, but he passed away the same month. In August, the federal government appointed Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah as the new chairperson.

# Fundamental Freedoms

## Freedom of expression

The state's application of the controversial PECA laws, amended in January and discussed above (see *Laws and law-making*), among other things, weaponised the persecution of journalists on questionable grounds by the newly formed NCCIA. Pakistan's [ranking](#) on the global press freedom index by Reporters Without Borders fell by six points, from 152/180 to 158.

Journalists perceived to be critical of the state also bore the brunt of state repression. Asad Ali Toor, a journalist with a significant social media following, discovered in April that his bank account, along with those of his family members and several [bird sellers](#) across the country (from whom he had purchased pets), had been frozen by the FIA. The agency informed the IHC that it needed to investigate Toor's income, allegedly earned through 'anti-state' activity. The accounts were belatedly unfrozen on the court's orders. Then, in July, Toor faced further action when his YouTube channel was briefly suspended among 27 similar channels that authorities claimed were spreading 'anti-state' content.

Besides targeting his family, journalist Ahmad Noorani had a [case](#) registered against him by the NCCIA in March, alleging the spreading of fake news, promoting anti-state propaganda, and attempting to incite public hatred against national institutions. The agency later filed several other cases against him on similar dubious grounds, while Noorani's YouTube channel was also [blocked](#) inside Pakistan in May. In December, a court [issued](#) Noorani's arrest warrants for not responding to various summons based on the NCCIA's charges.

In March, journalist Waheed Murad was allegedly abducted from his home in Islamabad by unidentified men. Following a petition filed by his family before the IHC, he was produced before the court by the FIA and [remanded](#) in its custody under various sections of PECA for having allegedly shared 'highly intimidating content' and 'false... information' against government functionaries.

Sohrab Barkat, associated with the online news blog Siasat.pk, which was banned in Pakistan years ago, was [arrested](#) by the FIA from the Islamabad airport in November. The NCCIA accused him of various offences, including criticising state institutions and spreading false information. He continues to fight his case in the courts.

Journalist Khalid Jamil was arrested by the NCCIA in August on charges of spreading false information, though he was released a day later on the magistrate's orders. However, the case against him was reconstituted in January 2026 when the NCCIA won its appeal against the decision, and Jamil obtained pre-arrest [bail](#). He had also been [arrested](#) by the FIA in September 2023 on similar charges.

Journalist Matiullah Jan continued to face controversial [charges](#) of terrorism and drug smuggling, originally filed against him in 2024. In April, Jan also claimed that his wife's and sister's bank accounts had been frozen at the state's behest. HRCP called on the government to ensure due process and demanded that journalists be able to work free from harassment and intimidation.

In October, police [raided](#) the National Press Club premises in Islamabad and reportedly manhandled journalists who were covering a demonstration by protesters from Azad Jammu and Kashmir. HRCP and the International Federation of Journalists strongly condemned the raid and assault on journalists.

The state also wielded its financial influence against critical media outlets, such as by stopping government advertisements to the Dawn Media Group. Expressing grave concern, HRCP reiterated that freedom of expression and democratic accountability cannot survive where economic coercion is used to discipline the press. It urged the government to end such discriminatory practices and restore an enabling environment for free, independent, and responsible journalism.

Table 5 indicates that 322 cases were lodged countrywide by the NCCIA under PECA in 2025 (including against minors), with charges of disinformation being the most common offence. HRCP notes that while the NCCIA reported a strength of 552 officers and 14 training and refresher courses in place, none of these courses included a human rights education component.

*Table 5: Cases filed by NCCIA under PECA in 2025*

Crime	No of cases	Female suspects	Male suspects	Minor suspects
Offences under PECA	322	42	273	5
Disinformation	187	21	180	1
Hate speech	173	89	200	2
Cyber-terrorism	99	11	94	0

*Source: National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency, in response to HRCP's request for information.*

## Freedom of peaceful assembly

The controversial Section 144 of the Pakistan Penal Code, which bars freedom of movement, was enforced numerous times in the capital. This was mostly in anticipation of protests by the PTI in August and December, which called for the release of jailed party leader Imran Khan.

In July, police barricaded the National Press Club to deny access to peaceful protesters from Balochistan, including women and children, who wished to set up a protest camp at the site. HRCP expressed concern over the treatment meted out to the protesters, calling for the state to uphold the right to peaceful assembly. The families were later permitted to set up a camp, which remained intact for over a month. However, their demands for an end to enforced disappearances and the release of their loved ones remained unheard.

## Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

The alleged entrapment of innocent individuals in blasphemy cases resonated in the IHC while hearing a petition to establish a commission to investigate the matter. While the court's order to form a commission was overruled on review in July, the issue—involving the alleged registration of fraudulent online blasphemy cases for extortion—urgently requires investigation due to the inherent dangers surrounding blasphemy allegations.

In December, the National Commission for Minorities Act was finally passed into law, following its initial passage in May. This commission, first envisioned in the landmark 2014 Jilani judgment concerning the protection of minorities, will include representation from religious minority communities, human rights institutions, and experts. Regrettably, the re-passage of the law in Parliament once again saw lawmakers employ invective against the beleaguered Ahmadi community. HRCP welcomed the law but emphasised that the 'proposed commission must protect all religious minorities equally, without exception or hierarchy,' and that its scope must 'align strictly with constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion or belief.'

## Freedom of movement

The state's arbitrary use of the Exit Control List and other similar measures to curtail movement continued in 2025. The director general of the FIA informed the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Overseas Pakistanis that a total of 66,000 passengers were **offloaded** at various airports in the country, 51,000 of whom were stopped due to the questionable veracity of their travel documents. In August, immigration authorities at the Islamabad airport **barred** journalist Asad Toor from leaving for the US, as his name was on a no-fly list, with no reason divulged to him. HRCP strongly condemned the incident, along with the growing practice of restricting people's constitutional right of movement, as did the Committee to Protect Journalists.



*A total of 66,000 passengers were offloaded at various airports in the country.*

In February, the IHC criticised the role of the Ministry of Interior and ISI in placing eight family members of a formerly missing person on the Exit Control List and directed their **removal** from it. In another case in March, the IHC **observed** that stopping a citizen from travelling abroad without tangible evidence was illegal and unconstitutional. Similar cases **continued** throughout the year.

In October, the capital's residents were in near-lockdown for several days when authorities **blocked** all entry points into Islamabad following a protest march by the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) from Lahore.

## Freedom of association

The TLP, a far-right religious-political party, was declared a 'terrorist' organisation and banned by the federal government in October. This decision followed deadly clashes with the police during the TLP's anti-Israel protest march from Lahore to Islamabad, particularly in Muridke during a midnight operation by law enforcement agencies. Experts felt that while the government may have **banned** the organisation, it still existed as a political party, requiring other legal considerations.

HRCP itself faced intimidation when, among other incidents, a conference on militancy and its impact on human rights in marginalised regions in Islamabad, and another in Gilgit on local communities' right to natural resources, were stopped. Officials, reportedly belonging to security agencies, informed the venue managers that a no-objection certificate was required, which is not a legal requirement. In a **statement**, HRCP highlighted the harassment and intimidation of its membership and staff and urged authorities to ensure that 'human rights defenders can operate without fear of reprisal or undue interference'.

# Democratic Development

## Political participation

In January, the ECP recorded the total [registered](#) voters in the country at 132.6 million, comprising 71.2 million male and 61.3 million female voters. In Islamabad, the total registered voters were reported at 1.17 million. In December, the ECP [claimed](#) that the gender gap in Pakistan's electoral rolls had narrowed to 7.1 percent in 2025, from 11.8 percent in 2018. The ECP secretary shared that women's voter registration has outpaced men's in the past five years, with the former increasing by 27 percent and the latter by 17 percent.

In September, after considerable delay, the Commonwealth Observer Group released its final [report](#) on the 2024 general elections. The observers described an 'electoral environment in which decisions by key institutions consistently limited the ability of one particular party [the PTI] to contest the elections', hinting at developments that it said may have 'impinged on the credibility, transparency and inclusiveness of the electoral process'. Events in 2025 witnessed a continuation of that policy.

In June, in a blow to the PTI's standing in Parliament, the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court [overturned](#) the July 2024 full bench majority judgment. This earlier judgment had recognised the PTI as a parliamentary party and ruled it eligible for its due share of reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies. Legal experts asserted that the June judgment, delivered by a bench formed under the controversial 26th Amendment, had weakened democracy. Following the order, the ECP [distributed](#) the PTI's reserved seats among the Pakistan Muslim League (N), the Pakistan People's Party, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) in the National Assembly, giving the ruling coalition a two-thirds majority. This action also increased the coalition's share in the Senate by applying the same redistribution in the provincial assemblies.

In August, the ECP [disqualified](#) nine PTI lawmakers, including National Assembly Opposition Leader Omar Ayub Khan and Senate Opposition Leader Shibli Faraz. This followed their convictions by an anti-terrorism court for their role in the riots on 9 May 2023. Expressing deep concern over the decision, HRCP stated that the right to political participation was a cornerstone of any democracy and urged the state to ensure that political competition was resolved through democratic means, not by curtailing civic and political space. Both constitutionally important posts remained [vacant](#) for the rest of the year due to delaying tactics by the ruling coalition.

## Shrinking democratic spaces and the role of elected assemblies

According to a study by the Pakistani think tank PILDAT, which [assessed](#) the quality of democracy in Pakistan, the military's influence over governance and politics increased tremendously in 2025. This was especially pronounced after the India-Pakistan war in May, which raised the military's standing. This shift became even more stark when the chief of army staff, General Asim Munir, was [promoted](#) to a five-star field marshal and then chief of defence forces, with an extended tenure and lifetime immunity from prosecution, making it clear where the balance of power was shifting.

At the conclusion of its 39th annual general meeting in November, HRCP [observed](#) that lifetime immunity for holders of public office had concentrated unchecked power in the hands of a few, thereby eroding parliamentary supremacy.

Surprisingly—or perhaps predictably given their shared adversary in the PTI—the ruling coalition openly embraced its closeness to the military. This mirrored the PTI government’s behaviour after the 2018 elections, when the roles were reversed. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif even [praised](#) this so-called ‘hybrid model,’ [explaining](#) it as ‘co-ownership of the power structure.’ The army’s repeated [criticism](#) of governance and security conditions in PTI-ruled Khyber Pakhtunkhwa further clarified its allegiance.

In August, an all-parties conference, organised by the Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-e-Pakistan—an opposition alliance including the PTI—[called](#) for a new political charter among parties. It asserted that ‘attacks by the hybrid system’ had rendered the Constitution and Parliament meaningless. The opposition parties also demanded an end to ‘the wave of fascism and political manipulation’ sweeping the country.

This influence was perhaps best exemplified by veteran politician and frequent government ally, Maulana Fazlur Rehman. While criticising the [passage](#) of the anti-terrorism law, he stated that ‘this Parliament creates laws on signals,’ alluding to the military’s sway over lawmakers. Similarly, PTI Senator Saifullah Abro, who twice broke with his party to vote for the 27th Amendment at the risk of losing his seat, informed the Senate in November that he had ‘voted only for General Syed Asim Munir.’ He remains a senator despite the PTI’s insistence that he be [de-seated](#).

## Local government

As the delay over local government elections in Islamabad continued into its fourth year, the ECP in May once more [attempted](#) to assign blame to Article 140A of the Constitution. This article empowers governments to change various procedures for local government elections. However, legal experts [viewed](#) this as scapegoating, arguing that the ECP was empowered to restrict governments from amending the law and causing delays, as conducting polls was solely its purview.

After multiple governmental delays since 2021, the ECP once again issued an [election schedule](#) in December, marking 15 February 2026 as polling day. Thousands of people submitted nomination papers to [contest](#) the 1,125 wards across the capital’s 125 union councils.

# The Rights of the Disadvantaged

## Women

The country's top courts issued several rulings pertaining to women's rights; while some advanced the cause, others represented a setback.

In March, the Supreme Court, hearing a plea from a government schoolteacher dismissed from a compassionate quota seat after marriage, ruled that the presumption of a woman becoming financially dependent on her husband after marriage 'is legally untenable, religiously unfounded and contrary to the egalitarian spirit of Islamic law.' Justice Mansoor Ali Shah emphasised that women were autonomous, rights-bearing citizens in their own right, not by virtue of their relationship to a man. The court also **called** on authorities to 'adopt gender-sensitive and gender-neutral language' rather than using patriarchal phrases that reinforce outdated stereotypes.

While hearing a case related to dowry and marriage, Justice Shah **ruled** in April that any property received by the bride remained exclusively hers and was not subject to claim or appropriation by the groom or his family. In a similar case in June, the Supreme Court ordered the government to **simplify** *nikahnamas* [marriage contracts] and ensure that *nikah* [marriage] registrars were sufficiently qualified and knowledgeable to preserve the rights of both the bride and groom.

Regarding a woman's right to inheritance, the Federal Shariat Court in March **declared** all tribal and other customs denying female family members their due share illegal. Similarly, while hearing a property inheritance dispute from 2002 in November, Justice Athar Minallah **ruled** that 'it is incumbent upon the state...to ensure the effective and unfettered realisation of women's right to inheritance.'

In October, the Supreme Court ruled that family courts cannot convert a suit for dissolution of marriage into one for *khula* [dissolution of marriage] without the wife's clear and informed consent. While hearing a **case** over a woman's right to dissolve a marriage, Justice Ayesha Malik ruled that cruelty within marriage was not confined to physical violence but also included psychological, verbal, and emotional abuse, as well as behaviour that made it impossible for a woman to live with dignity and safety in her home.

In March, the Council of Islamic Ideology **declared** the Supreme Court's 2024 decision invalid and 'un-Islamic'. The Supreme Court had upheld a wife's plea to dissolve her marriage after her husband's second marriage under the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961. The advisory body claimed that, as per Islamic law, husbands did not require the permission of their current wife or wives to contract subsequent marriages.

In another troubling development in December, the Supreme Court converted a man's prison **sentence** for rape into a consensual fornication conviction, citing procedural issues. While Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad ruled out punishment for the woman for the crime of consensual illicit intercourse, the judgment was condemned by rights activists and legal experts, who called it a 'miscarriage of justice'. Justice Salahuddin Panhwar, who wrote a dissenting note, noted that cases of rape and sexual harassment often went unreported as victims feared the consequences of reporting. He further emphasised that the absence of marks on a victim's body did not favour the accused. Rights activists called for the reversal of the judgment as it set 'a very dangerous precedent for women'.

## Children

In May, the ICT Child Marriage Restraint Act became [law](#). HRCP welcomed the law, which criminalises the marriage of individuals under 18 with penalties for parents, guardians, clerics, and marriage registrars, terming it a ‘vital step towards protecting children’s rights’. However, it noted with deep concern attempts by the Council of Islamic Ideology to [obstruct](#) the law in its initial stages, stating that framing child protection as incompatible with religion undermined the rights of every child.

In October, the IHC highlighted ‘inconsistencies’ in the law when it [allowed](#) an underage girl to live with her husband, as per her wishes, after she had been taken back to her parents’ home. Justice Azam Khan questioned whether a marriage ‘valid under Islamic law/shariah can be considered void under the statutory law’, particularly in light of the new legislation. The judge observed that the child marriage law ‘does not render the marriage itself void’ but had been ‘enacted merely to punish the party contracting, arranging and/or solemnising a marriage with a child’, and directed the government to address this ‘legal paradox’.

In September, the Federal Directorate of Education reiterated the [ban](#) on corporal punishment in learning spaces within the capital territory and vowed to crack down on violators. The ban applies to all government, private, religious, and childcare institutions.

## Transgender persons

In April, a transgender person was allegedly [gang-raped](#) at gunpoint and robbed after being detained in a house, according to media reports. The survivor told the police that a man had picked her up on the pretext of attending a wedding ceremony but had driven her to a house where he and his accomplice had assaulted her physically and sexually.

## Labour

As part of its response to the federal budget in June, HRCP termed the government’s decision not to raise the federal minimum wage ‘troubling’. The wage remained at PKR 37,000 per month—a figure that fails to meet the basic cost of living for a family of six’.

In October, the International Labour Organization [reported](#) that 66.7 million women and 50.7 million men in Pakistan were engaged in unpaid care and domestic work. It called for coordinated efforts and greater investment to strengthen and transform the country’s care economy.

## The elderly

In October, the Supreme Court [directed](#) provincial governments to take concrete measures for the welfare and protection of senior citizens. This directive underscored the constitutional obligation to safeguard family life, dignity, and social security. In a property dispute case between an elderly father and his children, Justice Salahuddin Panwar highlighted that Pakistan’s constitutional framework ‘places family at the heart of social life’.

## Persons living with disabilities

In January, the Directorate General of Special Education, which supervises approximately a dozen institutes for differently abled students, [extended](#) its free lunch programme to all government-run special educational centres in the capital.

In June, the government [announced](#) that children with special abilities would soon have access to facilities at the Pakistan Sports Complex. Officials stated that up to 5,000 registered students with special needs would benefit from this initiative once the necessary improvements were in place.

## Refugees and internally displaced persons

The state's controversial and inhumane [deportation](#) of Afghan refugees continued forcefully, with the accompanying propaganda becoming more toxic following border skirmishes with the Taliban regime.

In January, the Ministry of Interior [ordered](#) Afghan nationals to relocate from Islamabad or face deportation. A deadline of 31 March was set for undocumented persons and Afghan Citizen Card holders. Those holding Proof of Registration cards were directed to leave the country by 30 June. This deadline was later extended to 1 September. Concurrently, the government ceased renewing Proof of Registration cards and invalidated existing ones, leaving refugees—many of whom had resided in Pakistan for decades or were even born there—without access to essential services like healthcare and finance. Moreover, police were reported to be harassing and evicting families who had taken refuge in the capital's Argentina Park.

In September, HRCP expressed alarm over reports that many Afghan refugees in need of medical care were avoiding hospitals for fear of arrest. Some hospitals reportedly refused treatment to those without valid visas.

Overall, in 2025, UNHCR recorded the return of more than [1.1 million people](#) from Pakistan to Afghanistan, of whom over 154,000 were deported. As of 31 December, the UN body reported a little over one million registered Afghan refugees still residing in Pakistan, with 2.4 percent (24,179 individuals) said to be in Islamabad.



*The state's controversial and inhumane deportation of Afghan refugees continued forcefully.*

# Social, Economic, and Environmental Rights

## Education

The country's education crisis continued into 2025, with an [estimated](#) 26 million children aged 5–16 remaining out of school. This represents one of the highest percentages globally, at one in three children, according to a June press release by Save the Children. The organisation noted that more girls than boys remained deprived of their right to education across Pakistan.

The Pakistan Economic Survey for 2024/25 noted that the cumulative expenditure on education by the federal and provincial governments remained at [0.8 percent](#) of GDP, while the country's literacy rate was a little over 60 percent. The education-GDP ratio has consistently remained [low](#) since 2018, when it was 2 percent, despite the prime minister announcing an 'education emergency' in 2024.

The 2025/26 federal education budget was [reduced](#) by 12 percent from the previous year to PKR 169 billion. Allocations were heavily skewed towards higher education, with 82 percent allocated to tertiary institutions, 9 percent to secondary education, and only 3 percent to primary education.

On the ground, there were some welcome policy developments, such as the Federal Directorate of Education's [announcement](#) in September that it was establishing book banks at its schools. The directorate instructed its model institutions to maintain book repositories, which would collect used textbooks from students and redistribute them at the start of new sessions from the 2026/27 academic year.

In October, the Federal Directorate of Education announced an [expansion](#) of its 'School on Wheels' project, an outreach programme for early childhood education in the capital's rural areas, by [adding](#) two more buses to the two already in operation.

## Health

Key indicators in the Pakistan Economic Survey for 2024/25 highlighted the [dismal](#) state of public health in the country, with 50 of every 1,000 infants dying at birth each year. Moreover, the survey showed an alarmingly low doctor-to-patient ratio, with only one doctor per 750,000 people.

Meanwhile, contrary to expectations, the federal budget saw a nearly 16 percent [reduction](#) in the overall allocation for health compared to the previous year. Health experts expressed deep concern over the budget, noting that it represented one of the [lowest](#) health allocations in the region, at less than 0.9 percent of GDP.

In September, the president approved the National Institutes of Health (Reorganisation) Amendment Act, which, among other things, will see a cancer [database](#) set up to understand the actual burden of the disease, implement a national action plan for prevention, and enact management strategies to control its spread. Pakistan reportedly also has the highest [incidence](#) of breast cancer in Asia, with one in nine women at risk of developing breast cancer in their lifetime.

A total of 31 cases of the wild poliovirus type 1 were recorded in Pakistan in 2025. While a fall from 2024's 74 cases, these figures still placed Pakistan at the [top](#) of the two countries where the preventable but incurable infectious virus remains endemic (alongside Afghanistan).

Pakistan recorded an estimated 670,000 tuberculosis cases and 47,000 deaths in 2024, placing it among the top five countries driving the epidemic and accounting for 6.3 percent of the global tuberculosis burden, according to a World Health Organization report in November. The report stated that Pakistan continued to face one of the largest gaps between estimated cases and actual reporting and diagnosis, as millions remained untested due to poverty, stigma, weak surveillance, and limited access to testing. The preventable and treatable disease continues to be one of the deadliest infectious killers in the country, with poverty, undernutrition, overcrowding, and diabetes fuelling transmission, especially in more susceptible urban informal settlements, rural areas, and among marginalised communities.



Pakistan recorded an estimated 670,000 tuberculosis cases and 47,000 deaths in 2024.

## Housing and public amenities

The capital's housing crisis continued to adversely affect the lower-income and middle classes, with the Capital Development Authority (CDA) failing in its duty to provide affordable housing.

Residents of Islamabad's myriad *katchi abadis* [informal settlements] were left in a state of panic in January after the Supreme Court reopened a decade-old case in which it had issued a stay order on summary evictions from informal settlements. Representatives of the capital's slums feared the court would vacate the order without any change in how the CDA and government authorities accommodated their displacement. In a press conference in February by the Awami Workers Party, whose leaders had filed the original petition in 2015, *katchi abadi* representatives berated the government over its failure to provide affordable housing for the poor, stating that the least it could do was not deprive them of their homes. In December, *katchi abadi* representatives and other working-class groups demanded an end to recent 'anti-encroachment operations' by the CDA. They called on the newly created Federal Constitutional Court to uphold and enforce the 2015 stay order.

In December, the IHC ordered the CDA to halt its demolition operation in the Muslim Colony *katchi abadi* near Bari Imam. During the hearing, the petitioner's counsel argued that thousands of people lived in the informal settlement, which had existed since 1960.

In December, while inaugurating yet another underpass, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi announced that the CDA had completed 18 projects, including five major road developments, during 2025. He stated that Islamabad's 'Vision 2027' development programme would prioritise enhancing the capital's greenery and overhauling its parks. The minister, whose primary remit is security, asserted that every effort had been made to preserve trees during these construction projects. Regarding the demolition of *katchi abadis*, Naqvi claimed that action was only taken against those who had encroached on state land.

Earlier in the year, residents [compelled](#) the CDA to vacate and restore a children’s park it had occupied for construction purposes. In February, residents of Sector E-11 approached the IHC to halt illegal construction on the park’s land. The court subsequently ordered civic authorities to cease all construction activity and restore the park to its original condition. In March, the CDA informed the IHC that it had complied with these orders and reinstated the recreational equipment that had been removed.

## Environment

In April, an HRCP fact-finding mission [concluded](#) that illegal construction and habitat destruction in the Margalla Hills National Park were not isolated incidents. The mission identified unchecked urban encroachment, which had resulted in deforestation, the loss of critical wildlife habitats, and weakened regulatory institutions. It urged for urgent, coordinated reforms—such as clarifying park boundaries, empowering independent conservation bodies, engaging local communities as stewards, and enforcing rigorous environmental assessments—to prevent the continued degradation of the Margalla Hills.

PUNJAB

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# Overview

In 2025, the human rights situation in Punjab was characterised by restricted freedom of expression, threats to minorities, and curtailed freedom of peaceful assembly. The repeated imposition of Section 144 was used to preempt political protests and address security threats posed by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). Allegations of extrajudicial killings also surfaced, along with concerns over the passage of laws that concentrated power in the executive branch while minimising judicial oversight.

To realise its vision of a 'Safe Punjab' by combating serious and organised crime, the Punjab government established the Crime Control Department (CCD) through the Police Order (Amendment) Act 2025. Soon after its formation, a sharp increase in CCD-led police 'encounters' was observed. HRCP documented approximately 707 such encounters between April and December, resulting in 924 reported deaths among suspects. The small number of police personnel killed or injured during these encounters raises questions as to their legality.

Several laws were passed that were seriously questioned by rights groups and challenged by the opposition in court. These included the Punjab Public Awareness and Dissemination of Information Act, intended to regulate government awareness campaigns; the Punjab Local Government Act, which mandates nonparty-based elections and recentralises power through indirect elections and bureaucratic dominance; and the Police Order (Second Amendment Act), which established a dedicated riot management unit, allowing authorities to declare riot zones, punish protesters, and increase surveillance.

Two positive legislative developments were the passage of the Punjab Autism School and Resource Centre Bill 2025 in October and the Punjab Regulation of Kite Flying Bill 2025 in December, aimed at reviving the festival of Basant after an 18-year ban in Lahore.

The Punjab Enforcement and Regulation Authority (PERA), created under the Punjab Enforcement and Regulation Act 2024, established a parallel enforcement body with powers of search, arrest, fines, and surveillance alongside the Punjab Police. This raised concerns about due process, fair trial, and judicial oversight. Traders and small business owners protested against PERA's alleged harassment under the pretext of encroachment and civic enforcement.

The Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N) overwhelmingly won the November by-elections for six National Assembly and seven provincial assembly seats vacated by PTI-backed lawmakers who had been convicted and removed from office after the 9 May 2023 riots. However, the media described the elections as lacklustre, noting abysmally low voter turnout, and the PTI declared them rigged.

Freedom Network documented 52 attacks on media personnel across Punjab. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, amended by the National Assembly in 2025 to include harsher punitive provisions for media practitioners, was used extensively by the authorities. The Digital Rights Foundation tracked 21 cases registered against social media users under PECA in Punjab.

The TLP's growing street power was met with a forceful crackdown in October, including a midnight operation against TLP protesters in Muridke. Conflicting reports emerged regarding casualties, ultimately leading to the banning of the far-right religious political party.

Despite Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif’s stated priority for women and children, violence against these vulnerable groups remained high. Rights monitor Sahil reported a 25 percent [increase](#) in incidents of violence against women in Pakistan during the first 11 months of 2025, with 78 percent of those cases occurring in Punjab. Similarly, a [report](#) by the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO) documented over 4,150 cases of violence against children during the first six months of the year, averaging 23 cases per day. A positive development was the establishment of the first virtual women’s police station.

The Ahmadiyya community continued to face persecution, including attacks on their places of worship, desecration of graves, and targeted killings.

Devastating floods killed 322 and injured 665 people in Punjab. Approximately 4.7 million people were affected, with 213,097 houses damaged or destroyed, and 118,000 people displaced to relief camps. Rice and sugarcane crops were affected, leaving agricultural land covered in sand and endangering the next wheat sowing season. The authorities introduced an HPV vaccine to protect young girls against cervical cancer, but its administration faced resistance due to a failure to build public trust.

Despite administrative efforts to control poor air quality, such as demolishing illegal brick kilns, filing first information reports (FIRs) against stubble burning, and expanding vehicular emission inspections, the province’s air quality index (AQI) remained at hazardous levels. On 13 December, Lahore recorded an AQI of 527, with Gujranwala at 632 and Sialkot at 462.

Civil society and environmental groups opposed the Punjab government’s plan to construct an underground parking plaza at Lahore’s historical Nasir Bagh.

# Rule of Law

## Laws and law-making

For yet another year, proceedings in the Punjab Assembly were marred by disruptions, including protests, the tearing up of legislative documents, lack of quorum, and frequent absences of ministers and secretaries. Consequently, lawmaking was often rushed and lacked meaningful debate.

In 2025, the Punjab Assembly passed several laws that raised human rights concerns. One such law was the Punjab Local Government Act 2025, passed on 7 March. The opposition challenged this act in the Lahore High Court (LHC), citing its centralisation of authority in district administrations, reduction of powers for elected union councils, and infringement upon their right to participate.

On 21 May, the Punjab Assembly [passed](#) the Police Order (Amendment) Act, enabling the establishment of the parallel CCD in Punjab to combat organised crime. Later, in December, the assembly further amended the law with the Police Order (Second Amendment) Act 2025, which established a dedicated riot management unit. This amendment granted law enforcement broad authority to declare any area a ‘riot zone,’ expanded surveillance capabilities, and introduced harsher penalties for protesters. Human rights advocates argued that this law would discourage public protests and violate the right to peaceful assembly.

In June, the Punjab government presented the Punjab Public Awareness and Dissemination of Information Act 2025, intended to regulate awareness campaigns for government projects and initiatives. Journalists’ organisations and the political opposition criticised the act for potentially undermining citizens’ right to question government spending and restricting judicial oversight.

A number of progressive laws were approved, including the Punjab Autism School and Resource Centre Bill 2025, passed in October to promote education and support for children with autism; the Punjab Regulation of Kite Flying Bill 2025, passed in December to revive the festival of Basant after an 18-year ban in Lahore, allowing people to practice culture and leisure; and the PKR 5.33 trillion Finance Bill for FY2025/26, passed in November amid disruptions and minimal debate.

Delays in assembly proceedings were also attributed to the persistent absence of ministers—a practice that Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan [condemned](#) in May, calling it ‘extremely shameful.’

## Administration of justice

According to news reports, the LHC [resolved](#) over 173,000 cases in 2025, while 145,748 new cases were registered. This reflects a higher disposal rate compared to 2024, when 144,122 cases were resolved and 148,453 new cases were filed across the LHC and its regional benches. Specifically, the principal seat in Lahore settled 92,505 cases, while the Multan bench handled 44,145 cases, the Bahawalpur bench 18,415, and the Rawalpindi bench 17,948.

**The PTI in court.** The PTI remained at the centre of intense legal battles, both in Punjab and across the country. PTI chief Imran Khan and his party members faced numerous cases linked to the 9 May 2023 riots. In July, the LHC [denied](#) bail to Khan in one of many bail-related cases, ruling that strong evidence and his refusal to cooperate with investigations

indicated his involvement in conspiring and abetting the 9 May riots. In November, several FIRs were consolidated for trial in the Rawalpindi Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC), [allowing](#) him to appear via video link from Adiala Jail.

The ATCs also [heard](#) cases against other PTI members, including Dr Yasmin Rashid, Umar Sarfraz Cheema, Ejaz Chaudhry, and Mian Mehmood-ur-Rasheed. In August and December, they were [convicted](#) in 9 May riot-related cases and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. While Shah Mahmood Qureshi was acquitted in several ATC verdicts due to insufficient evidence, he was not released because of his involvement in other cases.

**Other court cases.** In an important development, the LHC [suspended](#) the Punjab Protection of Ownership of Immovable Property Ordinance 2025, on 22 December. This action halted all eviction and possession orders issued under the ordinance and restored disputed properties. The ordinance, which empowered deputy commissioner-led committees to decide property disputes, was [challenged](#) for violating citizens' civil rights by enabling dispossession without proper judicial oversight. The court referred the case to a full bench for comprehensive review.

In April, the LHC [ruled](#) that a wife who seeks *khula* [dissolution of marriage] due to her husband's 'cruelty' remains entitled to her full deferred dower, while *khula* without a valid reason forfeits this right.

# Enforcement of Law

## Law and order

Official data from the Punjab Police indicates that kidnapping and abduction accounted by far for the most common crimes reported, followed by street crime, domestic violence and rape (see Table 1).

Table 1: Crime statistics for Punjab in 2025

Crime	No. of FIRs	Victims		
		Female	Male	Transgender
Kidnapping and abduction	24,772	16,664	8,328	1
Street crime	8,527	512	8,015	1
Domestic violence	7,084	6,572	698	2
Rape	4,089	3,281	808	5
Murder	3,188	884	2,524	1
Sexual assault of children	2,622	1,013	1,611	0
Gang rape	1,407	780	625	6
Custodial torture	227	84	158	0
Honour killing	218	188	39	0
Acid crimes	48	32	16	0
Custodial death	18	9	9	0
Blasphemy u/s 295C PPC	4	0	4	0
Custodial rape	2			
Total	55,207	30,021	22,836	16

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

**Police encounters by the CCD.** HRCP's media monitoring team observed a [surge](#) in police encounters in April and formally expressed its concern in a statement released in October. HRCP found that Punjab's CCD, established under the Police Order (Amendment) Act, engaged in at least 707 CCD-led encounters in the province between 15 April and 31 December. These encounters resulted in 977 suspect fatalities, while only two police officers were killed (see Table 2). The frequency of these encounters, averaging two incidents a day, the disproportionate number of civilian deaths compared to police personnel, and the similarity of circumstances raised alarm among rights bodies and the media, leading them to suspect extrajudicial killings conducted under the guise of encounters.

Table 2: CCD-led encounters in Punjab in 2025

Suspected crime / charge	Number of encounters	Number of suspects killed
Dacoity	280	375
Robbery	112	139
Murder	88	114
Narcotics-related crimes	70	127
Rape	20	23
Militancy	10	32
Kidnapping	4	8
Extortion	1	2
Acid crimes	1	1
Other	10	14
No information	111	142
Total	707	977

Source: HRCP Knowledge Management System.

**TLP protest.** In October, supporters of the TLP, a far-right religious-political party, [marched](#) from Lahore toward Islamabad to protest in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza outside the US embassy. Despite a ban on public gatherings under Section 144, they set up camps along the Grand Trunk Road in Muridke. The authorities dug trenches in the road ahead to block their march. On 13 October, the Punjab Police and Rangers launched a large-scale ‘cordon-and-search operation’ involving over 10,000 law enforcement personnel in a pre-dawn raid, leading to pitched clashes. TLP-affiliated social media accounts claimed that around 500 TLP supporters were killed by law enforcement agencies. However, Punjab’s information minister stated that three civilian passersby were killed, while 48 civilians and 110 police officers were injured.



In October, supporters of the TLP marched from Lahore toward Islamabad to protest in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza outside the US embassy.

HRCP criticised the lack of transparency surrounding the operation. While acknowledging the TLP’s history of hate speech and incitement, HRCP [stressed](#) that excessive force was unjustified and called for prompt investigations, prosecutions, and transparent reforms. Subsequently, the federal government banned the TLP.

**‘Honey-trap’ cases.** Throughout the year, the Punjab Police reported several online honeytrap and extortion cases. In March, the Lahore police [arrested](#) seven suspects, including two police officers and three women, who had allegedly lured victims through social media and demanded money to prevent the release of compromising material. In June, the Rawalpindi authorities [filed](#) a case against a gang, including a police subinspector and a public prosecutor, accused of using forged identities and women to extort money from citizens. In December, the Satellite Town Police in Sargodha [booked](#) a woman involved in a similar crime, with at least nine related cases in Sargodha and 21 in Faisalabad.

**Custodial torture.** In one instance, four police officers from Donga Bonga Police Station, Bahawalnagar, were booked and two arrested for allegedly torturing 37-year-old Muhammad Tabeer to death in custody. The FIR, filed by his brother, alleged that Tabeer’s opponents bribed local police, who arrested, falsely implicated, and tortured Tabeer over a land dispute. He died in hospital on 30 April.

Reflecting judicial concern about how cases of custodial torture and death were handled by police investigators, the LHC directed in July that such cases be [transferred](#) from local police investigation to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act 2022.

## Jails and prisoners

According to official data from the Prisons Department, Punjab reported a total of 45 jails, with a combined sanctioned capacity of 38,980 inmates as against a prison population of 70,994 inmates. The prison population included 328 female inmates living with their children on jail premises and 1,077 foreign nationals. A total of 1,374 inmates were on death row, while 81 prisoners were identified as suffering from mental health conditions; 18 inmates reportedly died ‘unnatural deaths’ while incarcerated. Table 3 provides a breakdown of inmate categories.

*Table 3: Prison population in Punjab in 2025*

<i>Inmate categories</i>	<i>Under trial</i>	<i>Convicted</i>
Total inmates	50,898	16,669
Male inmates	49,036	16,179
Female inmates	1,159	370
Transgender inmates	0	0
Juvenile inmates	703	120

*Source: Punjab Prisons Department, in response to HRCP’s request for information.*

Table 4 indicates that the majority of adult prisoners were incarcerated on charges of murder, followed by narcotics-related crimes. Correspondingly, most juvenile offenders were incarcerated on charges of rape, followed by murder.

Table 4: Incarcerated population in Punjab in 2025, by crime

Nature of crime	Adults		Juveniles		Total
	M	F	M	F	
Murder	14,591	293	146	3	15,033
Control of Narcotic Substances Act 1997	13,664	371	36	0	14,071
Attempted murder	2,777	35	37	1	2,850
Rape	1,657	20	188	0	1,865
Anti-Terrorism Act 1997	1,452	11	8	0	1,471
Kidnapping and abduction	1,186	29	2	0	1,217
Control of Narcotic Substances Act 1997 (S. 9b)	1,112	27	3	0	1,142
Unnatural offences	915	4	26	0	945
Rape	823	2	13	0	838
Blasphemy	796	15	1	0	812
Criminal assault	524	29	1	0	554
Pakistan Army Act 1952	479	0	2	0	481
Detained by police	401	5	0	0	406
Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance 1979	365	0	0	0	365
Control of Narcotic Substances Act 1997 (S. 9a)	322	15	0	0	337
Violating the modesty of women	328	4	1	0	333
Detaining women with wrong intent	198	10	1	0	209
<i>Itlaf-i-udw/salahiyyat-i-udw</i>	184	3	2	0	189
Border crossing	170	2	0	0	172
Abortion with consent/without consent	137	0	0	0	137
Foreigners Act 1946 (S. 4)	125	4	0	0	129
Foreigners Act 1946 (S. 52)	113	10	0	0	123
'Lunacy' (S. 471 CrPc)	115	0	2	0	117
Foreigners Act 1946 (S. 13/14)	94	16	1	0	111
Wrongful restraint/confinement of person	88	18	0	0	106
<i>Zina</i>	80	11	0	0	91
Attacking armed forces	77	3	0	0	80
Attempted suicide	64	0	0	0	64
Breach of peace	25	0	0	0	25
Other	26,124	353	244	0	26,721
Total	68,986	1,290	714	4	70,994

Source: Punjab Prisons Department.

Table 5 illustrates the number of facilities available to inmates across prisons in Punjab.

Table 5: Prison facilities in Punjab in 2025

Health facility	Total no. across prisons
Prison hospitals	45
Psychologists	60
Psychiatrists	54
Drug rehabilitation centres	17
Medical staff	188
Probation and parole officers	100
Educational centres	44 (religious education)
Vocational centres	All jails
Libraries	44
Video trial systems	9 (Central Jail)
Panic buttons in prison cells/barrack	-
All staff	21,722

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

Towards the end of the year, [reports](#) emerged that former prime minister Imran Khan, incarcerated since 2022, was not allowed to meet his family, party leaders, or his legal team. One of Khan's sisters, who was granted access, claimed that he was largely isolated with limited contact and visiting rights. The authorities maintained that visits must adhere to prison regulations and security protocols.

According to [screening](#) conducted by the Punjab AIDS Control Programme, and published in August, there were 645 HIV-positive inmates across 43 jails in Punjab. Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi recorded the highest number with 148 cases, followed by Camp Jail Lahore (83), Central Jail Faisalabad (37), and Kot Lakhpat and Gujranwala central jails (27 each). The report noted that overcrowding and limited health facilities posed serious challenges for effective prevention and treatment within the prison system.

Several [initiatives](#) were undertaken to improve conditions in jails, including the Smart Library Project at District Jail Lahore in May, the [addition](#) of 37 junior psychologists in Punjab jails, a programme to provide 40,000 prisoners across 40 jails with one month of [free](#) vocational training with the Tourism Department, and the establishment of an [open gym](#) at Camp Jail in Lahore.

## The death penalty

The death penalty was awarded in multiple blasphemy-related cases by lower courts. In January, an additional sessions court [sentenced](#) four accused persons to death for blaspheming against holy figures through content uploaded on social media. The court also imposed a cumulative 80 years of life imprisonment and fines totalling PKR 5.2 million under various sections of the law. Furthermore, in March, a Rawalpindi court [sentenced](#) five men accused of blasphemy to death, life imprisonment, and a total of 100 years in prison for spreading 'objectionable' content on social media.

The death penalty was also applied to rape offenders. An additional district and sessions judge sentenced four under-trial prisoners to [death](#) for the sodomy and murder of a fellow inmate in Adiala jail on New Year's night of 2024. In another incident in April, the court in Toba Tek Singh [handed down](#) the death sentence on three counts, along with a PKR 500,000 fine, to a man for kidnapping, raping, and murdering a minor boy.

# Fundamental Freedoms

## Freedom of expression

In January, the National Assembly [amended](#) PECA, increasing the severity of its penalties for journalists and online content creators. This action triggered widespread condemnation from rights groups, media organisations, and political activists, who cautioned that the law, particularly Section 26A concerning ‘fake or false news,’ lacked clear safeguards and narrowly defined terms. Critics warned that this ambiguity risked weaponising the law to suppress



*The amendments to PECA 2016 triggered widespread condemnation from rights groups, media organisations, and political activists.*

dissent and restrict freedom of expression. Afzal Butt, president of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, denounced the amended law as ‘a black law’ and demanded its repeal.

The Digital Rights Foundation documented 21 cases registered in Punjab by the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) against social media users under PECA and the Pakistan Penal Code. These cases primarily involved allegations of spreading misinformation, propaganda, or derogatory content targeting state institutions and/or Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

In June, the Punjab government introduced and passed the Punjab Public Awareness and Dissemination of Information Act 2025. This law aimed to [regulate](#) awareness campaigns related to government projects and initiatives, stipulating that no court would have jurisdiction over matters pertaining to the Act. Journalists’ organisations and the political opposition [criticised](#) the bill on several grounds, including concerns about censorship, the infringement of citizens’ right to question the use of public funds, the potential for political promotion, and the restriction of judicial oversight. The Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors characterised the Act as an attempt to silence journalists by denying them the right to question government actions.

Freedom Network documented 52 attacks on media personnel across Punjab (Table 6). Legal action was the most frequently reported form of threat, accounting for nine cases, followed by incidents of assault resulting in injury and manhandling, which each occurred in seven cases. The Pakistan Press Foundation recorded a similar number of [attacks](#) on journalists and media personnel.

Table 6: Attacks against media personnel in Punjab in 2025

Category	No of cases
Threat of legal action (private/state)	9
Arrest (based on case/FIR/formal accusation)	3
Death threat	3
Assault without injury (manhandling etc.)	7
Assault resulting in injury	7
Disappearance	1
Kidnapping	2
Attempted murder	3
Detention (without formal case)	4
Threat of harm (non-murder related)	3
Digital threats (harassment, trolling, etc.)	4
Attack on property	1
Actual legal action (civil/criminal + specific law)	5
Total	52

Source Freedom Network.

## Freedom of peaceful assembly

In October, after the TLP called for protests, the Punjab government banned rallies, protests, sit-ins, and public gatherings, citing threats to public order and terrorism. Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, was imposed across the province and periodically extended.

Throughout August, PTI supporters protested across Punjab—including in Lahore, Sahiwal, Okara, Sialkot, and Muzaffargarh—demanding the release of party leader Imran Khan. Authorities [raided](#) locations and detained hundreds of party workers before and during the rallies, including over 300 arrests in Lahore before the 5 August protest. Prior to this, demonstrators in several districts also faced [crackdowns](#) on 8 February.

On 26 December, police restricted Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi’s [rally](#) at Liberty Chowk in Lahore with roadblocks and heightened security during his visit.

Traders and small business owners protested against the newly formed [PERA](#), accusing it of harassing shopkeepers and street vendors under the pretext of encroachment and civic enforcement. In October, traders in Rawalpindi’s Pirwadhai held street demonstrations against PERA inspections; some complained that officials extorted money from vendors without issuing receipts.

In April, protesters [blocked](#) the National Highway at the Sindh-Punjab border near Kamoon Shaheed to protest the Special Investment Facilitation Council canal project. Subsequently, the federal government paused construction, pending approval from the Council of Common Interests.

## Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

**Ahmadis under attack.** The Ahmadiyya community continued to face persecution. In May, Mahmood Sheikh, a 58-year-old gastroenterologist from the Ahmadiyya community, was [shot dead](#) in a private hospital in Sargodha. Prior to this, in April, [42 Ahmadis](#) were arrested in Kasur for allegedly converting a house into a place of worship.

In June, the Lahore High Court Bar Association sent a [letter](#) to the Punjab inspector general of police seeking to prevent the Ahmadiyya community from observing Islamic rituals on Eid ul Azha. HRCP responded by demanding the bar association immediately withdraw the letter.

In July, an Ahmadi man in Gujranwala was [arrested](#) on blasphemy charges for distributing communal food on the tenth of Muharram and was subsequently sent to jail on judicial remand for seven days.

In April, the Punjab Housing and Town Planning Agency published a residential and commercial plots auction advertisement that [excluded](#) members of the Ahmadiyya community from participating in a plot auction in Chenabnagar, the headquarters of the Jamaat-i-Ahmadiyya.

In August, a mob, reportedly led by TLP leader Hafiz Rafaqat and armed with bricks and rods, attacked two Ahmadi places of worship in Faisalabad. Police later [booked](#) 300 individuals and arrested 25.

According to information from the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya, in addition to other assaults on community members, two people were killed in targeted attacks; 254 Ahmadi graves were desecrated or damaged; 21 places of worship were demolished; and nine burials were denied in public cemeteries. Overall, persecution figures in 2025 remained broadly consistent with those recorded in 2024 (see Table 7).

*Table 7: Attacks against the Ahmadiyya community in Punjab in 2025*

<i>Rights violation</i>	<i>No. of reported incidents</i>
Graves desecrated	254
Worship sites vandalised/destroyed	21
Arrests for religious offences	48
Faith-based killings	2
Blasphemy and faith-based allegations	125
Faith-based physical attacks	10

*Source: Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya press section.*

**Blasphemy.** An HRCP report, *Streets of Fear: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2024/25*, stated that based on data available on the official website of the Punjab prisons department up to 17 June 2025, there were 729 inmates in blasphemy cases, including 51 women and two juveniles (under 18 years old). Of these, 679 were under-trial prisoners, including 48 women. Some 39 men were convicted, 19 were unconfirmed condemned (including two women), and two men were confirmed condemned.

At a press conference held in Toba Tek Singh on 15 September, victims of the Jaranwala attack [complained](#) that, despite the passage of two years, the government had yet to provide full compensation for the losses Christians suffered during attacks on their homes and churches in 2023.

## Freedom of movement

The Pakistani authorities [offloaded](#) more than 66,150 passengers at airports nationwide—including Lahore and Sialkot—reportedly as part of a crackdown on illegal migration and human smuggling. This figure is nearly double that of 2024.

The FIA attributed most of this offloading to passengers either failing immigration checks, lacking valid or complete documentation, or being suspected of having links to migrant smugglers. However, a newspaper [editorial](#) noted that the reasons for deplaning were ‘open to interpretation,’ offering little clarity on the specific documents required or what constituted a connection to human traffickers.

In October, the Punjab government used containers and barricades to seal off entry and exit points in major cities, particularly along the Grand Trunk Road. This was done to [curtail](#) the TLP’s anti-Israel protests, effectively suspending traffic and restricting commuters’ freedom of movement. Furthermore, the Punjab Mass Transit Authority [suspended](#) the Lahore Orange Line Metro Train for two days due to violence on Multan Road following the TLP’s announcement of an anti-Israel protest rally, further restricting commuters’ freedom of movement.

In December, transport services across Punjab were halted for several days due to a strike by transporters protesting the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 2025, specifically the heavy fines and increased FIRs against drivers. This [strike](#) disrupted public travel, goods movement, and commercial supply chains. The strike was [called off](#) on 7 December after talks with the provincial government.



*Transport services across Punjab were halted for several days due to a strike by transporters protesting the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 2025.*

## Right to personal liberty

In April, the Punjab Police raided a farmhouse party in Kasur and detained 55 individuals for alleged drug use, loud music, and ‘indecent’ conduct. Disturbing videos circulated on social media, showing detainees, including women, being humiliated and subjected to head-shaving. The LHC issued [contempt](#) notices to police officers involved in recording the videos, ensured the detainees’ release, and called for stronger safeguards on police conduct and social media practices.

Cultural activities in colleges also faced increased scrutiny. In May, at Islamia University Bahawalpur, Vice-Chancellor Dr Muhammad Kamran ordered an [inquiry](#) into a dance event held in the mathematics department after a video of the event went viral.

That same month, the Punjab Directorate of Public Instructions [banned](#) funfairs and sports galas in all public and private colleges across the province, describing such extracurricular activities as ‘unethical’ and ‘vulgar.’

# Democratic Development

## Political participation

In the 23 November by-elections, the ruling PML-N won five National Assembly constituencies—NA-96 and NA-104 (Faisalabad), NA-129 (Lahore), NA-143 (Sahiwal), and NA-185 (Dera Ghazi Khan)—and seven Punjab Assembly constituencies—PP-73 (Sargodha), PP-87 (Mianwali), PP-98, PP-115, and PP-116 (Faisalabad), PP-203 (Sahiwal), and PP-269 (Muzaffargarh). The PML-N won all the seats except PP-269, where it did not field a candidate against the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP)’s Alamdar Qureshi.

All the seats, except for the National Assembly seat NA-129 in Lahore (which was vacated following the death of Mian Muhammad Azhar, a senior PTI leader), became vacant due to the conviction and removal of PTI-supported legislators after the events of 9 May 2023.

The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) [reported](#) that voter turnout in 13 national and provincial constituencies of Punjab (and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) dropped from 51 percent in the 2024 general election to 28 percent in the November by-elections. According to FAFEN, ‘in absolute terms, more than one million, or 42 percent fewer, voters exercised their right to vote.’

The PTI [accused](#) the ruling PML-N of rigging the by-elections. Punjab Assembly opposition leader Moeen Riaz Qureshi stated that nearly 99 percent of PTI camps outside polling stations in Lahore had been dismantled and over half the polling station lists were distributed in a way that directed voters to the wrong polling stations.

Earlier, in June, the Supreme Court’s constitutional bench dismissed petitions filed by the PTI in the reserved-seats case, overturning its earlier judgment of 12 July 2024, which had revived the PTI as a parliamentary party and allowed them, under the Sunni Ittehad Council banner, to claim reserved seats in Parliament.

Following the ruling, on 2 July, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) [notified](#) the restoration and reallocation of 27 reserved seats in the Punjab Assembly—24 for women and three for non-Muslims. Of these, the PML-N received 23 seats (21 for women and two for non-Muslims), the PPP was allocated two seats (one for women and one for non-Muslims), while the Pakistan Muslim League (Q) and Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party each received one reserved seat for women.

## Shrinking democratic spaces and the role of elected assemblies

In June, the opposition disrupted Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz’s speech, leading the speaker to [suspend](#) the membership of 26 opposition lawmakers for 15 sessions and fine ten legislators for damaging the house’s sound system. The following month, a Punjab Assembly session devolved into chaos as opposition lawmakers protested the sentencing of PTI leaders in the 9 May 2023 riot cases.

These incidents raised concerns about weakened legislative oversight, eroding consensus-building, and the dilution of parliamentary norms in Punjab’s lawmaking processes. The Punjab Local Government (Amendment) Act 2025, [rushed](#) through with minimal debate, exemplifies this trend.

The [resignation](#) of PTI parliamentarians from the standing committees of the Punjab Assembly in October further diminished the role of assemblies.

## Local government

In October, the Punjab government passed the Local Government (Amendment) Act 2025 through the Punjab Assembly. This new law, which replaced the Punjab Local Government Act 2022, was **enacted** rapidly, in approximately five days, amid **disruptions** from opposition members.

Critics argued that the new law made local governments accountable upward to the provincial government and bureaucracy, rather than to citizens. Instead of devolving power, the law aimed to recentralise it through indirect elections and increased bureaucratic control.

The ECP had previously issued a delimitation schedule on 9 October for polls under the Punjab Local Government Act 2022, directing the provincial government to complete delimitation and hold elections by the last week of December. However, with the enactment of the 2025 law, the ECP withdrew the delimitation schedule and postponed the elections, granting the province time to frame rules and carry out delimitation afresh under the new act.

In early November, PTI lawmakers **challenged** the Punjab Local Government Act 2025 in the LHC. They argued that several provisions of the Act weakened the role of political parties, replaced elected representatives with administrative officers, and centralised financial authority, thereby violating constitutional protections such as articles 17, 32, and 140-A, which guarantee political participation and the devolution of power to elected local governments.

# The Rights of the Disadvantaged

## Women

The SSDO, a nongovernment organisation (NGO) that conducts research and advocacy on human rights and governance using information obtained through right-to-information laws, reported [15,376 cases](#) of violence against women in Punjab between January and June 2025. This indicated that Punjab was the most affected province in Pakistan. The reported cases included 1,651 incidents of rape, 9,166 kidnappings, 89 honour killings, and 4,455 cases of domestic violence.

Sahil, an organisation monitoring gender-based violence, reported a 25 percent [increase](#) in incidents of violence against women in Pakistan during the first 11 months of 2025, with 78 percent of these cases occurring in Punjab. The report suggested that the high rate of gender-based crimes could be attributed to the province's active reporting mechanisms.

A delayed but positive development was the [passage](#) of the Punjab Acid Control Act 2025 in May. This act regulates the sale, storage, and transport of acid to curb attacks, particularly against women. It requires vendors to obtain licenses, prohibits selling acid to individuals under 18, mandates clear labelling and safety precautions, and makes unlicensed trade a nonbailable offense punishable by imprisonment (up to three years) and hefty fines. If negligence in the acid business results in harm, penalties increase to two to five years' imprisonment and significant fines.

The Maryam Nawaz Sharif-led government launched several initiatives. In April, the first virtual women's police station, named 'Meri Awaz, Maryam Nawaz,' was officially [inaugurated](#), eliminating the need for women to physically visit police stations and ensuring their privacy and security. In March, the Aghosh programme provided PKR 23,000 to pregnant women and mothers of children under two. However, this programme received criticism for potentially incentivising population growth. In June, the Punjab Livestock Assets Programme [allocated](#) PKR 2 billion to distribute 4,870 cows and buffaloes to 11,000 rural women across 12 southern districts to boost milk production, generate home-based income, and empower widows and divorced women up to age 55.

Legal challenges regarding the [sales tax](#) of up to 40 percent on sanitary napkins continued in the LHC until the end of the year. The petitioner argued that the tax treated women's basic health needs as luxury items. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund refused to allow Pakistan to abolish the 18 percent general sales tax on contraceptives and sanitary pads with immediate effect, rejecting a proposal submitted by the Federal Board of Revenue.

## Children

Despite Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz declaring crimes against women and children a red line, such offences saw little reduction during the year. According to the SSDO, over 4,150 cases of violence against children were reported in Punjab during the first six months of the year, averaging 23 cases a day. However, only 12 convictions were recorded, resulting in a conviction rate of under 1 percent.

In September, the Child Protection Bureau raided an unregistered orphanage in Chichawatni and [recovered](#) 18 children, 17 of whom were from Balochistan. This followed a widely circulated social media video showing a teacher beating a boy with a stick while other children restrained him. Later that month, the Child Protection Court in Sahiwal ordered the children to be [handed over](#) to verified parents or guardians.

In March, the LHC [ruled](#) that a biological father was legally required to financially support a child even if that child was born outside wedlock or as a result of rape. The case involved a woman who alleged that her child had been conceived through rape, leading to the birth of a daughter in 2020. An FIR had been registered against the petitioner in March 2020, under Sections 376 and 109 of the Pakistan Penal Code.

According to a news [report](#) published in October, at least 140 children under the age of six were living in Punjab's prisons alongside their incarcerated mothers. Official records indicated that these children—67 boys and 73 girls—were spread across 45 prisons in the province. Data from the Punjab Home Department showed that Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi and Multan Women's Jail housed the highest numbers, while Central Jail Lahore held 10 children, Gujranwala Central Jail 12, Kasur District Jail 2, and Shekhupura 3.

## Transgender persons

Fashion designer Maria Butt (known as 'Maria B') was [summoned](#) by the NCCIA after a complaint alleged that her social media posts had defamed the transgender community. The complaint stemmed from her sharing videos and photos from a private gathering, which she labelled as being 'against moral values.'

Following her posts, Lahore police took action against approximately 60 transgender persons in connection with the gathering. However, a magistrate later dismissed the case, citing a lack of incriminating evidence linking the individuals to any crime.

In October, Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan [distributed](#) health cards to transgender individuals, providing access to subsidised medical services with coverage up to PKR 600,000.

## Labour

**Low wages and weak protections.** In September, the Punjab government issued a notification to increase the minimum wage from PKR 37,000 to PKR 40,000 per month, a raise that had been announced in the budget in June.

To enforce the Punjab Minimum Wages Act 2019, the Punjab Labour and Human Resource Department launched a major campaign in October to ensure compliance with minimum wage laws and key provisions of the Punjab Occupational Safety and Health Act 2019 across workplaces. Between January and September, labour [inspections](#) were carried out at 1,330 factories, of which 623 were prosecuted for violations such as unpaid wages, poor safety conditions, and lack of protective equipment for workers.

Recognising a living wage as a basic fundamental right, HRCP stated in its [report](#), *From Survival to Dignity: The Case for a Living Wage*, that a minimum monthly income of over PKR 75,000 was required for workers to not only meet their basic needs but also live a life of dignity, supporting a family of six and covering essential expenses such as food, housing, utilities, healthcare, and education.

In July, a ration card subsidy programme was launched to benefit 1.2 million deserving families across the province, with each registered family receiving a monthly subsidy of PKR 3,000.

The proposed Punjab Labour Code 2025 remained under discussion throughout the year and was criticised by labour rights activists and trade unionists for failing to meet international standards regarding workers' rights to form unions, bargain collectively, and be free from child labour, forced labour, and discrimination at work.

Taking note of these concerns, HRCP published a [report](#) recommending that the Punjab Labour Code be redrafted through meaningful consultations with employers and workers to ensure compliance with international labour standards.

**Delayed access to justice.** The severe human impact on workers of delays in access to justice was painfully evident in the case of Asif Javed, a union leader at the Kabirwala-based plant of a multinational food and beverage company. He attempted self-immolation at the Lahore High Court in February in protest against prolonged delays in the adjudication of an ongoing labour dispute. Although he was rescued and hospitalised, he succumbed to his injuries several days later. The [incident](#) was reportedly linked to a case pending for five years regarding his dismissal—despite earlier orders for reinstatement.

**Agricultural labour.** Recovery from the 2025 floods became a major struggle for farmers, who typically reinvest earnings from the summer harvest to finance the winter sowing season. The losses to the summer crop significantly reduced their ability to reinvest in winter cultivation.

A fact-finding mission conducted by HRCP in November to flood-affected areas in South Punjab documented the concerns of families in Basti Lang and Basti Sher Shah in Multan, and Basti Jat Khurpa in Uch Sharif. Residents of Basti Lang reported that although 300 houses had been destroyed by the floods, the compensation promised by the government had not reached them.

In late September, the Pakistani government announced [compensation](#) of around PKR 20,000 per acre for farmers who had suffered flood-related losses. The affected farmers claimed that the amount barely covered the real cost of restoring farmland, particularly given the loss of seeds and the heavy silt deposits left behind by floodwaters.

Earlier, in April, HRCP held a Kissan Convention in Multan, where agricultural workers, farmers, and rights activists from across South Punjab gathered to voice urgent concerns pertaining to climate change, land rights, corporate farming, and the systemic exclusion of women, transgender people, and minority communities from agricultural policymaking.

## Internally displaced persons

In August, severe monsoon flooding in Punjab [displaced](#) more than 1.5 million people, according to senior provincial minister Marriyum Aurangzeb. The floods submerged 2,038 villages and led to the evacuation of over 481,000 individuals from the hardest-hit districts, including Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Muzaffargarh, Bahawalpur, and Rahim Yar Khan. During the floods, many villagers initially [resisted](#) evacuation, choosing to remain in their homes to protect livestock and salvage crops despite the rising waters.

## Refugees

The deportation of undocumented Afghan nationals entered its final phase in October. The Punjab government reported on 13 October that it had [repatriated](#) approximately 42,913 Afghan nationals since 1 April under Pakistan's Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan. That same month, Punjab police registered [58 cases](#) against landlords in Rawalpindi and Attock for renting properties to undocumented Afghan nationals.

Also in October, the Punjab government announced plans to introduce a [whistleblower](#) system to identify and deport undocumented immigrants, particularly Afghan nationals, residing in the province.

# Social, Economic, and Environmental Rights

## Education

The Punjab government [increased](#) the education budget by 21.2 percent for the fiscal year 2025/26, allocating PKR 811.8 billion, up from PKR 669.83 billion the previous year. This allocation covered both development and recurring expenditures, including funding for classrooms, IT labs, scholarships, and other educational support initiatives.

In addition, 4,500 primary, middle, and high schools were [transferred](#) to NGOs and other private entities. This move aligned with a broader three-phase plan, implemented through the Punjab Education Foundation, to transfer nearly 14,000 public schools to NGOs and private entities.

The province's already fragile school infrastructure suffered further damage when floods [affected](#) approximately 3,000 schools. Punjab Minister for School Education Rana Sikandar Hayat stated in September that it would take about three months to rehabilitate the damaged schools.

However, in October, the department [withdrew](#) a previously approved allocation of PKR 30 billion for repairing flood-damaged and aging school structures. News reports indicated that this decision effectively halted nearly all repair and construction projects in the province.

The Punjab government [ordered](#) all schools, colleges, and universities to close for two days, on 9 and 10 May, during the four-day conflict between India and Pakistan, and all scheduled exams were postponed. Subsequently, early summer vacations were [announced](#) on 28 May due to an intense heatwave.

Unlike 2024, when educational institutions were closed due to smog, authorities in 2025 opted to adjust school timings. From 3 November onward, institutions were [instructed](#) not to open before 8.45 AM.

## Health

In September, Punjab joined the national rollout of the HPV vaccine, aiming to protect girls aged 9–14 from cervical cancer by integrating the vaccine into routine immunisation programmes. While healthcare experts supported the initiative, emphasising the importance of addressing this critical health issue, they [criticised](#) its implementation. They argued that authorities relied too heavily on superficial promotion instead of effective behavioural change communication, which allowed conspiracy theories to spread, undermining public confidence in the vaccine's safety and necessity. In Mandi Bahauddin and Chishtian, vaccinators were even [attacked](#).

Reaching millions of out-of-school girls for vaccination also posed a significant logistical [challenge](#), especially in flood-affected and marginalised areas.

Many public hospitals, including major institutions such as Bahawal Victoria Hospital in South Punjab, faced critical shortages of essential drugs. News reports [indicated](#) that the hospital received only PKR 530 million in medicine funds for the first quarter of the current fiscal year—far short of the PKR 1,250 million it had requested.

For yet another year, health authorities in Punjab [failed](#) to control the spread of dengue. Following the monsoon rains, reports surfaced of an [outbreak](#) in Rawalpindi.

**Dog bite cases.** Dog bite cases remained a serious public health concern, highlighting systemic gaps in municipal control and disease prevention. The media [reported](#) over 275,000 dog bite cases across Punjab in 2025, averaging nearly 900 incidents daily. In a [case](#) filed by Young Doctors Association Secretary General Dr Salman Kazmi, the LHC was informed that Lahore’s Mayo Hospital alone treated 1,796 dog bite cases between September 2024 and November 2025.

## Housing

In July, the Bank of Punjab partnered with the Housing and Town Planning Agency under the ‘Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar’ programme. This housing initiative, [launched](#) by the Punjab government the previous year, aimed to provide affordable home ownership opportunities for low- and middle-income families by offering interest-free loans to prospective applicants.

**Anti-encroachment measures.** In 2025, the Punjab government intensified its anti-encroachment drive, which had begun in 2024. This campaign disrupted the livelihoods of many small street vendors, daily wage earners whose plight remained largely invisible in national debates and media coverage. Large-scale operations were carried out throughout the year across major cities, including Lahore, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Dera Ghazi Khan, Attock, and Pakpattan. In May, Lahore alone saw the [removal](#) of more than 3,000 encroachments and over 7,000 illegal advertisements within 72 hours.

To institutionalise these measures, the province established [PERA](#) under the Punjab Enforcement and Regulation Act 2024. This provincial authority is tasked with eliminating encroachments, enforcing regulations, and improving urban order across Punjab.

PERA also became part of the ‘[Suthra Punjab](#)’ campaign—an initiative to clear footpaths, roads, and public spaces of unlawful stalls and other structures, such as signboards.

## Environment

**Poor air quality.** A December [report](#) by the Pakistan Air Quality Initiative, a nonprofit citizen-led platform, indicated that Lahore’s air quality in November 2025—typically the worst month for air pollution—had improved substantially compared to November 2024. Daily peak PM2.5 levels dropped by about 56 percent, with a maximum concentration of 237µg/m<sup>3</sup> in November 2025, compared to a severe peak of 539µg/m<sup>3</sup> in November 2024.

The Punjab Environment Protection Authority intensified enforcement by demolishing brick kilns operating in violation of environmental regulations, numerous FIRs against stubble burning in rice fields, expanded vehicular emission inspections, and rapid-response teams across the province to combat severe air pollution. More PM2.5 monitors were [set up](#), with 160 monitors in 14 cities providing real-time data to identify pollution hotspots. However, the deployment of smog guns was [criticised](#) for consuming thousands of litres of water while only temporarily addressing the problem.

Despite these initiatives, sustained, long-term improvements remained elusive. On 13 December, Lahore recorded a [hazardous](#) air quality index (AQI) of 527, second only to 710 in New Delhi, India. Other cities in Punjab also faced hazardous air quality; in November, Gujranwala [recorded](#) an AQI of 632 and Sialkot 462.

**Fallout of floods.** In October, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [reported](#) that the 2025 floods had killed 322 and injured 665 people in Punjab. Approximately 4.7 million people were affected, with 213,097 houses damaged or destroyed, forcing 118,000 people into relief camps. The floods submerged over 3,900 villages and washed away large tracts of farmland, also causing the loss of 3,992 head of livestock.

The floods hit hardest along the Sutlej, Chenab, Ravi, and Indus rivers. The most affected districts included Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Muzaffargarh, Multan, Khanewal, Lodhran, Vehari, Sahiwal, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Gujrat, and Mandi Bahauddin.

The floods also exposed engineering and planning failures around the Panjnad Barrage, a key structure where the Sutlej, Chenab, and other rivers converge. Mushtaq Gadi, a water governance expert based in Islamabad, [noted](#) that villagers and technical experts reported that floodwaters upstream lingered much longer than expected, with peak flows taking days to recede, causing prolonged inundation in towns such as Jalalpur Pirwala due to engineering oversights. He also questioned the construction of the motorway across the drainage plains where the Sutlej and Chenab meet upstream of Panjnad Barrage, calling for an independent inquiry into the barrage design and decision-making process and emphasising the need to give rivers more room to flow.

**Parking plaza in Nasir Bagh.** Civil society and environmental groups—including the Lahore Conservation Society, HRCP, Ravi Bachao Tehreek, WWF Pakistan, and the Institute of Architects Pakistan—filed a writ petition challenging the Punjab government’s plan to construct an underground parking plaza at Lahore’s Nasir Bagh. This space is traditionally used by people for protests, political gatherings, student movements, artistic expression, and everyday leisure.

Objecting to the development of the parking space, HRCP underscored that the preservation of Nasir Bagh directly aligns with Pakistan’s commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly those pertaining to the protection of cultural life, good health and wellbeing, and a clean environment under Article 9A. Despite hearings being scheduled between 26 and 31 December, the LHC [deferred](#) the case, allowing construction activities and the alleged tree cutting to continue.

SINDH

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# Overview

Overall, the human rights situation in Sindh during 2025 remained fragile, characterised by governance deficits, shrinking civic space, law enforcement abuses, and socioeconomic inequalities affecting vulnerable populations. Although democratic institutions continued to function formally and certain welfare programmes were expanded, structural challenges impeded the effective protection of civil, political, economic, and social rights across the province.

During much of 2025, Sindh witnessed sustained public unrest over the proposed construction of six canals on the Indus River system, amid widespread concerns about worsening water shortages during critical agricultural seasons. Political activists, lawyers, journalists, students, and farmers organised province-wide protests. The Sindh Assembly passed a resolution opposing the project, arguing that it had been initiated without approval from the Council of Common Interests (CCI). Subsequently, the federal government referred the matter to the CCI, which suspended the canal project pending inter-provincial consensus.



*Political activists, lawyers, journalists, students, and farmers organised province-wide protests over the proposed construction of six canals on the Indus River system.*

Following a brief military confrontation (or four-day war) between India and Pakistan in May, India unilaterally announced the suspension of the decades-old Indus Waters Treaty, which governs the distribution of waters from six shared rivers. This decision generated serious concerns, particularly for downstream communities dependent on the Indus River, where existing water shortages have already contributed to environmental degradation in the Indus Delta across Thatta, Badin, and Sujawal districts.

Allegations of extrajudicial killings, custodial torture, and enforced disappearances continued to surface during the year.

Freedom of expression and media independence faced pressure through the application of cybercrime laws, especially the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 and related amendments, arrests of journalists, and alleged financial restrictions on critical media outlets. Freedom of peaceful assembly was frequently restricted by police action against demonstrations, while protests, strikes, and sit-ins occasionally disrupted mobility and economic activity. Religious minorities continued to face discrimination and persecution.

Electoral processes continued through by-elections, marked by much lower voter turnout and allegations of political interference. Local governments operated with limited fiscal autonomy, affecting service delivery and municipal governance.

The megacity and provincial capital, Karachi, experienced some disturbing developments. More than 800 people lost their lives in traffic accidents in the city during 2025, and many more were injured, hinting at weak grassroots governance.

Additionally, a major jailbreak occurred in Malir Jail when 225 prisoners managed to escape after a massive earthquake cracked open the prison walls.

Women, children, transgender persons, labourers, and religious minorities remained among the most vulnerable groups. Miners and sanitation workers continued to lose their lives in accidents, as in previous years, with no reported progress in improving their safety. Gender-based violence, child labour, workplace safety violations, and inadequate labour protections persisted despite existing legislation. Nevertheless, several social initiatives, including education programmes for prisoners' children, disability support funds, the devolution of education funds to schools, and welfare schemes for senior citizens, demonstrated ongoing government efforts to address social protection gaps.

# Rule of Law

## Laws and law-making

The rule of law in Sindh remained fragile, characterised by selective legislation, weak implementation, executive interference, and the persistence of parallel justice systems. While the Sindh Assembly continued to legislate on matters of fiscal governance, natural resources, and accountability, the practical impact of these laws on citizens' rights was uneven and often undermined by political considerations.

In 2025, the provincial assembly passed 26 bills, including amendments to existing laws such as the Sindh Criminal Prosecution Service (Constitution, Functions and Powers) (Amendment) Act 2025, the Sindh Motor Vehicles Taxation (Amendment) Act 2025, and the Sindh Universities and Institutes Laws (Amendment) Act 2025.

A notable legislative development was the [unanimous passage](#) of the Sindh Agricultural Income Tax Act in February. This act was intended to align provincial law with federal commitments made under an International Monetary Fund programme.

In March, the Sindh Assembly unanimously passed a [resolution](#) opposing the construction of six new canals on the Indus River in Punjab. This reflected growing provincial anxieties regarding water rights, environmental sustainability, and inter-provincial equity.

At the same time, legislative oversight mechanisms exposed weaknesses in public accountability. In July, the Public Accounts Committee of the Sindh Assembly ordered that eight nongovernment organisations be [blacklisted](#) for failing to submit audit reports on public funds exceeding PKR 800 million.

The Sindh Assembly passed the [Constitutional Benches](#) of High Court of Sindh (Practice and Procedure) Bill in December. This legislation empowers the constitutional benches with exclusive jurisdiction over constitutional matters, ensuring that every petition or application falling within Article 199 of the Constitution will be heard and decided solely by these benches.

## Administration of justice

The administration of justice in Sindh continued to suffer from chronic delays, capacity constraints, and executive noncompliance with court orders. Despite constitutional guarantees of due process and fair trial, multiple cases demonstrated how judicial authority was frequently undermined by law enforcement agencies.

During the year, the Sindh High Court (SHC) took steps to promote alternative dispute resolution by establishing a court-annexed [mediation centre](#) at the Karachi city courts. Judicial officers were appointed to facilitate mediation proceedings, reflecting judicial recognition of excessive caseloads and prolonged litigation.

Several high-profile cases highlighted disregard for judicial orders. The SHC's Larkana Circuit issued [contempt notices](#) to senior provincial officials, including the home secretary and police leadership, for allegedly violating a court order granting protection from arrest to Ghulam Murtaza Jatoi of the National People's Party. Despite the order, Jatoi was arrested in multiple cases and detained in prison. The court also suspended a judicial magistrate who had granted remand, reflecting judicial concern over the disregard of court directives and the misuse of arrest powers.

**Dacoit surrender policy.** On 6 October, the Sindh Cabinet approved a comprehensive [surrender policy](#) for dacoits in the *katcha* [riverine] areas. This policy encouraged gangs to lay down their arms in exchange for the protection of their families, along with rehabilitation and livelihood support. In late October, 72 alleged dacoits handed over more than 200 weapons, including rifles, submachine guns, and heavy ammunition.

**Jirga justice.** Although the Supreme Court declared jirga decisions illegal and unconstitutional in 2019, parallel justice mechanisms continued to operate in Sindh, particularly in the northern districts.

In January, the alleged custodial killing of 24-year-old Sahil Solangi in Larkana was settled through a jirga led by political and tribal leaders. The jirga [imposed](#) a PKR 2.5 million penalty on a station house officer and transport operator, concluding that the victim had been tortured to death after his arrest on theft charges.

In another case in March, a jirga in Shikarpur district settled a long-running [blood dispute](#) between the Nareja and Solangi communities by imposing fines on both sides.

In September, a jirga [settled](#) a blood feud between rival groups of the Chandio and Jafri clans by imposing PKR 4.3 million on a police official for having allegedly murdered a Jafri clansman in Tangwani two years prior.

**Conversion of anti-terrorism courts into anti-narcotics courts.** In November, the provincial Cabinet decided to [abolish](#) 14 anti-terrorism courts in Karachi and Hyderabad. This decision was based on a low caseload and improved law and order. The courts were to be redesignated as anti-narcotics courts to handle the rising number of drug-related cases.

Earlier, in September 2024, the Sindh Assembly [passed](#) the Sindh Control of Narcotic Substances Act, which repealed the federal Control of Narcotic Substances Act 1997 to the extent of the province.



*A comprehensive surrender policy for dacoits in the katcha areas encouraged gangs to lay down their arms.*

# Enforcement of Law

## Law and order

**Crime statistics.** According to [police statistics](#), the total number of cognisable crimes reported across Sindh increased by 5,170 cases, rising from 118,240 in 2024 to 123,410 in 2025.

Murder cases saw a slight increase, from 1,854 in 2024 to 1,889 in 2025. Rioting cases also rose significantly by 951, indicating growing public disorder. Sexual crimes increased notably, with rape cases rising from 365 in 2024 to 464 in 2025. Gang rape cases also experienced a minor increase. Kidnapping and abduction cases rose sharply by 1,181, making this one of the most alarming trends of the year.

Motorcycle theft increased substantially, from 11,894 in 2024 to 13,464 in 2025—an increase of 1,570 cases. Accidental deaths and injuries also rose significantly in 2025. Fatal accidents increased by 188 cases, while nonfatal accidents rose by 166 cases, highlighting serious road safety concerns across the province.

**Other law-and-order cases.** In March, law enforcement agencies [arrested](#) an alleged member of the banned Baloch Republican Army in Karachi's Malir area during a joint operation by the Sindh Rangers and the Counter-Terrorism Department.

In June, a powerful remote-controlled explosive device fitted to rail tracks caused four bogies of the Jaffar Express to [derail](#) near Cattle Market in Jacobabad. No one was injured. The banned Baloch Republican Guards claimed responsibility.

Again, in October, a remote-controlled explosion derailed four coaches of the Jaffar Express train near Sultan Kot village in Shikarpur district, injuring [four passengers](#).

In yet another incident in December, a [low-intensity blast](#) damaged a small section of the rail tracks between Jacobabad and Shikarpur, disrupting train service in Sindh and Balochistan. Several trains, including the Jaffar Express, running between the two provinces, were halted for security reasons.

**Custodial deaths.** Many news reports during the year highlighted persistent allegations of extrajudicial killings, custodial deaths, excessive use of force, and weak accountability mechanisms within law enforcement agencies in Sindh.

Proceedings in the case of Dr Shahnawaz Kumbhar—allegedly killed in police custody following his arrest on charges of blasphemy in Umerkot in September 2024—continued throughout 2025. However, the [main accused](#), Javed Soonharo Jiskani (DIG Mirpurkhas), was not arrested despite court-issued arrest orders. Lawyers representing Kumbhar's family also reported an [attempted attack](#) on their lives, raising serious concerns about witness and counsel protection in sensitive cases.

Sikandar Dawood, a man held for his alleged involvement in a motorbike theft case, [died in police custody](#) in controversial circumstances on 14 March. While police claimed that the suspect died of natural causes, doctors at the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi found 'multiple injuries' on the body.

Muhammad Irfan died in the custody of the Special Investigation Unit after he, along with three friends, was arrested from the Federal B Area Karachi on 22 October. A [manslaughter case](#) was registered against seven police officers, who were subsequently suspended.

Twenty-two-year-old Yaseen Mari was allegedly killed in a staged police encounter following illegal detention. In October, the SHC [directed](#) the joint investigation team to submit its final report, amid claims by the petitioner’s counsel that Mari was killed because his family was unable to pay the PKR 700,000 demanded by the station house officer for the former’s release.

**SHC asks police to shut down ‘torture’ cells.** In December, the SHC’s Constitutional Bench, Hyderabad Circuit, [directed](#) the provincial police chief to ensure that all ‘torture’ cells in police stations, operating under the guise of ‘investigation’ cells, were closed forthwith.

**Cases against BYC leaders.** In March, the SHC [disposed of](#) two petitions filed by Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) leader Dr Mahrang Baloch. These petitions sought to have a first information report (FIR) withdrawn and an inquiry held against police officials who had allegedly assaulted Baloch and her companions and confiscated her mobile phone and passport within the jurisdiction of the airport police station. The court directed the police to record her statement and to register a case if a cognisable offence was established against the officials. The two-judge constitutional bench, headed by Justice Mohammad Karim Khan Agha, also advised the petitioner to seek appropriate relief before the trial court in relation to a separate case in which she and others were accused of inciting the public by making allegations against security institutions.

In December, an anti-terrorism court in Karachi [acquitted](#) Dr Mahrang Baloch of sedition and related charges in a case alleging that she had incited individuals by levelling accusations against security institutions. However, she remained in custody at a prison in Quetta for other pending cases. In its ruling, the court noted that although an FIR had been registered, the complainant had failed to present any independent witnesses; all prosecution witnesses, apart from the complainant, were police officials who lacked direct knowledge of the alleged incident.

In March, the SHC [issued notices](#) to the Sindh home secretary and other respondents regarding a petition challenging the detention of BYC leader Sammi Deen Baloch under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance. The two-judge bench, led by Justice Zafar Ahmed Rajput, also instructed jail authorities to allow meetings between the detainee and her legal counsel.

## Jails and prisoners

Sindh’s 23 jails held a population of 25,809 inmates against a sanctioned capacity of 14,188. Official data indicates that female inmates included 80 mothers living with their children on jail premises. At least one suicide was reported among inmates during the year. Nineteen punishments were awarded to inmates under the Prison Rules, while 42 prison staff members were penalised for violating the rules; three complaints were lodged by inmates against staff. Table 1 provides data on the proportion of under-trial and convicted prisoners, disaggregated by gender.

*Table 1: Prison population in Sindh in 2025*

Inmate category	Under trial	Convicted
Total inmates	21,712	4,097
Male inmates	21,106	4,014
Female inmates	331	74
Transgender inmates	0	0
Juvenile inmates	275	9

*Source: Sindh Prisons Department, in response to HRCP’s request for information.*

Karachi faced a serious security situation after a series of earthquakes in June 2025 damaged Malir Jail, leading to a major jailbreak. According to officials, 225 prisoners escaped when the prison walls cracked, and gates were damaged during the tremors. Soon after the escape, the police and Rangers launched a large search operation across Karachi and nearby areas, setting up checkpoints and conducting raids. In the days that followed, many prisoners were [rearrested](#), while some returned to the jail voluntarily. However, 44 prisoners were still [missing](#) at the time of writing this report.

A prisoner at District Jail Badin died in mysterious circumstances amid [allegations of torture](#), while he was also reportedly ill. The 30-year-old inmate, Muhammad Yousuf, had been shifted from Badin to Hyderabad Civil Hospital. Before his death, two videos went viral on social media. In one video, the prisoner accused jail authorities of torturing him, while in the second, he stated that he was sick and suffering from stomach pain.

## The death penalty

While no executions were reported in Sindh during 2025, courts continued to award death sentences in criminal cases.

In February, a sessions court [sentenced](#) Nawaz Khursheed to death for the 2020 double murder of an elderly couple, Jawed Iftikhar and his wife Salma, during a robbery.

In October, a sessions court [sentenced three men](#) to death after finding them guilty of brutally killing a 22-year-old woman from their community last year in the name of 'honour'. They were also accused of attempting to kill a man.

## Enforced disappearances

Enforced disappearances continued to be reported in Sindh, particularly of political activists, individuals accused of links with proscribed organisations (including nationalists or separatists), and even students. The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances reported that 28 new cases from Sindh were brought before the Commission.

In December, Shahnawaz Khoso, a final-year MBBS student in Tando Mohammad Khan, was reportedly offloaded from a passenger bus near Dadu by unidentified individuals, and his whereabouts subsequently became unknown. HRCP [called](#) for him to be produced before a court of law. Other civil society organisations and medical associations also protested against his disappearance.

In September, the SHC [issued](#) notices to respondents in two petitions seeking information regarding the whereabouts of two Muttahida Qaumi Movement (L) leaders, including a former lawmaker. The petitioner, Hassan Nisar, stated that his father, Nisar Panhwar, and his associate, Anwar Tareen, were allegedly detained by law enforcement agencies on 16 September after leaving Panhwar's residence in Saadi Town, Karachi. The two leaders were reported to have returned home in December, but approximately two weeks later, Nisar Panhwar and his son Mohsin Panhwar were allegedly abducted once again. After receiving complaints from the families, HRCP issued a statement and communicated with the authorities, urging their release.

# Fundamental Freedoms

## Freedom of expression

**Cases registered under PECA.** In March, the Dadu police registered a case under Section 26A of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2025. The case was filed against 34 individuals accused of spreading ‘false’ information on social media about a purported bomb blast at the senior superintendent of police’s office targeting senior police officials. The FIR, lodged by an assistant sub-inspector against Aftab Jamali and his associates, prompted multiple police raids. However, the suspects reportedly fled.

In a separate incident, police in Tangwani, Kashmore district, registered a case under PECA against [28 individuals](#)—mostly journalists, political activists, and residents—alleging misuse of social media, spreading unrest through Facebook and WhatsApp, and defamation of the police and law department. In response, the nominated individuals, along with other local journalists, convened at the Tangwani Press Club, maintaining that the case had been fabricated and filed in retaliation for their reporting on deteriorating law and order, as well as their protests against rising insecurity in Tangwani and Kandhkot.

**FIA arrests journalist.** Journalist and YouTube content creator Farhan Mallick, founder of the digital channel Raftar, was [arrested](#) on 20 March by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). His arrest occurred after he appeared at its Cybercrime Reporting Centre in connection with an inquiry reportedly linked to programmes critical of the security establishment. Mallick’s family stated that no FIR or written charges were furnished. HRCP and the Karachi Press Club condemned the arrest, demanded his immediate release, and warned that cybercrime laws were being misused to suppress journalism. Mallick was [released](#) on 7 April, following post-arrest bail.

**Special unit to check misuse of social media.** The Sindh Apex Committee decided to establish a [dedicated unit](#) within the Home Department to address the increasing misuse of social media. This unit was to operate in coordination with the FIA, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, and the provincial police. The decision was made at a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, attended by senior military, law enforcement, and government officials. The new provincial unit was to be responsible for handling complaints and coordinating enforcement efforts.

**State advertising policies under scrutiny.** In March, HRCP and the Karachi Press Club issued separate [statements](#) condemning the government’s alleged withholding of public-sector advertisements from media outlets critical of its policies. HRCP warned that denying advertisements to independent newspapers while favouring others undermined constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and the public’s right to information. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists also condemned these discriminatory advertising policies against an independent media.

**Targeted attacks on journalists.** In September, Imtiaz Meer, a journalist and anchor with a private TV channel, was [critically wounded](#) in an armed attack on his car on the National Highway in Malir. His elder brother, Mohammed Salih, also sustained a bullet wound in the incident. The case, initially attributed to personal enmity, was later [described](#) by authorities as an attack by a ‘terrorist’ organisation.

In an earlier [incident](#) in June, two journalists, Rafiq Channa and Niaz Chandio, were seriously injured when four armed assailants on motorcycles opened fire at them outside a printing shop on Kachehri Road in Dadu. During the attack,

one of the gunmen was accidentally shot and killed by his accomplices. Police indicated that the attack may have been carried out in retaliation for Chandio's reporting on drug abuse and drug trafficking.

**Controversy over 'killing' of key suspect.** In May, Shikarpur police reported that notorious dacoit, Sher Mohammad Mahar, alias Sheroo—the main suspect in the 2024 murder of journalist Jan Mohammad Mahar—was [killed in a drone strike](#) during a joint police–Rangers operation in the riverine area of Chak taluka, where he had long evaded arrest. However, some activists disputed the official account, alleging that Sheroo had died earlier of hepatitis C and that the authorities were falsely claiming credit to secure the announced bounty.

## Freedom of peaceful assembly

**Sit-in against oil and gas company.** On 8 January, hundreds of farmers, landowners, and residents from over 40 villages [staged](#) an hours-long sit-in outside the Oil and Gas Development Corporation Limited field office in Jhangara Bajara town, Johi taluka. They alleged that oil and gas survey activities had caused extensive damage to crops, trees, land, and water reserves. The protesters claimed that despite these losses, the affected villages had received no compensation.

**Moro clash.** On 20 May, violent clashes erupted in Moro city, Naushahro Feroz district, during a protest against the proposed construction of new canals on the Indus River. The protest became [violent](#) when police attempted to disperse demonstrators who had blocked the Moro bypass road. One protester, Zahid Leghari, later died as a result of bullet injuries, while more than a dozen others were injured, including a deputy superintendent of police and six other police officers. Protesters, armed with rods and sticks, reportedly resisted police action, leading to baton charges and aerial firing. Several vehicles, including two trailers and a police van, were set on fire, and businesses in the area shut down. Following Leghari's death, the situation escalated further, with protesters attacking and partially burning the residence of Sindh Home Minister Zia Lanjar.

HRCP [expressed](#) concerns about the credibility of a police-led investigation and demanded an immediate, independent judicial inquiry into the events surrounding the protest in Moro.

**Police book BYC activists in Karachi.** On 19 January, the Karachi police [arrested](#) dozens of activists linked to the BYC in various parts of the city. Police filed terrorism and sedition charges against 19 BYC activists, including three women, for allegedly chanting slogans against national institutions during a rally in Malir.

A day earlier, police in Lyari detained about 25 BYC leaders and workers, including women, after stopping their rally. Authorities alleged that the protesters were engaged in 'anti-Pakistan activities'. The BYC, however, contested this account, stating that law enforcement personnel had carried out a violent crackdown on peaceful participants who had gathered to promote an upcoming event in Dalbandin, alleging that the police had used batons and arrests to disperse them.

**Students baton charged.** In March, the Jamshoro police baton-charged students and fired teargas shells to disperse a protest against the proposed Cholistan canal and other water channels intended to irrigate land in Punjab using Indus River water. A case was registered against the protesting students. HRCP [expressed](#) concern over the criminal case filed against nearly 100 students in Jamshoro for participating in the protest.



*The Jamshoro police baton-charged students and fired teargas shells to disperse a protest against the proposed Cholistan canal.the proposed construction of six canals on the Indus River system.*

## Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

**Forced conversions.** The problem of ‘forced conversions’ of Hindu girls was consistently reported by their families, even though some girls themselves often claim to have married of their own volition. One such case, reported in late 2024, involved Kajal Meghwar, a Hindu girl from Mirpurkhas district, who was allegedly abducted. She later appeared with her husband, stating that she had converted to Islam and married a Muslim man, Punhoon, on 30 December 2024. In January, following her statement, the additional sessions judge of Mirpurkhas [ordered](#) the police to provide security to the newly married couple.

In February, Bhagwanti Bheel, a Hindu TikTok star and emerging singer from Diplo, Tharparkar district, [converted](#) to Islam and married a Muslim friend, Saddam Bajeer, in Samaro, Umerkot. Several social media activists criticised the singer’s conversion and urged authorities to ensure the safety of Hindus, especially young girls.

In July, a case involving the alleged abduction and forced religious conversion of [three Hindu girls](#) was reported in the Tando Allahyar district. The families of the underage girls—Khenchi, Lata Devi, and Meena—filed three separate FIRs at the Sultanabad police station, stating that the girls had been kidnapped and forcibly converted to Islam. Two days later, the girls appeared before the SHC’s Hyderabad Circuit Bench and stated that they had willingly converted and married Tanveer, Saeed, and Ali Sher.

**Persecution of Ahmadiyya community.** On 18 April, Laeeq Ahmed Cheema, a 46-year-old member of the Ahmadiyya community, was [beaten to death](#) by a mob in Karachi. The attack occurred near an Ahmadi place of worship in the Saddar area. According to reports, workers of the far-right Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) allegedly assaulted Cheema while he was recording a video of the mob outside the worship place. He was then taken to Civil Hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries. Police registered a case against 15 nominated suspects on charges of murder and terrorism in connection with the lynching.

Earlier, in February, authorities in Karachi sealed an Ahmadi place of worship, Bait-ul-Nasir, in Malir Colony, following demands from an [extremist mob](#) linked with the TLP. The Ahmadi community in Karachi has since demanded that their place of worship be reopened and restored to its previous function.

There were multiple instances of the desecration of graves and blasphemy and faith-based allegations against community members through the year (Table 2).

*Table 2: Attacks against the Ahmadiyya community in Sindh in 2025*

<i>Rights violation</i>	<i>No. of reported incidents</i>
Graves desecrated	127
Worship sites vandalised/destroyed	0
Arrests for religious offences	8
Faith-based killings	2
Blasphemy and faith-based allegations	34
Faith-based physical attacks	0

*Source: Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya press section.*

## Freedom of movement

**Babarloi blockade.** The most significant political development of the year was the federal government's controversial announcement of a project involving the construction of six canals on the Indus River. In March, the provincial assembly passed a unanimous [resolution](#) opposing the move. However, the issue refused to die down. In April, an all-Sindh lawyers' convention in Karachi decided to launch a mass protest and sit-in against the decision. The blockade of the National Highway at the Babarloi Bypass in upper Sindh began; on 22 April, lawyer leaders [threatened](#) to block the railway tracks if the project was not shelved within 72 hours.

The protest involved political parties from the province, including the Awami Tehreek, Sindh United Party, and Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz, as well as professional associations such as the Karachi Bar Association, Malir Bar Association, and other civil society groups. As a result of the blockade, traffic between Sindh and Punjab came to a halt. Protesters [called off](#) all sit-ins across the province on 29 April after the CCI rejected the federal government's plan to build new canals from the Indus River, pending a mutual agreement.

**Protests disturb traffic in Karachi.** Traffic disruptions were reported in Karachi following two separate incidents. In August, an enraged mob [set fire](#) to at least seven dumper trucks on Rashid Minhas Road after a dumper ran over two siblings riding a motorcycle with their father. The driver was arrested, while ten suspects were detained for arson.

In September, residents staged a protest near Abul Hasan Ispahani Road over alleged [illegal police detentions](#), bringing traffic on the Super-Highway to a halt. The protest ended after negotiations, allowing traffic to resume.

**Transporters' strike.** In December, the Pakistan Goods Transporters Alliance launched an indefinite nationwide strike against various road-safety policies. However, about ten days later, following talks with federal and provincial authorities, the transporters [called off](#) the strike, which had severely disrupted the supply of raw materials, local production, and exports.

## Freedom of association

In July, workers in Karachi held a [rally](#) from Regal Chowk to the Karachi Press Club, demanding the democratic right to unionise. Organised by the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), the rally drew participation from workers across various industrial zones, as well as representatives from political, social, and human rights organisations. NTUF General Secretary Nasir Mansoor criticised authorities for criminalising unionisation efforts, pointing out that employers disregarded basic worker entitlements, such as minimum wages, social security, and legal working hours. Qazi Khizar Habib, the vice-chair of HRCP Sindh, asserted that labour rights form part of fundamental human rights, and that authorities violate both Pakistani law and international conventions by denying these rights.

# Democratic Development

## Political participation

**Rigging allegations in by-elections.** In April, amid low turnout and [allegations](#) of rigging, Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) candidate Saba Talpur won the by-election for the National Assembly seat NA-213, which had fallen vacant after the death of her husband Nawab Yousuf Talpur. According to unofficial and unconfirmed results, the PPP candidate secured 164,788 votes, while Lal Chand Malhi, the candidate from the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI)-backed opposition alliance, received 81,247 votes.

**PPP sweeps local government by-polls.** On 24 September, local government by-elections were held for 28 seats across Karachi and 13 other districts of Sindh, including Hyderabad, Thatta, Ghotki, Sukkur, Khairpur, Mirpurkhas, Umerkot, Dadu, and Badin. Voter turnout was again low, and the PPP emerged victorious, winning a [sweeping majority](#). According to unofficial results, the PPP claimed 20 seats, followed by the TLP with two seats. The Grand Democratic Alliance, Jamaat-e-Islami, a PTI-backed candidate, and an independent candidate each secured one seat.

**Shikarpur by-election.** In the PS-9 Shikarpur by-election held on 14 December, following the death of former Sindh Assembly Speaker Agha Siraj Durrani, his son and PPP candidate Agha Shahbaz Khan Durrani [won decisively](#) with 72,975 votes. Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) candidate Rashdullah Shah Amrooti came second with 12,834 votes.

## Shrinking democratic spaces and the role of elected assemblies

In January, the Sindh Assembly [rejected](#) a resolution on student union polls after the PPP treasury benches voted against it. The resolution, introduced by the Jamaat-e-Islami’s Muhammad Farooq, demanded the immediate enforcement of the Sindh Students’ Union Restoration Act, which requires annual elections and a 60-day window for formulating rules. Although Farooq highlighted the delay in implementation since the bill’s passage in 2022, Law Minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjar maintained that the government was already acting in accordance with the law. Consequently, the House rejected the resolution through a majority vote, leaving the enforcement of annual student union elections unchanged.

# The Rights of the Disadvantaged

## Women

Gender-based violence continued unabated through the year. Table 3 provides a breakdown of gender-based violence in the province, based on official data, with kidnapping and abduction being the most commonly reported crime.

Table 3: Gender-based violence in Sindh in 2025

Crime	Reported cases
Domestic violence	
Murder	130
Beating	319
Other	18
Honour killings	126
Acid attacks	3
Stove-burning incidents	0
Vani	0
Sexual assault	
Rape	371
Gang rape	76
Incest	4
Custodial rape	0
Workplace harassment	
Physical	70
Sexual	12
Kidnapping and abduction	4,578

Source: National Police Bureau, in response to HRCP's request for information.

In October, a man allegedly killed his two young daughters in Karachi's Kausar Niazi Colony. During interrogation, the suspect confessed to the murders, claiming that he had killed his eldest daughter for [using a mobile phone](#) despite his repeated warnings.

In July, a panel discussion was organised at Karachi University to discuss the [alarming increase](#) in harassment cases at educational institutions. Experts, including Mahnaz Rahman of the Aurat Foundation, journalist Lubna Jarrar Naqvi, and lawyer Shahrukh Shahnawaz, shed light on the legal protections available to women and called for urgent societal reform to address these systemic issues.

A petition filed by Alisha Shabbir in the SHC challenged the [40 percent tax](#) on sanitary napkins. It contended that under Articles 9 and 14 of the Constitution, every citizen had the right to life and health. The petition sought the inclusion of sanitary napkins as essential items and requested exemption from the Sales Tax Act 1990, as they had become unaffordable for most women.

In February, the Sindh Cabinet approved the procurement of 50 additional electric buses for the city and 1,000 [pink electric motorcycles](#) for women. In September, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari [distributed](#) 200 pink e-bikes to women beneficiaries.

## Children

In March, the Sindh government launched the country's first-ever [programme](#) to support the education of children of convicted prisoners. Under this initiative, the children of 4,684 inmates across Sindh will receive educational assistance from primary to university level.

In June, the police and Women and Child Protection Cell [foiled](#) the planned child marriage of a 13-year-old girl in Hijrat Colony, Karachi. The raid was conducted at the location, preventing the ceremony from taking place, after the cell received credible information.

Despite strict laws, child labour remains widespread in both urban and rural Sindh. The Sindh Child Labour Survey 2022–24 found that [over 1.6 million children](#) aged 5 to 17 were engaged in child labour. Conducted by the provincial labour department with support from UNICEF and the Bureau of Statistics, the survey also reported that more than half of all child labourers aged 10–17 worked in hazardous conditions, facing long hours, extreme weather, and unsafe tools. However, the survey noted a significant decline in child labour, with rates reduced by nearly 50 percent compared to the 1996 baseline.

On 28 October, it was reported that [HIV spread](#) in the province had reached an 'extremely alarming' level, with 3,995 registered HIV-positive children.

In a shocking case in Memon Goth, Karachi, police reported that a woman was allegedly [forced to sell](#) her newborn baby to pay medical bills at a private clinic. Subsequently, the Malir district police chief confirmed that the child was safely with its family and that the authorities had sealed the clinic.

## Transgender persons

In September, three transgender persons were found [shot dead](#) on the outskirts of Karachi within the remit of the Memon Goth police station. Gender Interactive Alliance president Bindiya Rana condemned the murder and claimed that since 2022, a total of [56 transgender](#) people had been killed across Sindh. Calling this 'the height of cruelty', Rana claimed that transgender persons were among the most marginalised in society and continued to face problems related to housing, food, access to identity cards, and employment. Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah also condemned the murder.

In January, the chief minister directed the Education Department to develop the province's first transgender [education policy](#).

In October, the Hijra Festival, themed 'From climate to identity, from struggle to liberation', was held at Burns Garden in Karachi. Explaining the purpose of the event, transgender model and organiser Kami Chaudhry [stated](#) that the community sought the freedom to live with dignity and on its own terms,



*The Hijra Festival, themed 'From climate to identity, from struggle to liberation', was held at Burns Garden in Karachi.*

adding 'We demand the full implementation of the employment quota reserved for transgender persons, as well as the mandatory inclusion of the transgender community in disaster management, relief, housing, and health programmes, so that no one is left behind in national policy and practice.'

## Labour

**Sindh Labour Code.** The provincial government, with the support of the International Labour Organization, prepared a [labour code](#). However, local trade unions and federations rejected it, stating that it was developed without adequate consultation. Addressing a conference organised by the NTUF, speakers termed the code 'an agenda to weaken the agency and rights of workers'.

**Women cotton pickers.** Labour rights leaders and representatives of women-led trade unions of cotton workers from Matiari district held a press conference at the Hyderabad Press Club on 30 April, raising [strong demands](#) for justice, fair wages, and decent working conditions for more than one million women labourers across Sindh's cotton-producing districts.

**Coal mine fatalities.** On 12 May, two mine workers [died](#) and seven others lost consciousness after inhaling poisonous gas in a coal mine at the Lakhra coalfield in Jamshoro district. Two more were hospitalised in critical condition. The bodies of the deceased, who were residents of Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, were later sent to their hometown after the completion of medico-legal formalities.

In December, three more miners died after toxic gas filled a mine during operations in Manjhand near Jamshoro, prompting protests by workers over the frequency of such incidents.

**Sanitation worker's deaths.** In February, [two sanitation workers](#) died after inhaling toxic gases while cleaning gutter lines in North Nazimabad, Karachi. In September, three sanitation workers, including 45-year-old George and his 19-year-old son, Wishal, [died](#) after inhaling toxic gases while cleaning a sewage manhole in Karachi's Garden area. A fourth worker lost consciousness and was hospitalised.

**Minimum wage.** In June, the Sindh Assembly's Public Accounts Committee was informed that over 80 percent of industrial units had [failed](#) to implement the officially notified minimum wage. This reflected weak enforcement of labour laws and limited access to remedies for workers.

Later, in July, the Government of Sindh [notified](#) a minimum monthly wage of PKR 40,000 for unskilled workers in all industrial and commercial establishments across the province, effective from 1 July 2025. The minimum monthly salary for semi-skilled workers was set at PKR 41,380.

**Fishermen released by India.** In October, [53 fishermen](#) from Sindh, released by the Indian authorities and handed over to Pakistan at the Wagah border on 9 September, remained stranded in Lahore for over 25 days. Their families alleged that the Sindh Fisheries Department and the Fishermen's Cooperative Society had failed to coordinate with the Punjab Rangers to ensure a prompt handover.

Meanwhile, on 10 December, Indian forces [detained](#) 11 Pakistani fishermen, including two minors, from waters near Kajar Creek and confiscated their boat. According to Kamal Shah of the Coastal Media Centre, all those detained were residents of Ibrahim Hyderi in Karachi.

**Deaths at fireworks factory.** Industrial accidents continued throughout the year. In November, a powerful explosion at an illegal fireworks factory in a riverine area of Hyderabad killed six people instantly. Four others died during treatment, raising the [death toll](#) to ten.

## The elderly

**Senior Citizen Card.** The Government of Sindh, in collaboration with the National Database and Regulatory Authority, launched the Sindh Senior Citizen Azadi Card programme in December 2024. This initiative aimed to enhance welfare support and improve access to public services for elderly citizens. Although announced earlier, [registration](#) for eligible applicants began in 2025, with offices established in every district. The card provides free public services to residents aged 60 and above. Approximately 3.7 million senior citizens in Sindh are expected to benefit. According to official figures, 29,821 senior citizens registered between March and mid-August 2025.

**Changes in Pension Rules.** The Government of Sindh introduced what it termed a [pension reform plan](#) in the 2025/26 budget. This triggered widespread dissatisfaction among government employees, who organised province-wide protests, strikes, and rallies demanding the withdrawal of the new policy. This forced the government to announce steps to revise or withdraw its earlier pension-related decisions.

## Persons living with disabilities

In March, a constitutional division bench of the SHC (Hyderabad Circuit) directed the focal person of the Services, General Administration and Coordination Department to consider the appointment of 14 petitioners under the [5 percent quota](#) for persons living with disabilities (PLWDs). The petition, filed in 2021 by Mohammad Naveed Qureshi and 13 others, stated that the applicants had responded to a government advertisement published in November 2017 and appeared for interviews before a selection committee in February 2018. The petitioners sought court directions for their appointment in accordance with the recommendation list.

In June, Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah announced a PKR 400 million allocation to support PLWDs. At a cheque distribution ceremony organised by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, he distributed cheques to 56 partner organisations as part of this financial assistance package. He also announced that 12 autism centres would be operational by the end of 2025, adding that the provincial government planned to establish at least one such centre in every district.

The SHC directed district courts across the province to ensure the installation of ramps, wheelchairs, and special washrooms to improve [court access](#) for PLWDs.

## Refugees and internally displaced persons

Deportations and targeted crackdowns on Afghan refugees continued in Sindh and Karachi, implemented as part of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan. In October, the authorities, in coordination with the city police, [launched](#) a demolition operation in the Afghan Basti in Sohrab Goth, Karachi. This operation aimed to prevent what they termed the illegal occupation of land by alleged land mafia elements. Approximately 1,200 of over 3,000 housing structures had been demolished at the time of reporting. The police claimed that over 14,000 Afghan residents had returned to Afghanistan, while around 1,384 individuals remained and were being repatriated in phases.

# Social, Economic, and Environmental Rights

## Education

Sindh increased its [education budget](#) by 25 percent in 2025—earmarking PKR 613 billion as opposed to the previous year's allocation of PKR 454 billion. However, problems in education remained myriad and serious. In 2025, the gross primary enrolment rate in Sindh was 71 percent against the national average of 84 percent, with just 33 percent in disaster-prone districts. One positive development was the decentralisation of education funds to school-level cost centres, benefiting and empowering about 34,000 schools.

## Health

**Rabies death toll.** In 2025, a 12-year-old boy, who developed rabies despite receiving multiple vaccine doses at a government hospital in Jacobabad, died at the Indus Hospital in Karachi, raising the [death toll](#) in Sindh to 25. A significant number of these patients were from northern Sindh districts and were compelled to travel to Karachi after failing to access appropriate treatment in their areas of residence or nearby districts.

**Polio.** Of the 31 polio cases reported in Pakistan in 2025, nine were from Sindh. Official data indicates that parents [refused](#) polio vaccinations for 41,875 children during home visits in Karachi. In contrast, only 1,124 refusals were reported in other districts of Sindh.



*Of the 31 polio cases reported in Pakistan in 2025, nine were from Sindh.*

**Cervical cancer.** In September, the Health Department launched a 12-day HPV vaccination campaign. This was the first-ever initiative in the province to protect young girls from [cervical cancer](#). The campaign was reportedly intended to target 4.1 million girls aged 9 to 14 in 1,190 union councils across 30 districts.

**Malaria.** A provincial [report](#) on malaria found that 2,416,427 blood samples were screened between 1 January and 15 October, with 215,270 (approximately 9 percent) testing positive. Independent public health experts questioned these findings, noting that the reported figures underestimated the actual situation. Official data on dengue cases also differed from that reported by major public and private hospitals.

**Measles.** Some 73 measles outbreaks were recorded across Sindh, resulting in more than 4,200 confirmed cases and [57 deaths](#).

## Housing and public amenities

As of the end of 2025, the first phase of the Sindh government-led Sindh Flood Emergency Rehabilitation Project was nearing completion. The project was launched following the devastating floods in 2022 and aimed to rehabilitate key infrastructure and amenities, benefiting reportedly 5 million people through better infrastructure and over 139,000 flood-affected people through a cash-for-work programme.

The Sindh government faced strong criticism, however, over amendments to the Karachi Town Planning and Building Regulations. These amendments, which [permitted](#) the commercial use of residential properties, were rejected by three major opposition parties who demanded their immediate withdrawal. They argued that the changes would severely damage the already deteriorating urban infrastructure. On 13 March, the Sindh Building Control Authority director general issued a notification allowing the commercial use of residential properties. However, following a petition filed in the SHC, the government [withdrew](#) the notification in May.

**Railway land occupation.** Of the 19,594 acres managed by Pakistan Railways in the Karachi division, 954 acres remained under [private occupation](#). This update, provided to a National Assembly standing committee, highlighted that 340 acres had been recovered within the past three years.

**Eviction of families from unsafe buildings.** A committee established to address unsafe buildings and illegal construction across the province was informed that [300 families](#) had been evicted from 56 'extremely dangerous' buildings in Karachi. These families received monthly rental assistance of PKR 30,000 for three months.

## Environment

The Sindh government announced a province-wide [ban](#) on all plastic shopping bags, effective from 15 June. An official notification confirmed that the ban covered non-degradable, oxo-degradable, black, and recycled plastic bags.

A report by the Pakistan Air Quality Initiative estimated that Karachi emitted over [394 kilotons](#) of air pollutants annually. Industry was identified as the largest contributor to fine particulate matter (PM2.5), accounting for 49 percent, followed by the transport sector at 33 percent. The report further noted that the city's annual emissions included approximately 39.11 kilotons of PM2.5, 52 kilotons of sulphur dioxide, 100.78 kilotons of nitrogen oxides, and 203.41 kilotons of carbon, underscoring the significant pollution burden on Karachi's atmosphere.

KHYBER

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# Overview

The year 2025 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was characterised by a complex interplay of heightened insecurity, strained justice systems, and deepening social vulnerabilities, all unfolding amid persistent economic and environmental stress. Across governance, human rights, and public welfare indicators, the province experienced both structural attempts at reform and significant regression, fuelled by militancy, displacement, institutional fragility, and uneven state responsiveness.

The most alarming trend in 2025 was the surge in militancy. The province accounted for the overwhelming share of over 1,500 terror-related incidents nationwide, with the southern provincial districts bearing the brunt. Casualties among law enforcement personnel rose sharply and violence claimed hundreds of civilian lives, including women and children. Thousands of intelligence-based operations underscored the relentless nature of the security crisis but also raised concerns about heavy-handed counter-terrorism tactics and



*The province accounted for the overwhelming share of over 1,500 terror-related incidents nationwide.*

the enduring presence of militant networks. The resulting climate of fear affected political workers, public servants, journalists, and communities across the province.

As in the previous year, the provincial government successfully convened a widely attended peace jirga, this time held within the premises of the provincial assembly. Among other resolutions, the jirga called for opening borders with Afghanistan for trade, prioritising talks with Kabul, and including the province in Afghan policy, while also demanding peace, rights, and justice for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the province's majority and ruling party, was unable to secure reserved seats after a Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court overturned a full bench majority judgment from 2024. Consequently, the reserved seats were distributed among the opposition parties.

Legislatively, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly remained active, passing dozens of laws and resolutions. However, the overall trajectory reflected political imperatives more than a coherent, rights-centred agenda. Key enactments expanded regulatory frameworks concerning narcotics, climate governance, women's rights, and business facilitation. Even positive shifts, however, were undermined by limited consultation, provincial-federal tensions, and inconsistent implementation. Simultaneously, resolutions reflected the province's heightened exposure to national crises—from Afghan border disruptions to drone strikes and repatriation policies—indicating a legislature preoccupied with reactive rather than preventive governance.

One bill that remained much discussed and highly controversial was the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines and Minerals Bill, which had not been passed by the end of the year.

Rule-of-law indicators presented a mixed picture. Courts reduced backlogs and filled some judicial vacancies, yet systemic strain persisted, with thousands of cases pending at year's end. and an overburdened district judiciary. The crisis of enforced disappearances remained a defining human rights concern, as the Peshawar High Court repeatedly intervened to demand accountability from state institutions. The persistence of such cases revealed deep institutional inertia and entrenched impunity.

The state of fundamental freedoms remained precarious. Freedom of movement was repeatedly curtailed due to border closures, curfews, and military operations, affecting trade, livelihoods, and civilian mobility. Freedom of expression also weakened under the weight of the 2025 amendment to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 and mounting violence against journalists. The rise in digital disruptions and cybercrime prosecutions highlighted a growing contest over public space, both physical and online.

Protests across the province—concerning peace, power outages, inflation, salaries, and education—demonstrated an assertive citizenry responding to everyday governance failures. Marginalised groups, particularly women, children, and transgender persons, faced worsening vulnerabilities. Gender-based violence remained pervasive, with extremely low conviction rates. Transgender communities endured targeted killings, forced expulsions, and intensified discrimination. Children suffered extreme violence, from landmine blasts to custodial abuse, highlighting widening protection gaps.

Similarly, worsening labour conditions reflected systemic insecurity: mining accidents, kidnappings, wage delays, and mass layoffs exposed precarious livelihoods. People with disabilities saw incremental improvements in social protection but needs outpaced state capacity. Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) faced forced repatriations, inconsistent protections, and repeated displacement due to conflict and operations.

In the social and economic sectors, education and health systems grappled with chronic deficits. The province's out-of-school population remained among the highest in the country, compounded by severe teacher shortages and controversial outsourcing models. Public health threats, including polio, dengue, tuberculosis, measles, and HIV/AIDS, continued to strain limited infrastructure, although expansions in the Sehat Card programme offered some relief.

Environmental disasters inflicted enormous damage. Floods, deforestation, air pollution, and encroachments exposed governance failures across climate resilience, land management, and urban planning. The state's aggressive but uneven anti-encroachment drives highlighted the tension between environmental necessity and socioeconomic fallout.

Overall, 2025 underscored the fragility of rights protections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Despite some institutional reforms and targeted welfare measures, systemic insecurity, political volatility, and chronic public service deficits continued to constrain both governance capacity and the lived realities of millions.

# Rule of Law

## Laws and law-making

In 2025, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly maintained an active legislative agenda, enacting 29 laws, passing 26 bills, and adopting 63 resolutions. Human rights remained peripheral, while governance reforms, environmental regulation, and economic development dominated the agenda.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Control of Narcotic Substances (Amendment) Act was passed in March, instituting rigorous regulatory and punitive frameworks targeting drug trafficking and possession.

As in other provinces, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines and Minerals Bill was presented in April. However, due to concerns of federal overreach, provincial autonomy, and lack of consultation, it faced significant opposition from both ruling and opposition lawmakers and therefore did not become law.

In June, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women (Amendment) Act was passed, strengthening the operational effectiveness of the provincial Commission on the Status of Women.

In September, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Climate Action Board Act was passed, establishing a climate action board with extraordinary powers to 'plan, oversee and execute all climate-related initiatives' and 'address climate-related risks'.

In January, a resolution denounced the federal enactment of the PECA (Amendment) Act as repressive to press freedom. In April, one resolution urged the extension of the repatriation deadline for Afghan refugees, while another pressed for improved connectivity infrastructure in Dir. June saw a resolution demanding an immediate cessation of drone strikes in the province. In October, the assembly opposed the military operation against militants in Bajaur. In December, it called on federal authorities to enable the return of Pakistani students stranded in Afghanistan due to border closures.

Despite a resolution by the provincial assembly in September seeking to repeal the Actions (in Aid of Civil Power) Regulations 2011—which were extended to the whole province in 2019 and granted legal protection to security forces during operations, effectively legalising internment centres—no further [movement](#) was observed on this front as of the end of 2025.

## Administration of justice

**Pendency of cases.** In 2025, the Peshawar High Court (PHC) [adjudicated](#) 33,774 cases against 32,224 new cases filed, reducing its backlog from 37,505 at the year's outset to 35,955 by December. The district judiciary, which commenced the year with 252,539 pending matters, lowered this figure to 223,748 cases. Over the same period, 486,080 fresh cases were instituted and 527,762 resolved, yielding a 109 percent disposal rate. A particular emphasis on family litigation resulted in the resolution of 24,997 cases against 23,600 new cases filed, reflecting a disposal rate of 106 percent.

**Judicial vacancies.** In February, ten newly inducted PHC judges [took](#) oath, expanding its bench from 13 to 23 members, although the sanctioned strength of 30 remained unfulfilled by year-end. In December, the registrar disclosed that a requisition for 112 civil judges had been forwarded to the Public Service Commission. However, only 12 appointments materialised.

# Enforcement of Law

## Law and order

The year 2025 witnessed an intensification of violence in Pakistan, with at least 1,034 fatalities recorded—a 21 percent increase compared to the previous year—and 1,366 individuals sustaining injuries. This surge was most pronounced in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which experienced a sharp escalation in militancy. According to the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, a total of 1,588 terror-related incidents were documented, including at least eight suicide attacks and over 500 direct assaults—representing a 50 percent [rise](#) from 2024. Six southern districts—Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Lakki Marwat, North and South Waziristan, and Tank—absorbed the majority of the violence, accounting for at least 248 incidents.

At least 264 officers were killed in the line of duty, comprising 124 members of the Frontier Constabulary, 137 police officers, and three officials from the Counter-Terrorism Department. Violence claimed the lives of at least 223 civilians and left 570 others wounded. Among those killed were at least five women and 47 children.

In March, an [explosion](#) within a South Waziristan mosque injured four worshippers, including Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) (JUI-F) district emir Abdullah Naeem. In June, the residence of legislator Mubarak Zeb was [struck](#) twice by unknown assailants in Bajaur. That same month, former senator Shamim Afridi publicly contended that his son, Abbas Khan Afridi—himself a former state minister—had been [killed](#) in a deliberate bomb attack in Kohat, contradicting initial media reports. In November, Awami National Party (ANP) leader Mumtaz Ali Khan [survived](#) an assassination attempt in Swat.

Security forces [undertook](#) 12,857 intelligence-based operations and 2,791 search-and-strike efforts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These campaigns resulted in the deaths of at least 420 individuals, officially designated as *khawarij*, militants, or terrorists. In addition, 1,244 suspected militants were arrested during these operations, while at least 320 planned acts of violence were prevented. During a parliamentary briefing on law and order in November, authorities [disclosed](#) that 4,000 terrorists remain in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, primarily concentrated in the merged tribal districts.

## Jails and prisoners

As per official data from the Prisons Department, the total number of prisoners in the province's 39 jails was 11,382, against a sanctioned capacity of 13,599. The data acknowledges approximately 155 inmates as suffering from mental health conditions; 1,365 inmates were disciplined under the Prison Rules, two inmates committed suicide, and 60 complaints were lodged against prison staff (see Tables 1–2).

Table 1: Prison population in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2025

Inmate category	Under trial	Convicted
Total inmates	9,062	2,320
Male inmates	8,973	2,299
Female inmates	89	21
Transgender inmates	0	0
Juvenile inmates	298	17

Source: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prisons Department, in response to HRCP's request for information.

*Table 2: Vulnerable prison inmates in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2025*

<i>Inmate description</i>	<i>Number</i>
Female inmates living with their children on jail premises	15
Foreign prisoners	2
Inmates on death row	250
Prisoners lodged in punishment cells or prolonged solitary confinement for any duration through the year	0
Inmates suffering from drug addiction	894
Inmates suffering from mental health problems	155

*Source: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prisons Department, in response to HRCP's request for information.*

In January, the National Commission for Human Development, a statutory autonomous body, **enrolled** 32 inmates from a cohort of 180 in an adult literacy programme at a sub-jail in Khyber district. In June, the Directorate of Prisons, partnering with the University of Peshawar, **launched** internship placements for students across the provincial prison system. September witnessed education rights emerge as a site of legal contention: one prisoner **petitioned** the PHC over remission denial, while another challenged the provincial **ban** on academic access for narcotics-related crime convicts.

In December, a fund of PKR 440 million was **sanctioned** for installing an upgraded security system at Peshawar Central Jail, accompanied by the inauguration of an in-house drug rehabilitation unit and a model interview room. Chief Minister Sohail Afridi further pledged PKR 20 million to enhance inmate facilities and advance the solarisation of prisons across the province. Table 3 provides a breakdown of health and other facilities at prisons in the province in 2025.

*Table 3: Health and other facilities across prisons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2025*

<i>Health and other facility/service</i>	<i>Total no. across all jails</i>
Prison hospitals	33 (incl. 6 dispensaries)
Psychologists	11
Psychiatrists	2
Drug rehabilitation centre or services	15
Educational centres	16
Vocational centres	7
Gyms	1
Libraries	18
Video trial systems	7
Panic buttons in prison cells/ barracks	10
Medical staff	181
All staff	5,145

*Source: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prisons Department, in response to HRCP's request for information.*

## The death penalty

According to a detailed [report](#) on the death penalty, prepared by Justice Project Pakistan and the National Commission for Human Rights and published in October 2025, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has 325 prisoners on death row. (Official data received by HRCP from the Prisons Department puts this figure at 250). This number includes two women and one juvenile. Notably, the report states that 65 percent of these death row prisoners have been sentenced under the Pakistan Army Act 1952.

While no exact number is available for death sentences awarded by the courts during the year, the following incidents were documented by HRCP's Knowledge Management System.

In April, a child protection court in Peshawar [sentenced](#) a man to death and imprisonment for the abduction and murder of a 14-year-old boy. In June, the PHC [upheld](#) capital punishment in two separate cases: one concerning a property-related killing in Swabi and [another](#) involving the murder of a five-year-old daughter in Charsadda on suspicion of illegitimacy. In July and August, courts in Swabi delivered death sentences, along with fines, in a [double-murder](#) case and in the [killing](#) of a maternal uncle.

In September, a Shangla sessions court [handed](#) the death penalty to a man convicted of murdering his wife. In October, a Peshawar court [pronounced](#) seven death sentences in an honour-related homicide that claimed the lives of seven individuals, including the suspect's former wife, three children, and other relatives.

## Enforced disappearances

The issue of enforced disappearances persisted throughout the year, remaining a central preoccupation for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa judiciary. In March, the PHC solicited responses from federal and provincial authorities regarding the escalating pattern of such disappearances. In April, it [ordered](#) a detailed account of the disappearance of an Interior Ministry employee along with six others. July brought renewed judicial [pressure](#) on state institutions to account for nine additional missing individuals. In September, the PHC [reprimanded](#) the provincial police for their protracted inaction.

October marked a procedural shift, as ten petitions were [referred](#) to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED), while 17 of 22 related petitions were [transferred](#) to the COIED for continued adjudication. As per data provided by the COIED, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recorded the highest number of new cases—101—in 2025.

## Use of the blasphemy laws

Throughout 2025, multiple proceedings on blasphemy charges unfolded in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. At least two individuals received life imprisonment. one in April, when a Peshawar district court [convicted](#) an accused of blasphemy, and another in October, when a Mansehra district court [imposed](#) the same sentence for allegedly disseminating blasphemous material via social media. A Peshawar district court, in January, [refused](#) bail to an individual accused of blasphemy, ordering his incarceration. This was followed in February by the dismissal of a doctor's [bail plea](#) over alleged desecration of religious texts. In August, Mansehra authorities [apprehended](#) a man for purportedly disseminating blasphemous content on social media platforms. In October, another accused was [remanded](#) to judicial custody for alleged blasphemy in Peshawar, despite his father pleading his mental incapacitation.

In June, the District Bar Association Mansehra unanimously passed a [resolution](#) seeking to bar its members from providing legal representation to individuals accused of blasphemy or desecration of the Holy Quran.

# Fundamental Freedoms

## Freedom of expression

**Journalists' safety.** In October, a Freedom Network [report](#) documented 142 incidents of assaults and infringements targeting journalists nationwide—a sharp escalation from the 57 cases in 2024. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa emerged as the second most dangerous province for media practitioners, accounting for 39 of the 142 cases reported.

**PECA Amendment.** The Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act, endorsed by presidential assent in January, provoked intense censure in 2025. Political parties, journalists, and civil society decried the amendment while prosecutions persisted. In January, the Landi Kotal Press Club [denounced](#) the PECA amendments as an assault on journalists' independence. In February, the ANP and Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party demanded their [repeal](#) while the PTI [condemned](#) them as curtailing free expression.

Arrests followed in [Mansehra](#), [Mardan](#), and [Lakki Marwat](#), ranging from charges of derogatory speech against the state and press clubs to the online circulation of allegedly objectionable videos targeting clerics. In May, two PTI activists in Swabi were [detained](#) for social media criticism of state bodies. In June, the PHC [sought](#) federal responses in a PECA case against a lawyer, and in October, it [suspended](#) cybercrime summons issued to three journalists under a complaint filed by the Peshawar commissioner.

**Digital rights.** In May, residents of South Waziristan demonstrated against recurring [disruptions](#) in mobile internet services. In September, satellite phone and internet connectivity were [introduced](#) in Chitral's Bumburet Valley, even as Shangla residents [protested](#) inadequate digital infrastructure. That same month, journalists in Khyber district [decried](#) restricted access to information and the absence of verification mechanisms.

## Freedom of peaceful assembly

In January, Mohmand residents [marched](#) for peace, opposing the design of military operations and demanding the protection of life and property. In February, Bajaur hosted a peace [rally](#) calling for an end to targeted killings and violence, while similar mobilisation in [Lakki Marwat](#), [South Waziristan](#), and [Swabi](#) urged the restoration of stability and normalcy. July saw peace demonstrations in [Bajaur](#) and [Lower Dir](#) condemning lawlessness and alleged assassinations. In September, thousands [assembled](#) in Swat demanding peace and the expulsion of militants from the border areas of Swat and Dir. In October, South Waziristan [witnessed](#) another peace gathering, denouncing targeted killings, kidnappings, extortion, and alleged drone strikes.

Other protests throughout the year included those by local government representatives over the denial of development allocations and administrative powers; against electricity



*The province saw protests against electricity outages, on wage-related unrest across the academic and health sectors and student mobilisation.*

outages; on wage-related unrest across the academic and health sectors; student mobilisation in Swabi, Swat, and Charsadda against government initiatives to privatise or outsource public schools and colleges; and demonstrations by traders against tax hikes, border closures, among other issues.

## Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

In July, under its Minority Students Scholarship Distribution Programme, the government [awarded](#) financial assistance to 300 students, with individual grants ranging between PKR 50,000 and 1 million.

In April, the Cantonment Board Peshawar [deployed](#) three electric carts to provide complimentary transport for Christian residents attending Easter services within the cantonment precincts. In August, the Cabinet Committee on Legislation [endorsed](#) the draft Kalash Marriage Bill for presentation in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. In November, minority women in Swat [mobilised](#) to voice grievances regarding a lack of employment opportunities and public services.

## Freedom of movement

**Border restrictions.** During the year, border closures in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with Afghanistan [curtailed](#) the mobility of thousands and disrupted the commercial flow of goods. In March, the Torkham crossing reopened after a 25-day suspension, allowing pedestrian passage and trade. The same month, a [jirga](#) convened in Bajaur pressed authorities to restore all border trade routes with Afghanistan. In May, the Kharlachi crossing in Kurram district [resumed](#) operations after a six-month closure, reviving intra-border commerce. In October, the Angoor Adda border in South Waziristan district [reopened](#) after two years, re-establishing another conduit for Afghan trade.

The same month also witnessed renewed disruption, however. Pakistan [sealed](#) both the Torkham and Chaman crossings in response to military hostilities with Afghanistan, halting all trade activities. A news [report](#) in the same month underscored the plight of transporters stranded on either side, many facing financial exhaustion as their perishable cargoes risked spoilage. In November, a news [report](#) estimated trade losses of USD 45 million resulting from the month-long closure of Torkham and four other Afghan border crossings.

**Curfews.** In January, a curfew was imposed in the Bagan area of Lower Kurram as authorities [launched](#) an operation to restore peace to Kurram. In March, South Waziristan authorities instituted a 12-hour [curfew](#) in response to heightened security concerns. In June, the administration in North Waziristan [prohibited](#) civilian and vehicular movement during the transit of security forces. In August, the administration in Bajaur district [imposed](#) curfews across 24 localities as part of a targeted counter-militancy operation. In November, Mansehra authorities cited security concerns, enforcing a [ban](#) on travel through the Kaghan Valley between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan, effective until summer 2026.

**Travel curbs.** In [February](#) and [March](#), the PHC struck down a decision to place PTI leaders Azam Swati and Faisal Javed on the Exit and Passport Control Lists, directing the authorities to permit them international travel. In August, the PHC [annulled](#) a federal travel ban on two Kurram district residents, authorising travel on valid visas. In September, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur challenged his inclusion on multiple federal travel ban lists and sought a diplomatic passport; the PHC [upheld](#) his petition in October, declaring the restrictions unconstitutional.

# Democratic Development

## Political participation

An important political development was the convening of a peace jirga by the newly elected chief minister, Sohail Afridi, in November. This jirga was attended by all political parties and movements, including the opposition and the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), as well as religious scholars and journalists. The jirga [called](#) for prioritising talks with Kabul and the inclusion of the province in Afghan policy, and demanded peace, rights, and justice for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Regrettably, two PTM delegates were allegedly abducted after attending the event in what the chief minister [referred](#) to as a ‘violation of Pashtun tradition’.

A series of electoral developments were recorded in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2025. Following a June verdict by the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court, which overturned the July 2024 full-bench majority judgment that had allowed the PTI its share of reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies, the Election Commission of Pakistan [announced](#) the allocation of reserved seats in July. Of the 21 reserved seats, the JUI-F secured eight, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N) six, and the Pakistan People’s Party five, while the ANP and PTI Parliamentarians each claimed one. The same month, PTI candidates were [elected](#) to six of the 11 Senate seats contested, with an opposition alliance collectively winning five.

October [witnessed](#) local government by-elections in three village councils in Dera Ismail Khan, facilitated through 21 polling stations and 57 booths to serve 25,000 registered voters. In the same month, PTI candidate Khurram Zeeshan [attained](#) a Senate seat following the disqualification of then opposition leader, Shibli Faraz. November was marked by the government’s directive to investigate allegations of [rigging](#) in the NA-18 Haripur by-election, ultimately won by PML-N candidate Babar Nawaz Khan.

## Local government

In September, the PHC [declared](#) unconstitutional the 2002 amendments to the law that had curtailed the powers of tehsil and city local council heads.

# The Rights of the Disadvantaged

## Women

**Gender-based violence.** According to [data](#) released by the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO) and HRCP's Knowledge Management System in 2025, at least 941 incidents of violence against women were documented. These included 95 murders—74 of which were 'honour' killings—alongside 467 kidnappings, 234 cases of domestic abuse, 41 violations of the Ghag Act, and 115 instances of rape and sexual assault. Strikingly, the SSDO reported that none of these cases secured a conviction in the first half of 2025, with challans filed in 801 incidents and 770 still under trial.

A news [report](#) in October underscored the administration's failure to constitute district-level committees mandated to combat domestic violence against women, despite four years having passed since the enactment of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act. Table 4 provides a breakdown of gender-based violence in the province, based on official data, with kidnapping and abduction being the most commonly reported crime.

*Table 4: Gender-based violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2025*

Crime	Reported cases
Domestic violence	
Murder	325
Beating	149
Other	123
Honour killings	116
Acid attacks	3
Stove-burning incidents	1
Vani	1
Sexual assault	
Rape	220
Gang rape	4
Incest	2
Custodial rape	0
Workplace harassment	
Physical	5
Sexual	2
Kidnapping and abduction	1,034

*Source: National Police Bureau, in response to HRCP's request for information.*

**Positive steps.** In January, women constables became [moharrars](#) [administrative officers] in nine of Mansehra district's 17 police stations, which eased complaint registration. In October, the establishment of a women-only police station was [announced](#) in Mansehra to address gender-based violence and harassment.

In February, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa [introduced](#) the Sahara Card—a social protection initiative providing a monthly stipend of PKR 10,000 to 15,000 widows above the age of 45, thereby institutionalising targeted financial assistance through a structured scheme.

In September, UN Women Pakistan [equipped](#) 750 women farmers across Bajaur, Khyber, and Mohmand districts with essential digital competencies to enhance agricultural productivity and broaden their integration into market networks.

In November, Chief Minister Sohail Afridi [introduced](#) the Insaf Female Education Card, offering free intermediate-level education in public institutions to over 55,000 female and orphan students.

## Children

In 2025, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reported at least 36 minors killed or found dead—a 140 percent increase from the 15 cases documented by HRCP in 2024. In January, a child in South Waziristan [died](#) when a mortar shell he was playing with exploded. In March, the body of a six-year-old boy was recovered in Dera Ismail Khan; his mother and stepfather were subsequently [arrested](#) for the crime. May saw a student in Khyber district die after being [tortured](#) by his school head.

In June, a 13-year-old girl was [killed](#) in a landmine blast in South Waziristan and a woman in Nowshera was arrested for allegedly [murdering](#) her three grandchildren. August witnessed further [tragedy](#) as five children were killed and 13 injured in a mortar shell blast in Lakki Marwat. That same month, a quadcopter drone [strike](#) in North Waziristan claimed the life of a two-year-old boy.

In September, the body of a minor girl was [discovered](#) abandoned in a Peshawar hospital, while in Dera Ismail Khan, a man was arrested for allegedly [axing](#) his teenage sister to death. In November, a landmine [blast](#) in Bajaur claimed the lives of two boys, including one minor.

In 2025, at least 19 minors were subjected to assault across 17 documented incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including at the hands of clerics, teachers, and in one case, a biological father.

Official prison data shows approximately 315 juveniles incarcerated in provincial prisons and at least 15 women prisoners living with their children on jail premises.

## Transgender persons

In 2025, at least ten transgender individuals were killed in seven separate incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—a twofold increase from 2024. The Trans Action Alliance [reported](#) in August that since 2015, at least 158 transgender persons had been murdered in the province, with not a single case culminating in justice.

In February, a transgender individual was [shot dead](#) by unknown assailants in Charsadda. In April, unknown motorcyclists opened fire on a vehicle carrying transgender persons in Nowshera, killing one. May saw two fatal attacks: a 28-year-old shot dead in [Malakand](#) after returning from a musical event, and another victim slain by armed riders who also injured her driver. In June, a performer was [killed](#) in Abbottabad while her companion sustained injuries. The following month, a 32-year-old in Peshawar [sustained](#) multiple gunshot wounds. In October, two more were [assaulted](#) in separate incidents in Dera Ismail Khan and Swat, with the latter suffering severe facial and spinal injuries. In November, two transgender individuals were [murdered](#) in their rented room in Lakki Marwat.

In September, residents of Swabi constituted an 11-member committee that issued a directive [expelling](#) all transgender residents from the district, claiming that the measure would protect youth from ‘immoral’ activities. HRCP [denounced](#)

the move, describing it as an incitement to violence against a marginalised community, while transgender groups [interpreted](#) it as part of an escalating hate campaign. In October, community leaders [alleged](#) persecution, accusing provincial police of forcibly evicting transgender individuals from multiple districts.

In September, Kohat district established a dedicated [desk](#) within its Emergency 15 responder service to address transgender persons' grievances regarding rental discrimination and criminal intimidation. In October, the Health Department unveiled a healthcare [policy](#) for transgender and intersex individuals, introducing dedicated hospital wards, separate washrooms, and privacy safeguards during consultation and treatment.

## Labour

**Mining accidents.** In 2025, hazardous labour conditions, militant violence, and recurrent mine collapses claimed the lives of at least 14 workers and left 15 injured across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In February, two labourers perished in a coal mine [accident](#) in Shangla. In March, a collier was killed in a landmine [explosion](#) in the same district. In April, two workers in Shangla [suffocated](#) in their sleep after inhaling toxic fumes from an electricity generator. July witnessed the [death](#) of another miner in a coal mine blast in Shangla.

In August, a labourer in Swabi was fatally [shot](#) during a wage dispute. In September, a coal miner in Kohat [died](#) alongside two rescuers attempting to extricate him after he became trapped underground. October proved devastating: three workers were killed in a phosphate mine collapse in [Abbottabad](#), two others lost their lives while trapped during a well-digging operation in [Shangla](#), and another mine worker was killed in an emerald mine collapse in [Swat](#).

**Kidnappings.** At least 25 labourers were kidnapped in five separate incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2025. In April, three labourers engaged in a road construction project in Dera Ismail Khan were forcibly taken [hostage](#), while in June, 13 private company workers were [abducted](#) in the same district.

**Lay-offs.** In January, the government [introduced](#) the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Employees Removal from Service Bill 2025 to dismiss 16,000 appointees recruited under the 2024 caretaker administration. The legislation became a matter of judicial contention, culminating in August when the PHC upheld its validity and [declared](#) the appointments void.

In February, ANP activists [protested](#) the federal closure of utility stores—a measure that would see at least 3,000 contractual appointees lose their jobs. In May, the PHC [suspended](#) action against 164 law department employees whose 2021 recruitment had been slated for cancellation. In July, a Peshawar hospital rescinded the performance-based [termination](#) of 20 assistant professors.

## Persons living with disabilities

In 2025, the government [advanced](#) targeted welfare initiatives for the province's 203,594 registered persons living with disabilities. In January, it [announced](#) a PKR 370 million assistance package to bolster institutional support for persons living with disabilities, initially distributing electric wheelchairs to government employees and university students. Following demonstrations in February, the government [raised](#) the conveyance allowance for employees with special needs from PKR 6,000 to PKR 8,000 and expanded their coverage under the Sehat Card programme.

In December, the Social Welfare Department [distributed](#) tricycles and hearing aids to 80 persons with disabilities in Lower Dir. That same month, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa launched the Ehsaas Umeed programme, allocating PKR 300 million annually to provide monthly [stipends](#) of PKR 5,000 for 10,000 eligible persons with special needs. Additionally, 23 vehicles were assigned to the department to ensure free transport for students across 54 special education institutions.

In January, the government formally [discontinued](#) the use of the term ‘disabled person’, adopting instead the designation ‘special person’, thereby signalling a shift towards linguistic inclusivity in official discourse.

## Refugees and internally displaced persons

**Afghans deported.** By the end of 2025, Pakistan had [repatriated](#) at least 860,000 refugees under the 2023 Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan, with 605,246 [departing](#) through the Angoor Adda, Kharlachi, and Torkham border crossings in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A March [report](#) estimated that 2.1 million Afghan refugees remained in the country, including 1.3 million Proof of Registration cardholders, 800,000 of whom resided in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In August, the federal government [targeted](#) the repatriation of the last category of Afghan nationals staying in Pakistan without visas: 1.3 million refugees whose cards had expired on 30 June, rendering them unlawful residents. In December, the authorities completed the [closure](#) of 42 Afghan refugee camps that had operated for 55 years, initiating the voluntary repatriation of an additional 300,000 refugees.

In January, the PHC invoked the non-refoulement principle, [instructing](#) authorities to defer the deportation of 150 Afghan musicians and transgender persons. In April, it [prohibited](#) the detention and deportation of registered refugees until 30 June. In September, the PHC [stayed](#) the deportation of an Afghan refugee married to a Pakistani woman and ordered that his Pakistan Origin Card application be resolved.

**Internally displaced persons.** In May, Khyber district’s displaced families were unable to resettle in their homes, even after the official [deadline](#) had lapsed. In August, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority [registered](#) 10,000 families for relocation to IDP camps across Bajaur, while in September, the Cabinet [approved](#) PKR 1.2 billion to support their relocation.

An October news report recorded the voluntary [exodus](#) of at least 15,000 individuals, comprising 2,200 families from 22 villages in Kurram district, to avoid military conflict. That same month, anticipating military clashes, hundreds in Bajaur district voluntarily [vacated](#) their homes. In November, at least 2,300 families [returned](#) to Bajaur’s Khar tehsil following operations against militants.

In December, a 24-member jirga [consented](#) to vacate homes in Tirah Valley for a military operation. The authorities pledged PKR 3 million for destroyed houses, PKR 1 million for damaged ones, and a PKR 50,000 monthly stipend per family until their anticipated return in April 2026. As of year-end, hundreds of families had [left](#) their homes, but with many expressing disillusionment and fear of an uncertain future.

# Social, Economic, and Environmental Rights

## Education

The Education Department acknowledged that an alarming 37 percent—or 4.92 million—children remained **unenrolled** in schools across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2025. The crisis was most pronounced in Kolai-Palas Kohistan district, where at least 80,333 children remained excluded, while Upper Chitral district recorded the lowest proportion, with only 10 percent out of school. Peshawar was a critical concern, with at least half a million children deprived of schooling, including 319,000 girls.

In April, education authorities in **Bajaur**, Khyber, and South Waziristan districts initiated an **enrolment** drive targeting over 90,000 new entrants, comprising 53,000 boys and 42,000 girls.

The year witnessed a persistent scarcity of teachers across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, most acutely in girls' schools, while at least 61 institutions in Lower **Dir**, **Khyber**, **Mohmand**, and **Shangla** districts were forced to close.

In November, news reports **highlighted** stark neglect in Upper Kohistan, where 60 percent of primary and middle schools for girls remained shuttered due to teacher scarcity and absenteeism.



*Upper Chitral district recorded the lowest proportion, with only 10 percent out of school.*

In April, the government resolved to **outsource** eight newly established primary schools through a public-private partnership framework. This decision, however, provoked strong **opposition**, as the All Primary Teachers' Association, students in **Haripur**, and public-school teachers in **Charsadda** organised successive protests in September and October, denouncing the policy as a violation of constitutional safeguards.

The government augmented its education budget from PKR 327 billion to PKR 363 billion for the fiscal year 2025/26—an **11 percent rise**. This enhanced allocation was directed towards infrastructure renovation and the supply of learning resources across 32,500 provincial schools, with an anticipated impact on 5.9 million students. In July, public sector universities across the province **repudiated** the PKR 10 billion budgetary allocation, insisting that the amount be raised to a minimum of PKR 50 billion to address their financial crisis.

However, there were disturbing instances of attacks on schools in two districts during the year. In September, a government girls' school was **blown up** in Lakki Marwat, while in December, a primary school and then a girls' school were **destroyed** by explosives in North Waziristan.

## Health

**Polio.** In 2025, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa accounted for 63 percent of Pakistan’s wild poliovirus burden, with 19 of the 31 cases nationwide, according to the Polio Eradication Programme. Outbreaks were clustered in [seven districts](#): Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Lakki Marwat, Lower Kohistan, North Waziristan, Tank, and Torghar. In the year’s fifth and final eradication drive targeting 6.8 million children, 100,742 vaccinations were [missed](#)—82,393 due to children’s absence and 18,349 owing to parental refusals rooted largely in religious and medical misconceptions.

In December, 127 sewage specimens from 87 districts across the country were tested for poliovirus, with 40 returning [positive](#). Of these, 34 samples were procured from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, among which eight tested positive for the virus.

**Dengue.** In 2025, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recorded at least 6,116 dengue fever cases, with 5,702 recoveries and four deaths—a 43 percent rise from 4,167 cases in 2024, though fatalities [declined](#) from seven. In October, the health department [mobilised](#) additional entomologists across Peshawar district’s 20 high-risk union councils, targeting mosquito breeding grounds in public spaces. The same month, Chief Minister Sohail Afridi [directed](#) legislators and the information department to intensify awareness campaigns on preventive measures against dengue fever.

**Tuberculosis.** According to the National Tuberculosis Control Programme, Pakistan records up to 700,000 tuberculosis cases annually, with at least 470,000 confirmed in 2024 alone. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the incidence consistently exceeds 100,000 cases per year, and 2025 trends reflected a similar trajectory. Alarming, at least 40,000 of these provincial cases remain [unregistered](#) with official sources, heightening the risk of unchecked transmission.

**Measles.** Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recorded 4,705 measles cases, with suspected infections among 12,800 children, in 2025. According to the Health Department, a 12-day measles-rubella campaign [immunised](#) 5.7 million children, achieving 96 percent coverage.

**HIV/AIDS.** While 9,800 cases remained registered in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Provincial AIDS Control Programme [estimated](#) that 40,000 individuals suffered through either HIV or AIDS in the province, with at least 15 cases being registered each day.

**Sehat Card.** The scope of the Sehat Card programme was broadened for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s residents in 2025. In January, [rehabilitation](#) services for drug addicts were added. In February, [free](#) outpatient care became available at registered hospitals. In April, the province [resumed](#) renal transplants under the scheme, and in October, the Health Department [revised](#) the rates of nearly 80 surgeries and procedures to ensure timely treatment at empanelled institutions. In December, a news [report](#) highlighted the non-implementation of a provincial decision to provide between PKR 500,000 and PKR 1 million to families whose heads had died in hospital during treatment under the Sehat Card Plus programme.

## Housing and public amenities

**Disaster-driven reform.** During June and July, flash floods in the Swat River [claimed](#) at least 19 lives. Experts attributed the devastation to climate inaction, rampant deforestation, and unlawful encroachments that had altered the natural river courses. In response, authorities [initiated](#) anti-encroachment campaigns along provincial riverbanks and crackdowns along the Panjkora and Swat rivers. In July, the government mandated the formal [demarcation](#) of river boundaries to forestall the re-emergence of unauthorised structures. That same month, [operations](#) in Swat targeted illicit properties associated with political figures, and in Dera Ismail Khan, [intensified](#) efforts sought to dismantle encroachments impeding the flow of the River Indus.

**Anti-encroachment drives.** Throughout 2025, the government pursued sustained campaigns against encroachments on public property. In January and February, operations in Dera Ismail Khan, Lakki Marwat, and Peshawar districts targeted unlawful commercial structures, [reclaiming](#) encroached land, including a 55-kanal property that was then returned to the administration at Islamia College.

June witnessed demolitions in Mansehra district, where hotels and residences illegally built along the Kunhar River were razed. In July, authorities [reclaimed](#) over 220 kanals in Charsadda district and 125 marlas in [Mohmand](#) district. September saw 51 arrests in Swat, including the city mayor, during [protests](#) against anti-encroachment drives, while in October, Mansehra authorities again [demolished](#) structures obstructing the Kunhar River's natural flow. In November, over 150 houses were [demolished](#) in Upper Kohistan to facilitate the execution of the Dasu hydropower project. In December, authorities in Peshawar [arrested](#) 22 individuals involved in illegal encroachments.

**Easier access to housing.** In July, the government [introduced](#) the Ehsaas Apna Ghar programme, extending interest-free loans to low-income families for the construction, expansion, and renovation of housing. In August, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly approved the Government Servants Housing Foundation Bill, establishing a [scheme](#) to provide residential properties to public employees through interest-free instalment payment plans, accessible both during service and after retirement.

## Environment

**Rains and floods.** Calamitous rains and floods claimed at least 631 lives in the province during the year—202 men, 190 women, and 239 children—while injuring 438 others. This represented a fivefold surge compared to the 99 rain-related deaths documented by HRCP in 2024. According to the [PDMA](#), the natural disaster also killed 7,153 livestock, damaged 3,798 homes, and left 796 school buildings impaired, including at least 166 reduced to rubble. The government further reported that 511 roads, 77 bridges, and 2,123 shops were damaged, underscoring the extensive toll on infrastructure and livelihoods.

In August, the chief minister announced a [compensation](#) package granting PKR 2 million each to families of the deceased and PKR 500,000 to the injured. Owners of destroyed houses were allocated PKR 1 million each, while partially damaged homes were to receive PKR 300,000. Shopkeepers were compensated with PKR 500,000 for ruined shops and PKR 100,000 for cleanup where floodwaters entered. By August, PKR 654 million had been disbursed digitally to families of 350 deceased individuals, and PKR 6.5 billion was released to the Relief Department to support recovery efforts.



*Calamitous rains and floods claimed at least 631 lives in the province during the year.*

**Forests at stake.** A July news [report](#) highlighted the lack of technological progress and inadequate firefighting resources impeding efforts to combat forest fires in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Concurrently, experts at a Peshawar moot [advocated](#) for

a practical urban afforestation strategy for the provincial capital. In September, the Peshawar Forestry Circle uncovered a significant timber [scam](#), seizing 2.3 million cubic feet of illicit wood and implicating at least 140 provincial officers in its report.

**Air quality crisis.** Peshawar recorded Pakistan’s [highest](#) per capita PM2.5 emissions, at 2.15 kg per person annually, according to the Pakistan Air Quality Initiative. The health implications were severe: in 2024, average particulate concentrations reached 95.8 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, exceeding World Health Organization limits by nineteen-fold and national standards by sixfold. This positioned the city as a critical centre for environmental and public health risks.

**Anti-pollution crackdown.** In June, the Bajaur administration [sealed](#) 18 unauthorised stone-crushing plants for environmental regulation breaches. Subsequently, in October, authorities in Lakki Marwat [shut down](#) four brick kilns on similar grounds. Concurrently, the transport department in Peshawar [inspected](#) 7,453 vehicles for excessive smoke emissions, penalising 3,301 and mandating they obtain fitness certificates.

**BALUCHISTAN**

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# Overview

The human rights situation in Balochistan continued to decline throughout the year, with rights violations perpetrated by both state and separatist militant groups. The most egregious incident was the unprecedented hijacking of a passenger train in March, condemned by the UN as a 'heinous terrorist act', which demonstrated the insurgents' strengthened operational capacity. That same month, activists of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), including its leader Dr Mahrang Baloch, were arrested on charges of terrorism, sedition, murder, and inciting violence. Shortly after their arrest, a group of UN human rights experts expressed concern, demanding their immediate release and an end to the crackdown on peaceful protesters.

Following a contested election in 2024, deemed illegitimate by Baloch nationalist leaders, public trust in the democratic process diminished. Amid this political instability, two controversial laws emerged that impacted provincial autonomy and fundamental freedoms: the Balochistan Mines and Minerals Act in March and the Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act 2025 in June.

Government crackdowns continued to suppress dissent and disrupt peaceful gatherings by grieving families of missing persons. Conversely, protesters blocked major highways across the province, restricting citizens' freedom of movement.

Separatist groups frequently erected roadblocks on major roads and highways, targeting travellers based on ethnicity, with at least 21 lethal attacks directed at non-Baloch settlers and workers.

Freedom of expression was particularly imperilled. Journalists faced a dilemma: publish militants' claims or comply with law enforcement directives to suppress coverage of proscribed groups. Some journalists were pressured to reveal sources and share contact details, leading to self-censorship, compounded by restrictions imposed under the draconian Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016. A Freedom Network report noted the declining presence of national media outlets in Balochistan, leaving one of the country's largest regions increasingly isolated from information.

While the country recorded 45.7 percent (116 million) of its population as internet users in 2025, digital penetration in Balochistan lagged at 15 percent, with approximately 60 percent of the province lacking optical fibre connectivity. Frequent, prolonged internet shutdowns, triggered by deteriorating security conditions, exacerbated this digital divide.

Trade and business also suffered due to the persistent closure of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border at Chaman, causing



*BYC leader Dr Mahrang Baloch was arrested, along with other members of the organisation, on charges of terrorism, sedition, murder, and inciting violence.*

economic hardship for hundreds of thousands. In addition to these challenges, a severe crackdown on cross-border Iranian fuel trade impacted the livelihoods of thousands who depended on this informal trade.

Women’s rights remained dire throughout the year, with many women falling victim to unabated ‘honour’ killings. Furthermore, women human rights defenders faced enforced disappearances, harassment, and restrictions throughout 2025.

# Rule of Law

## Laws and law-making

The year 2025 was a busy one for the provincial government, with 26 acts passed. Some legislation drew criticism from the opposition and civil society, including the Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act 2025, [passed](#) by the Balochistan Assembly in June to expand the powers of law-enforcement agencies. The Act allowed any law enforcement agency to detain a person for up to three months without charge. The law was viewed as a measure to suppress dissent and legalise enforced disappearances. According to the [amendment](#), armed forces, civil armed forces, and intelligence agencies can detain anyone suspected of involvement in an offense under the act; oversight boards can transfer detainees to a detention centre; and the authorities can exercise these powers without judicial oversight. HRCP also expressed concern over the amendment's passage, citing the sweeping powers of preventive detention as undermining fundamental rights to liberty, due process, and protection from arbitrary detention.

Earlier, in March 2025, the provincial assembly passed the controversial Balochistan Mines and Minerals Act. Following its passage, opposition parties [questioned](#) the bill's legal standing, claiming the government did not present the draft for debate and discussion.

Subsequently, in July, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Fazal (JUI-F) [challenged](#) the bill in the Balochistan High Court (BHC) through a constitutional petition, arguing that the Act was detrimental to the people of Balochistan. Several [other political parties](#), including the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PMAP), National Party, Awami National Party (ANP), Balochistan National Party (M) (BNP-M), and former senator Lashkari Raisani, also challenged the Act in the BHC.

In a follow-up sitting on 29 September, the opposition and treasury benches jointly [adopted](#) a resolution urging the government to review the Act due to legislators' reservations about some of its provisions.

In a promising move, in November, the provincial government [passed](#) the Child Marriages Restraint Act 2025, aiming to curb early child marriages across the province by allowing for harsh punishments for culprits and facilitators, including a three-year jail term and a fine of up to PKR 1 million.

## Administration of justice

Throughout the year, the BHC addressed numerous cases as the government continued its crackdown on political activists and dissent.

In March, the BHC [directed](#) the attorney general to respond to a petition challenging the frequent use of PECA provisions, expressing reservations about the abuse of freedom of expression and the misuse of cybercrime laws directed against political activists. Also in March, the BHC directed that BYC leader Mahrang Baloch be allowed to meet with her attorney and family members.

The decision followed a petition filed against Mahrang Baloch's detention, questioning its legality. Mahrang's sister, Nadia Baloch, argued in her [petition](#) that her sister had been detained under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance without adequate justification, violating her fundamental constitutional rights, including freedom of movement, peaceful assembly, and expression.

In another case, the court [questioned](#) the prolonged suspension of cellular services and transport disruptions in Balochistan, highlighting their impact on routine life and activities, including trade and access to information. Following court directives and public pressure, cellular services were restored in Balochistan after a prolonged shutdown.

In the first week of October, the BHC removed legal obstacles that had delayed local government elections in the provincial capital, [citing](#) its constitutional obligation to hold the polls. However, the Balochistan Mines and Minerals Act was challenged by opposition parties. In October, notices were [issued](#) to the provincial and federal governments, formally bringing the legality of the Act under judicial review. The provincial government requested additional time to submit replies, delaying substantive hearings on the controversial law.

In December, the BHC [requested](#) the provincial government to file replies in petitions challenging PECA, which activists argued was being misused to curb free speech.

Additionally in December, the court [accepted](#) petitions from five political parties contesting the postponement of local government elections in Quetta.

Finally, in December, the BHC [quashed](#) a first information report (FIR) registered against leaders of the BNP-M for charges related to political activities, holding that the filings lacked legal basis and offering relief to the party's leadership.

# Enforcement of Law

## Law and order

In 2025, insurgent groups appeared stronger, launching more lethal attacks than before. Data from the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies indicates that these groups carried out 229 attacks, 225 within the province. Non-Baloch workers, travellers, and settlers were targeted in 21 attacks, and 12 attacks were directed against alleged spies or collaborators. The most shocking incident occurred in March when a passenger train carrying 400 passengers from Quetta to Peshawar was hijacked.

According to the Pakistan Security Report 2025, issued by the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, Balochistan witnessed a 34 percent increase in terror incidents, with 699 attacks resulting in 1,034 deaths and 1,366 injuries.

In January, approximately 80 armed militants launched a coordinated [attack](#) in Khuzdar's Zehri tehsil, torching several state-run buildings, including a Levies Force station, a National Database and Registration Authority building, and municipal committee offices.

In February, a roadside bomb [targeted](#) a vehicle carrying 20 coal miners in Shahrag Bazar in Harnai district. The explosion killed 11 coal miners and critically injured seven. Four days later, seven passengers were [killed](#) in an attack in the Barkhan area. Armed men stopped a passenger bus, identified passengers using their national identity cards, and then took the identified individuals to nearby mountains where they were killed. All the victims were reportedly residents of Punjab.

In March, a rare and deadly [train hijacking](#) occurred when Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) militants executed a highly coordinated attack. Armed men detonated explosives on the tracks near the Mashkaf Tunnel to stop the Jaffar Express on 11 March, taking more than 400 passengers hostage, including numerous security personnel, resulting in a 36-hour battle between militants and security forces. A major clearance operation by the armed forces [rescued](#) the hostages the next day. According to official sources, 33 militants and 26 passengers were killed.



*Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) militants hijacked the the Jaffar Express in March.*

Subsequently that month, the relatives of missing persons, who had gathered at the Civil Hospital in Quetta, demanded that they be allowed to identify a number of dead bodies brought to the hospital morgue. Some protestors reportedly forced their way in and [took away](#) at least five bodies. While the BYC claimed that these were the bodies of people who

had been forcibly disappeared, the government claimed that they were the unidentified bodies of militants killed in a military operation following the attack on the Jaffar Express [see also *Enforced disappearances*].

Following these claims and counterclaims, BYC chief organiser Mahrang Baloch and 150 other protesters were arrested on terrorism and other charges on 21 March. They were protesting outside Balochistan University, demanding the release of detained and forcibly disappeared activists. A few days after the arrests, a group of UN human rights experts [expressed](#) concern and demanded their immediate release.

On 26 March, weeks after the Jaffar Express attack, unknown armed men intercepted a bus traveling from Gwadar to Karachi at Kalmat near Gwadar and brutally [executed](#) six passengers. The assailants entered the bus, checked passengers' national identity cards, and then killed six of them.

In May, an [attack](#) on a school bus carrying students to Army Public School in Khuzdar killed ten people, including eight children, and injured 40 others. Politicians and higher authorities, including the prime minister and the chief of army staff, widely [condemned](#) the attack.

In July, unidentified armed men [attacked](#) two Punjab-bound coaches in the Sur-Dakai area between Zhob and Loralai districts, killing nine passengers. Six days later, on 16 July, another group of unidentified armed men [targeted](#) a bus from Karachi to Quetta carrying musicians, killing three and seriously injuring 13 others.

In September, a car laden with explosives was driven into the gate of the Frontier Corps headquarters in Quetta, killing ten people and injuring 30. It was one of the [deadliest](#) attacks carried out by the banned BLA since the Jaffar Express hijacking.

According to official data from the Balochistan police, 14 encounters were carried out by law enforcement personnel, in which a total of 60 suspects were killed. No police officials were among the casualties. However, no inquiries were held following these encounters as mandated under S. 176 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Additionally, 221 law enforcement personnel were killed in attacks by suspected militants.

Police data indicates that the provincial police force comprised 227 men and 5 women, with an average of 10.4 investigating officers per 1,000 cases.

## Jails and prisoners

Prisons in Balochistan remained under scrutiny after detained BYC leaders, held in various prisons in Quetta, went on a [hunger strike](#) to protest the abuse and unjust treatment of imprisoned BYC members. On 26 April, Mahrang Baloch's sister [appealed](#) to the chief justice of Pakistan to intervene and end the mental torture Mahrang had allegedly endured since her detention.

In May, armed men [ambushed](#) a prison transport from Gaddani Jail near Mangocher in Kalat, freeing ten prisoners, including two convicts, and capturing five police officials. The two convicts, both condemned inmates, had been sentenced to death and life imprisonment, respectively, for killing their wives.

To provide relief to inmates across the province, the chief minister [announced](#) a 60-day reduction in prisoners' terms in August. The move applied to all prisoners in the province. However, in October, the BHC [ruled](#) that convicts under the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 were not entitled to any remission or pardon, raising concerns, as many political activists had also been charged under the Act.

## Enforced disappearances

Enforced disappearances persisted and remained unresolved. The year saw the disappearance of government officials, students, and rights activists. Enforced disappearances also continued to **disrupt** freedom of movement, as victims' families frequently **blocked** main highways across the province.

In February, Sammi Deen Baloch, a key member of the BYC, alleged that around **88 cases** of missing persons were reported in January 2025 alone, with the Makran division accounting for 43 of these cases.

These tensions in Balochistan were highlighted in February, when UN human rights experts raised serious concerns about alleged human rights violations occurring during counter-terrorism operations in Balochistan. In a communication to Pakistan's government, they **cited** the impact on the Baloch minority, human rights defenders, and civil society organisations. Alleged violations included enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment, excessive use of force, misuse of counter-terrorism measures, media censorship, legislative amendments, and the possibility of internment centres. The communication noted an 'escalation in the number of enforced disappearances' and called it among 'the most serious violations of international human rights law.'

In March, Baloch tribal elder Nasir Qambrani was abducted during a raid on his house in Quetta, prompting HRCP to comment on the incident. His daughters told reporters at a press conference at the Quetta Press Club on 20 March that their father was a social activist and had committed no crime. They revealed that their father had been subjected to enforced disappearance before and **threatened** to block the main highway if he was not recovered.

In a subsequent session of the provincial assembly, lawmakers **expressed** serious concern over the rising number of missing persons. The debate escalated when opposition members alleged that authorities had 'secretly' buried around 13 bodies in a graveyard recently.

On 21 March, after the Jaffar Express attack, the authorities stated that the bodies brought to the Civil Hospital Quetta were those of attackers killed in the ensuing military operation. However, relatives claimed that these were missing family members. After a skirmish with the police, protesters **retrieved** the bodies from the hospital.

In July, conflicting **claims** emerged from the government's Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances and the BYC regarding the number of missing persons. According to the commission, 36 cases of enforced disappearances were recorded in Balochistan in the first six months of 2025, while the BYC claimed the figure was 750. On 30 July, the BNP-M **condemned** the alleged abduction of its party leader, Dr Abdul Majeed Mengal, accusing the federal government of worsening the situation in the province.

Earlier, in June, the assistant commissioner of Tump, Muhammad Hanif Noorzai, was **kidnapped** from Kech district. He was traveling from Quetta to Tump with his family when his vehicle was stopped by armed men belonging to the banned Balochistan Liberation Front. After three months in captivity, Mr Noorzai was **freed** by his kidnappers on 17 September. In a tragic **incident** on 23 October, the body of a missing deputy superintendent of police in Noshki was found in Mastung district. He had gone missing a week earlier while traveling to Quetta from Noshki when unidentified armed men stopped his vehicle and abducted him.

At a press conference in November, Voice for Baloch Missing Persons **expressed** its concerns regarding Baloch missing women, referring to Mahjabeen Baloch and Nasreen Baloch, whom the organisation claimed had been forcibly disappeared. Nasreen was taken into custody from Hub Chowki during a raid on her house, while Mahjabeen had been missing for the last six months.

# Fundamental Freedoms

## Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression, a fundamental right, continued to suffer due to multiple factors, ranging from restrictions imposed under PECA to killings and threats by state and nonstate actors in the province. Several protests were held against the draconian PECA law, under which journalists faced legal cases.

On 13 February, the Balochistan Union of Journalists set up a symbolic hunger strike camp outside the Quetta Press Club. This action followed a call by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, which [opposed](#) the passage of a PECA amendment and described it as a move to further suppress freedom of expression.

In March, the Quetta district administration [raided](#) the press club and arrested three individuals who wanted to hold a press conference, drawing condemnation from various groups, including the Balochistan Union of Journalists.

Beyond censorship, journalists in Balochistan continued to face life-threatening dangers. In a tragic incident on 23 May, Latif Baloch, a local journalist from Awaran associated with the daily *Intekhab*, was shot and [killed](#) by armed masked men in front of his family during an abduction attempt. [Latif Baloch's son](#) had also been abducted and killed a few years prior.

In another significant incident, Akbar Notezai, an investigative journalist with *Dawn*, was served a [notice](#) in March by the National Cyber Crime Investigation Authority under PECA regarding a year-old investigative story. Journalists' bodies and HRCP widely [condemned](#) the notice as a blatant attempt to suppress press freedom.

In its annual report on journalism in Balochistan, Freedom Network [revealed](#) that journalists in Balochistan are caught between security agencies and militant groups and are often compelled to self-censor to avoid trouble. The national media is gradually reducing its presence in the region, while women's participation in journalism remains limited due to mobility issues and hostile conditions.

## Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

The year included both tragic and positive events for members of the minority community. In February, two Hindu community members, Hari Lal and Moti Lal, were [shot dead](#), along with another person in Turbat, drawing strong condemnation from Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti. The attack was considered a targeted killing, which was concerning because attacks on Hindu community members are rare in the province, where most community members work in trade rather than local politics.



*In 2025, a record number of Hindu pilgrims attended the annual Hinglaj Mata festival in Lasbela.*

In April, locals in Nasirabad district's Mangoli area staged a sit-in to protest the [abduction](#) of a Hindu trader, Sital Das, raising concerns about the safety of religious minorities.

However, the community's religious festivals remained peaceful and continued without any issues. In 2025, a record number of Hindu pilgrims [attended](#) the annual Hinglaj Mata festival in Lasbela.

The government also appeared to be improving the social wellbeing of minority communities. A Hindu woman, Kashish Chaudhary, was [appointed](#) the first female assistant commissioner.

Nonetheless, the situation for minority communities, particularly Hindus, grew uncertain mid-year. On 16 May, Lal Das, a balloon seller, was [shot dead](#) in Kharan for unknown reasons.

The issue of forced labour within the minority community also surfaced during the year. Following the chief minister's directive, the commissioner of Kalat division and the Levies force [raided](#) a home in Khura in Khuzdar district, freeing nine labourers who had been held under coercive conditions by landlords Babu and Dad Mohammad Baloch.

On 12 September, at its nineteenth meeting, the cabinet [adopted](#) Balochistan's first-ever transgender rights policy and approved an endowment fund for minority welfare. The policy aimed to safeguard the community against discrimination and ensure its fundamental rights. Similarly, the government also [unveiled](#) the People's Minority Card scheme, an outlay of PKR 500 million aimed at improving the self-reliance of minority communities by improving their access to education, healthcare, entrepreneurship and employment in Balochistan.

## Freedom of movement

Apart from restrictions on cross-border movement and air travel, citizens also faced increasingly stringent restrictions on highway travel. In July, BNP-M president Sardar Akhtar Mengal was [barred](#) from boarding an international flight and offloaded from the plane after his name was added to the Provisional National Identification List, which temporarily prevents listed individuals from travelling abroad. Mengal condemned the act and [challenged](#) it in the high court.

Also in July, dozens of Pakistani students studying in religious schools in Iran were [stuck](#) for two days on the Gabd border, awaiting approval from Pakistani authorities to cross. The ban followed the Iran-Israel war.

Road travel bans also limited freedom of movement within the province during the year. [Road safety](#) deteriorated due to frequent protests blocking main highways, and deadly militant ambushes, leaving passenger safety uncertain. Night travel, in particular, became a major concern, prompting provincial transport authorities to ban it and instruct all bus companies to avoid travel from 5 PM to 5 AM.

In October, fierce [clashes](#) erupted between Pakistani security forces and the Afghan Taliban at the Chaman border, resulting in a prolonged ban on movement across this crucial international crossing, severely impeding [trade](#) on both sides.

Also in October, after the Balochistan government designated several individuals as 'proscribed individuals' under the Fourth Schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 and restricted their movement, [HRCP](#) and [Amnesty International](#) issued separate statements expressing grave concern and called on the government to immediately withdraw the notification and uphold international human rights standards.

# Democratic Development

## Political participation

Following what was widely considered a controversial general election in 2024, particularly in Balochistan, 2025 was marked by political instability, public alienation from the political process, the sidelining of nationalist parties, the suppression of peaceful action for the protection and promotion of human rights groups such as the BYC, restrictions on fundamental freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and movement, and media censorship and threats to journalists (as discussed in other sections of this chapter). To assess the situation regarding these concerns, HRCP conducted a fact-finding mission in July and released a comprehensive [report](#).

## Local government

Local government polls dominated the political discourse in the province. In January, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) [announced](#) that it had finalised arrangements to hold by-elections across 25 districts. With 43,784 registered voters, 167 candidates contested the by-elections for 50 general ward seats. However, the elections could not take place in Quetta because the ECP had yet to finalise a plan for the Quetta by-elections.

Subsequently, in April, three months after the by-elections, reports indicated that almost 27 percent of the province's 871 union councils remained [nonfunctional](#) due to a lack of funds.

In October, the BHC dismissed petitions raising concerns about local government elections, delimitation, and the census in Quetta. Petitioners conveyed to the BHC that the ECP had committed serious irregularities in the delimitation of districts in Quetta, affecting rural areas, and objected to the delimitation based on the 2017 census. However, the court [observed](#) that the power of delimitation constitutionally rested with the ECP and judicial interference at that stage was unwarranted. Complying with the BHC verdict, the provincial election commissioner [announced](#) in October that the ECP was preparing to hold local government elections in Quetta district.

Following the announcement in November, the Balochistan government requested that the ECP [postpone](#) the by-elections in Quetta, citing harsh weather and the prevailing security situation in the city. The ECP [rejected](#) the government's request and announced 28 December as the date for by-elections in Quetta. However, the Federal Constitutional Court ordered the [suspension](#) of the polls just three days before polling day.

# The Rights of the Disadvantaged

## Women

The social landscape in the province remained volatile for women, due to the persistent threat of honour killings and gender-based violence. The arrest of women activists, especially those associated with the BYC, further aggravated the situation. In April, while addressing a gathering in Khuzdar, BNP-M chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal [criticised](#) the government for mistreating BYC members, particularly Mahrang Baloch, and arresting them for demanding their rights.

In January, two women were [killed](#) in separate honour killing incidents. Sakran Bibi and Hidayatullah, identified as her friend, were reportedly gunned down in the name of honour in Dera Allahyar's Mohbat Shakh area. In the second incident that month, a father killed his daughter, having allegedly disapproved of her TikTok content. Hira, a [US-born girl](#) who had returned to her family in Pakistan, was reportedly shot dead in front of her house by her father, Anwarul Haq.

In July, five women were killed in separate honour killing incidents in the province. In the first two incidents, a woman was [strangled](#) to death in Nasirabad district, while another woman was [gunned down](#) in Jaffarabad district.

The third case emerged when a video went viral on 19 July, showing a group of men leading a couple to a deserted area and [shooting](#) them from behind in the name of honour in the Dagari area of Quetta district. The incident gained national and international media attention, prompting strong criticism of the government from rights activists and politicians. The government [responded](#) by arresting one person.



*A video went viral showing a group of men leading a couple to a deserted area and shooting them from behind in the name of honour in the Dagari area of Quetta.*

However, a controversy [arose](#) when Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti claimed that the couple was not married, a statement that appeared to legitimise the murder.

Just days after this murder, a man [shot](#) and killed his daughter and nephew in the name of honour in the Kechi Baig area of Quetta. In July, a couple who had been married for seven years and had two children were invited to an event by the woman's family and reportedly gunned down in a [gruesome](#) honour killing in the Lakpass area of Mastung. Levies nominated five people in the case, including the woman's brothers. In August, news reports [indicated](#) that a man and woman were killed in the name of honour in Dera Murad Jamali.

Musarrat Aziz, a social worker who ran a vocational centre for women, was [reportedly](#) killed by her brother in the Zhob area in January, reportedly over a property dispute, with some reports claiming, however, that it may have been an honour killing.

Table 1 provides official data on gender-based violence in the province.

*Table 1: Gender-based violence in Balochistan in 2025*

Crime	Reported cases
Domestic violence	
Murder	54
Beating	168
Other	15
Honour killing	29
Acid attacks	1
Rape	23
Kidnapping and abduction	270

*Source: National Police Bureau, in response to HRCP's request for information.*

On a more positive note, the chief minister **launched** the Women's Economic Empowerment Endowment Fund to increase women's participation in the province's economic growth and enhance their economic independence. In a related initiative, the government **established** anti-rape crisis cells at both the Civil Hospital in Quetta and Bolan Medical Complex Hospital.

In February, in Khuzdar, the house of a woman, Asma Bibi, was attacked by masked men who allegedly **abducted** her, prompting strong public and civil society outcry, demands for the arrest of the culprits, and the blocking of the main highway. Two days after the incident, police **recovered** Asma Bibi from the Zehri area and claimed to have arrested 14 people linked to the abduction.

On 25 November, marking 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, HRCP's Balochistan chapter **emphasised** the need for greater freedom for women in Balochistan, both at home and outside. The chapter voiced concerns over gender-based violence and the hindrance of women's access to politics and education due to harassment in various sectors.

In December, the provincial government **inaugurated** the Pink Bus service in the provincial capital, claiming that the service would enable women to travel safely.

## Children

The situation for children in Balochistan remained marred by violence, militant attacks, and abductions. However, no polio cases were **reported** in the province, compared with 26 confirmed cases the previous year. In April, the abduction and killing of a ninth-grade student, Sahil Gulab, sparked **protests** in the Pasni area.

Children continued to suffer as collateral damage from attacks by banned militant groups. In May, approximately eight children died when an **explosion** targeted a school bus in the Khuzdar area. In another incident, a seven-year-old girl was reportedly raped by a relative in Naseerabad district. The girl's family **demand**ed the arrest of the rapist but were pressured to settle the case out of court. In another incident, an eight-year-old girl **died** due to indiscriminate firing on a van in the Mekhtar area of Loralai. In June, police found the body of Muhammad Musawir Kakar. The 14-year-old boy had been abducted in November 2024, **killed** seven months later, and dumped in Mastung. Police claimed that Afghan nationals abducted Musawir Kakar and handed him over to the militant organisation Daesh, who demanded \$12 million ransom from his father.

In August, the bodies of two minor girls were found in a gunny bag on Quetta’s Qambrani Road. Balochistan’s chief minister addressed the double murder after lawmakers [raised](#) the issue in the assembly. Abductions of girls continued, and in September, armed men forcibly [abducted](#) 12-year-old Ayesha Bibi from her home in the Baghbana Hassanzai area.

## Labour

Balochistan’s unregulated and poorly controlled coal mining industry continued to be deadly in 2025. According to the Pakistan Central Mines Labour Federation, 90 miners died in accidents such as collapses and explosions, highlighting the lack of ventilation, gas detectors, and emergency response protocols. The highest number of [fatalities](#) occurred in January, with 21 deaths, followed by 15 in February, 11 in July, and 9 in December. Table 2 gives the details of mining accidents recorded by HRCP.

*Table 2: Mining accidents in Balochistan in 2025*

Date	Site	Killed	Injured	Details
10/01/2025	Quetta	12	3	Coal mine
30/01/2025	Harnai	1	-	Coal mine
06/02/2025	Harnai	1	-	Coal mine
14/03/2025	Muslim Bagh	5	-	Chromite mine
19/03/2025	Duki	1	1	Coal mine
07/04/2025	Duki	1	-	Coal mine
09/04/2025	Duki	2	-	Coal mine
10/04/2025	Duki	2	-	Coal mine
05/05/2025	Duki	1	-	Coal mine
01/07/2025	Duki	1	-	Coal mine
25/07/2025	Duki	3	-	Coal mine
05/08/2025	Duki	3	-	Coal mine
19/08/2025	Mach	1	-	Coal mine
27/08/2025	Mach	3	-	Coal mine
03/09/2025	Harnai	1	1	Coal mine
15/09/2025	Harnai	1	-	Coal mine
19/10/2025	Duki	4	-	Coal mine
30/11/2025	Quetta	2	-	Coal mine
12/12/2025	Harnai	2	-	Coal mine
31/12/2025	Duki	1	1	Coal mine
Total		48	6	

*Source: HRCP Knowledge Management System.*

On the policy front, the Balochistan government [passed](#) the Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy 2025–35 in February, aimed at registering fishing vessels, building processing and cold-chain facilities, and promoting the development of the coastal economy through aquaculture. However, local fishermen in Gwadar [warned](#) that failure to

provide basic services to the community, such as electricity and water, and the exclusion of the seafood industry from free-zone benefits would affect thousands of people dependent on local fish and ice factories.

During the summer, agricultural communities experienced delays in receiving funds to solarise tube wells, resulting in irrigation gaps and crop damage. In August, farmers [criticised](#) the government for failing to release these solarisation funds, which further increased their losses. In September, members of the Kissan Ittehad Pakistan [held](#) a hunger strike in Quetta to demand the restoration of power to tube wells, among other demands.

In a tragic incident in October, nine construction workers were [kidnapped](#) in Mastung, highlighting the ongoing insecurity faced by workers in the province.

## Refugees

The government's firm stance on repatriating Afghan nationals led to a human rights crisis, with reports indicating the poor conditions at the Chaman and Torkham borders.

In January, levies forces [arrested](#) approximately 72 Afghan nationals in Chagai for illegally entering the country and sent them back to Afghanistan. In April, Afghan Refugees Pakistan, an organisation advocating for Afghan refugee rights, [urged](#) the government and judicial bodies to reassess the compulsory repatriation plans, arguing that this approach would not resolve the refugee problem without negotiated solutions addressing refugees' long-term presence and contributions.

Local stakeholders, including the Quetta Chamber of Commerce, also [requested](#) that work permits be issued to skilled Afghan employees by mid-2025 to address labour shortages in industries like agriculture and mining, citing the risk that expulsion policies posed to economic stability.

Repatriations resumed at the Chaman border—suspended for a day after a deadly bomb blast on 18 September that killed six—under stricter security measures, and families returned to Afghanistan. In October and November, thousands of Afghan refugees [returned](#) to their country, with the most intense enforcement actions recorded and incarceration and detention of Afghan citizens increasing dramatically.

In October, Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti stated that 50,000 Afghan nationals had been [repatriated](#) from Balochistan over the past 18 months. The following month, the Federal Investigation Agency and police arrested 50 people, including 29 Afghan nationals, for [attempting](#) to cross into Iran by sea. In December, security forces claimed to have apprehended 179 Afghan nationals from the Nokundi and Taftan areas of Chagai district during an intelligence-based operation. Officials also [reported](#) that approximately 11 Afghan nationals died in a road accident in the same area a week earlier, prompting increased patrolling.

# Social, Economic, and Environmental Rights

## Education

Like other sectors, education faced daunting challenges during the year, including ghost teachers, inadequate school facilities, and the need to improve educational quality.

To address some of these challenges, in January, the Secretary of Secondary Education announced that approximately 1,000 of the 2,300 inactive schools had been made functional. In addition, 700 absent teachers were promptly **dismissed**.

Two weeks later, the Balochistan chief secretary **pledged** to reopen all non-operational schools in the province. To that end, he stated that the government would partner with Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University to recruit teachers on a contract basis.

In March, three key universities—University of Balochistan, Sardar Bahadur Khan Women University, and University of Turbat—**suspended** on-campus classes and transitioned to virtual learning. Authorities stated that campuses would reopen after the Eid holidays in April, depending on the security situation.

Bolan Medical College **reopened** in May after a six-month closure resulting from clashes between two student organisations in November 2024. The administration also announced a new hostel allotment system.



*Bolan Medical College reopened in May after a six-month closure resulting from clashes between two student organisations.*

In May, a group of students alleged that the **cancellation** of their Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan scholarships was carried out by an officer acting beyond their authority and requested an immediate inquiry by federal and provincial authorities to resolve the matter.

Two months later, the provincial government faced criticism from the National Party, which opposed the consolidation of the Balochi, Brahvi, and Pashto departments at Balochistan University into a single language institute, arguing that it would weaken language education. They **demand**ed that the decision be reversed.

In July, a corruption investigation **revealed** the forging of degrees and official documents at the Balochistan Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education. Five board officials and a student were arrested for using forged documents to gain admission to Bolan Medical College.

In August, with a government grant reinstated, the Balochi Academy, during its 67th general body meeting, **relaunched** significant cultural and language preservation projects, including digitisation, natural language processing, and the creation of a Balochi encyclopaedia. Members also raised the issue of teacher shortages.

The persistent issue of out-of-school children continued to plague the province's education system. This was acknowledged by the education minister of Balochistan, who **identified** the large number of out-of-school children as the most significant challenge in the region's education sector. He added that a policy roundtable had been convened to connect research with policymaking, particularly to increase attendance among girls.

## Health

Healthcare in the province also experienced significant fluctuations in 2025. In January, doctors and paramedics in Balochistan initiated an outpatient department **boycott** across government hospitals to protest the arrest of two leaders of the Grand Health Alliance on charges of assaulting the director general of health. Although emergency services remained operational, the boycott affected hundreds of thousands of patients.

In response, authorities took action, **ordering** disciplinary measures against medical practitioners who participated in the strike. Health officials **reminded** the protestors that the BHC had already declared the protests illegal. The provincial government also suspended a hospital administrator and issued show-cause notices to the medical superintendents of several district hospitals for failing to control the situation during the doctors' strike.

The impasse ended later in the month with the release of the arrested leaders of the Grand Health Alliance, and doctors **announced** the end of their strike and the resumption of outpatient department services.

The safety of health professionals conducting polio campaigns remained a critical concern. On 28 August, unidentified attackers fatally shot a polio vaccination campaign supervisor in Quetta, highlighting the ongoing security threats faced by polio workers. The **attack** disrupted the vaccination process and raised renewed concerns about the safety of health personnel.



*The safety of health professionals conducting polio campaigns remained a critical concern.*

Separately, a dengue **outbreak** occurred in Panjgur, followed by Turbat. A report cited a poor prevention strategy and inadequate healthcare facilities in the area. The report recommended fumigation and public awareness campaigns as solutions to mitigate the impact of viral infections.

In another tragic incident in October, a security officer guarding a polio inoculation team was killed in a **shooting**. The event underscored the persistent security threats to polio eradication initiatives, health workers, and their security personnel.

Communicable diseases, especially tuberculosis, also remained a concern, with increasing cases reported among prisoners in Balochistan. According to health officials, the number of **cases** ranged from 16,000 to 18,000.

## Economy

The prolonged closure of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in 2025 significantly disrupted the economy, severely affecting trade, key industries, and livelihoods in the border region. Trade representatives reported that the **closure**

blocked a major corridor responsible for billions in annual bilateral trade. Pharmaceuticals and agriculture experienced substantial losses, with seasonal fruit and vegetable exports particularly impacted. The shutdown also resulted in job and income losses for workers and farmers on both sides of the border.

## Environment

Balochistan appeared to be making serious efforts to tackle climate change. Raging forest fires remained central to policy debate. Government officials, scientists, and stakeholders [emphasised](#) the need for collective efforts to address the growing threat of forest fires attributed to climate change.

In June, the Balochistan government [approved](#) the establishment of the Climate Change Fund, which the chief minister hailed as a major step towards combatting climate change while securing and sustaining natural resources to enhance environmental and ecological health.

To promote sustainability, the provincial government announced a new climate change [policy](#), initially allocating PKR 500 million to the newly implemented Climate Change Fund. Authorities briefed the provincial assembly on pollution reduction measures, including modernising 45 brick kilns with cleaner technology, relocating 28 chromite grinding mills outside the residential zone, and installing treatment plants and scrubbers in some industrial plants to contain pollution.

GILGIT-BALTISTAN

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# Overview

In 2025, the human rights landscape in Gilgit-Baltistan was defined by political transition, shrinking civic space, deteriorating law and order, climate disasters, and persistent social inequalities. While legislative activity continued and some institutional reforms were introduced, governance failures, security concerns, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities significantly affected the fundamental rights situation.

The Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) completed its five-year term in November. Of the 63 laws passed, the most significant and controversial was the passage of the Land Reforms Act 2025, which sparked fears of dispossession and insufficient safeguards for communal land rights. Several pro-human-rights bills, including child marriage restraint, domestic violence prevention, and right-to-information legislation, remained pending.

Following the dissolution of the assembly, a caretaker government was formed after delays, and elections were postponed to May 2026, raising concerns about democratic continuity. The PKR 148.63 billion budget for the financial year 2025/26 remained heavily dependent on federal grants, reflecting structural fiscal fragility.

In 2025, the administration of justice in Gilgit-Baltistan was marked by efforts to balance judicial reform with persistent institutional challenges, including delays caused by vacant judicial posts and debates over appointment procedures. The Gilgit-Baltistan chief court intervened in economic matters affecting tourism, while modernisation steps, such as a virtual customs court, improved access to justice. Meanwhile, decisions involving the Supreme Court of Pakistan and federal authorities highlighted the need for clearer legal frameworks governing the region's judiciary.

Law and order worsened during the year, with police recording 2,162 crimes, including 64 murders, 96 attempted suicides, 14 'honour' killings, and 40 suicides. Militant attacks in Diamer and targeted shootings in Gilgit heightened insecurity. The attacks on a senior religious leader and a chief court judge in October intensified sectarian tensions and public fear. Although arrests were made, these incidents exposed weaknesses in preventive policing and long-term conflict management. Enforcement actions under anti-terror laws, which included placing 13 Awami Action Committee (AAC) leaders under Schedule Four, raised serious concerns about due process and the shrinking space for peaceful political dissent.

During the period of tension and armed escalation between Pakistan and India from 22 April to 10 May, airspace closures disrupted both national and international flights, including routes to Gilgit and Skardu, stranding tourists and significantly affecting tourism and the local economy in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Fundamental freedoms remained under sustained pressure throughout the year. Authorities frequently imposed movement restrictions under Section 144 during protests and security operations, while prolonged highway closures because of natural disasters stranded thousands of travellers. Freedom of expression was constrained by the arrests of activists, legal intimidation, and pressure on journalists operating in a fragile media environment where most publications struggle to survive and internet access remains limited. Civil society documented a pattern of suppressing dissent, particularly during protests by traders, lawyers, teachers, students, and people affected by infrastructure projects. These protests, including a 53-day sit-in by families displaced by the construction of the Diamer-Bhasha dam and prolonged strikes by traders and nearly 7,000 teachers, reflected deep public frustration with governance failures.



Flash floods between June and August resulted in 41 deaths, 52 injuries, and damage to at least 1,253 homes.

Vulnerable groups faced persistent rights challenges. Women continued to experience gender-based violence, including 14 reported 'honour' killings. They confronted limited legal protections and barriers to justice due to the absence of family courts and shelter services. Children faced serious protection risks, such as a polio outbreak affecting a 23-month-old child, cases of sexual abuse, and alarming reports of the trafficking of 70–80 underage girls. Weak and under-resourced child protection institutions compounded these vulnerabilities. Labour protections remained weak, with informal employment, low wages, and suppressed union activity prevalent across key sectors.

Socioeconomic rights were deeply affected by economic and environmental stress. Education outcomes remained unsatisfactory, with 41 percent exam pass rates in Grade 5 and 29 percent in Grade 8. Tourism, a critical economic pillar of the region, declined by up to 90 percent amid safety concerns and climate disruptions, despite administrative efforts to promote high-altitude tourism. Chronic electricity shortages exceeding 18 hours daily, and inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure further undermined livelihoods and public health.

The humanitarian situation worsened dramatically after devastating floods and glacial disasters destroyed more than 1,250 homes and affected a considerable portion of the population. The failure of formal early warning mechanisms under a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) project forced communities to rely on traditional alert systems to save lives, highlighting the region's vulnerability to climate change and the urgent need for resilient disaster governance.

# Rule of Law

## Laws and law-making

The GBLA, created under the 2009 Empowerment and Self-Governance Order, [completed](#) its third five-year term on 25 November 2025. During the term, it enacted 63 laws (including six federal acts) and passed 114 resolutions. On its final day, the assembly approved 12 laws, including amendments to bills on tobacco control and tourism promotion.

In May, the Assembly also [passed](#) the Gilgit-Baltistan Land Reforms Act, with a majority vote. The government [described](#) the Act as a historic reform granting local communities ownership rights over land and natural resources by abolishing the *khalisa sarkar* [state-owned land] system. Opposition members, however, [abstained](#), calling it an attempt to dispossess locals of communal lands and concentrate power in the hands of bureaucrats.

In June, the Gilgit-Baltistan government presented a PKR 148.63 billion [budget](#) for the financial year 2025/26, heavily weighted toward nondevelopment expenditures, with reliance on a PKR 80 billion federal grant. Opposition parties boycotted the session, calling the budget 'anti-poor'.

**Other resolutions.** In response to the region's deepening energy crisis, which resulted in daily load-shedding of up to 18 hours, the GBLA unanimously adopted a [resolution](#) in September reaffirming its authority to legislate on electricity generation and regulation. Lawmakers noted that the Gilgit-Baltistan Energy Development Organisation Act 2025 and the Gilgit-Baltistan Regulation of Electric Power Services Act 2025 were expected to play a significant role in addressing the crisis.

## Administration of justice

**Judicial appointments.** The matter of judicial appointments remained in limbo this year too. In April, the Supreme Court of Pakistan [heard](#) a case on judicial appointments in Gilgit-Baltistan, debating the Prime Minister's discretion versus the governor's advice. During the hearing, judges urged legislative or constitutional reform to clarify the process. The hearing was adjourned after discussion on lifting the stay and revising the 2019 order.

The year saw continued [protests](#) by lawyers, including a [boycott](#) of court proceedings, over the appointment of judges to two vacant positions in the Gilgit-Baltistan Supreme Appellate Court, which has been operating with only one judge for the past seven years. In August, the administration [assured](#) the protesting lawyers that the vacancies would be filled soon. In November, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif [extended](#) the three-year term of Chief Judge Sardar Muhammad Shamim Khan in the Gilgit-Baltistan Supreme Appellate Court. However, the prime minister did not approve the summary moved by the Gilgit-Baltistan chief minister for the appointment of additional judges.

**Mountaineering royalty case.** In March, the Gilgit-Baltistan chief court suspended a 300 percent [hike](#) in mountaineering, trekking, and Central Karakorum National Park environmental fees. The court cited damage to tourism and livelihoods, noting that 70 percent of foreign tourists cancelled visits as a result.

**Virtual customs court.** In December, a virtual customs court was [inaugurated](#) at Sost Dry Port, to enable litigants to attend hearings remotely, reducing travel costs, delays, and barriers to justice for traders and customs staff.

# Enforcement of Law

## Law and order

**Crime statistics.** According to Gilgit-Baltistan police data, a total of 2,215 crimes were reported in 2025, slightly lower than the 2,250 reported in 2024 (see Table 1). While cases of grievous or simple hurt increased by 37 percent compared to last year, there was no significant increase in the incidence of murder. Cases of attempted murder decreased from last year, as did incidents of honour killings, suicides, and kidnapping and abduction.

*Table 1: Crime statistics for Gilgit-Baltistan in 2025*

Offence	Total
Murder	64
Attempted murder	96
Honour killing	14
Hurt (grievous or simple)	189
Rioting	52
Assault in a public place	70
Rape	3
Zina	8
Kidnapping and abduction	40
Suicide	40
Dacoity	1
Robbery	25
Burglary	112
Other motor vehicle theft	14
Motorcycle theft	174
Cattle theft	32
Other theft	215
Arms Act	190
Prohibition Ordinance smuggling	173
Other local and special laws	3
Fatal accident	30
Nonfatal accident	88
Miscellaneous	582
Total crimes	2,215

*Source: Central Police Office, Gilgit.*

**Cybercrime.** In 2025, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)'s Cybercrime Wing in Gilgit handled 999 complaints, conducted 296 enquiries (a third of which were carried over from 2024), and worked on 31 first information reports (FIRs), 19 of which were registered during the year. While 94 percent of complaints were disposed of, only 35 percent of FIRs were closed, indicating gaps in prosecution. Online financial fraud accounted for the most complaints (750, leading to 13 FIRs), followed by social media offences such as harassment and blackmail (141 complaints resulting in 2 FIRs), with fewer cases of identity theft and system misuse.

**Militancy.** Terrorist activities kept disturbing the peace in the region. In August 2025, at least two Gilgit-Baltistan Scouts personnel were martyred, and another was injured when terrorists opened fire on a security checkpoint along the Karakoram Highway in Diamer from a nearby mountain peak. In September, militants ambushed a police patrol van near Babusar Top in Diamer, injuring at least four police personnel, one critically. The banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility. In October, two WAPDA officials from Punjab, working on the Diamer-Bhasha Dam, were abducted by militants from the Thore area of Chilas.

In December, the FIA's Gilgit unit arrested suspects trafficking locals to Cambodia for fake jobs, forcing them into bonded labour and extorting ransoms from their families.

**Sectarianism.** Sectarian tensions in Gilgit-Baltistan, which remained largely dormant before the 1988 Gilgit clashes, have persisted due to a complex web of political and social factors. This enduring friction is driven by demographic anxieties, local religious disputes, and state policies that exacerbated divisions during the 1980s.

In October, in two separate targeted attacks in Gilgit, Ahl-e Sunnat Wal Jamaat leader Maulana Qazi Nisar Ahmed and chief court judge Malik Inayat-ur-Rehman were injured, triggering widespread fear. Markets were shut down, and roads were blocked as tensions escalated. In December, the Gilgit-Baltistan police stated that all nine individuals involved in the October attack on Qazi Nisar Ahmed had been identified, with two key suspects arrested, including the alleged mastermind.



*Sectarian tensions in Gilgit-Baltistan persisted due to a complex web of political and social factors.*

**Land disputes.** A number of land disputes turned violent, resulting in casualties. In January, a land dispute between relatives in Gilgit's Gludas village led to a gunfight, killing two people and injuring six others, including a woman. In February, a violent clash between relatives over a land and mosque leadership dispute in Bathrait, Ghizer, resulted in two deaths and four injuries.

## Jails and prisoners

As of 31 December 2025, Gilgit-Baltistan's five district jails in Gilgit, Diamer, Ghizer, Skardu, and Astore held a total of 341 inmates, including 215 under-trial prisoners and 41 on death row (see Table 2). The Central Jail Minawar, the only overcrowded jail in Gilgit, houses 220 inmates, whereas its capacity is 177.

Table 2: Prison statistics for Gilgit in 2025

Category	Offence	Number of inmates					Total
		Central Jail Minawar	District Jail Diamer	District Jail Ghizer	District Jail Skardu	District Jail Astore	
Death sentence	ATA	21	0	0	0	0	21
	Other	15	0	4	1	0	20
Life sentence	ATA	6	0	4	0	0	10
	Other	15	11	4	4	1	35
Misc	ATA	4	0	0	0	0	4
	Other	10	0	1	11	0	22
Under trial	ATA	15	0	0	0	0	15
	Other	123	44	16	10	2	195
Juveniles		2	0	1	0	0	3
Females under trial		1	3	1	0	0	5
Female convicts		1	2	0	0	0	3
Under treatment		7	1	0	0	0	8
Total		220	61	31	26	3	341

Source: Gilgit-Baltistan prison authorities.

## Enforced disappearances

In early December 2025, families and supporters staged a three-day [protest](#) in Gilgit demanding the recovery of Faisal Abbas, who had gone missing while travelling on the Karakoram Highway in Diamer district. Abbas was later recovered, though his recovery did not receive media coverage.

# Fundamental Freedoms

## Freedom of expression

In February, journalists in Gilgit-Baltistan [protested](#) the government's plan to implement the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2025 in the region. They accused the authorities of undermining press freedom and vowed to resist the controversial law.

In May, several leaders of the AAC, including its chairman Ehsan Ali, were [arrested](#) under anti-terrorism provisions ahead of a planned grand jirga in Gilgit-Baltistan. Rights activists said the arrests were aimed at suppressing peaceful political expression and dissent. They were later released on bail after months, but two activists, Nusrat Hussain and Irfan Azad, remained in jail until the end of 2025.

In June, social activist Yawar Abbas, known for raising community and governance issues, was found [dead](#) in a remote mountainous area of Gilgit-Baltistan, causing widespread concern among civil society about the safety of vocal activists.

In late June, ahead of Muharram, authorities registered [cases](#) against four individuals for allegedly sharing controversial content online and inciting hatred. This episode illustrated the tensions between religious sensitivities, law enforcement actions, and online expression.

Social media in Gilgit-Baltistan served both as a tool and a site of control in 2025. In September, the Gilgit-Baltistan police [banned](#) the use of TikTok for all personnel to 'maintain discipline and dignity'. In November, Iqbal Salik, a freelance journalist from Skardu, posted on Facebook allegations from a patient's family claiming that a surgeon had performed the wrong operation that had worsened the patient's condition. The post went viral and sparked public debate, after which a [legal notice](#) was served to Iqbal Salik, and a request for an FIR was submitted to the City Police Station.

## Freedom of peaceful assembly

In January, Hunza residents, including women and children, [held](#) week-long sit-ins to protest power outages lasting up to 22 hours. These demonstrations disrupted trade and transport until authorities offered assurances. Therefore, in June, opposition lawmakers [raised](#) the issue of prolonged electricity outages in the GBLA, demanding immediate government action to resolve the power crisis.

In February, Diamer Basha dam-affected residents in Chilas held sustained rallies and sit-ins, [demanding](#) full compensation, land rights, local jobs, and resettlement under a 31-point charter. The federal government formed high-level committees and engaged in negotiations, but protesters rejected verbal promises and continued the sit-in until written assurances were provided, after which the blockade and protests ended.

In March, demonstrators across Baltistan blocked the Kargil Road in Kharmang and the K2 Road in Shigar. They demanded the immediate [release](#) of religious scholars, Syed Aga Ali Abbas, Sheikh Ghulam Abbas, and Sheikh Akhtar Hussain, who were detained at the Pakistan-Iran border, prompting condemnation by the opposition parties and concerns for their safety.

In April, Gilgit-Baltistan's legal fraternity [began](#) region-wide strikes, court boycotts, and sit-ins demanding judicial reforms, timely appointments, and extension of the Lawyers Protection Act. The protests, repeatedly extended throughout 2025,

highlighted frustration over stalled justice, though some demonstrations were paused amid heightened Pakistan-India tensions, increasing pressure on authorities to address the lawyers' demands.

In May 2025, protests **erupted** across Gilgit-Baltistan after police arrested key leaders of the AAC. Civil society and trade groups joined rallies across multiple districts, calling for the release of detainees charged under anti-terror laws, reflecting deep regional political frustration.

In the second week of August, at least 63 police personnel were **suspended** and faced disciplinary action after they staged a sit-in in front of the Chief Minister's Secretariat in Gilgit, demanding implementation of already approved increases in daily allowances. This marked the second such protest as an earlier sit-in ended after talks with government representatives that yielded no tangible progress.

A traders' sit-in at Sost Dry Port and **blockade** of the Karakoram Highway over federal taxation and trade grievances led to clashes with police in August, leaving six protesters injured. The protest **sparked** a shutter-down strike on 30 August 2025, observed across multiple districts of Gilgit-Baltistan in solidarity with the traders. On 29 September, the 68-day-long protest, which had severely disrupted cross-border movement between Pakistan and China, **ended**.

## Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

In 2025, Gilgit-Baltistan experienced heightened sectarian tensions and religious unrest, particularly following attacks on prominent religious figures and the detention of clerics. Despite these challenges, the region's potential for religious tourism was highlighted in April 2025 when a Malaysian Buddhist delegation **visited** sacred heritage sites, including the historic Manthal Buddha Rock near Skardu, and performed rituals.



*Malaysian Buddhist delegation visited sacred heritage sites, including the historic Manthal Buddha Rock near Skardu.*

**Blasphemy allegations.** The category of blasphemy cases was removed from the official police reporting format in 2025 despite several incidents being registered under blasphemy provisions. Last year, two people were booked in Gilgit and one in Skardu. Another person with mental disabilities was booked and arrested in Ghizer. In a prominent case, complaints were filed in multiple Gilgit-Baltistan districts against a cleric accused of delivering sectarian hate speech, leading the Astore police to **register** an FIR under Sections 295A and 298A of the Pakistan Penal Code.

## Freedom of movement

During the May 2025 Pakistan–India conflict, numerous flights across Pakistan, including those to and from Gilgit and Skardu, were intermittently **cancelled** over several days, causing significant disruption for local travellers. Residents and visitors faced difficulties in both domestic and international travel, with many **stranded** by sudden cancellations and uncertainty about flight schedules, highlighting the vulnerability of Gilgit Baltistan air connectivity during security crises and its impact on local mobility and tourism.

During the year, the Gilgit-Baltistan Home and Prisons Department placed several leaders of the AAC under [Schedule Four](#) of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997, raising serious concerns among human rights defenders and political observers. Those affected included Ehsan Ali, Masoodur Rehman, Javed Naji, Kausar Hussain, Raja Nasir, journalist Issa Khan Danish, and Usman Ali Qureshi, while Hasnain Ramal, Manzoor Parwana, and Shabir Mayar were already on the list. Those on the list are required to report regularly to the police and to obtain prior permission for travel. Shabir Mayar, a political activist, was stopped twice and sent back to his village while on his way to attend protests.

In May, local traders involved in Pakistan–China trade through the Khunjerab Pass staged an indefinite protest sit-in at Pissan in Nagar, [blocking](#) the Karakoram Highway and stranding thousands of local and international travellers. The protesters, chanting slogans against Pakistan Customs and the Gilgit-Baltistan government, said their main grievance was the suspension of customs clearance for imports from China at Sost Dry Port for the previous six months, which had effectively halted cross-border trade. In response, the local administration imposed Section 144 to restrict public gatherings.

## Freedom of association

In June, Freedom Network supported the [creation](#) of a joint media advocacy platform in Gilgit-Baltistan, uniting major journalist bodies under the Pakistan Journalists Safety Coalition Gilgit-Baltistan chapter. The coalition’s launch event produced a joint declaration demanding stronger protection and safety for journalists and action against impunity for crimes targeting media workers.

In October, Kiran Qasim and Shereen Karim, Gilgitbased women journalists, made history by being [elected](#) the first female president and vice-president, respectively, of the Gilgit Union of Journalists—a significant milestone for gender inclusion and representation in Pakistan’s journalist community.

# Democratic Development

## Shrinking democratic spaces and the role of elected assemblies

In October, the Gilgit-Baltistan Election Commission restricted the Gilgit-Baltistan government's administrative and financial powers one month before the end of its tenure. As a result, it **barred** new appointments, transfers, policy changes, fund releases, and development schemes ahead of the general elections.

The GBLA **completed** its five-year tenure with its final session on 25 November 2025. Originally elected on 15 November 2020, the assembly first saw a PTI government under Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid, who was disqualified in July 2023; thereafter, a coalition government of the Pakistan People's Party, Pakistan Muslim League (N) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)'s disgruntled members led by Haji Gulbar Khan completed the remaining two and a half years of the term.

**Caretaker government.** Following the dissolution of the GBLA, Justice (R) Yar Muhammad was **appointed** caretaker chief minister on 25 November. On 18 December, the 90-day tenure of the caretaker government was extended after 14 of 20 political parties, at a multiparty consultation organised by the Gilgit-Baltistan Election Commission, **opposed** holding elections in January 2026 due to harsh weather conditions.

## Local government

In March, the Gilgit-Baltistan government moved to **activate** newly created administrative districts Darel, Tangir, Rondu, and GupisYasin by appointing additional deputy commissioners.

The Gilgit-Baltistan Election Commission had **scheduled** the long-overdue local government elections, the first in nearly 20 years, for 14 February 2026. However, after consultations with political parties in mid-December 2025, the elections were **postponed** and were slated to take place at the same time as the GBLA elections.

# The Rights of the Disadvantaged

## Women

At an event marking International Women’s Day, human rights activists in Gilgit-Baltistan [highlighted](#) the lack of legal protections for women and the weak enforcement of existing laws on early marriage, domestic violence, and workplace harassment. These challenges are exacerbated by the absence of family courts and shelter homes, weak accountability mechanisms, entrenched cultural norms, and limited political will.

Official data highlights the extent of violence facing women: 14 honour killings were reported in 2025 in Gilgit-Baltistan, in which 10 women were murdered. In 2025 too, most ‘honour’ killings took place in Diamer, where seven women and three men lost their lives. In 2025, [suicide](#) continued to be a serious concern in the region, with 17 reported cases involving women, compared to 19 cases in both 2023 and 2024.

In July, a mother of four and another man were allegedly [shot dead](#) in an ‘honour’ killing by the woman’s husband in Frori village, Diamer. A little less than two weeks later, Javed Iqbal (also known as Javed Naji), a senior AAC activist from Tangir in Diamer, was [shot dead](#) in the presence of his mother and wife. The accused subsequently killed a married woman in the name of ‘honour’. Civil society groups condemned the murders and called for ‘action to dismantle the culture of impunity surrounding honour-based violence in Gilgit-Baltistan’.

In June, the fatal [shooting](#) of a woman during a police confrontation with a suspect at City Hospital, Gilgit, sparked immediate public outrage and cries for justice. The authorities, under intense scrutiny, acted swiftly by arresting seven police personnel, suspending senior officers, and launching an urgent inquiry to address mounting anger and demand accountability.

Challenges extend beyond direct violence. For example, in September, female runners and civil society activists protested their [exclusion](#) from the inaugural Sarfaranga National Marathon in Skardu. Despite completing registration and paying participation fees, women were barred when the online form was altered to allow only male participants.

A fake video aimed at the Gilgit-Baltistan chief minister and a woman minister went [viral](#) on social media from an account impersonating a popular Hunza-based singer. The FIA Cybercrime Reporting Centre in Gilgit launched an investigation and filed complaints to identify the perpetrators. Earlier in February, Imsha Rehman, a social media influencer, publicly [addressed](#) the impact of the fake video scandal on her life. She maintained that she had deactivated her social media accounts due to abuse and threats after an allegedly explicit video was leaked online in November 2024.

In 2025, gender disparity in journalism was pronounced in the region, with only 11 women in the journalists’ union and two full-time women reporters. Journalists faced censorship, legal harassment, and intimidation, prompting bodies such as the Pakistan Journalists Safety Council Gilgit Baltistan chapter, Gilgit-Baltistan Union of Journalists, Gilgit Union of Journalists, and Gilgit Press Club to call for a legal protection framework. A June 2025 Freedom Network [declaration](#) demanded independent investigations, stronger safeguards, safe working conditions, and support for women and marginalised journalists.

Despite these ongoing challenges, there were some positive developments. For example, over 200 girls in Gilgit-Baltistan received [training](#) in digital literacy, coding, and computer applications through a non-governmental initiative, aiming to reduce the digital gender divide and enhance civic opportunities for women.

## Children

**Child abuse.** In September, Raja Kashan, a first-year student, [died](#) under mysterious circumstances after reportedly resisting a rape attempt by his friends. The suspects claimed that he took his own life by jumping into a river to escape the assault, while police were investigating whether he had been murdered. Earlier, in February, Skardu police [arrested](#) three suspects for allegedly sexually assaulting an 11-year-old boy.

**Child trafficking.** Sadia Danish, deputy speaker of the GBLA, [raised](#) concerns over reported cases of trafficking and exploitation of underage girls from Astore under the guise of marriage. Citing sources, she noted that 70 to 80 cases have emerged involving minors married to older men in Punjab and Azad Kashmir, with several marriages reportedly ending quickly and others involving allegations of abuse. She also referred to a case in which a 13-year-old girl was allegedly sold twice on the pretext of marriage.

## Persons living with disabilities

In March, police in Ghizer [arrested](#) a suspect accused of raping a 13-year-old deaf and visually impaired girl from Yasin Valley in Gilgit-Baltistan. The girl died in July 2024 at a hospital in Gilgit after giving birth to a stillborn child. Investigators used DNA evidence to identify the suspect and took him into custody.

As per [data](#) released by the National Database and Regulatory Authority in 2025, the total number of persons living with disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan stand at 13,735 which includes 560 persons with mental disabilities.

# Social, Economic, and Environmental Rights

## Education

In February, students, parents, and community members across Gilgit-Baltistan [protested](#) widespread failures in the grades five and eight regional exams, demanding accountability, increased educational standards, and the opportunity to retake exams. A week later, the Gilgit-Baltistan government [initiated](#) disciplinary action against more than 50 teachers and education officers for the poor performance of students (61 percent pass rate) in the 2024 secondary school certificate exams.

In 2025, government schoolteachers across Gilgit-Baltistan [boycotted](#) classes and held sit-ins for several consecutive days to demand long-overdue promotions and implementation of court orders directing the government to adjust their service scales. The protests led to suspension of academic activities and to rallies outside the education department offices.

## Health

Health systems faced multiple pressures. Waterborne disease outbreaks, mental health trauma among flood survivors, and risks linked to indoor air pollution all took a toll. The extension of the Prime Minister Sehat Card offered some relief in access to healthcare.

**Polio.** On 1 June 2025, a polio vaccination team in Sheikho village, Tangir Valley, Diamer, narrowly escaped an [attack](#) when armed assailants stopped their vehicle, threatened them, and opened fire. Incidentally, the same day, the National Institute of Health in Islamabad confirmed the first wild poliovirus case found in Gilgit-Baltistan in years, after a toddler in Diamer tested positive.

**Health impacts of floods.** Following climate-induced disasters, including GLOFs, communities across Diamer, Shigar, Skardu, Astore, and Gilgit [reported](#) a sharp rise in water-borne diseases in August 2025. Hundreds of residents were affected by cholera, diarrhoea, pneumonia, and other infections, with children under five particularly vulnerable. Health data recorded 3,321 cases of acute diarrhoea by August, with most cases reported in Skardu and Diamer. Suspected typhoid cases also emerged, while shortages of essential medicines in several districts further strained the region's healthcare response.

Flood-impacted communities in Gilgit-Baltistan, especially in Ghizer district, experienced a worsening mental health [crisis](#), as an increasing number of people, including children, showed trauma-related psychological distress, prompting the regional government to plan psychological rehabilitation initiatives in affected areas.

A sudden [surge](#) in appendicitis cases in Shimshal Valley affected more than 30 to 60 people, mostly children, creating fear among residents and exposing severe shortages in local medical facilities and transport. On 14 November, patients were shifted to hospitals in Hunza while locals and leaders called for emergency medical support, ambulances, and improved healthcare services in the remote valley.

## Economy

Following sustained protests and lobbying by traders in Gilgit-Baltistan during August and September, the federal government [approved](#) annual tax exemptions worth PKR 4 billion on 2,403 import items through the Sost Dry Port to support the local economy. However, the agreement warns that any attempt to smuggle exempted goods beyond the region could result in a partial or complete withdrawal of the concessions.

Tourism, a key driver of economic growth in Gilgit-Baltistan, [declined](#) by up to 90 percent in July–August 2025 due to climate-related disasters and safety concerns, as the region experienced at least 20 flood incidents during the monsoon season. The downturn led to widespread job losses and significant economic fallout.

## Environment

**GLOFs and flash floods.** By 12 September 2025, devastating GLOFs and flash floods between June and August had [resulted](#) in 41 deaths, 52 injuries, and damage to at least 1,253 homes. The floods also destroyed over 100 bridges and nearly 450 kilometres of roads, severely disrupting relief efforts. The Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority set up 11 relief camps, which sheltered 3,140 people, while efforts focused on clearing roads and providing relief to the affected population.



*Flash floods between June and August had resulted in 41 deaths, 52 injuries, and damage to at least 1,253 homes.*

Technical experts [noted](#) that while early warning systems installed at glacial lakes had improved detection and alerts, they focused primarily on hazards, overlooking exposure and vulnerability. Consequently, while communities received warnings, they often did not know which households, infrastructure, or livelihoods were most at risk.

**Landslides.** In July, thousands of people, including foreign tourists, were [stranded](#) at multiple locations in Gilgit-Baltistan after landslides blocked the Karakoram Highway. Officials reported that the blockage at Achar Nallah in Kohistan disrupted travel to and from the region. In August, the National Disaster Management Authority [issued](#) travel advisories restricting movement on multiple roads in Gilgit-Baltistan due to floods, landslides, and infrastructure damage during the monsoon season, limiting access to several districts.

**Sewage dumping.** In June, the Gilgit-Baltistan Environmental Protection Agency sealed part of a resort at Attabad Lake and fined its owner PKR 1.5 million for environmental violations after a [video](#) shared by a foreign tourist, alleging the discharge of untreated sewage into the lake, went viral.

# AZAD JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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# Overview

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) occupies a unique and politically significant position within Pakistan. Administered by Pakistan as a self-governing territory, AJK is considered an autonomous region, but is intrinsically linked to Pakistan, both politically and economically, particularly in matters of defence, foreign policy, and economic affairs.

The human rights environment in AJK in 2025 was markedly complex, with very few dedicated organisations monitoring abuses.

The AJK Legislative Assembly passed several bills, including an annual budget of PKR 310 billion, with PKR 49 billion allocated for development. However, debates surrounding centralised development funds highlighted ongoing tensions in local governance and democratic participation.

Justice was administered through a three-tier judicial system, which saw some progress in accountability and reform. Despite these efforts, significant case backlogs persisted, especially in the district courts, reflecting ongoing capacity constraints and delays.

The most significant development of the year occurred in late September and early October when traders, students, lawyers, transporters, and other groups—under the banner of the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC)—organised a region-wide lockdown and wheel-jam strike that paralysed major districts. Demanding governance reforms, this marked the third such mobilisation in the last two years. The protests resulted in at least nine deaths, including six civilians and three police personnel, and over 200 injuries. Communication blackouts during this period further restricted civil liberties.



*The Joint Awami Action Committee organised a region-wide lockdown and wheel-jam strike that paralysed major districts.*

HRCP condemned the use of excessive force, all ensuing casualties, and political disenfranchisement, calling for respect for peaceful protest and inclusive dialogue. A negotiated agreement between the protestors and the federal government ultimately brought political stability.

Cross-border escalation between India and Pakistan in April and a near-war situation in May damaged 139 houses and displaced more than 3,100 people in Bagh, Haveli, and Muzaffarabad.

Crime trends for the year showed a slight increase in overall reported cases. An alarming finding was that AJK, with 150 prisoners on death row, had one of the highest death row-to-prisoner ratios.

Fundamental freedoms were both exercised and restricted. Large-scale protests demonstrated civic engagement but were frequently met with internet shutdowns and limits on expression and assembly. The media faced censorship under the guise of various laws. Religious minorities, especially the Ahmadiyya community, continued to experience targeted discrimination, including the desecration of graves.

Vulnerable groups continued to face significant challenges. Women experienced ongoing violence and economic exclusion. Youth unemployment stood at 27 percent, and overall unemployment at 11 percent, limiting broader economic participation. Child protection data recorded 48 abuse cases from just two districts, raising concerns about coverage and underreporting. Refugees, totalling over 9,500 families or approximately 46,000 people, continued to live in poor conditions.

The suspension of the Sehat Card continued to adversely affect health services. Climate-related disasters caused multiple deaths and destroyed houses and infrastructure, highlighting environmental vulnerabilities. Moreover, deadly road accidents in 2025 underscored the need for improved infrastructure.

# Rule of Law

## Laws and law-making

In 2025, the AJK Legislative Assembly continued to exercise its legislative authority under the Interim Constitution of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Act 1974, passing several important laws and financial measures. One major legislative action was the [approval](#) of the Finance Act 2025, which endorsed the government's [budget](#) for the fiscal year 2025/26 with an estimated outlay of approximately PKR 310 billion. Additionally, the Assembly [passed](#) the University of Haveli Act 2025, paving the way for the establishment of a new university in Haveli district to expand higher education opportunities in the region.

In May, the Assembly [enacted](#) the Dastoor-ul-Amal for Development Programme of Local Government and Rural Development Act 2025—legislation concerning the management of local government development funds. This generated debate because it shifted greater authority for identifying development schemes and utilising funds to elected assembly members, rather than to elected local councils. The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Mangla Dam Housing Authority Act 2025 was also passed during the year.

## Administration of justice

The administration of justice in AJK faces challenges related to case backlogs and limited administrative capacity. [Statistics](#) from the district courts' website show thousands of registered cases across categories, including civil, family, and bail matters, reflecting the substantial workload of the lower judiciary. To address this, in January, the AJK High Court [launched](#) e-judicial services across district courts, facilitating public access to case information and expediting adjudication.

In July, the Supreme Court of AJK [convicted](#) a former sessions judge of contempt of court and misconduct in a narcotics case—a rare instance of disciplinary action against a judicial officer. In August, the AJK High Court [addressed](#) controversies in judicial recruitment by suspending and annulling appointments found to violate merit and procedural norms.

In July, the Supreme Court of AJK [directed](#) the activation of environmental courts, demonstrating proactive judicial intervention in public-interest matters.

In December, while deciding two consolidated writ petitions concerning private paramedical and allied health institutes in Muzaffarabad, the AJK High Court directed the government and health authorities to strictly [enforce](#) the 2019 policy regulating allied health sciences institutions. The court required inspections, legal action against violators, and the submission of a compliance report within three months to ensure that only compliant institutes were operating and that public health was protected.

In another significant case, the AJK High Court [ruled](#) that Public Service Commission waiting lists could not be used to fill unadvertised civil judge posts and directed the authorities to refer all vacancies to the latter. The court also invalidated irregular Health Department appointments due to a lack of transparency and discriminatory practices.

# Enforcement of Law

## Law and order

Crime statistics for AJK indicate an overall rise in reported crime, with total cases increasing from 9,592 in 2024 to 10,555 in 2025 (Table 1).

*Table 1: Crime statistics for AJK in 2025*

Crime	Reported cases
Murder	91
Dacoity	2
Robbery	80
Gang rape	1
Rape	13
Kidnapping	20
Kidnapping for ransom	2
Abduction/zina	387
Burglary	352
Theft	589
Trespass	551
Hurt	361
Riot	603
Arms Act	276
Narcotics	997
Other crimes	6,230
Total	10,555

*Source: AJK Central Police Office.*

On 29 September, unrest began after the JAAC [called](#) for a protest and shutdown to demand governance reforms and improved public services. Clashes at Neelum Bridge in Muzaffarabad resulted in at least one death, while telecommunications services, including landline, cellular, and internet services, were widely suspended.

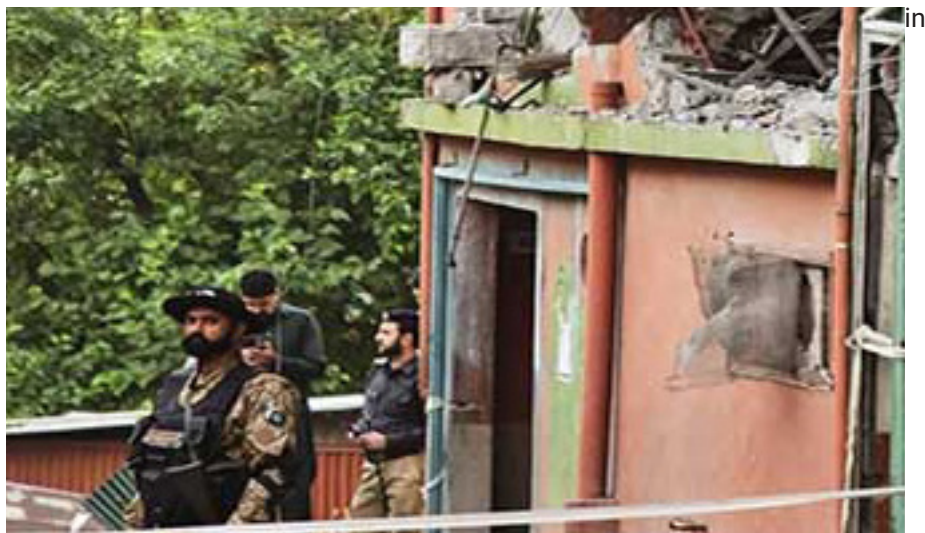
By 4 October, the death toll from the unrest had [risen](#) to at least nine—six civilians and three police personnel—with more than 200 individuals reported injured. Official figures identified 172 police personnel and approximately 50 civilians among the wounded, some critically. Subsequently, cases were registered under the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 as a result of a [negotiated](#) agreement to address the incidents and their consequences.

The [escalation](#) between India and Pakistan in April–May, which followed the 22 April Pahalgam attack in Indian-occupied Kashmir, had severe humanitarian impacts on AJK. Cross-border shelling, drone strikes, and artillery fire damaged 139 houses and displaced over 3,100 people in Bagh, Haveli, and Muzaffarabad districts. Many of the

displaced were forced to shelter overcrowded schools or with relatives, raising protection and safety concerns, especially for women and children.

### The death penalty

A [report](#) published by the National Commission for Human Rights and Justice Project Pakistan in October states that 150 prisoners, including two women, were on death row in AJK in 2025. This represents one of the highest death row-to-prisoner ratios in Pakistan, at approximately 19 percent.



*Cross-border shelling damaged houses and displaced over 3,100 people in Bagh, Haveli, and Muzaffarabad districts during the four-day India-Pakistan conflict in April-May.*

### Enforced disappearances

According to [statistics](#) issued by the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED), 71 cases of missing persons related to AJK were recorded between March 2011 and June 2025. Of these, 61 cases were resolved, while ten remained pending during the year. Data from the COIED indicates that three new cases of enforced disappearance were brought before the Commission in 2025—a number consistent with the previous year.

# Fundamental Freedoms

## Freedom of expression

A September 2025 [report](#) by Freedom Network found that journalism in AJK was restricted by censorship, harassment, and insufficient legal protection. Journalists were vulnerable to pressure from both state and nonstate actors as well as low pay, unsafe working conditions, and increasing self-censorship. The report recommended stronger legal frameworks, institutional support, gender inclusion, and enhanced digital media training.

As noted in previous years, censorship persisted in 2025, particularly regarding the region's status. Nationalist groups continued to struggle for their opinions to be voiced in the mainstream media. As highlighted above, the government resorted to suspending internet services during protests.

On 6 April, the AJK government [registered](#) a criminal case against the *Daily Jammu & Kashmir* newspaper and its editors for publishing what officials deemed 'propaganda' and 'fake news'—a move condemned by journalists' unions as a violation of speech and press freedoms. In 2024, the AJK government had passed a controversial amendment to Section 505 of the Pakistan Penal Code, criminalising public criticism of government officials and prescribing penalties that include a minimum prison term of seven years.

At a Supreme Court event in December, the chief justice [urged](#) journalists to verify all judiciary-related news before publication, emphasising accuracy as an ethical, legal, and religious responsibility.

## Freedom of peaceful assembly

As in 2024, freedom of peaceful assembly remained a defining feature of the political landscape in AJK in 2025, with large public gatherings reflecting widespread civic engagement and dissent. From late September to early October, JAAC [organised](#) mass assemblies, strikes, and demonstrations across AJK to press a 38-point charter of demands related to governance reforms and economic issues. This mobilisation brought life in major districts to a halt, encompassing both peaceful protests and violent clashes with security forces. The government [responded](#) through negotiations, alongside the deployment of security measures and communication restrictions, underscoring tensions over the scope and exercise of the right to assembly.

HRCPC condemned the use of excessive force, civilian deaths, and political disenfranchisement, calling on the state to respect the right to peaceful protest and for inclusive dialogue. Meanwhile, the Foreign Office [emphasised](#) that residents of AJK enjoyed civil and political rights, drawing a comparison with ongoing human rights violations in Indian-occupied Kashmir.

## Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

**Attacks against the Ahmadiyya community.** On 21 March, at least 76 Ahmadi graves were reportedly [damaged](#) by unidentified individuals in a graveyard in Kotli, which has existed since before 1984. This was the eighth such incident reported in the first three months of 2025 in AJK, bringing the total number of damaged Ahmadi gravestones to 169. The authorities subsequently registered a case under Section 297 of the Pakistan Penal Code, which covers trespassing on burial sites with intent to insult religious feelings.

**Blasphemy allegations.** In July, a Shia cleric in Muzaffarabad was reportedly taken into police [custody](#) on charges of alleged blasphemy after a video clip of his sermon circulated widely on social media. Although no first information report (FIR) was registered, the incident raised concerns regarding freedom of belief and expression in the region.

## **Freedom of movement**

On 29 September, the 'third such major mobilisation in the last two years' saw a JAAC-backed [lockdown](#) bring several districts of AJK to a complete halt, shutting down markets and public transport. Authorities responded by imposing a complete communications blackout and temporarily restricting freedom of movement during the political protests. Security measures, such as roadblocks, were [implemented](#) in several cities, including Muzaffarabad. These actions disrupted transportation and limited residents' movement for extended periods as security forces worked to control demonstrations and maintain order.

Earlier, in August, climate-induced flash floods and a mudslide in Muzaffarabad disrupted mobility across AJK for several days. Torrential rains and a cloudburst caused [nine deaths](#) across the region and significant damage to homes, infrastructure, and key transport links. Roads were blocked or damaged, including access routes in Neelum Valley, where over 700 tourists were stranded. The disruption to bridges and major routes, including the Muzaffarabad-Mansehra Road, restricted movement, delayed rescue efforts, and left affected communities isolated.

## **Freedom of association**

Freedom of association in AJK was evident in large-scale collective action, particularly when traders, students, lawyers, transporters, and other groups came together to [organise](#) a region-wide shut-down and wheel-jam strike under the aegis of JAAC that paralysed major districts from 29 September onwards. The strike and related mass gatherings formed part of coordinated action around a 38 point charter of demands, reflecting strong public organisation around shared political and socioeconomic grievances.

# Democratic Development

## Political participation

In 2025, political participation in AJK was reflected in engagement within formal institutions as well as in public mobilisation. A major political development occurred in November when the Pakistan People’s Party successfully [moved](#) a no-confidence motion in the AJK Legislative Assembly, leading to the removal of Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq and the election of Raja Faisal Mumtaz Rathore as the sixteenth prime minister, with 36 votes. The shift also altered parliamentary alignments, with the Pakistan Muslim League (N) moving to the opposition.

Alongside developments within the legislature, grassroots political mobilisation also shaped participation. JAAC [organised](#) a region-wide strike and protest from 29 September to 4 October 2025, drawing thousands of citizens and highlighting widespread public dissatisfaction with governance, resource management, and representation. Just days before the September strike, [talks](#) between the AJK government and JAAC broke down without agreement, illustrating how both institutional and extrainstitutional political actors engaged in negotiations over public demands and governance issues. Following several days of unrest, the federal government [signed](#) an agreement with protest leaders on 4 October, accepting most demands and committing a PKR 10 billion financial package to improve electricity systems and support feasibility studies for two tunnels and a large water supply scheme.

On 14 December, AJK Prime Minister Faisal Mumtaz Rathore [announced](#) the immediate release of funds for key development projects in Rawalakot, reaffirming his commitment to implementing agreements with the JAAC. The funds were intended to support the completion of a district hospital, water supply schemes, a medical college, and a cardiac facility.

The 4 October agreement addressed several demands but did not resolve the issue of 12 reserved seats in the AJK Legislative Assembly for refugees. JAAC called for these seats to be abolished to prevent external influence—a request the government declined. Instead, the government agreed to begin assembly deliberations and consult legal experts to identify a solution, including a possible constitutional review. Nearly three months later, a nine-member committee was [established](#) to review the issue and provide recommendations to the monitoring and implementation committee.

## Local government

During the 2025 mass protests and shutdown strike, many of the grievances put forward by protestors, including demands for enhanced local governance powers, resource control, and accountability, effectively [critiqued](#) the functioning of local institutions. Protesters called for reforms to strengthen local governments and address public needs. In addition to the financial package mentioned above, the [agreement](#) with the federal government included a commitment to align existing local government laws with the AJK Local Government Act 1990 and relevant apex court decisions within 90 days.

# The Rights of the Disadvantaged

## Women

The large-scale out-migration of men for work has **increased** the burden on women in AJK, who now shoulder unpaid care work, subsistence farming, and household management. With a 27 percent unemployment rate among those aged 15 to 29, women's participation in the formal sector remains limited.

Gender-based violence and the harassment of women continued in 2025. In January, police reported a rape **case** in Sudhnoti district, involving two suspects who assaulted a 22-year-old woman in her home. One suspect was arrested, while police conducted raids to apprehend the other.

In February, the police chief **ordered** the arrest of a station house officer accused of having sexually harassed a British-Kashmiri woman in Thothal, Mirpur. The victim alleged that the officer had abducted and attempted to assault her; she also accused the police of weakening the case and pressuring her to withdraw it.

In August, a young woman was **killed** after falling from a cliff while fleeing alleged harassers involved in so-called 'moral policing' in Muzaffarabad. The suspects, including a police constable, reportedly assaulted the man accompanying her. Some arrests were made, while others remained at large. The case sparked protests across AJK, with strong public demands for accountability and an end to harassment and extortion in the name of morality.

Earlier, in March, two suspects were **arrested** for blackmailing women using a fake gaming app that exploited personal data in Muzaffarabad. Victims were manipulated into sharing sensitive information, which was then used for harassment and blackmail, leading at least two women to attempt suicide.

## Children

In February, during a meeting with a delegation from the National Assembly's Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights, Speaker Chaudhry Latif Akbar **assured** participants that a child rights caucus would be established in the AJK Legislative Assembly. This caucus was intended to strengthen engagement on child protection, improve access to education, and address child labour. The proposed caucus was expected to provide recommendations and collaborate with its National Assembly counterpart to advance effective child rights advocacy.

**Child abuse.** The Social Welfare Department reported 48 cases of child abuse in AJK in 2025, originating from Muzaffarabad and Rawalakot. These cases comprised 18 instances of physical violence, 9 of sexual abuse, 10 of psychological abuse, 7 of neglect, and 4 of exploitation. Girls accounted for 25 cases—slightly more than boys (23 cases). Given that child protection units operate in only two districts, the actual number of cases is likely higher. This underscores the urgent need to expand protection and reporting mechanisms across all ten districts.

In July, a local shopkeeper in Dadyal was arrested and **remanded** in police custody for allegedly sexually assaulting a 14-year-old boy. In December, police in Jhelum Valley arrested a mosque imam on charges of **raping** a nine-year-old girl.

**Child marriage.** Despite AJK Minister Taqdees Gillani's previous commitment to introducing legislation against early and forced marriages, no bill was presented in the AJK Legislative Assembly in 2025. Progress on raising the minimum legal age for marriage remained limited, and the current legal framework still permits child marriage in some circumstances. The enforcement of existing protections also remained weak.

## Transgender persons

AJK has maintained the inclusion of transgender individuals in existing social protection frameworks. However, the lack of region-specific data and targeted interventions continues to limit their visibility.

In February, the AJK Cabinet [approved](#) a PKR 1 billion interest-free loan scheme to support skilled youth—including transgender persons, women, and persons living with disabilities—in establishing businesses.

## Persons living with disabilities

In January, the Special Communications Organization established AJK's [first](#) dedicated freelancing hub for persons living with disabilities in Muzaffarabad. This initiative aims to support their socioeconomic inclusion by providing specialised IT training and digital work opportunities.



*AJK's first dedicated freelancing hub for persons living with disabilities was established.*

## Refugees and internally displaced persons

**Kashmiri refugees.** In May, representatives of post-1989 Kashmiri refugees in AJK expressed concerns about unmet [demands](#), including the establishment of two reserved seats in the AJK Legislative Assembly and increased financial support. They reported that over 9,500 families (approximately 46,000 individuals) continued to live in poor conditions, despite having submitted a charter of demands 18 months prior. The representatives urged progress on resettlement, allowances, and political representation, warning that further action would be taken if these issues were not addressed.

**Afghan nationals repatriated.** In November, authorities in Dadyal [repatriated](#) over 2,000 undocumented Afghan nationals to Afghanistan via the Torkham border following biometric verification. The process was conducted by the police, with support from the National Database and Registration Authority and other agencies. Officials also warned residents against sheltering undocumented individuals, stating that legal action would be taken, and clarified that only those with valid visas and passports were permitted to remain.

# Social, Economic, and Environmental Rights

## Education

In 2025, AJK's education sector experienced both reforms and disruptions. The government focused on improving infrastructure, staffing, and school management. In February, Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq highlighted the need for educational [reforms](#) and innovation, pledging merit-based improvements and support for orphans, including exemption from registration and exam fees.

In July, the AJK government [prioritised](#) resolving teachers' issues, particularly financial concerns and working conditions.

Authorities emphasised the importance of ongoing dialogue with educators to enhance the effectiveness of the education system.

In August, Minister for Higher Education Zafar Iqbal Malik [announced](#) that a comprehensive education package would be introduced in mid-September. This package aimed to address institutional gaps and improve resources in schools and colleges. He noted that the government was investing over PKR 500 million to upgrade college facilities across all AJK districts and that approximately 3,500 education sector jobs were being filled. In October, the government approved the [upgrade](#) of over 15,000 teaching posts, thereby advancing teacher professionalisation.

Under the federal government's Daanish School plan, which aims to provide good-quality residential education to underprivileged students, construction [began](#) on AJK's first Daanish School in Bhimber in January. A second school followed in Harighel, Bagh, in November. Both schools were scheduled to open in 2026.

The University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir faced a severe financial [crisis](#), with a deficit exceeding PKR 1.3 billion due to rising pension costs and stagnant funding. The administration warned that, without urgent government support, the institution's sustainability was at risk.

In May 2025, all public and private educational institutions in AJK, including schools, colleges, and universities, were [closed](#) due to security tensions following cross-border escalation. Two months later, severe weather events, including heavy rains, floods, and landslide risks, [led](#) to further temporary school closures, disrupting learning continuity.

## Health

In 2025, AJK residents remained without access to the federally supported Sehat Card programme, which had previously provided subsidised treatment to millions. The programme was [suspended](#) in AJK and neighbouring regions after the federal government failed to clear outstanding dues. Since March 2024, this suspension has affected over 10 million residents of AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan.



*The construction on AJK's first Daanish School in Bhimber began in January.*

In December, the AJK Cabinet approved a new health card [scheme](#), to be implemented following the finalisation of agreements with an insurance provider. An allocation of PKR 2 billion was made in the annual budget for the programme. Once operational, the scheme was intended to provide free or subsidised treatment in government hospitals.

In December, the Health Department [mandated](#) 24-hour emergency preparedness and upgrades to trauma and maternity care at hospitals along the Line of Control. Hospitals were instructed to maintain adequate staff, medicines, and equipment to manage emergencies in conflict-prone areas.

Also in December, the prime minister [inaugurated](#) a nuclear medicine and oncology centre in Muzaffarabad to provide advanced cancer diagnosis and treatment. The facility aimed to reduce patient travel outside AJK and enhance early detection and care.

## Environment

Climate change is no longer a distant concern for AJK; it affects everyday life in the shape of erratic rainfall, shrinking glaciers, landslides, floods, forest degradation, and water stress. These environmental challenges are threatening ecological stability, livelihood sustainability, and human security in the region.

In February, officials from Pakistan's Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination informed the AJK government that the region had been included in a proposed USD 10 million climate mitigation and adaptation [project](#) supported by the Green Climate Fund. However, as of mid-2025, the proposal to access international climate finance for AJK had not been submitted and remained under review by the Planning and Development Department. Experts noted that strengthening institutional capacity was critical for effectively utilising potential Green Climate Fund resources to address the region's environmental vulnerabilities.

In August, torrential monsoon rains caused severe flooding and landslides across AJK, with multiple deaths [reported](#) and rescue operations launched. Schools were shut, and over 20 people were rescued amid worsening weather conditions.

**Road accidents.** A major road [accident](#), which resulted in the death of six people, occurred on 12 December, when a passenger van travelling from Hajira in AJK to Rawalpindi lost control near Garari Bridge and plunged into the Jhelum River. In May, a tragic road accident in the Tolipir area of Rawalakot [killed](#) five AJK police officials when their vehicle skidded off the road and fell into a ravine. In July, a van carrying schoolchildren and a driver was involved in an accident near Chikar hill station in Neelum Valley. At least 25 children and the driver were [injured](#) when the vehicle skidded off a mountain road into a ravine.

# APPENDICES

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# Appendix 1

## Human rights legislation passed in 2025

This appendix outlines selected laws passed in 2025 that pertain to human rights and constitutional democracy.

### Federal legislation

- *The Constitution (Twenty-Seventh Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Constitution in several ways. It establishes the Federal Constitutional Court, whose decisions are binding on all other courts, including the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The amendment also alters the process for the transfer of high court judges under Article 200 of the Constitution such that they can now be transferred from one high court to another without their consent and without consultation with the chief justice of the Supreme Court and the chief justices of both high courts. The amendment further gives the president absolute power to make such transfers, subject merely to recommendations from the Judicial Council of Pakistan. In addition to restructuring the higher judiciary, the amendment revises Articles 243 and 248, which govern immunity from criminal and civil proceedings. Under these changes, both the president and field marshal now enjoy lifetime immunity from criminal prosecution and arrest, extending the protection previously limited to their term in office.
- *The National Commission for Minorities Rights Act 2025* establishes an independent statutory commission (as envisaged under the 2014 Supreme Court judgment) to protect and promote the social, economic, civil and political rights of religious minorities in Pakistan. The Act empowers the commission to monitor the implementation of constitutional and legal protections, investigate rights violations, recommend policy reforms, provide legal and financial assistance to victims, and ensure the effective inclusion of minority communities across the country.
- *The Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997. The Act expands the government's powers of preventive detention in terrorism-related and serious public order offences. It authorises detention for up to three months (extendable under constitutional safeguards), allows the involvement of the armed forces in issuing detention orders, and provides for investigation through a joint investigation team for a period of three years.
- *The Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 to criminalise the intentional dissemination of false or fake information online that is likely to create fear, panic, disorder, or unrest in the public, although these categories are defined in vague terms. For such offences, it prescribes punishment of up to three years' imprisonment, a fine of up to PKR 2 million, or both. The Act also establishes a powerful regulatory authority, a complaints council, and a tribunal—all of which are subject to disproportionate executive control. Further concerns include the conversion of previously bailable and non-cognisable offences into non-bailable and cognisable ones, widening the scope for coercive action. Additionally, the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency replaces the Federal Investigation Authority, albeit operating without adequate safeguards.
- *The Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Act 2025* aims to prohibit and prevent child marriages in the Islamabad Capital Territory by setting the minimum age for marriage at 18 for both males and females. Its

purpose is to protect children from exploitation, abuse, and trafficking by criminalising child marriage, penalising parents and facilitators, and empowering courts to stop such marriages before they occur.

- *The Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants (Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Act 2018 by significantly increasing penalties and transferring jurisdiction to special courts to enhance enforcement against migrant smuggling.
- *The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons (Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act 2018 by expanding definitions (including sexual exploitation and organised beggary), increasing punishments, and making offences non-compoundable. Its objective is to enhance protection for victims, remove consent as a defence in trafficking cases, ensure stricter accountability for offenders, and improve enforcement to combat human trafficking more effectively.

## Provincial legislation

### Punjab

- *The Punjab Local Government (Amendment) Act 2025* concentrates key powers in the hands of the provincial government that are to be exercised through the bureaucracy, effectively undermining the autonomy of local governments. It also allows the government to conduct the first phase of local body polls on a non-party basis and eliminates the district tier. The voting mechanism provided for limits citizens to casting a single vote rather than multiple votes for different seats.
- *The Police Order (Amendment) Act 2025* establishes a Crime Control Department to investigate crimes of a serious and heinous nature. It effectively creates a parallel police organisation in the province (in addition to the Counter-Terrorism Department and regular provincial police) headed by the additional inspector general of police.
- *The Punjab Acid Control Act 2025* aims to regulate and strictly control the manufacture, import, sale, storage, and transportation of acid in Punjab in order to prevent acid attacks and protect individuals, particularly women, from acid-related violence and harm. It introduces a comprehensive licensing regime for all persons and entities involved in the acid business, making it unlawful to deal in acid without authorisation from the district administration. The Act also establishes criminal liability for negligence and misuse of acid.
- *The Punjab Autism School and Resource Centre Act 2025* ensures the right to education, inclusion, and wellbeing of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) by establishing a dedicated institutional framework in Punjab. It provides for the establishment of an autism school and resource centre to deliver specialised education, therapeutic support, and capacity-building services for children with ASD, while promoting inclusive practices.
- *The Punjab Centre of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism Act 2025* provides for the establishment of a research-based centre of excellence on countering violent extremism in Punjab to address emerging issues and challenges arising from terrorism and subversive activities against Pakistan through narratives of hatred, extremism, radicalisation, intolerance, misuse of charities, and the glorification of terrorism and terrorist organisations, and to diagnose root causes and matters connected therewith.
- *The Punjab Establishment of Special Courts (Overseas Pakistanis Property) Act 2025* aims to protect the rights of ownership and possession of immovable property belonging to overseas Pakistanis by providing a specialised, speedy, and effective judicial mechanism for adjudication of property disputes. It establishes Special Courts dedicated exclusively to hearing property-related petitions filed by overseas Pakistanis, including provisions for electronic filing, virtual hearings, and expedited proceedings.

## **Sindh**

- *The Sindh Centre for Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism Act 2025* aims to counter violent extremism, terrorism, militancy, and subversive activities in the province of Sindh, arising through narratives of hatred, extremism, radicalisation, intolerance, misuse of charities, fund generation for entities of concern, and the glorification of terrorism and terrorist organisations, and to diagnose the root causes and for matters connected therewith.
- *The Anti-Terrorism (Sindh Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997. The Home Department, with the approval of the provincial government, may increase, decrease, or abolish the number of courts as deemed necessary. In such cases, any pending cases in newly created, reduced, or abolished courts shall be transferred by the department to another court with appropriate jurisdiction.

## **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

- *The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government (Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act 2013.
- *The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sentencing (Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sentencing Act 2021. The chief minister may appoint members of the council from serving or retired civil servants, prosecutors, judges, lawyers, and criminal justice practitioners.
- *The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women (Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women Act 2016 to establish and constitute district committees with the approval of the department, to examine and review policies, programmes, and plans for each office in the district and to ensure that they address gender concerns adequately. The district committee shall be headed by a female on such terms and conditions and for such period as may be prescribed in regulations and shall consist of such number of other members as the department may determine, provided that two female members of any of the tehsil local governments of the district concerned shall be added to the district committee.
- *The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Overseas Pakistanis Commission Act 2025* establishes the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Overseas Pakistanis Commission in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to receive and redress the grievances of overseas Pakistanis relating to government agencies and to refer complaints and suggestions of such overseas Pakistanis to the concerned offices.

## **Balochistan**

- *The Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 by empowering law enforcement agencies to detain any person for three months without being charged. Such detention orders can also be issued by the armed forces or intelligence agencies. Inquiries under the Act are held by a police officer not below the rank of superintendent or through a joint interrogation team that is vested with all powers relating to search, arrest and seizure of property.
- *The Balochistan Child Marriages Restraint Act 2025* aims to eliminate child marriage in Balochistan by raising the minimum age for marriage to 18 years for both males and females and strengthening legal protections for children. It criminalises the solemnisation, facilitation, and promotion of child marriages, including by parents, guardians, and *nikah* registrars. The law introduces stricter penalties, including imprisonment and fines, for offenders and empowers courts to issue injunctions to prevent child marriages. It also prioritises the best

interests, health, education, and well-being of children, aligning provincial law with constitutional guarantees and international human rights standards.

- *The Balochistan Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Balochistan Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2016. The government must appoint a woman Ombudsperson for Balochistan on the recommendation of a search committee.
- *The Balochistan Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response Act No. XXII of 2025* establishes an effective system to record maternal and perinatal deaths across Balochistan.
- *The Balochistan Civilian Victims of Terrorism (Relief and Rehabilitation) (Amendment) Act 2025* amends the Balochistan Civilian Victims of Terrorism (Relief and Rehabilitation) Act 2014.

## Legislation by administrative regions

### ***Gilgit-Baltistan***

- *The Gilgit-Baltistan Commission on the Status of Women (Amendment) Act 2024* introduces a significant change in the qualification requirements for its chairperson; the sole qualification for the chairperson is that she must be a woman, with no requirement for educational experience.

# Appendix 2

## Key HRCP activities

HRCP's work is organized around six strategic areas (see below), some of which is cross-cutting work. This work takes the form of (a) human rights monitoring and fact-finding, (b) research, documentation and learning, (c) training and capacity building, (d) convening and alliance building for solidarity, (e) awareness raising, (f) advocacy and lobbying, (g) human rights education and engagement with youth, (h) public interest litigation, and (i) support to survivors of human rights violations. In addition, members hold regular monthly meetings on human rights-based themes of local or national interest. Much of this work is informed by the Knowledge Management System that HRCP maintains, comprising human rights-related news reports dating back to 1990, digitized and categorized according to 20 broad themes and 130 subthemes.

## Combating discrimination and violence against vulnerable and excluded groups

- 17 January, Rajanpur: Outreach meeting on bride trafficking and harmful customary practices.
- 21 January, Multan: Networking visit to women's protection centre and Gender Crime Unit.
- 27 January, Shikarpur: Outreach meeting on countering gender-based violence.
- 12 February, Turbat: Mobilisation meeting to mark National Women's Day.
- 18 February, Gilgit: Advocacy meeting on the formulation of rules of business for the Gilgit-Baltistan Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2019.
- 19 February, Peshawar: Consultation on family laws affecting religious minorities.
- 24 February, Sanghar: Consultation on the prevalence of violence against women and girls.
- 26 February, Islamabad: Meeting of HRCP's national interfaith working group.
- 8 March, Multan: Fact-finding mission on the displacement of a Christian household.
- 10 March, Gilgit: Consultation on accelerating implementation of pro-women laws in Gilgit-Baltistan.
- 13 March, Peshawar: Meeting with the AIG Human Rights.
- 13 March, Lahore: Networking visit to Dastak.
- 18 March, Lahore: Haq Baat podcast series episode release titled 'Revisiting the 2014 Jilani judgment: A forgotten promise?'
- 18 March, Islamabad: Advocacy meeting on strengthening women's rights.
- 20 March, Multan: Advocacy meeting on religious minorities' inheritance rights.
- 24 March, Islamabad: Networking meeting with UNHCR country office.

- 28 March, Karachi: Fact-finding mission on the prevalence of honour killings in Karachi.
- 11 April, Gilgit: Networking visit to Family Health Association of Pakistan.
- 14 April, Lahore: Consultation on the prevalence of gender-based violence.
- 21 April, Gilgit: Meeting on reporting gender-based violence cases in Gilgit-Baltistan.
- 13 May, Hyderabad: Complaints Cell investigation of the threatened eviction of a Hindu community from government land.
- 20 May, Quetta: Networking visit to the office of the Women’s Ombudsperson.
- 19 June, Islamabad: Roundtable on the right to self-perceived identity under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018.
- 19 June, Karachi: Roundtable on the right to self-perceived identity under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018.
- 24 June, Karachi: Networking visit to the Women’s Development Department.
- 24 June: Haq Baat podcast series episode release titled ‘Seen as we are’ on the right to self-perceived identity for transgender persons.
- 15 July, Multan: Advocacy meeting on countering sexual violence against children.
- 17 July, Hyderabad: Outreach meeting on justice, dignity and protection for marginalised communities.
- 17 July, Multan: Fact-finding mission on violations of land rights in Cholistan.
- 21 July, Karachi: Outreach meeting on combating violence against women.
- 22 July, Peshawar: Networking meeting with DPO Mardan, women’s police station and bar association.
- 23 July, Peshawar: Outreach meeting on promoting minority rights.
- 1 August, Quetta: Complaints Cell investigation of allegations of blasphemy against a woman.
- 18 August, Peshawar: Complaints Cell investigation of the alleged abduction and forced conversion of a woman and two children.
- 19 August, Lahore: Launch of HRCP report *Streets of Fear: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2024/25*.
- 12 September, Gilgit: Advocacy meeting on protecting the rights of vulnerable communities.
- 18 September, Lahore: Outreach meeting on promoting the rights of minorities.
- 22 September, Quetta: Outreach meeting on promoting the rights of minorities.
- 27 September, Quetta: Networking visit to women’s crisis centre.
- 30 September, Lahore: Networking visit to women’s crisis centre and bar association.
- 8 October, Lahore: Networking meeting with the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women.

- 22 October, Multan: Networking visit to Dar ul Aman.
- 24 October, Peshawar: Networking visit to Dar ul Aman.
- 6 November, Turbat: Networking visit to women’s police station.
- 17 November, Karachi: Networking visit to Women’s Development Department.
- 18 November, Islamabad: Networking visit to Bedari.
- 20 November, Hyderabad: Rights awareness camp at Government Fatima Girls’ Elementary and Middle Schools.
- 25 November, Turbat: Civil society dialogue on International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.
- 27 November, Hyderabad: Civil society dialogue on International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (University of Sindh, Jamshoro).
- 27 November, Karachi: Civil society dialogue on protecting women and girls from technology-facilitated GBV (16 Days of Activism).
- 29 November, Peshawar: Civil society dialogue on ending digital violence against women and girls (16 Days of Activism).
- 9 December, Lahore: Consultation on the resurgence of honour crimes in central Punjab.
- 9 December, Multan: Consultation on violence against women in South Punjab.
- 10 December, Lahore: Networking visit to Child Protection and Welfare Bureau.
- 11 December, Quetta: Networking visit to anti-rape cell.
- 11 December, Gilgit: Consultation on strengthening child protection measures.
- 18–19 December, Multan: Complaints Cell investigation of the alleged abduction of an individual and reported public torture and humiliation.
- 23 December, Lahore: Networking visit to Child Protection Welfare Bureau.
- 23 December, Gilgit: Roundtable on safeguarding women and girls and tackling gender-based violence in flood-affected areas of Gilgit-Baltistan.

## **Defending the rights of workers and peasants**

- 20 February, Islamabad: Consultation on the right to social security.
- 25 February, Karachi: Consultation on the rights of incarcerated fisherfolk.
- 14 March, Karachi: Public dialogue on the situation of incarcerated fisherfolk and launch of HRCP report *Caught in the Net: A Regional Policy Framework for Incarcerated Fisherfolk in India and Pakistan*.
- 27 April, Multan: Kissan convention on the rights of small farmers and peasants.
- 29 April, Karachi: Consultation on delays in teachers’ salaries.

- 17 May, Multan: Training workshop on labour rights standards and advocacy strategies.
- 28 May, Karachi: Advocacy meeting on salary and pension payments in public sector universities.
- 14 July, Islamabad: Film screening of *Beyond Survival: The Struggle for Dignified Work*.
- 24 July, Karachi: Training workshop on labour rights standards and advocacy strategies.
- 28 July, Hyderabad: Film screening of *Beyond Survival: The Struggle for Dignified Work*.
- 29 July, Multan: Film screening of *Beyond Survival: The Struggle for Dignified Work*.
- 31 July, Gilgit: Film screening of *Beyond Survival: The Struggle for Dignified Work*.
- 1 August, Peshawar: Film screening of *Beyond Survival: The Struggle for Dignified Work*.
- 5 August, Lahore: Film screening of *Beyond Survival: The Struggle for Dignified Work*.
- 6 August, Karachi: Film screening of *Beyond Survival: The Struggle for Dignified Work*.
- 7 August, Turbat: Film screening of *Beyond Survival: The Struggle for Dignified Work*.
- 18 August, Islamabad: Film screening of *Beyond Survival: The Struggle for Dignified Work*.
- 20 August, Lahore: Training workshop on labour rights standards and advocacy strategies.
- 28 November, Lahore: Press conference on the Punjab Labour Code.
- 1 December, Lahore: Consultation on the Punjab Labour Code and its expected impact on workers.

### **Strengthening constitutional democracy and federalism, including electoral reforms**

- 6 November, Turbat: Outreach meeting to mark International Day of Democracy.
- 13 November, Lahore: Consultation on the 27th Constitutional Amendment.
- 6 December, Quetta: Discussion on the 27th Constitutional Amendment.

### **Advancing the rule of law and justice system reforms, including an end to torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings**

- 26 June, Lahore: Consultation on Pakistan’s 2025 review by the UN Committee against Torture.
- 4 September, Karachi: Conference titled ‘Decolonising the Law: Human Rights and Legal Reform in Pakistan.’
- 10 October, Quetta: Consultation on the misconception that the death penalty can make people and communities safer (World Day against the Death Penalty).
- 10 October, Karachi: Demonstration against the misconception that the death penalty can make people and communities safer (World Day against the Death Penalty).
- 10 October, Peshawar: Discussion on the misconception that the death penalty can make people and communities safer (World Day against the Death Penalty).
- 21 October, Lahore: Networking visit to Kot Lakhpat Jail.

- 21 October, Karachi: Advocacy meeting on the right to bail, probation and parole.
- 18 November, Peshawar: Consultation on alternative dispute resolution in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and launch of HRCP report *Beyond the Courts: Analysing Alternative Dispute Resolution in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*.
- 22–24 December, Lahore: Fact-finding mission investigating the prevalence of extrajudicial killings in Punjab.

### **Reclaiming space for civil society**

- 15 January, Islamabad: Consultation on the impact of the ICT Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act 2024.
- 24 January, Karachi: Press conference on curbs on freedom of expression and launch of HRCP report *Harsh Sentences: The State of Freedom of Expression in 2022–2024*.
- 7 February, Multan: Public dialogue on cyber-harassment of journalists.
- 21 February, Quetta: Consultation on curbs on digital freedoms.
- 15 March: Haq Baat podcast series episode release titled ‘Speak freely: Navigating censorship in the press’.
- 3 May, Karachi: Meeting to mark World Press Freedom Day.
- 24 June, Lahore: National working group meeting on the state of freedom of expression.
- 3 July, Islamabad: Consultation on the impact of the PECA (Amendment) Act 2025 on freedom of expression.
- 17 July, Islamabad: Roundtable on the constriction of digital spaces.
- 26–27 July, Lahore: Regional conference titled ‘Bridges, not Borders: Building Regional Rights-Based Movements in South Asia’ held in collaboration with South Asians for Human Rights.
- 22 August, Islamabad: Training workshop on the use of right-to-information laws.
- 24 September, Lahore: Outreach meeting on the state of freedom of expression in Punjab.
- 7 November, Turbat: Advocacy meeting on civic spaces and democratic rights.
- 25 December: Webinar on the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act and its implications.

### **Contributing to climate action and local communities’ right to natural resources**

- 25 February: Haq Baat podcast series episode release titled ‘Earth on the edge: How the climate crisis affects the most vulnerable’.
- 10–15 March, Islamabad: Fact-finding mission on the environmental rights impact of illegal construction in the Margalla Hills National Park.
- 15 May, Hyderabad: Advocacy meeting on the unlawful appropriation of ancestral lands belonging to local communities in Sindh.
- 3 June, Hyderabad: Fact-finding mission on the alleged deaths of protestors during protests against the construction of canals on the Indus River.
- 16 June, Quetta: Roundtable on local communities’ right to natural resources in the context of mineral resources.

- 17 June, Gilgit: Roundtable on local communities’ right to natural resources in the context of mineral resources.
- 18 June, Hyderabad: Roundtable on local communities’ right to natural resources in the context of corporate farming.
- 18 June, Multan: Press conference to launch HRCP report *Unequal Claims: Land Rights in Cholistan*.
- 23 June, Multan: Press conference on local communities’ right to natural resources in the context of corporate farming.
- 25 June, Peshawar: Roundtable on local communities’ right to natural resources in the context of mineral resources.
- 10 July, Hyderabad: Consultation on environmental challenges and government initiatives in Sindh.
- 16 July, Lahore: Civil society dialogue on the environmental impact of the proposed urban transit system in Lahore.
- 22 July, Lahore: Consultation on the environmental impact of the proposed urban transit system in Lahore.
- 7 August, Islamabad: Advocacy meeting on local communities’ right to natural resources.
- 2 November, Multan: Consultation on the post-flood rehabilitation of vulnerable households.

### **Cross-cutting work**

- 2 January: Webinar on the impact of winter gas shortages on low-income communities.
- 15 January, Matiari: Networking visit to the police department.
- 16 January, Lahore: Networking visit to the Tahaffuz Markaz.
- 24–25 January, Hyderabad: Training workshop on fundamental rights and advocacy for rights-based networks.
- 30–31 January, Islamabad: Training workshop on national and international legal frameworks for human rights defenders.
- 10–11 February, Thatta: Training workshop on human rights and advocacy for civil society groups.
- 11 February, Khanewal: Networking visit to the District Police Office.
- 25 February, Karachi: Networking meeting with AIG Human Rights and IG Sindh.
- 27 February, Kasur: Consultation on local human rights concerns.
- 10 April, Multan: Networking visit to Khidmat Markaz.
- 15–16 April, Islamkot, Nagarparkar and Chachro: Three human rights camps.
- 16 April, Hyderabad: Consultation with local administration and civil society on local human rights concerns.
- 16–17 April, Peshawar: Training workshop on human rights and advocacy for civil society groups.
- 25 April, Karachi: Training workshop on national and international legal frameworks for human rights defenders.

- 30 April, Islamabad: Launch of *State of Human Rights in 2024*.
- 7 May, Lahore: National consultation of human rights defenders (meeting of HRCP Council).
- 16–17 May, Karachi: Training workshop on national and international legal frameworks for human rights defenders.
- 20 May, Multan: Advocacy meeting on the role of law and civil society in ending impunity for rights violations.
- 21–22 May, Peshawar: Training workshop on project management and rights-based advocacy for civil society organisations.
- 25 May, Gilgit: Networking meeting with SHO Ghizer.
- 25 May, Turbat: Meeting on local human rights situation.
- 26 May, Gilgit: Networking visit to Ishkoman police station.
- 13 June, Karachi: Press conference on the state of human rights in 2024 in Sindh.
- 28–29 June, Islamabad: Staff planning and review meeting.
- 9–12 July, Quetta: Fact-finding mission to Balochistan to assess the human rights situation, including shrinking civic spaces and enforced disappearances.
- 22 July, Lahore: Press conference on the state of human rights in Punjab in 2024.
- 2 August, Lahore: Haq Baat podcast series episode release titled ‘The state of human rights in 2024’.
- 6 August, Islamabad: Press conference to launch HRCP report *Balochistan’s Crisis of Trust*.
- 16–17 August, Gilgit: Training workshop on constitutional and international human rights frameworks and rights-based advocacy.
- 16 September, Islamabad: Project closing meeting.
- 29 September, Islamabad: Training workshop on national and international human rights law for human rights defenders.
- 15 October, Lahore: Networking meeting with the National Commission for Human Rights.
- 15 October, Hyderabad: Networking visit to the DIG office.
- 4 November, Islamabad: Networking meeting with the National Commission for Human Rights.
- 22 November, Lahore: National consultation of human rights defenders (meeting of HRCP Council).
- 23 November, Lahore: National convention of human rights defenders: 39<sup>th</sup> HRCP annual general meeting.
- 10 December, Karachi: Conference to mark Human Rights Day.
- 18 December, Peshawar: Networking visit with IG Complaints Cell.
- 19 December, Hyderabad: Networking visit to the SSP office.

- 19 December, Hyderabad: Networking visit with SSP Jamshoro.
- 22 December, Islamabad: Networking meeting with the Ministry of Human Rights.
- 29–30 December, Islamabad: Staff planning and review meeting.

## **Publications**

### **State of Human Rights series**

*State of Human Rights in 2024* (English)

*State of Human Rights in 2024* (Urdu)

### **Thematic reports**

*Harsh Sentences: The State of Freedom of Expression in 2022–2024* (English and Urdu).

*Under Siege: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2023/24* (English and Urdu).

*Streets of Fear: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2024/25* (English and Urdu).

*Bridges, Not Boundaries: Building Regional Rights-Based Movements in South Asia*

### **Policy papers and legislative reviews**

*The Promise of Article 9A: Bridging Constitutional Rights and Environmental Governance*

*From Survival to Dignity: The Case for a Living Wage*

*Caught in the Net: A Regional Policy Framework for Incarcerated Fisherfolk in India and Pakistan*

### **International submissions to treaty bodies**

Submission to the UN Committee against Torture for the List of Issues for Pakistan's second periodic report on the implementation of the UN Convention against Torture

### **Fact-finding studies and reports**

*Unequal claims: Land rights in Cholistan*

*November 2024 PTI protests*

*Beyond the Courts: Analysing Alternative Dispute Resolution in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.*

*When Policy Divides: The Human Rights Fallout of Border Closures in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan*

*Caught in the Crossfire: Civilians, Security and the Crisis of Justice in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*

*Closure of Dera Ghazi Khan Press Club by District Administration*

*Balochistan's Crisis of Trust*

*Illegal Construction and Environmental Degradation in the Margalla Hills National Park*

### **Legislation Watch Cell series**

*Punjab Defamation Act 2024*

*Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2025*

*Punjab Labour Code 2025*

### **Jehd-e-Haq series**

HRCP produced and disseminated 12 issues of its monthly newsletter, *Jehd-e-Haq*, which provides coverage of local human rights concerns.

# Appendix 3

## HRCP stands

### Combating discrimination and violence against vulnerable and excluded groups

*Press release: HRCP report investigates Hindu migration from Sindh*

Karachi, 22 January 2025. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)'s fact-finding study *Exodus: Is the Hindu Community Leaving Sindh?* underscores the state's failure to protect a vulnerable minority, with many Hindu families compelled to migrate not only in connection with faith-based violence, but also economic struggles and climate change.

At a meeting held to share the study's findings, HRCP chairperson Asad Iqbal Butt, pointed out that violence and discrimination against Hindu communities in Sindh was underreported. Many such communities felt compelled to migrate overseas, including to India, despite the social cost of doing so.

Rajvir Singh Sodha, special assistant to the Sindh chief minister for human rights, observed that many upper-caste Hindu families were subjected to extortion by criminal gangs amid deteriorating law and order in the province, thereby forcing them to migrate. HRCP Council member Pushpa Kumari highlighted the vulnerability of Hindu women to abduction, forced conversion and underage marriage.

Council member and journalist Sohail Sangi called on the Sindh and federal governments to take prompt steps to create a safer, more dignified environment for the Hindu community, including more effective law enforcement, greater Hindu representation in the police, and consistent dialogue between the government and local Hindu communities.

HRCP's study also recommends collecting credible data on the migration of Hindu individuals and families from Sindh to assess the scale of the problem, deploying specialised law enforcement units in areas with high violence against minorities, and enacting and enforcing legislation against forced conversions and underage marriages.

HRCP Sindh vice-chair Qazi Khizer Habib concluded the meeting with a vote of thanks.

26 January 2025. HRCP reminds the state that it is legally bound under the 2014 Supreme Court judgement to protect not only religious minorities' sites of worship but also their burial sites. In this context, the continued desecration of Ahmadiyya graves—with about 40 tombstones reportedly vandalised in Sheikhpura between 21 and 24 January—is reprehensible. The local administration must be directed to take action against the perpetrators and ensure that hate speech inciting such acts is stringently penalised.

*Press release: HRCP report condemns scale and frequency of mob attacks against minorities*

Islamabad, 26 February 2025. A report released by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) calls attention to continued mob-led assaults on religious minorities' homes and sites of worship, the persistent desecration of Ahmadiyya graves and arbitrary detention of community members, and the vulnerability of Hindu and Christian women and girls to forced conversion. The report also indicates that over 750 persons were incarcerated on charges of blasphemy as of October 2024. At least four faith-based killings are documented, three of which targeted the Ahmadiyya community.

A key finding of *Under Siege: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2023/24* is the widespread registration of blasphemy cases fuelled by disinformation on social media. Analysing two mob-led attacks against the Christian community in Jaranwala and Sargodha, the report documents the scale and frequency of social media posts that incited violence, following allegations of blasphemy.

The report points out that impunity for perpetrators of hate and violence persists. Despite investigations by the Special Branch in Punjab, no effective measures have been taken against networks suspected of entrapping individuals in false blasphemy cases. The report notes some positive developments, however, including occasional judicial relief to suspects and victims of faith-based violence.

The report was presented at a meeting of HRCP's National Interfaith Working Group, which was instituted as a platform for collective action and advocacy for all religious minorities and sects.

Members of the working group underlined the need to introduce at least procedural changes to discriminatory laws that affect religious minorities disproportionately. They proposed a constitutional amendment giving religious minorities the right to hold the office of president and prime minister. Members also called attention to the bigoted role of Muslim clergy in district peace committees, inadequate compensation for victims of mob-led attacks, and the need for a legal aid mechanism supporting persons accused of blasphemy.

Another concern raised was that of large-scale religious conversions among poor communities and the lack of space for religious minorities' graveyards. Other recommendations included the need for pro-minority legislation to be vetted by the human rights ministry rather than the religious affairs ministry, and for religious minorities' marriage laws to be enforced. Members also called for affirmative action to create greater political space for religious minorities, including through a minorities' caucus in Parliament.

Concluding the meeting, HRCP Council member Farhatullah Babar endorsed the institution of a commission to investigate the entrapment of people by far-right lawyers' groups on allegations of blasphemy.

*18 April 2025.* HRCP is appalled by reports that an Ahmadi man has been allegedly lynched in Karachi, following an orchestrated attack by a far-right religious party on a colonial-era Ahmadi place of worship in the Saddar area. This failure of law and order is a stark reminder of the continued complicity of the state in the systematic persecution of a beleaguered community.

Earlier in March, dozens of Ahmadi worshippers were arrested in Lahore simply for carrying out their religious rites, while the desecration of graves and sites of worship continues unabated. The Ahmadiyya community is incessantly denied the right to dignity, life and freedom of worship. This must cease if Pakistan is to meet its international human rights obligations. The perpetrators of the attack in Saddar must be swiftly traced, arrested and prosecuted without caving in to pressure from the far right to release those responsible.

*Press release: Urgent action needed to protect farmers in Derek Abad, Kot Addu*

*Lahore, 13 May 2025.* An HRCP fact-finding mission, carried out earlier in March, has called attention to the alleged injustice and neglect faced by small farmers in Derek Abad, Kot Addu, many of whom belong to the Christian community and are now being evicted by local land mafias. The mission was conducted in response to a complaint received from the pastor of Church Derek Abad, who alleged that local land grabbers were attempting to deprive the Christian community of land to which the latter had a legitimate claim, which amounted to faith-based discrimination.

The mission has found an alarming rise in land grabbing by local land mafias and a consistent failure by the state to uphold court rulings that protect these vulnerable farmers. These include a 1983 directive from the Punjab Board of Revenue, which recognises the community's right to the agricultural land they farm. Similarly, a 1995 directive from the deputy commissioner of Muzaffargarh's office states that nine *chaks* (547, 548, 552, and 584 to 589) were in the possession of the Christian community, contingent on the settlement of arrears, which have reportedly since been paid. The farmers informed the mission that their writ petition was pending in the Lahore High Court, which had issued a stay order to prevent any evictions.

Farmers who spoke to the mission said they were still awaiting land allotment letters, following judgments in their favour. HRCP is concerned that in the absence of such documentation, these farmers will lose the little land they currently cultivate. This would leave them vulnerable to forced displacement and without a source of income, increasing their risk of falling deeper into poverty.

HRCP urges the Punjab government to probe the matter immediately and issue land allotment letters to all eligible farmers in Derek Abad. The government must also take decisive legal action against land mafias and individuals involved in unlawful evictions and provide urgent protection to the affected families to ensure that they can live and work without fear of reprisal. As Christians, this community is doubly vulnerable and deserves recognition, legal protection and restitution for decades of state neglect.

17 May 2025. HRCP strongly condemns the murder of three individuals in Bajaur district, including two women who were killed in a suspected honour-related attack. Such acts of violence are a gross violation of the right to life and reflect deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. HRCP urges the authorities to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation, ensuring that the perpetrators are held accountable under the law and the incident treated as a non-compoundable offence. The state must become a party in all such cases.

18 May 2025. HRCP welcomes the passage of a bill prohibiting child marriage within the Islamabad Capital Territory. Criminalising the marriage of individuals under 18 and introducing penalties for parents, guardians, clerics, and marriage registrars is a vital step toward protecting children's rights. This is an important step towards aligning domestic law with Pakistan's international commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We urge the Senate to pass this bill as well and the provincial governments of Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to adopt similar legislation to ensure that all children, regardless of location, are safeguarded from early and forced marriage—a practice that violates their rights to health, education and dignity.

23 May 2025. HRCP expresses grave concern over sectarian discrimination in Chitral, where the local administration's recent decision to ban Ismaili butchers in Garam Chashma from supplying meat raises serious questions about equal economic opportunity for all citizens. Such one-sided measures, particularly in a region traditionally known for inter-communal harmony, risk fanning the flames of fragmentation, potentially leading to violence.

All Pakistani citizens have equal constitutional rights, regardless of their sectarian affiliation. Undermining these rights due to religious pressure sets a dangerous precedent and threatens the fabric of pluralism. We urge the district administration to uphold its responsibility to protect all communities equally, and to ensure that decisions are rooted in law and fairness—not appeasement. Any failure to do so could deepen existing divides and erode public trust in the rule of law.

29 May 2025. HRCP is deeply alarmed by the alleged abduction, sexual assault and murder of 14-year-old Sahil Gulab in Pasni, Balochistan, on 4 April 2025. Despite the registration of an FIR, the investigation has made little progress—

reportedly due to the alleged influence of powerful individuals. HRCP urges the Balochistan government to conduct an impartial and thorough inquiry and ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable. We call on the authorities to safeguard the rights of Sahil's family, guarantee due process and prevent impunity in this deeply troubling case.

*30 May 2025.* HRCP is deeply concerned by the Council of Islamic Ideology's attempt to obstruct the passage of the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill. This much needed legislation, passed by the Parliament, sets a 'long-overdue legal standard by criminalising child marriage and protecting minors—especially girls—from exploitation and abuse. Framing child protection as incompatible with religion undermines the rights of every child. HRCP urges the state to uphold its constitutional and international obligations and ensure this vital bill is implemented without capitulating to lopsided interpretations.

*4 June 2025.* HRCP is deeply concerned by the Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA)'s recent letter, urging the Punjab police to prevent members of the Ahmadiyya community from observing their religious rituals during Eid. This action, coupled with the requirement that Ahmadis should submit affidavits disavowing their beliefs, violates the community's constitutional right to freedom of religion or belief under Article 20 as well as their right to equal citizenship.

HRCP fears that this continued institutionalised discrimination against the Ahmadiyya community will empower vigilante actors and extremist groups to enforce a de facto ban on the community's freedom of movement and public participation. The LHCBA must withdraw this directive. Moreover, the Punjab government should instruct the local authorities to protect members of the Ahmadiyya community at a time when they are especially vulnerable to vigilantism.

*10 June 2025.* HRCP expresses grave concern over the dismal conviction rate in cases of violence against women and children in Punjab in 2024. Press reports suggest that despite over 60,000 FIRs registered, only 924 suspects were convicted, while more than 2,300 were acquitted—exposing deep flaws in police investigations and accountability. This undermines Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's stated commitment to protecting vulnerable groups.

HRCP calls for the urgent reform of police practices, prosecution procedures, and meaningful support for survivors seeking justice. This should include more effective trauma-informed and gender-sensitive investigation techniques, performance benchmarks for police officers based on the quality of investigations, expanded support systems for survivors and district-wise performance reports—accessible to the public—on prosecution and conviction rates.

*20 June 2025.* HRCP commends the Sindh Human Rights Commission for taking suo moto notice of the alleged abduction and forced conversion of a young Hindu woman and two teenage girls from Shahdadpur in Sanghar district. The continued incidence of forced conversions violates not only victims' freedom of religion or belief but also puts their liberty and bodily autonomy at risk. We endorse the required investigation and reiterate our longstanding demand for the Sindh government to legislate against forced conversions.

*24 June 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the inflammatory language used by a far-right group against Senator Pervaiz Rashid, labelling an elected representative a 'traitor' for defending freedom of religion or belief for all citizens. Equally alarming is the narrative that equates religious minorities—particularly the already vulnerable Ahmadiyya community—with anti-state elements.

Such statements not only violate the principles of freedom of expression but also fuel extremism and deepen existing social divisions. The continued scapegoating of religious minorities in the name of ideology is a grave threat to Pakistan's democratic foundations. We urge the state to uphold the rule of law and take decisive action against such incitement to violence.

21 July 2025. HRCP calls on the authorities to urgently reconsider the deportation order of Adeel Abbasi, a disabled Indian national undergoing neurological treatment in Pakistan. His wife, Shagufta Shakil—a Pakistani national and his sole caregiver—fled India with him in 2021 after facing threats and harassment following the Pulwama attack in 2019. Despite timely visa extension applications, administrative delays and alleged lost paperwork have now resulted in a deportation notice contrary to earlier assurances of a long-term visa. Since Mr Abbasi is medically unfit to travel, we urge the authorities to cancel his exit order and issue him a long-term visa on humanitarian grounds.

31 July 2025. HRCP is appalled by reports that a minor has been presented before an anti-terrorism court in Turbat on charges of ‘terrorism’ for allegedly sharing the speech of a rights activist on social media. The misuse of anti-terror laws in this manner reflects a gross violation of child rights and due process. We demand the immediate withdrawal of charges, a thorough review of the FIR and accountability for the officials responsible for this alarming overreach.

14 August 2025. HRCP deplors the recent derogatory remarks made by a cleric against places of worship belonging to minority communities, in this case, Christian churches. Such statements not only demean the faith of millions of citizens but also incite hatred and undermine Pakistan’s constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion or belief under Article 20. We urge the state to ensure accountability for hate speech in all its forms by implementing the 2014 Supreme Court judgement and call on civil society to reject narratives that endanger peaceful coexistence and equal citizenship.

*Press release: Religious minorities must be treated as equal citizens*

Lahore, 19 August 2025. A seminar held by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has called attention to an alarming rise in violence against religious minorities in the last year. Launched at the seminar, HRCP’s report, Streets of Fear: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2024/25, documents a deeply troubling year for religious freedom and minority rights in Pakistan.

The report highlights an alarming rise in violence against religious minorities, including targeted killings of Ahmadis and the demolition of protected places of worship. In a chilling development, two individuals accused of blasphemy were extrajudicially killed by the police while seeking protection from hostile mobs. Such incidents underscore the urgent need for reform within law enforcement and accountability mechanisms.

The report also draws attention to persistent forced conversions and underage marriages of Hindu and Christian girls in Punjab and Sindh, exposing the systematic failure to enforce child marriage restraint laws. Meanwhile, the rise in hate speech—ranging from threats against the chief justice of the Supreme Court to public vilification of elected representatives—points to shrinking civic space and emboldened extremist elements.

HRCP notes with concern the increasing tilt of bar associations towards positions aligned with extremist religious groups—a trend that undermines the independence of the legal profession. The report also documents allegations of collusion by state institutions in cases where several hundred young men and women were entrapped in accusations of blasphemy and extorted.

Despite these challenges, the report acknowledges limited progress, including the passage of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2025 and provincial legislation establishing research-based centres of excellence on countering violent extremism.

Among other recommendations, HRCP strongly urges the federal government to establish an inquiry commission based on the findings of the National Commission for Human Rights with respect to entrapment in allegations of blasphemy. The authorities should also monitor those seminaries that are frequently involved in the conversion of underage girls.

Law enforcement forces also need to be better equipped to protect individuals from mob violence, with vital police training in intelligence gathering, crowd management, reading early signals of riots, and community policing. Moreover, swift action should be taken against those who instigate such mobs. As recommended in HRCP's previous reports, the government must urgently establish an independent statutory national commission dedicated to the rights of minorities, ensuring equal representation for all religious communities.

*14 September 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the reported decision by community elders in Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, to form a committee aimed at expelling transgender persons from the district. Such actions are unconstitutional, discriminatory and amount to incitement to violence against an already marginalised community. No citizen can be deprived of the right to reside, work or earn a livelihood anywhere in Pakistan on the basis of gender identity.

We call on the provincial and district authorities to immediately ensure the safety and dignity of transgender persons in Swabi and uphold their fundamental rights under the Constitution and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018.

*23 September 2025.* HRCP is deeply alarmed by reports that many Afghan refugees who are ill now avoid hospitals in Pakistan for fear of arrest by the police, while some hospitals have reportedly refused treatment to patients who do not hold valid visas. Particularly distressing are reports that even pregnant women in need of urgent medical attention are too afraid to seek help. Such practices not only violate basic human dignity but also contravene Pakistan's constitutional and international human rights obligations, especially given the risk that Afghan women and girls face if forced to return to a country practicing gender apartheid.

*Open letter: Call for immediate enactment of the National Commission for Minorities Bill*

*1 October 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expresses grave concern over the prolonged delay in enacting the National Commission for Minorities Bill, which was approved by Parliament on 12 May 2025 and subsequently sent for presidential assent. Nearly five months later, there is still no clarity on why this crucial step has stalled.

Pakistan has long pledged to protect the rights of religious minorities under its Constitution and through international human rights commitments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its obligations under the European Union GSP+ framework. Yet, the absence of a statutory, independent, adequately resourced and inclusive National Commission for Minorities continues to leave communities vulnerable to discrimination, persecution and exclusion.

The bill—as approved—reflects broad civil society consensus. It proposes a non-religiously specific commission mandated to safeguard the rights of all minorities, not only the interests of individual communities. Its membership, which includes representation not only from religious minority communities but also national human rights institutions and human rights experts, has been designed to ensure broad representation. HRCP urges the government, however, to ensure that all religious minorities and sects, especially those consistently marginalised and vulnerable to far-right violence, be given the option to be part of this body beyond mere tokenism.

We urge the government to act with transparency, disclose any recommendations received from the presidency and avoid backpedalling on provisions that have already secured consensus among civil society and minority representatives. The timely enactment and operationalisation of this commission are essential to uphold Pakistan's constitutional guarantees, rebuild trust between citizens and the state, and meet the country's international human rights obligations. Any further delays risk worsening the climate of exclusion and fear faced by religious minorities.

11 October 2025. HRCP deplores yesterday's attack on an Ahmadiyya place of worship in Rabwah, Punjab. The attacker inflicted gunshot wounds on six people, leaving one of them reportedly in critical condition. We are disappointed by the state's attitude towards ensuring the protection of its citizens, irrespective of their faith or ethnicity. HRCP reiterates its demand for the comprehensive implementation of the Supreme Court's 2014 Tasadduq Jilani judgement, which protects citizens of all faiths as well as their worship sites.

2 December 2025. HRCP welcomes in principle the passage of the National Commission for Minorities Bill 2025, which fulfils a long-overdue constitutional obligation first underscored in 2014 by the Supreme Court. Noting that the legislative debate and amendments reflected some political friction, we intend to review the bill closely but emphasise that the proposed commission must protect all religious minorities equally, without exception or hierarchy. Moreover, its mandate and powers must align strictly with constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion or belief and nondiscrimination for all minority citizens.

## **Defending the rights of workers and peasants**

21 January 2025. HRCP is deeply concerned to learn that the Balochistan government has revoked the registration of at least ten workers' associations, following a Balochistan High Court order. We pray to the court to review this decision in light of Article 17 of the Constitution, which protects all citizens' right to freedom of association and is integral to upholding workers' rights.

12 February 2025. HRCP is greatly concerned by reports from the Karachi Union of Journalists that 375 media personnel, earlier employed by Bol News, have still not received their outstanding dues despite repeated directions from PEMRA since August 2024 to settle all such payments. Some have waited as long as nine years for their arrears to be paid.

While the right to receive fair wages and on time is protected under the country's labour laws, such instances have become regrettably common in the media - to the detriment of journalistic standards. The Bol News management and all other media houses that have withheld current and former employees' payments must settle all dues immediately.

*Press release: Fulfilling the right to social security is about political will, not resources*

Islamabad, 20 February 2025. At a roundtable held earlier today, HRCP urged the state to fulfil the right to social security under Article 38 of the Constitution by protecting vulnerable and low-income workers against income insecurity in the form of old age, unemployment, illness, injury, childbirth and maternity.

Speaking at the event, Chaudhry Shaukat of the Pakistan Workers United Federation underscored the need for all employers to issue their workers with valid appointment letters and ensure that they were registered with the EOBI. Khurshid Alam, vice-commissioner of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Employees Social Security Institution, said that the lack of implementation of the minimum wage was also cause for concern.

Director (Administration) of the Punjab Employees Social Security Institution Malik Farrukh Mumtaz said that the definition of a worker should be consistent in both the EOBI and social security institutions, irrespective of their wages. Umer Hayat, secretary general of the National Labour Federation in Quetta, observed that hundreds of coal miners in Balochistan remained unaware of their right to access EOBI provisions, including injury and disability allowances. Maqsood Ahmed, representing PILER, said there was an urgent need for a tripartite conference to secure the right to social security.

Zahoor Awan, a member of the governing body of the ILO, pointed out that within the EOBI, only organisations with at least five workers were eligible for social security, leaving millions of small enterprises with fewer employees unregistered.

Misbah Ullah Khan, a member of the NIRC, underscored the situation of employees who lacked permanent status despite having worked for many years.

HRCP Council member Farhatullah Babar said that overlooking informal workers' right to social security amounted to 'criminal negligence' on the part of the state. He also recommended that Article 38 of the Constitution be made a fundamental right.

HRCP vice-chair Islamabad Nasreen Azhar concluded the roundtable by observing that capitalist modes of production had entrenched the oppression of workers in this context.

*24 February 2025.* HRCP notes that the Bol News management has responded to its post of 12 February 2025, which drew attention to a complaint received from the Karachi Union of Journalists (KUJ) alleging that a large number of former Bol News media personnel had not received their dues.

We would like to clarify that this post was not intended to single out a particular media outlet. Rather, it clearly calls on 'all other media houses that have withheld current and former employees' payments' to settle their dues, although the KUJ complaint referred specifically to Bol News employees.

Nor has HRCP in any way insinuated that Bol News has failed altogether to resolve the alleged nonpayment of staff arrears. We acknowledge their management's claims that Bol News is in the process of resolving this matter. We trust that it will do so as fairly and transparently as possible in the interest of upholding workers' rights.

*2 March 2025.* HRCP is distressed by the death of Asif Javed, a worker formerly employed by a multinational, who recently self-immolated outside the Lahore High Court, reportedly in protest against the alleged manipulation of a court case pertaining to the reinstatement of workers—including Mr Javed—who had been sacked in 2015. We share the grief of his family and friends.

HRCP has already noted that numerous labour disputes remain unresolved for years due to procedural delays and, in many cases, corporate influence. We demand a high-level inquiry into Mr Javed's death as well as the alleged corporate manipulation of his court case. Moreover, the state must ensure that labour laws are strictly enforced at all national and multinational workplaces with significant penalties for companies that exploit legal loopholes to delay justice.

*18 May 2025.* HRCP stands in solidarity with the faculties of higher education institutions, including those in service and retired, whose longstanding dues and pensions are not being released. The former faculty members of Federal Urdu University are a case in point. HRCP acknowledges the role played by senators Masroor Ahsan and Bushra Anjum Butt in raising the issue in the upper house but the issue remains unresolved. We demand its immediate redressal.

*Press release: HRCP demands living wage for workers*

*Lahore, 18 June 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is deeply concerned by the implications of the 2025–26 federal budget for the economic and social rights of the country's most vulnerable communities. Adopted under a strict austerity framework aligned with IMF conditionalities, the budget offers little protection for low-income groups already struggling with the prolonged inflationary crisis from 2022 to 2024.

Although the government has marginally reduced income tax rates for salaried individuals, this relief is insufficient to restore the eroded purchasing power of working-class households. More troubling is the decision not to raise the federal minimum wage, which remains at PKR 37,000 per month—a figure that fails to meet the basic cost of living for a family of six. Even in provinces like Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the minimum wage has been raised to PKR

40,000, the increase does not compensate for inflation-induced losses in real income. Moreover, enforcement remains alarmingly weak, with 80 percent of industries in Sindh reportedly not complying with minimum wage laws—a trend mirrored nationwide.

The allocations for key social sectors—health (0.96 percent of GDP), education (1.06 percent), and social protection (1.1 percent)—fall far below international benchmarks and regional comparators. In contrast, countries like India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh spend significantly more as a percentage of GDP on these essential services.

Speaking at a press briefing held by HRCP earlier today, economist Dr Fahd Ali pointed out that a time when 45 percent of Pakistanis live below the poverty line and 88 percent earn less than PKR 75,000 per month—the amount advocated by HRCP as a living wage—this budget signals a worrying lack of commitment to social justice and human dignity.

HRCP secretary-general Harris Khalique said that he was ‘deeply disappointed’ by the finance minister’s failure to raise the minimum wage while having announced an ‘exponential and disproportionate increase’ in parliamentarians’ salaries.

HRCP Punjab vice-chair Raja Ashraf said that the provision of healthcare and education was the state’s responsibility, while HRCP senior manager Feroza Batool pointed out that women were disproportionately affected by anti-poor budgets. ‘The budget’s implications for ordinary citizens’ economic and social rights must be debated in minute detail before it is passed,’ added HRCP treasurer Husain Naqi.

HRCP urges the federal and provincial governments to reconsider their fiscal priorities and ensure that ‘economic recovery plans centre the rights and needs of Pakistan’s most marginalised.’ Without adequate investment in public health, education, and a meaningful social safety net, the promise of equal citizenship remains hollow for millions. The right to a life with dignity cannot be balanced against fiscal restraint—it must be at the heart of it.

*27 August 2025.* HRCP stands in solidarity with the workers of MI Industries in Karachi, who have been denied the right to unionise for collective bargaining and most of whom are not registered for social security benefits. Labour is the engine of prosperity in any economy. HRCP demands that the authorities protect labour rights.

*25 October 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the abduction of 18 labourers and the arson attack on a construction camp in Khuzdar’s Naal area—the second such incident in Balochistan in recent days. The targeting of internal migrant workers underscores the region’s worsening security situation and the state’s failure to protect its citizens.

The abducted labourers must be recovered safely and those responsible held to account. The government must prioritise workers’ safety on development projects and address the root causes of insecurity and impunity that continue to endanger civilians across Balochistan.

## **Strengthening constitutional democracy and federalism, including electoral reforms**

*8 August 2025.* HRCP expresses deep concern over the ECP’s decision to disqualify several opposition leaders and lawmakers, including National Assembly Opposition Leader Omar Ayub Khan and Senate Opposition Leader Shibli Faraz, following their convictions in connection with the 9 May 2023 riots.

While HRCP consistently condemns violence, vandalism of public property and attacks on state installations—whether pertaining to the 9 May riots or when carried out at any time by any other group—it is equally concerned that due process and fair trial guarantees under the Constitution must be scrupulously upheld. Reports of mass trials, including by military courts, sweeping convictions, and lengthy prison sentences raise serious questions about the impartiality and transparency of proceedings.

The right to political participation is a cornerstone of any democracy. Disqualifying elected representatives under Article 63(1)(h) must not be used in a manner that undermines political pluralism or silences dissent. HRCP urges the judiciary to ensure that appeals are heard fairly and without delay and calls on the state to ensure that political competition is resolved through democratic means, not by curtailing civic and political space.

9 November 2025. HRCP deplores the manner in which the 27th Amendment to the Constitution is being tabled in Parliament. The government's haste—including the absence of any meaningful consultation with the political opposition, the wider legal fraternity and civil society—calls into question the very intention behind moving this amendment bill.

Its reported content, with numerous changes designed to reconfigure the judicial system, the office-specific concentration of power ceding more civilian space, and lifelong immunity to certain state offices, has alarmed constitutionalists, the legal fraternity, human rights defenders and many others who believe in the independence of the judiciary and the tenets of civilian supremacy in a democracy.

HRCP plans to hold an urgent consultation with a wide range of stakeholders to examine the proposed amendment and its far-reaching impact on the country's polity and society.

### **Advancing the rule of law and justice system reforms, including an end to torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings**

9 January 2025. HRCP demands the immediate release of former MNA Ali Wazir, who was recently transferred to Gadani Central Jail in Hub. Mr Wazir has been in and out of jail on contrived and ambiguous charges since 2020.

Given his forceful advocacy for the rights of Pashtun communities in marginalised areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and despite his stated belief in constitutionalism, human rights and peaceful protest, Mr Wazir has been subjected to arrest, criminal charges and denial of bail more than any other parliamentarian. His demands with respect to justice and accountability for vulnerable communities must be met immediately.

17 January 2025. HRCP deplores those organised groups that are allegedly responsible for having ensnared over 450 people through fabricated accusations of blasphemy across the country, reportedly with the complicity of some law enforcement personnel.

Reports received by HRCP corroborate the findings of an NCHR report from October 2024 as well as the allegations made recently by victims' families at a press conference in Islamabad. These indicate that organised groups—some with strong ties to far-right sections of the legal fraternity—share blasphemous content online with unsuspecting people and then file false cases to blackmail the families of the accused. Neither the government nor the judiciary can afford to ignore such systematic entrapment on this scale.

This calculated use of the blasphemy laws for profit signals criminal intent, implying that the victims of such groups deserve relief while the groups themselves must be brought to book. Reports that victims have also been subjected to torture in custody must also be investigated and the perpetrators held accountable.

27 January 2025. HRCP demands a full-scale inquiry by the Sindh government into the deaths of at least three people, who were killed in the village of Jani Junejo near Sanghar in crossfire following an altercation between two rival groups. Another 19 people were reportedly injured, some critically, in the incident. Those responsible for opening fire must be brought to book irrespective of their political standing.

19 February 2025. HRCP strongly condemns the targeted killing of at least seven passengers who were offloaded from a Lahore-bound bus in Barkhan, Balochistan, and shot dead by unidentified armed men based on their national identity cards. This is at least the fifth such incident in a year and follows on the heels of a roadside bomb blast in Harnai in which 12 coal miners were killed.

The continuing cycle of violence in Balochistan must be brought to an end and the perpetrators brought to book. The state must immediately resolve the longstanding reasons for such violence through uninterrupted, purposeful political dialogue with all stakeholders, with a focus on realising the constitutional rights of the people of Balochistan.

27 February 2025. HRCP is greatly concerned by reports that a Pakistani Hindu citizen, Prakash, was allegedly abducted by unidentified persons near Wagah on 21 February while on his way to India with family members to attend a religious festival. Prakash's family have claimed that this occurred during the immigration process. We demand that he be recovered immediately and, at the very least, his family informed of his whereabouts.

5 March 2025. HRCP is greatly alarmed by the reported surge in civilian and security force casualties, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where yesterday's attack by militants in Bannu has resulted in significant loss of life, including among women and children. In Balochistan, militants have targeted civilians with increasing frequency, while the killing of a police officer in Karachi, also at the hands of militants, reflect the state's consistent failure to protect citizens' right to life and security.

The federal and provincial governments must implement a concerted strategy based on intelligence and evidence rather than indiscriminate crackdowns, while ensuring the right to fair trial and the need for accountability.

10 March 2025. HRCP shares the grief of a family in Dera Ismail Khan whose 11-year-old daughter was forced into a *wani*-based marriage by a local panchayat, following which her distraught father committed suicide. The panchayat had compelled him to pay a large sum of money as well as giving up his daughter as 'reparation' for a perceived insult to a local influential figure.

This egregious violation of the Supreme Court's 2019 judgment declaring that jirgas have no authority to adjudicate on civil or criminal matters must be taken seriously by the provincial government and a judicial inquiry initiated into the continued practice of traditional alternative dispute resolution and its impact on the vulnerable.

The girl's safety must be secured and she must be allowed to remain with her family. While several of those responsible for handing down this verdict have been brought to book, all the perpetrators must be traced and punished in accordance with the law.

12 March 2025. HRCP is gravely concerned by the ongoing crisis in Balochistan, where the Peshawar-bound Jaffar Express was hijacked by militants after blowing up the rail track and several hundred passengers taken hostage. We demand that all hostages be released immediately.

We strongly urge all relevant stakeholders to forge an urgent rights-based, pro-people consensus on the issues faced by citizens in Balochistan and to find a peaceful, political solution. HRCP condemns violence against unarmed civilians and noncombatants by the state as well as nonstate actors.

19 March 2025. HRCP is gravely concerned by reports that Baloch tribal elder Nasir Qambrani, the son of renowned poet Nadir Qambrani, was disappeared forcibly by unidentified persons from his residence in Quetta several days ago.

His family allege that Mr Qambrani was previously subjected to enforced disappearance and illegal detention in 2015

and subsequently released in 2018. HRCP strongly condemns this systematic violation of Mr Qambrani's right to liberty and demands that he be safely recovered immediately and his perpetrators held to account.

*26 March 2025.* HRCP is alarmed by reports of the abduction of journalist A. Waheed Murad by unidentified persons in Islamabad last night. His elderly mother-in-law was also reportedly manhandled. Mr Murad's whereabouts remain unknown at present. We demand that he be traced and recovered safely and promptly and his abductors brought to book.

*30 March 2025.* HRCP seeks an impartial and urgent inquiry into the alleged attack and subsequent loss of civilian lives near Mardan, including those of a woman and a child. We share the grief of the families and reiterate our demand that the federal and provincial governments restore the peace and security of citizens immediately.

*29 April 2025.* HRCP is alarmed by allegations of torture perpetrated against incarcerated members of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee, particularly Beebow Baloch, who was allegedly subjected to physical assault by jail officials while resisting an attempt to transfer her from Quetta. Ms Baloch was later traced to District Jail Pishin. Such treatment violates both national legal frameworks as well as Pakistan's obligations under the Convention Against Torture, to which it is a state party. We also call for an independent inquiry into these allegations.

*20 May 2025.* HRCP is alarmed by reports that several children were killed and others injured, allegedly in a suspected munitions drop in Hurmuz village, North Waziristan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. While the source of the strike remains unclear, the reportedly continued use of drones in civilian areas is deeply concerning and constitutes a grave violation of human rights, including the fundamental right to life. HRCP supports the local community's demand for an independent investigation into the incident.

*21 May 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the heinous attack on a school bus in Khuzdar, Balochistan, which has reportedly killed several children and left dozens injured. The deliberate targeting of schoolchildren—innocent noncombatants in every sense—is a red line that must never be crossed. This act violates the most basic tenets of humanity and international humanitarian law.

The continued failure of the federal and provincial governments to prevent such attacks highlights serious and persistent lapses in providing security to common citizens. The state has an obligation to uphold law and order by strengthening civilian institutions and the rule of law—not through indiscriminate kinetic responses.

HRCP calls for the immediate identification and prosecution of the perpetrators and their enablers through lawful means. We also stress the urgent need for a meaningful political dialogue to address the deep-rooted problems of representation, governance and resource distribution in Balochistan.

*26 May 2025.* HRCP expresses deep alarm over the situation in Moro, Sindh, where a recent protest against enforced disappearances, corporate farming and the construction of new canals on the river Indus led to casualties and injuries among protestors as well as police. The burial of a deceased political activist under police supervision as well as subsequent arrests and charges of sedition against protestors and their families are gravely concerning. While HRCP does not condone violence by any actor, the disproportionate use of force by the police and criminalisation of dissent is unlawful. We demand an immediate, impartial inquiry into these incidents.

*28 May 2025.* HRCP is deeply concerned over continued reports of suspected drone and quadcopter strikes in different areas across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which have allegedly led to deaths and injuries among civilians, including minors. A recent such attack occurred reportedly while young people were playing volleyball. This is a tragic indictment of the

region's persistent insecurity. Local residents allege that ordinary people become collateral damage in such incidents. HRCP demands an urgent and transparent investigation into such repeated incidents and calls on the state to prioritise civilian protection in conflict-affected regions.

2 June 2025. HRCP strongly opposes any resolution or decision by bar associations, including in Mansehra, that prohibits lawyers from representing individuals accused of blasphemy or related offences. Such actions are in direct violation of the fundamental principle of due process, which guarantees every person the right to a fair trial and legal representation, regardless of the charges they face. Denying legal counsel—including to those who may have been wrongfully accused—would not only undermine the justice system but also encourage mob mentality and extrajudicial actions. In a democratic society, the legal community must uphold the rule of law, not abandon it.

5 June 2025. HRCP is deeply concerned by the Balochistan Assembly's adoption of the Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act 2025. While national security is a legitimate concern, the bill grants sweeping powers of preventive detention for up to three months without formal charges—an unacceptable measure that undermines the fundamental rights to liberty, due process and protection from arbitrary arrest.

The law further empowers security agencies to issue detention orders and lead inquiries through joint investigation teams, while the proposed oversight boards—which include military personnel—are tasked with reviewing detainees' ideological and psychological profiles. This framework violates the civilian law enforcement domain, blurring the lines of accountability. Moreover, giving law enforcement unchecked authority to search, arrest and seize material during 'inquiries' is liable to misuse and erodes constitutional safeguards.

We urge the provincial government to reconsider this legislation and ensure it aligns with Pakistan's constitutional obligations under Article 10 and international human rights commitments under the ICCPR, to which Pakistan is a state party.

*Press release: HRCP demands judicial inquiry into Moro protest incident*

Lahore, 6 June 2025. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has called for an immediate and independent judicial inquiry into the events surrounding the 20 May protest in Moro, district Naushahro Feroze, Sindh, where a police-protester confrontation reportedly resulted in multiple injuries on both sides and fatalities among protesters; several vehicles were also reportedly set ablaze.

An HRCP fact-finding team visited Moro to investigate the events that unfolded after demonstrations erupted along the National Highway against the proposed construction of canals from the Indus River and the allocation of land for corporate farming. According to community testimonies, the protest—led by local residents, including members of the Hari Mazdoor Ittehad group—was peaceful until the police resorted to violent means. One protester, Irfan Laghari, was critically injured and later died in a Hyderabad hospital. His family maintains he had no affiliation with nationalist groups and had been demonstrating peacefully.

Shortly after the confrontation, Lanjar House—the residence of the provincial home minister—was set on fire. According to Zahid Laghari's family, private individuals armed with heavy weapons, reportedly deployed to protect the house, opened fire. Zahid, who was not participating in the protest but happened to be nearby on personal business, was allegedly shot in the head and later succumbed to his injuries. He was 27 years old and his wife is currently expecting their first child.

The HRCP team visited Goth Bajrani Laghari, the victim's village, where they collected testimonies from the families of the deceased, local journalists and teachers. The team attempted to meet police officials at the Moro police station, but

the station house officer declined to comment, stating that only the senior superintendent of police (SSP) could speak on the matter. The SSP could not be contacted on account of suspended cellular services. The team also visited Lanjar House, but no one agreed to meet them.

The mission was informed that over 400 individuals have allegedly been falsely implicated in criminal and terrorism cases and that dozens—including political workers—have either been arrested or are missing. In several cases, first information reports (FIRs) have been registered in districts far from Moro, including Shikarpur and Mirpurkhas. The FIR for the arson at Lanjar House names senior opposition figures. Since 20 May, mobile services in the area have remained suspended and a visible police presence continues to create an atmosphere of fear among residents.

Given that the incident occurred in the constituency of the provincial home minister and that political rivals have been named in the FIRs, HRCP questions the impartiality of the police-led investigation announced by the Sindh inspector general of police. We therefore urge the Sindh government to announce an independent judicial inquiry without delay to establish the facts, ensure accountability and uphold the rights of all citizens involved.

*19 June 2025.* It has been brought to HRCP's notice that five Baloch Yakjehti Committee activists detained in Quetta District Jail under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance 1960 since March 2025—have allegedly been prevented from signing power-of-attorney letters (*vakalatnamas*) by the jail superintendent. Obstructing the execution of these letters effectively denies Mahrang Baloch, Beebarg Baloch, Sibghatullah Shahji, Beebow Baloch and Gulzadi Baloch the constitutional rights to legal counsel of their own choosing, due process, and equal protection under law. We urge the Balochistan government as well as the inspector general of prisons to take immediate action and ensure that the detainees are allowed to sign vakalatnamas without any obstruction or pressure.

*27 June 2025.* HRCP notes the formation of a government committee to explore the possibility of reviving the jirga system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. While alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms have gained legal traction in other provinces, the committee should ensure that any such system incorporates human rights safeguards. ADR must be inclusive—particularly of women and marginalised groups—and uphold fairness, transparency and accountability.

Given jirgas' history of exclusion and rights violations, including the promotion of harmful customary practices, meaningful reform should strengthen independent judicial institutions while ensuring that any alternative models align with constitutional protections and the rule of law.

*2 July 2025.* HRCP expresses deep concern that Assistant Commissioner Tump Muhammad Hanif Noorzai remains missing, following his abduction by unknown armed men in Kech district, Balochistan, on 3 June. His continued disappearance is deeply distressing for his family and the wider community. We urgently appeal for his release on humanitarian grounds, while urging the authorities to intensify their efforts to secure Mr Noorzai's safe and immediate recovery.

*10 July 2025.* HRCP condemns the killing of Maulana Khan Zeb, a leading peace campaigner and political leader of the ANP, who was assassinated by unknown assailants in Bajaur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, earlier today. We demand a swift and impartial inquiry into this tragic incident. The federal and provincial governments must ensure that normalcy returns to the terror-stricken districts of the province and that people who have suffered for decades can lead their lives peacefully and without fear.

*11 July 2025.* HRCP is deeply grieved by the killing of at least nine passengers who were ordered to disembark from Punjab-bound coaches and were subsequently shot near the border between districts Loralai and Zhob in Balochistan. This wanton violence against labourers and common citizens is deplorable and must cease immediately. HRCP

demands that the federal and provincial governments move urgently to seek a fair political solution to the long-standing issues in Balochistan.

*17 July 2025.* HRCP condemns the armed attack on musicians near Kalat who were travelling to Quetta from Karachi to sing at a wedding reception. Reportedly, three qawwals were killed on the spot and 13 sustained injuries. Such cowardly acts of indiscriminate killing serve no legitimate cause. HRCP shares the grief of the families of victims and demand an immediate inquiry into the incident.

*23 July 2025.* HRCP notes with concern the convictions delivered by an anti-terrorism court in Lahore against senior PTI leaders, including Dr Yasmin Rashid, Omar Sarfraz Cheema, Ejaz Chaudhry, and others who have already served over two years in prison in connection with the events of 9 May 2023.

The timing and severity of these convictions, resulting in 10-year sentences, risk being perceived as politically motivated rather than legally transparent. While HRCP upholds the need for accountability in instances of violence or unlawful conduct, the use of anti-terrorism legislation against political figures in this context raises questions about proportionality and adherence to due process. This amounts to undermining public confidence in the justice system.

*31 July 2025.* HRCP deplors the mass sentencing of PTI leaders and workers by an anti-terrorism court in Faisalabad, including ten-year prison terms for several senior party figures. While those involved in violence must be held accountable, the use of anti-terror laws to try civilians raises serious due-process concerns and is symptomatic of the continued erosion of democratic values. We reiterate that all those accused must receive fair, transparent trials in civilian courts and urge the state to refrain from using draconian laws to stifle political dissent.

*28 July 2025.* HRCP deplors the loss of life in Tirah, Khyber district, where a protest over the killing of a minor girl, allegedly in a mortar strike, escalated into violence, resulting in several deaths and injuries. We condemn the use of lethal force against civilians and urge an immediate, transparent judicial inquiry into the incident.

While people's right to peaceful protest must be upheld, HRCP does not condone violent demonstrations. The situation in Tirah underscores the urgent need for accountability, clear communication and a rights-based approach to security and conflict resolution in the region.

*31 July 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the brutal 'honour' killing of Javed Naji—vice-chairman of the Awami Action Committee in Gilgit-Baltistan—and a married woman in Tangir, Diamer. That Naji was murdered in the presence of his mother and wife underscores the barbarity of the act. This marks the second such incident in Tangir within a week, with two women and two men killed in the name of 'honour'. We demand an immediate and transparent investigation, swift prosecution of the perpetrators and urgent action to dismantle the culture of impunity surrounding honour-based violence in Gilgit-Baltistan.

*13 August 2025.* HRCP reiterates its concern over the National Assembly's passage of an amendment to the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997, reinstating provisions that allow the government, law enforcement and security agencies to detain individuals considered suspicious for up to three months.

Preventive detention without charge or trial—based on vague criteria—risks undermining due-process guarantees under Articles 10 and 10A of the Constitution and opens the door to abuse. HRCP urges legislators to reconsider this measure and ensure that counterterrorism efforts comply with Pakistan's constitutional human rights obligations.

*20 August 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the unlawful raid carried out in Quetta in the early hours of 20 August 2025, in which nearly 50 personnel of the Counter-Terrorism Department, accompanied by men in plainclothes, forcibly entered

the home of Justice (R) Zahoor Ahmed Shahwani, former vice-chair HRCP Balochistan, without presenting any legal warrant or authorisation. During the raid, his son, Zameer Ahmed Shahwani—currently serving as state counsel—was arrested and taken away without due process.

This brazen disregard for constitutional safeguards against arbitrary arrest and unlawful entry into private premises is deeply alarming. Such actions erode public trust in law enforcement and undermine the rule of law. Mr Shahwani must be released immediately and the officials involved held accountable.

*23 August 2025.* HRCP is alarmed by the recent arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan’s two nephews on charges related to their alleged involvement in the 9 May 2023 PTI-led protests, some of which turned violent. The fact that the arrests were made 27 months after the incident is difficult to understand for any independent observer, having occurred at a time when the trials of other accused persons have been long underway or already concluded.

HRCP is deeply concerned about the further backsliding of citizens’ rights and expresses its disappointment in the policing and legal system, particularly when it comes to dealing with political opponents. We demand that the authorities ensure transparency and the rule of law in all such matters.

*3 September 2025.* HRCP condemns the attack on the political rally of the Balochistan National Party, which has caused heavy casualties of many political workers. We seek an immediate and impartial inquiry into the incident and reiterate our demand for the restoration of law and order in the province and the initiation of a purposeful dialogue between all stakeholders, leading to genuine political representation and the realisation of rights, the right to life being the first to be protected.

*7 September 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the recent targeted killing of lawyer Khalid Khan, president of the Dargai Tehsil Bar Association, in Malakand district on 28 August 2025. Such attacks on members of the legal community gravely undermine the rule of law and erode public confidence in justice and accountability. HRCP calls on the authorities to ensure that the JIT formed to investigate Mr Khan’s murder carries out an urgent and impartial inquiry and bring the perpetrators to justice, while providing protection to his family.

*18 September 2025.* HRCP deplores the unlawful detention and reported torture of lawyer Sarfaraz Majeed, a member of the Kech Bar Association in Balochistan. According to reports, Mr Majeed was stopped by security forces on his way to court, assaulted and held in unlawful custody for several hours. Such treatment constitutes a blatant violation of the law and contributes to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among citizens, particularly in a conflict-affected regions such as Balochistan. We call for an immediate, impartial and transparent investigation into the incident.

*22 September 2025.* HRCP is deeply shocked to learn that a number of civilians, including children, have been killed, allegedly as a result of aerial bombing in Tirah, Khyber district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. We demand that the authorities carry out an immediate and impartial inquiry into the incident and hold to account those responsible. The state is constitutionally bound to protect all civilians’ right to life, which it has repeatedly failed to secure.

*22 September 2025.* HRCP condemns the physical assault against journalist and anchor Imtiaz Mir, which has left him badly wounded. The perpetrators must be brought to book immediately. We note with concern that Pakistan remains one of the most unsafe countries for journalists, compounded by increasing restrictions on freedom of expression. The authorities must act to protect journalists who are simply doing their jobs.

*7 October 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the armed attack on the Qazi Court in Kharan, Balochistan, in which assailants set the court building on fire and abducted Judge Muhammad Jan. Such acts of violence strike at the heart of the justice system, threaten judicial independence and endanger those who uphold the rule of law.

We urge the authorities to ensure the safe and immediate recovery of the kidnapped judge, hold the perpetrators accountable through fair and transparent investigation, and take measures to protect judicial officers and court staff across the province.

*11 October 2025.* HRCP calls for the immediate recovery of 15-year-old Hammal Kareem, who was allegedly abducted by security personnel on 2 September 2025 after they forcibly entered his home in Tump, district Kech. His family claim that he was initially detained at the Frontier Corps camp in Tump and subsequently transferred to Turbat. Since then, however, his whereabouts remain unknown. He must be released safely into his parents' custody immediately.

*13 October 2025.* HRCP is alarmed at the growing normalisation of alleged police encounters in Punjab, where extrajudicial killings appear to have become a substitute for the rule of law. Since January 2025, the province has witnessed more than 500 such encounters, claiming over 670 lives—more than in any other province—according to data collected by HRCP. This pattern appears to have become entrenched since the formation of the Crime Control Department (CCD) as a special wing of the Punjab Police in February 2025.

We are deeply concerned that the CCD, originally intended to curb crime, has evolved into a parallel police force with sweeping powers to register FIRs, detain suspects and carry out lethal operations against hardened criminals. The circumstances surrounding the recent killing of murder suspect Khwaja Tareef (alias Teefi Butt) in Rahim Yar Khan underscores this disturbing trend.

HRCP stresses that no agency can be above the law: even the most serious offenders are entitled to due process and a fair trial under the Constitution.

*14 October 2025.* HRCP is deeply concerned by the events that have unfolded since 8 October, culminating in violent clashes between security forces and the far-right TLP, leading to an operation in the early hours of 13 October, in Muridke, district Sheikhupura, Punjab, and causing multiple deaths and casualties among protesters as well as police personnel.

We are equally concerned by the lack of transparency and credible, independent information surrounding the operation, providing which was the government's responsibility. While state authorities have neglected to address the TLP's consistent role in promoting hate speech and inciting mob violence against individuals and groups, particularly religious minorities, this does not justify the alleged use of excessive force.

Both the Constitution as well as international law mandates that security forces, even when dispersing violent assemblies, use the minimum necessary force. The government must ensure that criminal acts are investigated promptly and the perpetrators duly prosecuted.

HRCP believes that the time has come for the state to commit to creating an inclusive and plural society, which warrants an honest and transparent shift in policy as well as long overdue structural reforms. Only then can we hope to resolve the deeper malaise of extremist religious violence.

*18 October 2025.* HRCP expresses grave concern over accounts of indiscriminate violence in Zehri, Khuzdar district, Balochistan, where military operations against insurgents are reportedly underway. Several people, including young children, were killed when a funeral gathering allegedly came under attack. Local sources also indicate that the movement of people has been severely restricted, with several towns now effectively declared no-go areas.

We call on the federal and provincial governments to initiate an immediate, transparent and independent inquiry into such incidents causing loss of civilian life. Journalists and neutral observers must also be allowed to visit the affected areas to verify the facts on the ground.

20 November 2025. HRCP is concerned by reports that the sisters of former Prime Minister Imran Khan were manhandled outside Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi while attempting to attend a scheduled meeting with the incarcerated leader. Witness and media accounts indicate that family members and party representatives were engaged in a peaceful protest when police intervened, allegedly using physical force. The rights of prisoners' families to meet their relatives and the right to peaceful assembly are protected under national and international human rights law. HRCP calls for a transparent inquiry and urges authorities to ensure the rights, safety and dignity of all involved are fully respected.

1 December 2025. HRCP expresses serious concern over reports regarding restrictive detention conditions and alleged limitations on family meetings for former prime minister Imran Khan. Allegations indicating that he has been unable to meet close relatives, associates or legal counsel warrant urgent clarification, as regular and unhindered access to immediate family and counsel is a fundamental safeguard against isolation and misuse of detention powers.

We call on the Government of Pakistan and the Punjab Home Department to ensure that all practices comply with constitutional due-process protections and international standards for humane treatment.

15 December 2025. HRCP expresses grave concern over the detention of 11 Pakistani fishermen by the Indian authorities near Kajar Creek off the Sindh coast, including two minor boys. Detaining children for inadvertent maritime boundary crossings—where borders are neither visible nor clearly demarcated—violates the principles of Arts. 9 and 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which both Pakistan and India are states parties.

HRCP notes that impoverished fishing communities on both sides of the border routinely suffer due to unresolved maritime disputes and the lack of effective humanitarian mechanisms. The distress caused to families in Ibrahim Hyderi reflects the broader human cost of these practices. We urge the immediate release and repatriation of the two children on humanitarian grounds and call on both governments to adopt child-sensitive, rights-based protocols to prevent such detentions in the future.

22 December 2025. HRCP reiterates its demand for an end to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances without delay and calls for the rule of law to be upheld in all circumstances across the country. No individual should be deprived of liberty without due process nor held incommunicado or beyond the protection of the courts.

In this context, we are deeply concerned by the recent case of Shahnawaz Khoso, a medical student at Indus Medical College in Tando Muhammad Khan, Sindh, who was reportedly offloaded from a bus near Dadu by unidentified persons over a week ago and whose whereabouts remain unknown. As with all other such cases, Mr Khoso must be presented before a court immediately.

29 December 2025. HRCP expresses grave concern over the continued practice of arbitrary arrests and detention, and enforced disappearances, which Pakistan must urgently confront. The alleged abduction of University of Peshawar students Habib Wazir and Adnan Wazir, missing since 12 November 2025 after attending a government-convened grand jirga, exemplifies how due process is routinely bypassed.

Equally alarming is the alleged disappearance of former MNA Nisar Panhwar and his son Mohsin Panhwar, reportedly taken by men in plainclothes in Karachi on 22 December 2025, despite earlier assurances following Mr Panhwar's brief release.

These cases sit alongside the detention of women and minors in Balochistan, including such activists as Mahjabeen Baloch, a disabled student, and at least six others in November and December 2025 alone.

Such acts violate constitutional guarantees and inflict irreversible harm on families and communities. We reiterate that the state must ensure transparency, accountability for perpetrators and unconditional access to justice for all affected families.

## Reclaiming space for civil society

*Press release: Civil society deplores ICT law curbing right to peaceful assembly*

Islamabad, 16 January 2025. At an advocacy meeting held earlier today, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) deplored the Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act 2024 as a 'draconian' law. HRCP secretary-general Harris Khaliq pointed out that domestic laws curbing freedom of peaceful assembly contravened not only Articles 8 and 16 of the Constitution, but also Pakistan's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Lawyer Asfand Yar Warraich, who was commissioned by HRCP to assess the law from a rights perspective, explained that it had crippled freedom of peaceful assembly by relegating assemblies to designated areas out of reach of their intended audience and barring spontaneous assemblies through an onerous permission regime. Most alarmingly, he said, the law had imposed harsh penalties on participants of 'unlawful' assemblies and set forth no clear criteria for dispersal by force.

Journalist Hamid Mir observed that such laws had been used disproportionately against Baloch rights activists despite court orders to the contrary. Islamabad Police AIG Tahir Kazim argued that the law in question reflected 'reasonable restrictions' on citizens' right to assemble peacefully but agreed that such laws should not be 'misused'.

Human rights ministry representative Imtiaz Ali observed that while the law was being used to contain the government's political rivals, it had serious implications for all citizens' right to peaceful assembly. Digital reporter Asad Ali Toor noted that the law was especially detrimental to marginalised groups. Journalist Matiullah Jan urged political parties to take a stand against laws that infringed on people's fundamental rights.

Members of civil society strongly criticised the state for applying 'double standards' by ceding space to violent mobs associated with the far right, while clamping down on peaceful protests organised by ordinary citizens demanding their constitutionally guaranteed rights.

Concluding the session, HRCP Council member Farhatullah Babar observed that it was critical to strike a balance between the need for public order and the right of all people to assemble peacefully. He also pointed out that the law in question had been passed in undue haste and without parliamentary deliberation, adding that unless people were able to address legislators directly through peaceful assemblies, they could not hope to resolve their concerns democratically.

18 January 2025. HRCP demands the immediate release of, and withdrawal of charges against peaceful protestors, including women, belonging to the Baloch Yakjehti Committee, who have been taken into custody by the Sindh police.

24 January 2025. HRCP demands the immediate release of the students arrested and charged by the police in Gwadar for running a book stall. The books confiscated must also be returned immediately. The authorities must cease such cowardly and irrational acts of repression against its own citizens.

*Press release: PECA bill curbs fundamental rights*

Lahore, 25 January 2025. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is deeply concerned by the passage of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Bill 2025 in the National Assembly. Given the state's poor record on protecting freedom of digital expression, the bill, if it becomes law, is likely to become yet another means of targeting

political workers, human rights defenders, journalists and dissidents by effectively penalising criticism of state institutions.

The bill's emphasis in Section 26-A on 'fake or false news' is troubling. The text of the bill does not satisfactorily define 'fake news' and instead refers to vague outcomes such as public 'fear, panic or disorder or unrest'. Moreover, the prescribed punishment of up to three years' imprisonment is excessive.

The institution of four new authorities to regulate digital content—thereby imposing disproportionate multi-layered controls—will have a chilling effect on freedom of expression and opinion. The fact that appeals to the proposed Social Media Protection Tribunal will go directly to the Supreme Court and that this tribunal will comprise government-appointed members is also cause for concern because it implies diminished judicial oversight and greater executive control.

HRCP reminds the government that digital freedoms have already been over-regulated, whether through law or policy, to the detriment of people's right to information and connectivity, both of which are integral to a twenty-first century democracy. The bill must be debated openly and extensively in the Senate before it proceeds any further.

*Press release: Coalition for freedom of expression formed in response to PECA law*

*Islamabad, 30 January 2025.* At a consultation held earlier today by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), participants deplored the passage of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (PECA) (Amendment) Act 2025 on the grounds that it would stifle freedom of expression further, not only for the press but also for ordinary social media users.

Attending the consultation were Mian Rauf Atta, president of the SCBA, senior SCBA lawyer Abid Saqi, PFUJ president Azfal Butt, RIUJ president Tariq Ali Virk, RIUJ general secretary Asif Bashir Chaudhry, WAJAH founder Fauzia Kulsoom Rana and PPP senator Zamir Hussain Ghumro. Journalists Hamid Mir and Matiullah Jan, HRCP Council members Nasir Zaidi, Farhatullah Babar and Nida Aly, and former HRCP chairperson Afrasiab Khattak also spoke on the law.

The consultation was moderated by HRCP co-chair Munizae Jahangir and included presentations on the law by Bolo Bhi director Usama Khilji, AGHS representative Ans Waqi, and lawyer Salahuddin Ahmed. Participants observed with great disappointment that those political parties that had condemned previous iterations of PECA had lost no time in passing the PECA (Amendment) Act. They demanded that all such parties clarify their position on freedom of expression and censured them for capitulating to the establishment in this matter.

While participants acknowledged that fake news posed numerous risks, they said that such consequences must be balanced against the constitutional right to freedom of expression. Vague and over-broad definitions of 'fake news' could moreover be used to suppress dissent. The fact that the law now allowed any person to file a complaint without necessarily being an aggrieved party left it open to wide misuse.

The consultation concluded with a resolution to form a grand coalition for freedom of expression, including the PFUJ, SCBA, HRCP, Digital Media Alliance for Pakistan, Freedom Network, IRADA, WAJAH, Bolo Bhi and the Anchors Association of Pakistan.

*Press release: HRCP calls for independent inquiry into PTI November protest*

*Lahore, 3 February 2025.* A fact-finding report released by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has concluded that, contrary to the federal government's claims, the PTI-led protest in Islamabad on 26 November 2024 led to loss of life allegedly among protesters as well as reported deaths among security personnel.

A high-level fact-finding mission has documented oral testimonies from state representatives, the PTI leadership, reporters on the ground and the families of seven people who were allegedly killed during the protest. The mission is deeply concerned by allegations that the hospital administrations and police withheld the bodies of victims until their families agreed not to pursue any legal action. While the hospital administrations refused to speak with the fact-finding team, accounts from journalists and the families of alleged victims suggest that these hospitals may be concealing information.

While the right to peaceful assembly is constitutionally guaranteed, it must remain within the bounds of the law. Reports indicate that some protesters carried slingshots, tear gas shells and firearms spotted on occasion. At the same time, the administration demonstrated a clear lack of proficiency in managing the protest and used force excessively and disproportionately. Although the mission attempted to contact the interior minister to inquire about the use of live ammunition against protesters, he was unavailable to meet the team.

The mission has expressed alarm over the mainstream media's blackout of the entire event, which may have resulted from state coercion or self-censorship. The media should have been allowed to assess the situation on the ground without hindrance and report the facts.

The report urges the government to immediately announce an independent, impartial inquiry into these events, involving the families of the alleged victims, the PTI and other political stakeholders.

*5 February 2025.* HRCP is gravely concerned by reports that individuals and groups with far-right affiliations have threatened members of civil society, including prominent journalist and HRCP co-chair Munizae Jahangir, for drawing attention to the entrapment of young people by religious extremists.

HRCP believes this is an attempt to deflect attention away from the commission proposed by the Islamabad High Court to investigate instances of entrapment through false allegations of blasphemy—a matter already documented by the state.

We have written to the Punjab chief minister and federal interior minister to express our concern, calling on the provincial and federal governments to take immediate action.

*14 February 2025.* HRCP is appalled by the ongoing smear campaign against Hum News anchor Mona Alam, who has been made the target of malicious fake videos and images. While the FIA has taken up the matter, it is also important for the wider journalist community and civil society generally to express solidarity with Ms Alam who finds herself in a situation familiar to all too many women journalists. We urge the FIA to track down the perpetrators and hold them to account as swiftly as possible.

*22 February 2025.* HRCP is alarmed by reports from Pattan Development Organisation that the Islamabad police, along with two magistrates, raided and sealed the home of their national coordinator Sarwar Bari, evicting his wife and an elderly female relative. This amounts to the violation of Article 14(1) of the Constitution. Such tactics of intimidation against citizens are unacceptable. The matter should be heard immediately in a court of law.

*26 February 2025.* HRCP stands in solidarity with Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and supports its charter of demands for ensuring freedom of expression, a fundamental freedom guaranteed under the Constitution of Pakistan.

*5 March 2025.* HRCP notes with serious concern that the government has continued to withhold public sector advertisements from some newspapers such as Dawn, deemed critical of its policies, as underscored recently in the

PFUJ's Islamabad declaration. At the same time, other newspapers appear to have been favoured with significant government advertisements including those presented as news in violation of journalistic norms.

We remind the government that it is constitutionally bound to protect people's right to information as well as their freedom of expression. Tacit censorship in the form of financial pressure must not be allowed to control narratives or undermine press freedom. By threatening the survival of independent journalism and critical editorial policies, the government is doing itself—and the people it claims to represent—an enormous disservice in the long term.

*7 March 2025.* HRCP is concerned by the FIR lodged against nearly 100 students in Jamshoro, Sindh, who were participating in a protest on 4 March against the development of new canals on the Indus River for purposes of additional irrigation in Punjab. We also deplore the use of disproportionate force against the protestors, after the police attempted to prevent them from gathering on the Indus Highway.

We remind the Sindh government that under international best practices, nonviolent assemblies that obstruct public roads should not be dispersed with force solely on the basis of the disruption they cause. The FIR must be withdrawn and those still in custody released.

*20 March 2025.* HRCP demands the immediate release of Farhan Mallick of Raftar Media, based in Karachi, and a transparent investigation into the matter. The government must check the overreach of agencies such as the FIA and uphold the right to freedom of expression as enshrined in Article 19 of the Constitution.

*21 March 2025.* HRCP is gravely alarmed by the escalating situation in Quetta, Balochistan, where reports have emerged of increasing casualties among protestors who had assembled to demand an end to enforced disappearances and the illegal use of force by the authorities.

The authorities must immediately cease to use force against peaceful protestors and release those arbitrarily detained. The use of disproportionate and unlawful kinetic means by the state must cease immediately to pave way for a purposeful political solution.

*22 March 2025.* HRCP strongly urges the state to avoid taking excessive steps to curb dissent. The arrest of BYC leaders and the reported suspension of connectivity in Quetta are knee-jerk reactions that will exacerbate the frustrations of ordinary people.

All political parties, including those with legitimate support in Balochistan, must take the lead and engage with all stakeholders in the province, including civil society and academia, to resolve the province's long-standing crisis. The Balochistan government must immediately release Mahrang Baloch and other BYC leaders and workers and initiate an urgent dialogue.

*24 March 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the arrest of Baloch rights activists and their supporters who have been detained in Karachi for holding a peaceful protest against the treatment meted out to their allies belonging to the BYC in Quetta.

Those arrested, including Sammi Deen and other civil rights activists, must be released immediately. We urge the Sindh government to allow peaceful assemblies to proceed unhindered.

*28 March 2025.* We are deeply concerned by the notice issued to rights activist and academic Taimur Rehman by the FIA, summoning him in connection with an online defamation case. HRCP believes the complaint has been lodged on frivolous grounds and should be withdrawn immediately.

9 April 2025. HRCP strongly condemns the inquiry launched by the FIA against well-respected human rights defender and former senator, Farhatullah Babar, following allegations of financial corruption. Based on a private citizen's complaint, the timing of this probe raises serious doubts as to its legitimacy, given that Mr Babar—who has been the driving force behind some of Pakistan's most progressive legislation and serves on HRCP's governing council—has long been a vocal critic of state policies and institutions.

This is yet another example of the state weaponising legal machinery to silence dissent and harass those who speak up. It is also a dangerous precedent, especially when the individual in question has contributed significantly to Pakistan's democratic and human rights causes. HRCP stands in solidarity with Mr Babar and demands that the inquiry be withdrawn and Mr Babar be issued a public apology by the state.

15 May 2025. HRCP is deeply concerned by the reported crackdown on political activists in Gilgit-Baltistan ahead of a grand jirga being organised by the Awami Action Committee to address the region's rights issues and to safeguard its land and mineral resources.

Those reportedly arrested—including three senior political leaders, Ehsan Ali, Mehboob Wali and Masood ur Rehman—should be released and no further raids or arrests carried out without just cause. Nor should the threat of arrest be used to suppress people's fundamental right to express their opinions freely.

19 May 2025. HRCP is deeply concerned by the crackdown on political activists in Hyderabad, Sindh, and the reported institution of FIRs under antiterrorism laws. The raid on public intellectual Taj Joyo's home is deeply disappointing. The Sindh government must investigate allegations of police manhandling and release the detained activists.

*Press release: HRCP calls for repeal of PECA (Amendment) Act*

Islamabad, 29 May 2025: A report released by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has underscored serious flaws in the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) (Amendment) Act 2025 and called for the law to be repealed entirely without accepting any coercive application of the law's previous iterations from 2016 and 2023.

Produced under HRCP's Legislation Watch Cell, the report's findings were presented by digital rights activist Fariha Aziz at an advocacy meeting held earlier today as part of a European Union-funded project. Introducing the meeting, director Farah Zia said that HRCP had noted with alarm the recent spate of repressive laws, particularly those impinging on civic spaces and being used to suppress dissent and freedom of expression.

Ms Aziz, who has authored the report, pointed out that the law criminalises vague categories of 'fake and false information' with penalties of up to three years' imprisonment. It also establishes a powerful regulatory authority, a complaints council, and a tribunal—all of which are subject to disproportionate executive control. Further concerns include the conversion of previouslyailable and non-cognisable offences into non-ailable and cognisable ones, widening the scope for coercive action. Additionally, the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency has replaced the Federal Investigation Authority, operating without adequate safeguards.

Speaking at the meeting, journalist Adnan Rehmat emphasised that the state was responsible for protecting individuals' rights; he advocated strongly for the decriminalisation of free speech and suggested engaging with political parties through broad-based representation.

Journalist Saleem Shahid criticised the PECA (Amendment) Act for violating the constitutional rights to free speech and information and urged journalists and civil society to form a united front to uphold these freedoms. Former BNP-M legislator Sanaullah Baloch identified freedom of expression as integral to a strong parliament.

HRCP co-chair Munizae Jahangir drew attention to hyper-regulated connectivity in Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan as well as the pressure under which journalists in these regions, as well as in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, operate. In this context, journalist Asad Ali Toor recounted his experience of finding out that his family's bank accounts had been frozen, allegedly in connection with his work—a practice that Ms Jahangir referred to as 'economic terrorism.'

Digital rights activists Usama Khilji and Aftab Alam advocated the formation of a national coalition comprising civil society members, journalists and human rights defenders to engage with political parties on the rapid escalation in curbs on freedom of expression and opinion. Supporting this proposal, HRCP Council member Farhatullah Babar also underscored the need to counter disinformation while protecting the broader right to free speech and information.

Concluding the meeting, HRCP Islamabad vice-chair Nasreen Azhar proposed that such a coalition should also identify all such laws in conflict with Constitutional guarantees of fundamental freedoms.

*30 May 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the arbitrary arrest of human rights defenders Tahira Abdullah and Samina Omar in Islamabad, who were taken into custody outside the National Press Club ahead of a protest in solidarity with the people of Gaza. Given that neither of them was part of any public gathering at the time, their actions in no way constitute a violation of S. 144 as the police have alleged. We are also concerned to learn that they are allegedly not being given access to their legal counsel. Both Ms Abdullah and Ms Omar must be released immediately and unconditionally.

*3 June 2025.* HRCP demands the immediate release of journalist Sher Nadir Shahi, who is in custody in Gilgit on charges of incitement against the state under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act—a law that HRCP has time and again asked to be repealed in its present form. A first-information report was filed against Mr Shahi and several others on 7 May for protesting against the government's perceived neglect of the region. Subsequently, he was detained after the local courts revoked his pre-arrest bail. Such misuse of cybercrime laws does not address digital harm. Rather, it criminalises dissent and sets a troubling precedent for freedom of speech.

*27 June 2025.* HRCP expresses serious concern over the arbitrary arrest of over 100 protestors of the Government Employees Grand Alliance, who had assembled peacefully outside the Balochistan Assembly in Quetta on 24 June to convey their charter of demands to lawmakers. The protestors were dispersed using tear gas and batons, reportedly injuring teachers, clerks and journalists.

We are concerned by reports that those detained have been sent to Machh Jail (which is intended to house convicted prisoners and not those under trial) and been denied access to medical care as well as their families and legal counsel. All citizens, including public sector workers, have the right to assemble peacefully and voice their concerns.

We urge the authorities to ensure that all detained protestors are allowed immediate access to their families and legal counsel and provided medical care. Moreover, legal restrictions, such as Section 144, must not be used to justify excessive force or to deny people their rights under the law.

*Press release: HRCP warns against efforts to constrain its work*

*Lahore, 2 July 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expresses deep concern over the steadily shrinking space for human rights defence work in the country.

In the past few months, HRCP has faced a series of arbitrary, illegal and unjustified actions that have impeded the organisation's ability to carry out its mandate. HRCP's work is based on the rights of all citizens and persons, as enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan and the country's international commitments and obligations.

We note with disappointment that persons claiming to represent the security apparatus have obstructed the organisation of HRCP events by informing either the venue or our staff that a no-objection certificate was required for indoor meetings, although this is not a legal requirement. Two recent examples include a high-level consultation in Islamabad on regions facing militancy and terrorism and their impact on human rights, and a roundtable in Gilgit on local communities' right to natural resources. Ironically, both the relevant legislators and government departments had confirmed their participation on both occasions.

There have also been incidents across the country where our membership and staff faced harassment and intimidation. For the first time in HRCP's decades-long history, its chairperson was taken in for questioning by the police in Karachi.

We have reason to believe that other actions are not merely coincidental. These include an attempt to seal our office premises in Lahore in 2024, the removal of the office's electricity meter, and a bank's refusal to release our funds, citing a State Bank of Pakistan directive, the existence of which was categorically denied by the latter in writing when asked by a court.

We urge the authorities to respect the fundamental freedoms of association, assembly and expression, and to ensure that human rights defenders can operate without fear of reprisal or undue interference. Civil society organisations such as HRCP are essential if Pakistan wishes to develop into a state that upholds the rights of all its citizens and remains responsible for their wellbeing. More broadly, human rights work helps create a more tolerant and inclusive society—something that Pakistan is in dire need of at present.

*7 July 2025.* HRCP is alarmed to learn that several civil society activists in Balochistan have been taken into custody in connection with their work. These include HRCP member Abdullah Baloch, who was arrested in Hub, and Gulzar Dost, who was arrested in Turbat. We urge the authorities to release them unconditionally and remind the state that it must uphold people's constitutional right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

*9 July 2025.* HRCP is greatly concerned by the recent court directive blocking 27 YouTube channels, reportedly following a complaint by the Federal Investigation Agency. The wholesale blocking of entire channels—rather than addressing specific instances of unlawful or hateful speech in accordance with due process—conflates dissent with criminal activity.

The constitutional right to freedom of expression is fundamental not only for individual liberty but also for ensuring government accountability, fostering debate and enabling the public to access a diversity of viewpoints. Any interventions targeting hate speech must be precise and proportionate.

*Press release: National roundtable demands protection of media and digital freedoms*

*Islamabad, 17 July 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), supported by the European Union, along with academics, civil society leaders, lawyers, editors and media practitioners hosted a national roundtable to address the issue of increasing restrictions on freedom of expression and shrinking digital spaces.

The roundtable, with opening remarks from leading political scientist Dr Mohammed Wasim, was moderated by digital rights activist Fariha Aziz. She explained the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (PECA) (Amendment) Act 2025, particularly Section 37, which grants vague and sweeping powers to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). Several speakers pointed to the lack of due process in recent actions taken against online content producers. Journalists Matiullah Jan and Asad Toor noted that YouTube channels were also blocked without any prior notice or valid legal proceedings.

Anchormember Absa Komal observed a shift in censorship tactics, from arrests to economic pressure and institutional intimidation, leading many to self-censor. Resident editor Dawn Amir Wasim echoed Komal's views. Anchormember and HRCF co-chair Munizae Jahangir warned that the authorities could exploit divisions within civil society and the media. She advocated for building an alliance of all relevant stakeholders.

Advocate Talha Sarfraz Khan emphasised the need to differentiate defamation and harassment. Barrister Rida Hosain and Advocate Usman Warraich criticised the misuse of defamation laws, which serve to protect state institutions rather than citizens, highlighting the neglect of digital rights violations amount to a digital martial rule currently being experienced.

Journalists from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan highlighted the difficulties of reporting from the two provinces saying that the repression in remote areas had now expanded to urban centres. There was consensus on the need to repeal or, at the very least amend the PECA 2016 law and its 2025 amendment.

Former PFUJ secretary-general and current HRCF council member Nasir Zaidi urged civil society to unite and push for urgent legal reforms, while journalist Mahim Maher suggested that laws alone may not suffice and that economic and legal routes must be pursued strategically.

Former senator and HRCF council member Farhatullah Babar urged the Senate's Information Committee to obtain and publish FIA data on PECA-related cases. He also called for a commission to assess the misuse of the blasphemy laws in conjunction with PECA and for digital surveillance to be reviewed.

HRCF secretary-general Harris Khaliq concluded the roundtable by saying that without freedom of expression, not a single rights issue—whether civil, economic or social—can be raised or voiced. He said that hate speech, online harassment and incitement to violence must be regulated, not the criticism of state policies and political dissent.

*19 July 2025.* HRCF is concerned by the treatment being meted out to peaceful protesters by the Islamabad police. The protestors, many of them women and children, have travelled to Islamabad from Balochistan, asking for the release of political prisoners and those forcibly disappeared in the province. HRCF stands by their right to peaceful assembly and protest and demands that the authorities differentiate between advocacy for legitimate rights and militancy. Women and children from Balochistan deserve as much dignity and respect as people from other parts of the country.

*5 August 2025.* HRCF is deeply concerned by reports that Dawn journalist Akbar Notezai has been issued a notice by the FIA's cybercrime wing in connection with a story he published over a year ago. Such actions contribute to a climate of fear and intimidation for journalists and raise serious concerns about the misuse of cybercrime laws to curb press freedom. We urge the authorities to respect constitutional protections for freedom of expression and ensure that journalists are not harassed for carrying out their professional duties in the public interest. This notice must be withdrawn immediately.

*7 August 2025.* HRCF condemns the FIR lodged against the vice-chairman of the Pakistan Trade Union Federation, Rehmanullah, on charges of incitement. Criminalising peaceful protest and dissenting speech on the pretext of protecting the state is a violation of the fundamental right to freedom of expression. The FIR should be withdrawn immediately.

*13 August 2025.* HRCF strongly condemns the growing practice of preventing journalists from travelling abroad without legal justification—most recently illustrated by the case of Asad Toor, who was barred by immigration authorities at Islamabad International Airport from attending an international professional exchange in the United States.

Such arbitrary use of the Provisional National Identification List (PNIL) to curtail movement undermines constitutional guarantees of free expression and movement, while contributing to an increasingly hostile environment for the press. HRCP calls for an immediate end to these reprisals and the removal of all journalists from the PNIL.

*15 August 2025.* HRCP demands the immediate release of journalist and human rights defender Samiullah, who has been wrongfully detained by the district administration in Khyber, for expressing his views. The state must learn to respect dissent.

*7 September 2025.* HRCP is deeply concerned by the continued misuse of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) to silence dissent. Most recently, a lawyer in Peshawar was booked under Section 11 on allegations of ‘anti-state’ speech—illustrating once again how vague and over-broad provisions are weaponised to target critics. Such practices undermine constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression. We reiterate our longstanding call for the repeal of such problematic legal provisions to ensure that digital rights and civil liberties are fully protected.

*17 September 2025.* HRCP is deeply concerned by the Islamabad High Court administration’s order de-notifying Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz from exercising her powers under the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, after she formed an inquiry committee on a complaint of harassment filed by lawyer Imaan Mazari-Hazir. Any such inquiry committee must include a woman member. At present, Justice Imtiaz is the only female judge among 12 judges of the Islamabad High Court, highlighting the stark gender imbalance in the judiciary.

HRCP also notes with concern the case lodged against Imaan Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chatha by the National Cyber-Crime Investigation Agency on grounds of terrorism and cybercrime for social media posts pertaining to enforced disappearances—charges that raise serious questions about freedom of expression and the misuse of counter-terrorism frameworks. The case should be withdrawn. Moreover, the state must cease to weaponise the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act to stifle dissent, particularly criticism of state institutions.

*23 September 2025.* HRCP demands the immediate withdrawal of notices registered against office bearers of the Lahore Press Club under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act. No law should be used to muzzle independent voices or the media.

*Press release: Government must end smear campaign against media and NGOs*

*Lahore, 2 October 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), the Women’s Action Forum (Lahore), Shirkat Gah-Women’s Resource Centre, South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, Simorgh, and the Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) strongly condemn a recent advertisement sponsored by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting that depicts journalists, NGO workers and ‘freelance’ researchers as potential instruments of ‘enemy propaganda.’ Framing civil society actors and independent media as part of an information war is deeply irresponsible and undermines the very freedoms that sustain a democratic society.

Independent journalists and NGOs in Pakistan already operate under highly restrictive conditions: frequent harassment, onerous registration and reporting requirements, arbitrary scrutiny of funding, and a climate of suspicion fostered by vague security narratives. Portraying their work as a threat to national security further endangers individuals committed to protecting rights and informing the public. Such narratives have been used to justify surveillance, intimidation, and even physical attacks on journalists and human rights defenders.

Urging citizens to report ‘suspicious’ NGO workers or reporters without any legal safeguards risks legitimising arbitrary targeting, harassment and censorship. Additionally, framing digital technologies largely as a means of entrapment aimed at sowing ‘unrest, fear and chaos’ will compound the chilling effect on freedom of expression already instituted

by the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act and its amendments, among other laws. It will also discourage independent reporting and obstruct the vital humanitarian and rights-based services that many organisations provide.

We call on the government to withdraw this campaign immediately, refrain from conflating legitimate civil society work with hostile activity and prioritise an enabling environment where journalists and human rights organisations can function safely and independently.

*2 October 2025.* HRCP strongly condemns the raid on the National Press Club and assault on journalists by the Islamabad police. We demand an immediate inquiry and those responsible brought to book.

*3 October 2025.* HRCP is deeply alarmed by the ongoing violence in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), where reportedly at least nine people, including three police officers, have lost their lives and hundreds have been injured during protests. We strongly condemn the use of excessive force and the deaths of civilians and law enforcers alike as well as communication blackouts.

While dialogue is essential, it cannot be meaningful amid the continued political disenfranchisement of the region's people. The right to peaceful protest must be upheld and grievances addressed transparently. We urge both the federal and AJK governments to avoid further escalation, respect people's fundamental rights and commit to genuine, inclusive negotiations. To this end, HRCP intends to send a fact-finding mission to AJK as soon as possible to assess the situation.

*7 October 2025.* HRCP notes with concern the recent registration of an FIR against former chairperson of the Islamabad Wildlife Management Board, Rina Saeed Khan. Given that she was closely involved in efforts to halt allegedly illegal operations in the Margalla Hills National Park and safeguard ecologically sensitive areas, we urge the authorities to maintain complete impartiality and transparency in this matter. There must be no political victimisation to muzzle dissenting voices.

*22 October 2025.* HRCP expresses grave concern over the Balochistan government's decision to place Shale Baloch, central organiser of the Baloch Women's Forum, and activists Nazgul and Syed Bibi Sharif on the Fourth Schedule under the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997. Labelling political dissenters or human rights defenders as security threats is a deeply regressive step that undermines fundamental freedoms of expression, association and movement. HRCP calls for the immediate withdrawal of this notification.

*25 October 2025.* HRCP expresses grave concern over the indictment of senior journalist Matiullah Jan in what appear to be politically motivated charges of terrorism and drug smuggling. The use of anti-terrorism and narcotics laws to target journalists undermines press freedom and chills dissent. Reports of Mr Jan's alleged abduction before his arrest further point to serious violations of due process and the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act 2021. We urge an independent investigation into these allegations and call on the government to ensure that journalists can work free from harassment and intimidation.

*29 October 2025.* HRCP demands the immediate recovery of political activist Ghani Aman Chandio, who was forcibly taken into custody, allegedly by state operatives at a hospital in Karachi, where he was tending to his young daughter. The manner in which this action was taken is deeply concerning. Mr Chandio and other such citizens who have been arbitrarily detained, abducted or forcibly disappeared reflect the state's continued policy of curbing fundamental freedoms and stifling political dissent. HRCP reiterates that such draconic measures only exacerbate political chaos and social fragmentation.

3 December 2025. HRCP stands with lawyers Imaan Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Chattha against the escalating misuse of cybercrime, terrorism and judicial processes to punish legitimate dissent. The FIR filed by the NCIA under PECA criminalises criticism of the military's conduct, violating constitutional and international protections on freedom of expression and fair trial. Moreover, the pressure on Ms Mazari-Hazir and Mr Chattha, their arbitrary arrest despite court attendance and reported denial of counsel of choice, reflect a systemic intent to silence and exhaust voices defending victims of state violence. We demand the withdrawal of baseless charges and an end to intimidation in this manner.

5 December 2025. HRCP condemns the police obstruction of Aurat March's scheduled press conference at the Karachi Press Club yesterday and the brief detention and manhandling of activists and reporters, including well-known rights activist Sheema Kirmani. We are also alarmed that journalist Zofeen Ebrahim was barred from entering the press club. HRCP urges the authorities to respect all people's access to civic spaces and investigate the alleged police misconduct.

16 December 2025. HRCP expresses grave concern over the rapidly shrinking space for independent and critical news reporting in the country, including the reported 13-month ban on government advertisements to the Dawn Media Group, which has recently been extended to Dawn News TV and CityFM89. This is ironic, given that M. A. Jinnah, the founder of Dawn, championed press freedom.

The selective withdrawal of state advertising—which constitutes public funds—has increasingly been used as a coercive instrument to pressure media organisations, influence editorial choices and penalise critical journalism. We reiterate that freedom of expression and democratic accountability cannot survive where economic coercion is used to discipline the press and urge the government to end such discriminatory practices and restore an enabling environment for free, independent and responsible journalism.

*Press release: Call for collective resistance to speech curbs at HRCP moot*

Islamabad, 24 December 2025. Speakers at a widely attended roundtable meeting held by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) reiterated the suffocating impact of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 and its subsequent amendments on ordinary citizens and called for a broad civil society coalition to defend freedom of digital expression.

Moderated by lawyer Azwar Shakeel, the roundtable was held as part of HRCP's ongoing campaign, 'Ten years of PECA, ten years of silence'. PFUJ president Afzal Butt reaffirmed the need for principled opposition to such rights-curtailing laws, proposing direct dialogue with the authorities to distinguish reasonable regulation from repression.

Veteran journalist and HRCP Council member Nasir Zaidi noted that the state's approach to speech has historically been restrictive, with laws designed to control narratives rather than protect constitutional rights. Several journalists also highlighted structural constraints to press freedom. Journalist Akbar Notezai noted that newspapers in Balochistan depended heavily on state advertising, making editorial independence increasingly untenable. Journalist Matiullah Jan stressed that any involvement of other security agencies in PECA-based FIA investigations risked abuse.

Several participants shared personal experiences of harassment, with one journalist recounting threats and intimidation by officials of the FIA, raising concerns about corruption and the lack of accountability within enforcement bodies.

Lawyers and journalists, including Saqib Bashir and Asad Toor, emphasised the importance of coordinated, evidence-based litigation across multiple courts in PECA-related cases, but argued that legal avenues alone were insufficient and must be complemented by transparent public debate and collective resistance to these laws. Former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi agreed that resisting laws that restrict press freedom was necessary.

Concluding the roundtable, former senator and HRCP Council member Farhatullah Babar proposed the formation of pro bono legal teams to address due-process violations under the PECA laws and structured engagement with political parties on this subject, which was endorsed by Rawalpindi Journalists Union president Tariq Ali. Mr Babar also suggested that officials responsible for abusing these laws should be publicly identified.

## **Contributing to climate action and indigenous communities' right to natural resources**

*Press release: HRCP Kissan Convention demands land rights, climate justice*

*Multan, 27 April 2025.* At the Kissan Convention held earlier today by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, agricultural workers, farmers and rights activists from across South Punjab gathered to voice their urgent concerns around climate change, land rights, corporate farming, and the systemic exclusion of women and minority communities from agricultural policymaking.

Speakers highlighted the devastating impacts of climate change on Pakistan's agricultural heartland, emphasising that shifting seasons and drying canals were severely affecting crop cycles and yields. HRCP Council member Lubna Nadeem emphasised that women agricultural workers remained invisible under Punjab's labour laws, even as they bore the brunt of climate-driven hardship.

A central theme of the convention was land rights. President of the Cholistan Bachao Tehreek, Allah Rakha, condemned the alleged dispossession of Cholistan's indigenous farmers by outsiders despite an earlier HRCP fact-finding mission led by former chairperson Hina Jilani that played a role in securing land allotments for over 27,000 people. Speakers from Kot Addu, including rights activist Rafi Shankar and Karitas executive officer Saleem Channan, decried eviction threats against families whom they said had cultivated these lands for generations.

Participants strongly denounced corporate farming schemes that displace local farmers and devastate ecosystems. President of Anjuman Tehreek Kissan, Bhakkar, Mahar Ghulam Abbas Sial, criticised the leasing of 'ancestral lands' to large corporations, saying that 'Food security must be prioritised over corporate greed.' Rana Muhammad Saleem, president of Anjuman Tehreek Kissan, Arif Wala, underscored the extent of illegal deforestation for such projects, adding that they had generated large profits for corporations at the cost of local livelihoods.

Women and minorities also raised pressing concerns. Rights activist Alisha Nayab called for labour rights and land benefits to be extended to women and Christian workers, pointing out that while 'Women sow, cultivate and harvest, they remain invisible in the eyes of the law. Members of the transgender community also demanded inclusion in agricultural policymaking. President of Anjuman Muzaraeen, Khanewal, Aqeela Naz, urged the government to officially observe 'Women Agricultural Workers' Day' and called for women farmers to be given a central role in policymaking.

The convention concluded with a charter of demands calling for the enforcement of minimum wage laws for agricultural workers at par with industrial workers, formal recognition of women and minorities as agricultural workers, a halt to corporate land takeover, and proprietary land rights for long-term cultivators. Participants also called for the redistribution of state land among landless farmers, ensuring that women receive equal ownership rights. HRCP Punjab vice-chair Raja Ashraf gave a vote of thanks.

Rights activist Father Maqsood summed up participants' collective resolve: 'We are not seeking sympathy. We are demanding justice.'

*Press release: HRCP mission deplures inequitable access to land amid corporate farming in Cholistan*

*Lahore, 16 May 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expresses deep concern over the continued marginalisation of indigenous communities in Cholistan, following a fact-finding mission to the region in October 2024. The mission has underscored disturbing patterns of land appropriation, suppression of civic rights, and the expansion of corporate farming at the expense of local livelihoods and ecological sustainability.

Residents across the region reported that fertile land and traditional grazing areas were being systematically appropriated, leaving livestock farmers and local communities without viable alternatives. Although the Punjab government had announced a land allotment scheme in 2010, balloting was not carried out until 2023, naming nearly 26,000 Cholistanis as beneficiaries. The mission's findings, however, suggest that the relief was problematic in design and implementation, failing to address long-standing structural issues as well as the idea that such schemes should be limited to local communities. Most locals complained that they had been allotted barren land and had not yet received official allotment letters, while non-locals had received leases for fully or partially cultivable land under the same scheme.

Particularly alarming is the expansion of corporate farming to include the army's formal entry into the sector in February 2023. Under a joint venture agreement signed with the Punjab government in March 2023, a 20-year lease (extendable by 10 years) was granted on a profit-sharing basis. A Lahore High Court ruling in May 2023 that stopped the transfer of land to the army for corporate farming was overturned in July 2023, enabling land transfers under the Green Initiative Pakistan, overseen by the Special Investment Facilitation Council.

The mission has also received reports of forced displacement by powerful state institutions. Locals further reported that only non-locals appeared to be benefiting from these ventures—underscoring growing social and economic exclusion in the region.

Equally troubling are reports that residents who attempted to peacefully protest in 2023 were allegedly denied permission by the district administration, raising serious concerns about violations of the constitutional right to peaceful assembly.

HRCP calls on the federal and Punjab governments, the Cholistan Development Authority, and all state institutions concerned to institute urgent reforms to ensure transparent, equitable, and rights-based land allotment; end all illegal land occupation, regardless of the identity or influence of those involved; uphold the rule of law by ending all forms of coercion or intimidation against dissenting residents; and ensure that corporate farming initiatives do not come at the cost of human rights or environmental degradation. These reforms must also protect the rights of minorities and ensure that women and transgender persons can access and benefit from land policies equally.

*28 June 2025.* HRCP expresses deep sorrow over the loss of lives in the recent Swat River flooding incident, in which at least nine people died and several remain missing. The tragedy underscores the urgent need for stronger enforcement of public safety measures, especially in tourist areas vulnerable to climate-induced hazards.

We urge the authorities to ensure better coordination, timely rescue responses, and accountability through the inquiry committee. As climate-related disasters increase in frequency and severity, HRCP reiterates the state's responsibility to safeguard lives through transparent planning, community awareness and resilient infrastructure. The protection of the right to life must remain paramount in both development and disaster preparedness policies.

*Press release: Devastation caused by floods confirms systemic neglect*

*Lahore, 10 September 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expresses grave concern over the devastating floods sweeping across the country. Reports from central and southern Punjab, parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

and Gilgit-Baltistan in particular reveal extensive human and material losses. These disasters are no longer merely 'natural'—they are manmade, fuelled by poor planning, land grabs, deforestation, corrupt practices and climate inaction, for which the state and successive governments must be held responsible.

While rescue and relief operations are underway, HRCP stresses that these efforts must be urgently expanded, with more rescue teams mobilised and more relief camps established with equitable access to food, shelter, clean drinking water and medical services. Particular attention must be given to the most vulnerable—women, children, the elderly and persons living with disabilities.

The floods also highlight the plight of climate refugees, who have been forced to abandon their homes and livelihoods. The government must recognise and rehabilitate these displaced persons through long-term resettlement plans, access to housing and livelihood support. Failure to do so will only exacerbate poverty, marginalisation and social unrest.

In the medium term, the consequences will be dire, including food inflation, urban migration and the collapse of already overstretched city infrastructure. With much arable land under water and crops destroyed, food supply chains will be disrupted, causing an economic and humanitarian crisis.

HRCP cautions the government that piecemeal responses will not suffice. Fully resourced, empowered and functional local governments are needed to ensure disaster preparedness and rapid response at the community level. Civil defence institutions must be revitalised, early warning systems modernised and climate-resilient infrastructure prioritised. The restoration of wetlands and an immediate end to encroachment on natural waterways are critical steps to mitigating the frequency and severity of such disasters.

HRCP calls on the federal and provincial governments to wake up to their constitutional obligations, demonstrate political will and foresight, and take the decisive and inclusive action needed to prevent Pakistan from remaining trapped in annual cycles of displacement and devastation.

28 November 2025. HRCP is deeply alarmed by the felling of trees in Lahore's historic Nasir Bagh, reportedly to make way for a parking plaza. Nasir Bagh is one of the city's oldest public green spaces and its mature tree cover is an irreplaceable environmental and cultural asset.

Destroying these trees for commercial infrastructure reflects a troubling disregard for public heritage, ecological balance and citizens' right to a healthy environment. Indeed, at a time when Pakistan is already among the countries most affected by the climate crisis, destroying vital urban green cover reflects deeply misguided priorities.

We call on the Punjab government and relevant authorities to halt all tree felling immediately, disclose the project's approvals and ensure that any development upholds environmental safeguards and public interest.

*Press release: HRCP urges government to prioritise rehabilitation of flood-hit communities*

Lahore, 22 December 2025. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has called on the Punjab government to prioritise the welfare of families affected by heavy monsoon floods in South Punjab, many of whom are still struggling to rebuild their homes without adequate assistance as winter sets in.

A fact-finding mission conducted by HRCP earlier in November to flood-affected areas in South Punjab documented the concerns of families in Basti Lang and Basti Sher Shah in Multan and Basti Jat Khurpa in Uch Sharif. Residents of Basti Lang said that around 300 houses had been destroyed by the floods but complained that government surveys had either not been conducted to assess the damage or had been delayed, as a result of which affected households had not

received adequate compensation. The government's compensation rate of PKR 20,000 per acre was described by one respondent as 'adding insult to injury.'

In Mauza Jat Khurpa, residents alleged that floodwaters from the Sutlej had been deliberately diverted toward their villages to protect nearby urban and influential agricultural interests. Across sites, communities alleged that the distribution of relief and irregularities in damage assessments had been politicised, with one respondent claiming that only those with recommendation slips from legislators had received government relief packages. Highlighting the destruction of orchards and farmland, with some areas still waterlogged, several respondents expressed fear that they would be unable to sow their next crop, thereby jeopardising their savings.

HRCP urges the Punjab government to carry out transparent and inclusive damage assessments and provide urgent rehabilitation and housing support. Any officials deemed responsible for irregularities must be held accountable. Importantly, tenant farmers and agricultural workers must be included in all relief and compensation schemes.

## **Cross-cutting work**

*Press release: Rising militancy and democratic backsliding mark 2024*

*HRCP launches annual report*

*Islamabad, 30 April 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)'s annual report, released earlier today, highlights a troubling decline in civic freedoms, deteriorating law and order, and a marked strain on federalism.

State of Human Rights in 2024 notes that the general elections in February 2024 were compromised by allegations of electoral manipulation. Amid the ensuing political instability, the fate of a major political party and its allocation of reserved seats were left undecided. The government that took office subsequently ceded space to undemocratic forces in the form of several hurriedly passed and flawed laws.

Of particular concern was the spike in militancy in 2024: related fatalities reportedly surged to over 2,500, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan accounting for the bulk of such attacks. At least 24 deaths were attributed to vigilante mobs, some of which were linked to allegations of blasphemy, including in Swat and Sargodha.

Speaking at the launch, HRCP chairperson Asad Iqbal Butt drew attention to continued state-sanctioned violence in 2024, with at least 379 officially reported new cases of enforced disappearance, two extrajudicial killings of persons suspected of blasphemy and 4,864 staged police encounters in Sindh and Punjab alone.

Former HRCP chairperson Hina Jilani said that enforced disappearances were not justified in any circumstances, 'including war or insurgency,' adding that 'no cause can justify violence or acts of terrorism.' The human rights community 'insists that all acts of violence be dealt with in accordance with the law,' she said.

Over 1,200 individuals were imprisoned on charges of blasphemy, having been entrapped by far-right groups into sharing allegedly blasphemous content online. The beleaguered Ahmadiyya community reported at least six faith-based killings and the desecration of over 200 graves and worship sites. Such developments are symptomatic of escalating radicalisation and the state's capitulation to far-right political parties.

The continued ban on social media platform X, arrests of journalists reporting on politically sensitive issues, repeated imposition of S. 144 to prevent public gatherings, the ban on the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement and the use of disproportionate—and on occasion, lethal—force against assemblies reflects a state not prepared to brook criticism

or dissent. Criticising the government’s law making in 2024 and its impact on freedom of expression, HRCP co-chair Munizae Jahangir said that public officials should not be shielded from legitimate criticism by ordinary citizens.

With 2.4 million cases pending nationwide, Pakistan’s judicial system remained heavily burdened during the year. Although at least 174 death sentences were reportedly handed down by the courts, no executions occurred. The country’s jails accounted for an overcrowding rate of almost 228 percent.

HRCP secretary-general Harris Khaliq pointed out that miners, sanitation workers and polio workers faced heightened safety risks, with at least 172 work-related deaths in 2024 in these sectors alone. Violence against women and children remained pervasive, with at least 405 honour killings, 4,175 cases of rape, 1,641 domestic murders, and 1,630 instances of violence against children. The government continued to repatriate Afghan nationals, but amid concerns that such deportations did not meet international standards of consent and dignity. Education and health outcomes remained poor, while recurring extreme weather events and hazardous air quality marked parts of the year.

HRCP Islamabad vice-chair Nasreen Azhar concluded the event by expressing concern that the 26th constitutional amendment had resulted in executive overreach in the affairs of the judiciary.

*Press release: Call for peace and protection of rights amid rising tensions*

*Lahore, 8 May 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)’s governing council, on concluding its biannual meeting yesterday, urgently appeals to the governments of Pakistan and India to de-escalate tensions. It believes that the reported casualties—including those of women and children—due to Indian air strikes, are a grave violation of international human rights law and may constitute crimes against humanity.

HRCP urges all actors to commit to dialogue and peaceful coexistence. It unequivocally condemns all forms of violent extremism and the weaponisation of religion on both sides of the border. Armed conflict between the two nuclear states threatens not only regional stability but also endangers the fundamental rights of more than a billion people. This climate of conflict also enables both states to suppress criticism and intensify securitisation, thereby weakening democratic norms and accountability. In such times, truth becomes the first casualty. HRCP cautions the public against toxic media narratives and calls on the media to maintain journalistic integrity.

Domestically, HRCP remains concerned about the impunity surrounding the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, which should be replaced by a credible body that holds perpetrators accountable. Attacks on the Ahmadiyya community and their places of worship, often led by far-right political groups, must be condemned unequivocally, and the community allowed to observe its religious rites. HRCP also condemns the recent attack on the National Commission for Human Rights by far-right groups for its principled stand on the misuse of the blasphemy laws and is concerned about the long incarceration of many persons on such charges.

HRCP urges the Supreme Court to expedite hearings on petitions related to the 2018 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act and the use of internment centres. It also calls for measures to address inter-provincial political tensions, restore student unions, uphold the rights of Afghan refugees, and protect indigenous communities from land grabbing.

The visible flouting of the law by security and law enforcement agencies must end. HRCP continues to receive reports of custodial torture, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary detentions. It also believes that former parliamentarian Ali Wazir and human rights defender Idris Khattak are wrongfully incarcerated and should be released. HRCP demands that leaders of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee, which operates within a rights-based framework, be released and an urgent political dialogue initiated between the state, political parties and civil society in Balochistan.

HRCP welcomes the Senate subcommittee’s approval of a bill to establish a statutory National Commission for Minorities and urges the Parliament to follow suit. Finally, it reiterates the call for comprehensive land reforms that prioritise the rights of small farmers, for consensus-building among all provinces to ensure a just and democratic future, and for the state to prioritise investing in people’s right to health and education.

*Press release: HRCP flags alarming trends in law and order, civil liberties in Sindh*

*Karachi, 24 June 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)’s annual report, *State of Human Rights in 2024*, draws attention to significant democratic backsliding, marked by serious concerns over the legitimacy of the general elections, sharp restrictions on dissent, and escalating militancy. At a press conference held earlier today, HRCP office bearers emphasised deteriorating law and order, extrajudicial killings and gender-based violence in the province.

The custodial murder of Dr Shahnawaz Kunbhar in Mirpurkhas, following blasphemy charges, marks a serious escalation in the misuse of the blasphemy laws and impunity for extrajudicial killings. The violent and disproportionate response of law enforcement personnel to the peaceful Rawadari March, held by civil society in Karachi to protest Kunbhar’s death, underscores the shrinking space for dissent and civic expression.

To HRCP’s consternation, the enforced disappearance of political workers and rights activists in Sindh continued unabated in 2024. Nationalist activist Hidayat Lohar was killed near his home in Qambar Shahdadkot district, after being previously detained and later released by law enforcement. HRCP’s chairperson was also held arbitrarily by the police for questioning in connection with his work as a human rights defender.

The report also notes that the general elections in Sindh were marred by allegations of political manipulation. Numerous election petitions were filed in the Sindh High Court before and after the elections, primarily by PTI candidates contesting as independents. However, the election of Anthony Naveed, a minority representative, as deputy speaker of the Sindh Assembly, offered a rare moment of progress.

Despite government efforts, the crime rate in Sindh rose in 2024 compared to 2023, according to data from the Sindh police. Instances of militancy continued, with one attack—claimed by the proscribed Balochistan Liberation Army—in Karachi killing two Chinese nationals and a Pakistani citizen.

Continued reports of violence and discrimination against vulnerable groups surfaced through the year. Women remained at risk of harmful customary practices, with at least 134 honour killings reported. In one instance, a group of over 100 men attacked transgender individuals in Karachi, threatening them with physical and sexual violence. The situation of refugees also remained cause for concern, with the Sindh Assembly unanimously passing a motion calling for the expulsion of all ‘illegal immigrants’ from the province, while Sindh’s civil society remained divided on the deportation of Afghan refugees.

Mass protests erupted over the federal government’s plan to construct six canals, largely benefitting Punjab, without consultation with Sindh through the Council of Common Interests. This decision intensified inter-provincial grievances over water distribution from the Indus River, threatening Sindh’s ecological and agricultural sustainability. The province also experienced record-breaking summer temperatures and monsoon floods, damaging infrastructure and displacing communities in multiple districts.

*Press release: HRCP 2024 report notes decline in rule of law in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*

*Peshawar, 30 June 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) held a press conference to launch its flagship annual report on the state of human rights in 2024. The report highlights a significant decline in democratic

standards in the country, fueled by increasing concerns over the legitimacy of the general elections and the weakening of the parliamentary system.

Its findings with respect to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa show that the province endured significant casualties among civilians as well as law enforcement and security personnel in 2024 as a result of militancy, reflecting the region's deteriorating security environment. In Kurram, sectarian violence and tribal rivalries also contributed to nearly 250 deaths, while the consequent closure of roads and supplies triggered a humanitarian crisis.

The deterioration in democratic governance, civic freedoms and law and order raised serious concerns over the region's political and social stability. However, the increased electoral participation of women in 2024, signaled a modest but welcome step towards political inclusion.

Data from the provincial police indicates that 77 people were charged with blasphemy and 49 people arrested, including one woman. However, the brutal lynching of a tourist in Swat, following an accusation of blasphemy, reflects an alarming rise in vigilantism nationwide.

The state's ban on the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement ahead of a national jirga restricted civic space further. The report also recorded at least 105 new cases of enforced disappearances in the province, based on official data, prompting repeated judicial interventions. While some progress was seen in freedom of movement through the reopening of the Torkham border, mobility restrictions and local protests persisted.

Legislative output remained limited, with only 30 bills introduced and 21 passed. The judiciary continued to face pressure, with more than 23,000 cases pending at the Peshawar High Court and a backlog exceeding 38,000—many involving contempt proceedings against political and police actors.

The report documents persistent gender-based violence, including hundreds of cases of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and honour killings. Violence against children also surged, with scores of minors killed, assaulted or sexually abused, reflecting serious gaps in child protection. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remained a key route for the deportation of Afghan nationals under the federal government's Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan.

Labour rights violations continued unabated. At least 26 miners lost their lives due to hazardous working conditions and militant attacks, underscoring the ongoing risks faced by workers in extractive industries. A spate of kidnappings saw at least 30 labourers abducted by militants in separate incidents. Persistent wage issues were also reported across sectors, despite provincial pledges to raise the minimum wage.

Environmental challenges intensified, with floods and torrential rains claiming over 100 lives and Peshawar ranking among the world's most polluted cities.

*Press release: HRCP raises alarm over political dysfunction and rising injustices in Punjab*

*Lahore, 22 July 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) held a press conference earlier today to highlight the human rights situation in Punjab as recorded in its report, *State of Human Rights in 2024*, launched earlier.

While voter registration and total votes cast reportedly increased in the 2024 general elections, turnout declined. Women's representation in the assemblies more than doubled, but the Punjab Assembly remained plagued by disruptions, a tendency to ignore input from the opposition, and hurried legislation. Assembly proceedings in 2024 were dominated by chaos. Women MPAs staged a walkout over inappropriate gestures in the House, and the allocation of reserved seats for women and minorities faced legal setbacks.

The Punjab Defamation Act 2024, hurriedly approved in June, was widely criticised by human rights networks for stifling free speech. The law was subsequently challenged in the Lahore High Court as unconstitutional. The Punjab authorities imposed road closures to prevent PTI protests in Islamabad, infringing on the right to movement for both political activists and ordinary citizens.

Continued persecution of religious minorities persisted, including a Christian man in Sargodha who was lynched by a violent mob, following accusations of blasphemy. The Ahmadiyya community withdrew from the electoral process entirely, citing systemic discrimination and lack of safety.

The report notes with alarm that nine people from Punjab were killed on the Quetta-Taftan highway as well as seven Punjabi labourers in an alleged militant attack in Panjgur, Balochistan.

Punjab continued to account for the highest number of child abuse cases in the country. Between January and June 2024 alone, the province reported 78 percent of the 1,630 cases nationwide, alongside 2,506 incidents of sexual abuse, 2,189 kidnappings, 457 cases of child trafficking, and 455 instances of physical abuse. The death of 11-year-old Ayesha, a domestic worker in Faisalabad, and similar incidents in Sargodha and Lahore exposed the violence faced by underage working children in private homes.

Reports of sexual violence against women with mental disabilities, domestic abuse resulting in fatalities, including pregnant women, and honour killings continued throughout the year. In a case involving an alleged rape at a private college in Lahore, HRCP noted that there was no conclusive evidence that the incident had occurred. A ruling by the Lahore High Court declared the age-based gender distinction in the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 unconstitutional; however, broader legislative reform remained stalled.

The report notes that workers' rights and environmental conditions were also neglected. Sanitation workers continued to face hazardous working conditions. Meanwhile, the provincial government failed to address dangerously high smog levels, with Lahore and Multan recording unprecedented air pollution levels in November.

*Press release: HRCP, SAHR call for global human rights reset*

*Lahore, 29 July 2025.* A joint regional conference held by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) on 26–27 July has called for South Asia to lead Global South efforts to reset the human rights agenda, given the failure of the Global North to uphold international human rights law in Palestine and to prevent gender apartheid in Afghanistan.

Titled 'Bridges, Not Boundaries: Building Regional Rights-based Movements in South Asia', the conference brought together rights activists, artists, writers and academics from Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In his welcome address, HRCP Secretary-General Harris Khaliq emphasised the urgency of building cross-border solidarity amid rising poverty, displacement, xenophobia, and democratic decline across South Asia. Keynote speaker Dr Syeda Hameed called for renewed people-to-people movements rooted in South Asia's shared heritage. Former HRCP chairperson Hina Jilani, in her keynote address, stressed that human rights work cannot thrive in isolation and urged sustained collective struggle across the region.

Discussing democracy and human rights, speakers in the first session underscored shrinking civic spaces, rising authoritarianism and discriminatory laws. While Sri Lanka and Nepal offer slivers of hope through peaceful activism and constitutional safeguards, Afghan women remain the most marginalised, facing gender apartheid under Taliban

rule. From media repression in Pakistan to media and digital crackdowns in India and Bangladesh, regional solidarity, youth activism and people-to-people contact emerged as key strategies for defending rights and reclaiming democratic spaces.

Speakers on the second panel warned of the systematic erasure of religious and ethnic minorities through state-sponsored exclusion in India and Bangladesh, shrinking spaces for Muslim and Tamil communities in Sri Lanka and the increasing vulnerability of religious minorities in Pakistan. The panel underscored how nationalism, populism and religious majoritarianism have fuelled dehumanisation.

Climate justice campaigners emphasised the escalating climate crisis and its disproportionate impact on marginalised communities. Speakers highlighted systemic governance failures, industrial pollution and inadequate responses by national and international actors as key contributors to the crisis and called for stronger regional cooperation on environmental justice, equitable development practices, and enhanced data-sharing for effective resource management and disaster preparedness.

Speakers in the final plenary session addressed the interconnectedness of socioeconomic rights with civil and political freedoms and called for reviving regional platforms such as SAARC and leveraging existing networks to amplify common concerns. They highlighted troubling patterns in the use of repressive laws—from anti-terror and sedition statutes to regulations curbing free speech and digital freedoms. In this context, speakers expressed the need for collective efforts to establish safe spaces and networks for rights activists facing threats and intimidation. SAHR co-chair Roshmi Goswami proposed a joint memorandum on the human rights situation in Gaza, while HRCP chairperson Asad Iqbal Butt said that cross-border solidarity was not just a luxury, but the only path forward.

*Press release: Political dialogue, human rights in Balochistan to restore trust, resolve conflict*

*Islamabad, 6 August 2025.* Following a fact-finding mission to Balochistan, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has expressed grave concern over the human rights crisis confronting the province. The mission's findings reveal a disturbing pattern of continued enforced disappearances, shrinking civic space, erosion of provincial autonomy and unchecked impunity—conditions that continue to fuel public alienation and political instability.

The mission has observed that, while state representatives now acknowledge the existence of enforced disappearances, they do so within a security narrative that treats the practice as a byproduct of insurgency. This framing risks normalising what international human rights law considers a crime against humanity. The report also calls for independent investigations into alleged reprisals against those who speak up against enforced disappearances.

The mission notes that while militant attacks targeting ordinary citizens, including non-Baloch settlers, are indefensible and must be prosecuted, the passage of the Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act 2025 is deeply problematic. The law permits 90-day detentions without meaningful judicial oversight, raising concerns about the potential for torture and abuse. The mission urges the government to withdraw the Act and instead ensure that all counterterrorism efforts comply with Pakistan's human rights obligations.

According to the report, electoral manipulation and the political sidelining of nationalist parties have severely undermined public trust in democratic processes. The mission recommends that the state ensure transparency, fairness and accountability in all electoral processes by investigating credible allegations of rigging and depoliticising administrative structures to avoid further political disaffection.

The mission has called for the demilitarisation of civilian law enforcement and for a unified civilian police force with adequate resources and training in community-based, rights-compliant policing to replace the current overreliance on paramilitary and military forces.

The report also underscores the de-legitimisation of civil society movements such as the Baloch Yakjehti Committee, observing that equating human rights advocacy with militancy only deepens alienation, especially among the youth. The state must publicly affirm the role of human rights defenders and guarantee their protection.

The mission urges the government to reinstate constitutional protections under the 18th Amendment and respect provincial autonomy in natural resource management. Controversial projects such as Saindak and recent amendments to the Balochistan Mines and Mineral Act must be revisited to ensure local consultation and equitable benefit-sharing.

Unless the state urgently initiates a transparent, inclusive and rights-based political solution, political and security conditions in Balochistan will continue to deteriorate. Importantly, the mission notes that the risk of ethnic reprisals beyond the province is real and growing, threatening national cohesion, and accordingly calls for principled leadership rather than further securitisation.

*Press release: HRCP calls for decolonising the law as a rights-based necessity*

*Karachi, 4 September 2025.* At a conference convened by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), titled ‘Decolonising the law: Human rights and legal reform in Pakistan,’ lawyers, journalists, academics and human rights defenders examined how colonial legal frameworks continue to shape Pakistan’s judicial and political systems at a significant cost to vulnerable groups.

HRCP chairperson Asad Butt reminded participants that laws curbing freedoms move swiftly through assemblies, while those serving the people languish. HRCP secretary-general Harris Khaliq emphasised that colonial systems had reconfigured societies into ‘cores and peripheries,’ treating people as subjects rather than citizens.

In his keynote address, Justice (R) Maqbool Baqer stressed that Pakistan’s judicial system remains designed ‘to control people rather than protect their rights.’ He called for repealing laws that criminalise dissent, embedding compassion into legal practice and safeguarding judicial independence.

In the opening plenary, lawyer Sara Malkani underscored how sedition and preventive detention laws replicate colonial strategies of control, while researcher Nazish Brohi highlighted the state’s continued ‘civilising mission’ as a colonial practice. Journalist Akbar Notezai pointed out that Balochistan was ‘still treated like a colony,’ citing resource extraction and widespread disappearances. Lawyer Asfandyar Warraich emphasised freedom of assembly as ‘the fulcrum of all rights,’ warning against restrictive new laws on peaceful protest.

Speakers presented abstracts of their research in three subsequent thematic sessions. Speaking on the right to freedom of expression, digital rights activist Farieha Aziz and lawyers Momna Taufeeq, Simra Sohail, Sibghat Sheikh, and Asfand Katchela critiqued the use of PECA and sedition laws as tools of suppression. HRCP Council member Sohail Sangi observed that digital repression was ‘a modern version of colonial controls on the press.’

Lawyers Abira Ashfaq and Mudassar Farooq, cultural rights practitioner Sadia Farooq Azeemi and HRCP Council member Sadia Baloch examined colonial legacies in criminal procedure, land tenure and social control. They called for educational reform, dismantling discriminatory laws and redefining rule of law on indigenous and human rights principles.

HRCP staffer Salman Farrukh and lawyer Aliza Masood highlighted how colonial laws had entrenched forced marriage and denial of women's consent, while lawyer Hareem Godil traced blasphemy-related provisions from their colonial origins to the abuse of such laws today. HRCP Council member Mahnaz Rahman described the struggles of women against patriarchal and colonial frameworks, while lawyer Salahuddin Ahmed called for judicial sensitisation and safeguards to curb the misuse of laws against women and minorities.

In her closing remarks, former HRCP chairperson Hina Jilani emphasised that 'We cannot cling to either colonial or indigenous authoritarian traditions. The rule of law must be redefined to reflect justice and equality.' Concluding the conference, Sindh Assembly deputy speaker Anthony Naveed said that it was necessary to critique draft laws governing the rights and freedoms of religious communities to ensure that they fulfilled the function of protecting rather than encumbering vulnerable groups.

*Press release: HRCP fact-finding mission raises alarm over human rights and security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*

*Peshawar, 26 September 2025.* A fact-finding mission to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa led by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is alarmed by the rapidly diminishing writ of the state and the government's seeming inability to protect citizens' right to life and liberty, particularly in the merged districts.

Comprising HRCP chairperson Asad Iqbal Butt, co-chair Munizae Jahangir, treasurer and veteran journalist Husain Naqi, vice-chair Akbar Khan, academic and HRCP member Dr Saba Gul Khattak and HRCP staff members Shahid Mehmood and Salman Farrukh, the mission held meetings from 24 to 26 September 2025 with a wide range of civil society—including the press, the legal community, human rights defenders, and families displaced by conflict—as well as with political party leaders, law enforcement officials and senior members of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, including the chief minister.

Principally, local communities and stakeholders have highlighted a worrying link between increasing violence, displacement and security operations, and the extraction of natural resources under the proposed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines and Minerals Act 2025. In many parts of the merged districts, militants appear to be operating unhindered, reportedly extorting and harassing residents, killing those who refuse to comply, and restricting people's movement beyond the afternoons. Some reports suggest that law enforcement agencies have ceased to operate in these areas.

The mission is especially concerned about the recent killings in Tirah, in which reportedly over 20 civilians, including women and children, were killed, allegedly under aerial bombardment. The mission has demanded a credible inquiry, urging the provincial and federal authorities to cease shifting blame onto one another. Inadequate compensation to victims' families cannot be a substitute for state accountability and due process.

The mission notes with concern that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Actions (in Aid of Civil Power) Ordinance 2019, an impugned law still in force, continues to legitimise internment centres and preventive detention in clear violation of Article 10 of the Constitution and Pakistan's international legal commitments. Moreover, decreased judicial and administrative oversight, alongside weak regulatory mechanisms, continue to perpetuate the practice of enforced disappearances, with allegations of thousands of cases reported, despite far lower official figures.

The mission has further documented the harassment of journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders, particularly those advocating against enforced disappearances. The allegation that law enforcement and security agencies have been complicit in forcibly disappearing people who are then traced to internment centres is of grave concern and merits an immediate response from the government.

The mission has also documented serious reservations expressed by the legal community regarding the revival of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, which risk creating a parallel justice system that lacks credibility and undermines the rule of law.

The mission concludes that there appears to be a clear effort to undo the hard-won constitutional merger of 2018, which will not only reverse social and economic progress, but will also prove disastrous for the rights of vulnerable groups, particularly women and transgender persons, living in these areas.

*Press release: Judicial independence, freedoms and safety under siege*

*Lahore, 23 November 2025.* On concluding its 39th annual general meeting, the general body of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) draws urgent attention to escalating threats to constitutional democracy, civic freedoms, and the safety of vulnerable communities across the country.

HRCP is deeply concerned over the passage of the 27th Constitutional Amendment, which undermines judicial independence by expanding executive control over matters that should remain free from executive interference. The amendment further weakens essential checks and balances at a time when public trust in state institutions is fragile. Lifetime immunity for holders of public office has concentrated unchecked power in the hands of a few, eroding parliamentary supremacy. HRCP also stresses that empowered, elected local governments are critical for deepening democracy and strengthening citizens' participation in governance.

Efforts to curb militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan must protect fundamental freedoms and the right to dissent. Blanket internet shutdowns in Balochistan and other parts of the country have disrupted education, livelihoods, and democratic participation and must end immediately. HRCP urges the federal and provincial governments to implement rights-respecting security measures, conduct impartial investigations into abuses by state actors, and engage meaningfully with local communities. This includes ending enforced disappearances and the use of interment centres without due process. The use of Schedule 4 to muzzle dissent must cease.

HRCP notes with alarm the ongoing harassment, detention, and forced repatriation of Afghan refugees, many facing credible threats of persecution, family separation, and severe humanitarian distress. The government must suspend deportations, ensure due process, and uphold international protection standards. Pakistan should ratify the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol and protect the right to citizenship by birth and naturalisation.

Custodial torture and extrajudicial killings, particularly involving CCD and CTD personnel, demand urgent independent inquiries and accountability. Such violations perpetuate impunity and threaten citizens' right to life and dignity.

Religious minorities, especially Ahmadis, continue to face mob violence, attacks on worship sites, and desecration of graves. The state must ensure protection, prosecute incitement, and implement the delayed commission to investigate blasphemy law misuse as well as legislate against forced conversions.

Child marriage remains pervasive, endangering girls' health, education, and futures. HRCP calls for legislative reforms to define a minor consistently across laws and declare all marriages under 18 illegal. Sexual harassment in educational, public and private institutions also persists; robust reporting, transparent accountability, and preventive training are essential to safeguard learning environments and workplaces.

HRCP urges the government to protect climate-displaced persons, especially in Gilgit-Baltistan, with safe shelter, essential services and sustainable resettlement solutions. The authorities must also ensure long-term support for rebuilding homes and livelihoods for those affected by the recent floods, particularly in South Punjab. Incarcerated

fisherfolk, both Indian and Pakistani, must be repatriated to their respective countries and receive humane treatment, legal representation and protection from arbitrary detention to preserve their rights and livelihoods.

## Loss of fellow human rights defenders

*30 January 2025.* HRCP mourns the demise of independent filmmaker and human rights defender Tapan Kumar Bose, who championed peace in South Asia for many years as part of the Pakistan India Forum for Peace and Development. While his loss is irreparable, it is also a reminder that the people-to-people peace process must be reinvigorated for the benefit of all.

*3 April 2025.* HRCP shares the grief of the family, friends, students and comrades of Dr Syed Haroon Ahmed who passed away in Karachi earlier today. His commitment to social justice and human rights remained unwavering. Dr Ahmed was also a member of HRCP.

*8 April 2025.* HRCP is grieved to learn that politician, author and playwright, Senator Taj Haider, breathed his last in Karachi today. Senator Haider was among the few politicians who stood uncompromisingly for economic justice, cultural rights and democratic governance in the country. Our deepest condolences to his family, friends and colleagues.

*9 July 2025.* HRCP mourns the passing of veteran journalist, columnist and editor Zubeida Mustafa who championed social, cultural and language rights like few. She was a comrade-in-arms and stood by the disadvantaged and the oppressed. May her family and friends find strength to bear this irreparable loss.

*10 July 2025.* HRCP offers its deepest condolences to the family of Tasnim Minto, a writer of great merit, who believed in progressive politics to bring about change in the lives of common people and the working class.

*5 September 2025.* HRCP mourns the death of Dr Zeenat Hussain and shares the grief of her family and friends, most of whom have long been part of HRCP. She was the wife of the late Dr Mubashir Hasan. Dr Zeenat Hussain's funeral prayers will be offered at 4 pm on Saturday 6 September 2025, at her residence, 4-K Main Boulevard, Gulberg II, Lahore. A remembrance prayer will be held on Sunday 7 September 2025 at 12 noon, at the same place.

*9 September 2025.* HRCP is deeply saddened by the passing of feminist and human rights defender Nuzhat Kidwai. A long-time member of the Women's Action Forum, she will be remembered for her integrity and commitment to justice. At a time when voices of conscience are most needed, her loss is profoundly felt by colleagues, friends and the wider human rights community. HRCP extends heartfelt condolences to her family, friends and colleagues.

*20 December 2025.* HRCP expresses deep sorrow at the passing of human rights defender Mama Abdul Qadeer, who, after the abduction and killing of his son in 2009, initiated a campaign against enforced disappearances. The founder of Voice for Baloch Missing Persons, it was Mama who led a historic long march from Quetta to Islamabad in 2013 to demand accountability for enforced disappearances. His legacy will endure in the countless families he stood beside. We reiterate that the state must take concerted action to restore the rights for which Mama spent decades campaigning.

## Other stands

*8 January 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) would like to clarify that it is not associated with any institutional ambassadors using either its name or abbreviation or creating social media content to this effect.

We would also like to reiterate that, apart from the regional coordinators we employ at our offices, whose names and contact details are available on our website (<https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/our-offices/>), we have no other local coordinators, whether in a voluntary capacity or otherwise.

HRCP has only two official spokespersons: the chairperson (Asad Iqbal Butt) and secretary-general (Harris Khaliq). From time to time, the spokespersons may delegate this role to other office bearers of its governing body or to senior members of staff. No other statements should be taken as reflecting HRCP's institutional position.

The continued use of the abbreviation 'HRCP' by another group in recent years remains cause for concern and we consider it unethical and misleading.

*18 January 2025.* HRCP calls for the immediate restoration of essential supplies to suffering communities in Kurram. It is the responsibility of the provincial Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and the federal government to curb continued killings and violence. They must ensure the implementation, in letter and spirit, of the agreement reached between the feuding parties.

*24 February 2025.* HRCP reminds the Sindh government that it must take concerted action to regulate the movement of heavy traffic in Karachi to prevent road accidents, especially as a result of rash driving. Given the high number of fatalities in recent weeks, particularly among vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists, the authorities must enforce stricter traffic laws, improve road safety infrastructure and promote public awareness of road safety. HRCP also believes that all citizens have the right to protest peacefully against slow government action in this area.

*27 March 2025.* HRCP is pleased to announce that researcher Syeda Armeen Nasim has been awarded the fifth I. A. Rehman Research Grant for 2025. Ms Nasim will study youth perspectives on the rise of ethno-religious nationalism in India and Pakistan and its implications for human rights and cross-border relations. Her findings will be published and disseminated by HRCP.

Instituted in honour of the veteran journalist, human rights defender, and former honorary spokesperson of HRCP, the I. A. Rehman Research grant is intended to facilitate original research carried out in human rights in Pakistan and, this year, in the wider South Asian region. This year's recipient was selected by an independent committee of lawyers, journalists and human rights defenders.

*24 July 2025.* HRCP greatly appreciates the letter of support from the statutory National Commission for Human Rights for protecting and facilitating the smooth functioning of the organisation, as ensured under Articles 17 and 19 of the Constitution as well as Pakistan's international commitments as a state party. HRCP is grateful to the NCHR chairperson for sending this letter to the relevant authorities.

*1 September 2025.* Today, HRCP marks the 95th birth anniversary of I. A. Rehman, leading journalist and human rights defender. His contributions to freedom of expression, the realisation of fundamental rights for all, peace building in South Asia, and labour and minority rights movements across the world remain unparalleled. Mr Rehman served as director and secretary-general of HRCP from 1990 and 2016 and as honorary spokesperson until he passed away in 2021.

*22 September 2025.* The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) wishes to state categorically that it has not nominated any individual for any award. HRCP is a nonpartisan, nonpolitical organisation committed solely to the promotion and protection of human rights. Any claims suggesting that HRCP has endorsed or nominated a particular individual, whether for political or other reasons, are entirely incorrect and misleading. Once again, we draw attention to the continued misuse of the abbreviation 'HRCP' to indicate other organisations with whom we have no connection whatsoever.

# Appendix 4

## Pakistan and international human rights mechanisms

### International human rights treaties

As of end-2025, Pakistan had signed and ratified the following treaties:

- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (signed in 2008 and ratified in 2010)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (signed in 2008 and ratified in 2010)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified in 1996)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (signed and ratified in 1966)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (signed in 2004 and ratified in 2008)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (signed and ratified in 1990)
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (on the involvement of children in armed conflict) (signed in 2001 and ratified in 2016)
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) (signed in 2001 and ratified in 2011)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (signed in 2008 and ratified in 2011)
- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention 1948 (ILO Convention no. 87)
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention 1949 (ILO Convention no. 98)
- Forced Labour Convention 1930 (ILO Convention no. 29) and its 2014 Protocol
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention 1957 (ILO Convention no. 105)
- Minimum Age Convention 1973 (ILO Convention no. 138)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 (ILO Convention no. 182)
- Equal Remuneration Convention 1951 (ILO Convention no. 100)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention 1958 (ILO Convention no. 111)
- Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (as amended)
- Labour Statistics Convention 1985 (ILO Convention no. 160)

As of end-2025, Pakistan had *not* signed or ratified the following treaties:

- Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture
- Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (aiming to abolish the death penalty)
- Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

## **UN Special Procedures and other observations**

In January, UN experts expressed grave concern over the imposition of the mandatory death penalty for blasphemy-related charges against academic Junaid Hafeez as well as allegations of arbitrary detention and prolonged solitary confinement.

In February, UN experts called on Pakistan to immediately release detained Baloch human rights defenders and cease its crackdown on peaceful protesters. In particular, they expressed concern about escalating actions by the police against the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), which had intensified after an attack by Baloch separatists on a passenger train.

In March, the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers expressed concern over the conviction of over 100 civilians by military courts and called on the state to abrogate the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians and release on bail all civilians detained under the jurisdiction of these courts.

In March, UN experts called the state's attention to allegations of continued attacks, including killings, harassment and hate speech, against religious minorities in the country as well as attacks on their places of worship and burial.

In May, UN experts underscored the judicial harassment and potential criminalisation of human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari in connection with her work. In the same month, a group of UN experts expressed concern over the arrest, arbitrary detention and mistreatment of leaders and members of the BYC, particularly Mahrang Baloch, Beebow Baloch, Gulzadi Baloch, Bebag Baloch and Sibghatullah Shahjee.

In August, UN experts expressed concern over the alleged extrajudicial killings of journalist and human rights defender Abdul Latif Baloch earlier in May and of his son, Saif Baloch, as well as the targeting of members of Abdul Latif Baloch's extended family and the arrest of human rights defender Gulzar Dost in July in Kech district in Balochistan.

In October, UN experts expressed concern over the imminent deportation of Afghan national Khairullah Khaliq and Mursal, together with their respective families, within the wider context of the ongoing mass refoulement of Afghan nationals from Pakistan under the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan. They observed that such deportation would place them at risk of irreparable harm and grave human rights violations.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk observed in November that Pakistan's hastily adopted 27th Constitutional Amendment seriously undermined judicial independence and raised 'grave concerns about military accountability and respect for the rule of law.'

In December, UN experts drew the state's attention to information received concerning former prime minister Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi, alleging that they were being held in conditions of detention that were considered to fall below international standards on humane and dignified treatment in detention.

## Other developments

In October, the UN General Assembly elected Pakistan to the UN Human Rights Council for a three-year term, commencing on 1 January 2026. This marked the sixth time that Pakistan has been elected to the Council since its establishment in 2006.

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