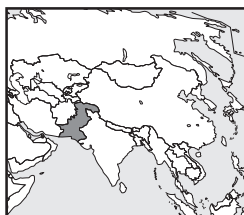


Extreme poverty, forced labour, «honour killings»...

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This report presents an overview of the dramatic Pakistani situation. Its 140 million people are among the world's poorest. High population growth and low social spending have deteriorated healthcare, education, sanitation and drinking water. Non-Muslim minorities experience routine discrimination. Child and forced labour and violence against women, subject to the rule of «honour killings», are part of a general climate of restricted public freedoms.

Pakistan's 140 million people are among the world's poorest (see table 1). High population growth (a 3% increase each year) and low social spending (see table 2) have deteriorated healthcare, education, sanitation and drinking water. Health services are particularly bad for the urban poor and rural population. On average there is one male doctor for a population of 1,923.¹ Private hospitals, which provide better medical facilities, are too expensive for the poor to use. Public hospitals lack treatment facilities and medicines. Long distances to the hospitals also deny many poor people access to healthcare.

TABLE 1

Human deprivation profile	
Population below poverty line	44%
Population without access to health services	45%
Population without access to safe water	12%
Population without access to sanitation	39%
Daily calorie supply	2,452
Illiterate adult women	70%
Malnourished children	38%
Infant mortality rate	81 (per 1,000 live births)
Under-5 mortality rate	112 (per 1,000 live births)
Child labourers	19 million

Source: Mehboob ul Haq, Human Development in South Asia 2001, Human Development Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

TABLE 2

Wealth and poverty	
Total GNP	USD 58.2 billion (1999)
GNP per capita	USD 470 (1999)
Income share: ratio of highest 20% to lowest 20% (1987-98)	4.3
Social security benefits expenditure (as % of GNP)	0.2
Public expenditure on education and health (as % of GNP)	3.6

Source: Mehboob ul Haq, Human Development in South Asia 2001, Human Development Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Although the literacy rate has increased, the effective literacy rate is much lower. It is estimated that the male literacy rate is 53% and the female literacy rate is only 30%. There is a large disparity in literacy levels between rural and urban areas, and between highly developed and less developed provinces. For example, female literacy in rural Sindh is only 13%.

Discrimination against minorities

Although the government claims to provide equal rights for non-Muslim minorities—mainly Hindus, Christians and Ahmadis²—in practice these groups experience routine discrimination and live in fear and suppression. In many places liberal Muslims are also prevented from living their lives as they want.

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, Christians have become the target of assaults. Peace activist Aslam Martin was recently killed in Karachi. Islamic extremist organisations equate Christians with the western world and identify them as enemies of Islam. Minorities also face formal discrimination, such as being barred from holding elected as well appointed high offices. The government has taken small steps toward protecting minorities, such as ending separate elections and reserving seats in assemblies and the Senate. Yet full equality remains distant.

Child and forced labour

Many households depend on child labour for survival. While reliable statistics are not available, it is thought that about two thirds of children population work in services, manufacturing, fishery, agriculture and forestry. Despite legal prohibitions, industrial child labour is widespread, especially in textile factories and home-based production. By conservative estimates, one million children work as carpet weavers alone.

Forced labour exists in agriculture and other sectors of the economy. These people are first loaned money beyond their capacity to repay and then they continue to work under low wages and harsh conditions and they are not free to leave the creditor's work place until they fully repay the loan. Bonded families are paid less than others and are denied basic social and human rights. They are virtual slaves and are kept in permanent poverty. Hundreds of bonded labour families were in the private jails owned by feudal lords and big landlords mostly in the Sindh province. They were released with the help of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, some NGOs and social and political groups. Some of the freed families settled in Hyderabad. Recently ILO with the help of the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), have undertaken their rehabilitation. The issue of forced labour is very acute in Mirpur Khas and Sanghar districts in Sindh. The exact number of bonded families cannot be counted but independent experts estimate them around 20,000.

Forced labourers and children trafficked from other countries have long worked in brick kilns, fisheries, shoe-making, power looms and carpet-making. High demand for cheap and docile workers ensures the continuation of rural child labour. Some reports indicate that police support child slavery and forced labour. Living conditions for these workers are appalling, and serious health problems, such as respiratory, skin and eye ailments, are common.

¹ Mehboob ul Haq, Human Development in South Asia 2001, Human Development Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

² The Ahmadis' claim to be Muslims has been rejected by parliament.

Poverty has led to increasing sexual exploitation of children. Child day-labourers are frequently kidnapped and sold into prostitution, or trafficked across national borders. Some brothel owners seek children who come from far away because they are powerless and least able to escape. In addition, many Pakistani children are smuggled as camel jockeys to the Gulf states; some are sold by their parents. Recently many young men were indoctrinated by religious fundamentalists and, often unknown to their parents, sent to Afghanistan to fight in the war against the United States. It is believed that thousands died in the fighting.

Violence against women

Violence against women is rising. Due to the lack of rule of law, corruption, retrogressive traditions and social acceptance of violence, women are frequently tortured, insulted, beaten and even killed. Gruesome incidents of «honour» killings, «naked walks» and physical torture against women are occurring in the country. Some are reported in the media but a large number of such cases go unreported. This reflects the status of women in the country.

In Sindh province alone, 129 people, mostly women, were victims of honour killings in 2001. In June 2002, a tribal council in Punjab ordered the gang-rape of an 18-year-old woman, as «punishment» to cast shame on her family after her 11-year-old brother allegedly had an affair with one of the tribe's divorced women.³

Tribal tradition (*Karo Kari*) mandates that a family whose honour has been offended by an illicit relationship should kill the man and woman involved. However, in practice the victims of these practices are mostly women. Under this custom, men who carry out the killing need not provide proof of their allegations or utilise the formal judicial system. Even the slightest suspicion of illicit relations by any woman can result in her being killed by her male relatives or husband.

«Honour» in Pakistan is defined by men. Women who defy those standards are often murdered by male family members. The practice seems to be spreading from rural areas to the city, claiming over a thousand victims in 2001 despite outspoken denunciation from political and religious leaders. Thus far the government has not passed a law to outlaw this custom.

Governance and civil society

Pakistan is a frontline state in the war against terrorism and is ruled by the military. The people of Pakistan continue to be denied the benefits of democratic governance. Human rights organisations, women's groups, the media, NGOs, and academic and professional organisations constitute the civil society

organisations in the country. They are very active in promoting social development, protecting human rights and demanding good governance. But the continued military rule has not allowed them to function as effectively as they might. There are several constraints to their work, such as a controlled judiciary, limited political freedom, feudal and tribal culture and religious extremism.

Recommendations

- Democracy should be restored and sovereignty of the people over the State be ensured.
- Human rights, political rights, and religious and cultural freedom should be guaranteed.
- Rights of minorities should be protected.
- Unemployment and poverty should be reduced.
- More funds should be allocated for social sectors such as health, education, sanitation, drinking water and transport.
- The infamous honour killings, child abuse and child labour, and forced labour should all be eliminated.
- Religious extremism, particularly religious terrorism, should be controlled.
- All communities, regardless of traditions, should be subject to the national rule of law and socio-economic reforms. ■

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