

DAWN

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Just how badly does the KP police treat Afghan refugees?

Dawn.com | Ali Akbar | Published November 18, 2015



Pakistan hosts one of the largest refugee populations in the world. – AP/File

The plight of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is no secret. But a special report by the Human Rights Watch (HRW) delves deeper into the horrors these settlers face, and unravels horrifying accounts of how the police abuse them.

Karim – a shopkeeper

“The police did not used to beat us much before December 16, 2014 [when the Taliban attacked a Peshawar school]. Now they [beat] us for no reason. I am afraid that one day when I won’t have bribe money, they will kill me. None of my other family members except me and my brother leave the house now. Our children do not go to school; they do not even go to play outside anymore... [But] I cannot go back to Afghanistan.”



Afghan refugee Shapera, right, stands with her daughter.
– AP/File

Atif – a butcher in Peshawar

30-year old Atif was born in Peshawar. His family came to Pakistan from Kuz Kunar, Nangarhar, Afghanistan in 1981. He grew up in Pakistan and now works as a butcher. He told Human Rights watch:

“In late February or early March [2015] I was arrested from my shop and kept in detention for three days at the University Town police station and fined Rs.5000 (\$50) for no reason. They wanted bribe money. I paid Rs.5000 (\$50) a fine and some extra money as a bribe. I was released when a Pakistani citizen friend of mine gave a surety bond. It has become very difficult to do business. The police come and threaten us with eviction every day.”

Jalal Shah – a vegetable vendor

Shah is originally from Nangarhar province in Afghanistan, and has been living in Peshawar for 20 years. Shah has a PoR card. His shop was destroyed in the September 30 raid, and since the police have continued to harass him. He told Human Rights Watch:

“The traffic police come almost every day now. They initially loot and plunder the shops, demand bribe money from whomever they want and take away anything that they wish. I don’t have a shop now and I sell my vegetables by the side of the road. However, I did have shop a wooden, covered stall until a month ago. The traffic police along with some people of the district administration came in the last days of September. The police demolition continued the

entire day and demolished almost every shop in the market. The police say that we Afghans have no right be here and to do business.”



Afghan refugees at a UNHCR registration centre in Peshawar. – AP/File

Sher Khan – chicken shop owner

Khan, 43, owns and runs a chicken shop in Peshawar's board market. He came to Pakistan in the mid-1980s.

Khan claimed that the during all these years, local traffic police often demanded bribes and threaten him with arrest and deportation if he disobeys them.

However, the raid on September 30 was different. He told Human Rights Watch:

“At first we did not get too scared since we know harassing people is one of their ways to get hush money. But this raid turned out to be different. They took away all my birds and cages and even weighing scales in the police vehicle. All this stuff had cost me Rs.50,000 (\$480). I was told that my shop will be demolished since it was built on

state-owned land and the government now wants to widen the road. I pleaded with them as I have been running this shop for the past 20 years, only to be slapped and kicked by the policemen. My shop was demolished in front of my eyes, and my brother Zia-ul-Haq was taken into police custody. I was asked to pay 6000Rs [\$60] in penalty. It took me two days to pay the money and get my brother released while my birds, cages and weighing scales were never returned, leaving me bankrupt. I am still trying to run my business in this ”



An elderly Afghan man sits outside his mud house in the outskirts of Islamabad. – AP/File

One of the largest global refugee populations

Pakistan has been host to one of the largest refugee populations for over three decades now, with 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees and a million undocumented Afghans. Unwanted in Pakistan, where they face increasing abuse by police, many are unwilling to return to

Afghanistan due to poor security and the lack of any means of livelihood.

After the Army Public School attack

The HRW notes that although hostility towards Afghans living in Pakistan is not new, its incidence rose dramatically after the Army Public School massacre in Peshawar late last year, especially so in the first six weeks following the attack.

All the Afghans who spoke to the HRW said they faced repeated threats, frequent detentions, regular demands for bribes and occasional violence by police since the Peshawar school attack.

Rate of returnees rises



An Afghan refugee family returning to Afghanistan through Torkham. –AP/File

The HRW found that an overwhelming majority of unregistered Afghans (those who have no legal status and are not registered with the government) who left Pakistan after the army school attack were not formally deported. The International Organisation for Migrants (IOM)

categorised some 33,000 refugees as "spontaneous returnees," meaning they were not formally asked to leave the country, from the beginning of 2015 through the first two weeks of February.

This, compared to the previous year, marked a 155% increase in the number of "spontaneous returnees."

The numbers of registered returning refugees — those who hold proof of registration — also increased considerably over the previous year in the Jan-Sep 2015 period.

Number of undocumented 2015

Data shows trend in the number of undocumented returnees from

Share

Repatriate or register?

Talking to Dawn.com, KP Police SSP Operations Mian Saeed, who deals with search operations at refugee settlements, said the police intensified its efforts following the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP).

He said around 11,000 illegal refugees have been deported since NAP was implemented. He went on to say that sometimes registered refugees have to be detained because their documents are missing.

“If they are able to produce their registration documents, we let them go.”

Regarding cases of abuse against the refugees and claims of police harassment, Saeed said some police officials have been fired and suspended from service on the basis of complaints of corruption and abuse.

He said the refugees have a council and a focal person, which holds regular meetings with the police. “All concerns are registered and addressed during these meetings.”

Saeed did go on to say that refugees have been found to have been involved in crimes and in some cases illegal weapons have also been recovered from their possession.

KP government spokesman Mushtaq Ghani said it was the government’s responsibility to ensure protection for the refugees. But he said police was an autonomous institution in KP and is not subject to political pressure.

“If there are complaints regarding police behavior, these must be registered with the relevant authority.”

He said the provincial government had requested the federal government to repatriate the refugees, adding that the KP government had offered to provide for their transport.

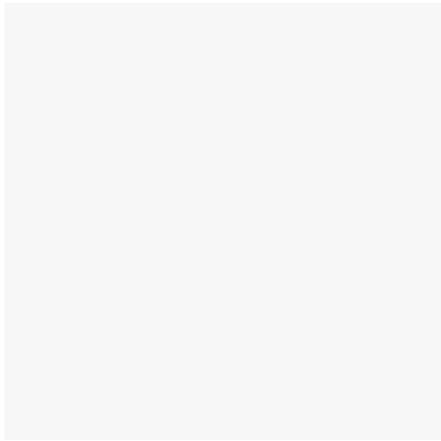
“If there are international pacts that stops the government from repatriating them [refugees], then at least all refugees must be registered.”

HRW recommendations to the govt of Pakistan

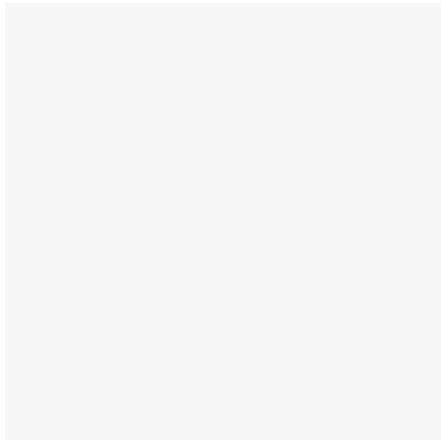
- Extend current PoR cards until at least December 31, 2017, and review the PoR system to establish procedures that would regularize the process and reduce the stress to cardholders of periodic short-term, renewals.
- Issue a specific written directive instructing all relevant government officials and state security forces to cease unlawful surveillance, harassment, intimidation, and violence against Afghans living in Pakistan.
- Ensure that all law enforcement and other government officials treat Afghans living in Pakistan with dignity and respect for their human rights in compliance with Pakistan’s domestic and international legal obligations.
- Direct the Federal Investigating Agency (FIA) to fully and impartially investigate incidents in which law enforcements and other government officials are implicated in unlawful surveillance, harassment, intimidation, and use of force against Afghan refugees and undocumented Afghans.
- Ratify the refugee convention and adopt a national refugee law, as recognized in 2013 National policy on the Management and repatriation of Afghan refugees.

- Ensure Afghans can lodge protection claims in Pakistan with UNHCR or, if UNCHR does not have capacity to do so, with the Pakistani authorities.
- Do not deport documented Afghan refugees; ensure undocumented Afghans can appeal against a decision to deport them and receive legal assistance; if they fear persecution or other serious harm in Afghanistan, ensure they are referred to UNCHR, which can determine whether they are refugees or need other forms of protection.
- Ensure that all refugees who decide to return do so in safety and dignity with full respect for their rights. Regarding Access to Education, Employment, and Other Services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers:
- Ensure, consistent with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and article 25A of the Constitution of Pakistan, that foreign national children, including Afghans, have access to free primary education and access to secondary education on the same basis as Pakistani children.
- Consistent with the ICESCR, provide all refugees and asylum seekers, including Afghans, access to health services and medication on at least the same basis as other non-citizens in the country. All children should have access to affordable health care regardless of their nationality or migration status.

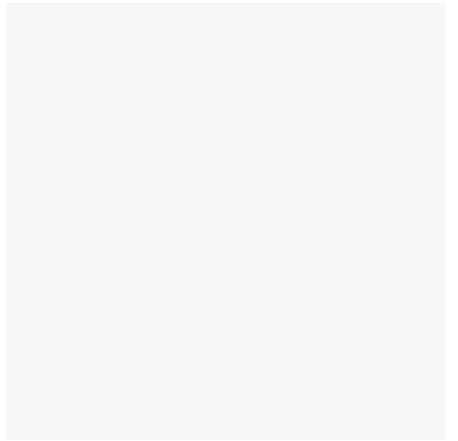
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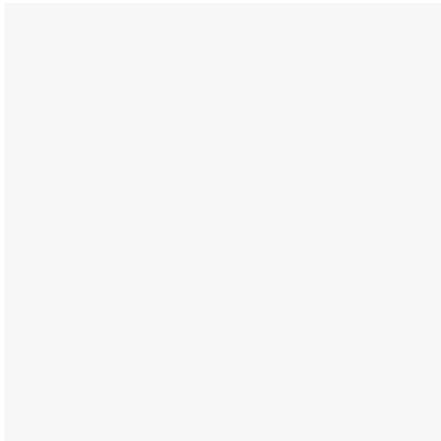
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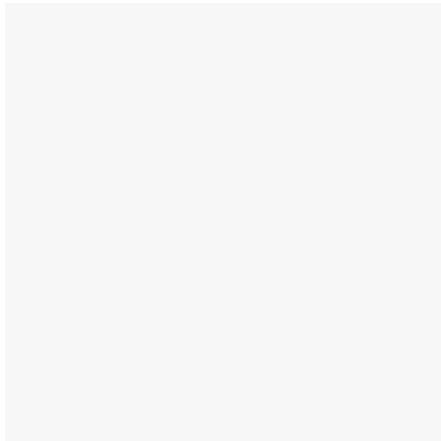
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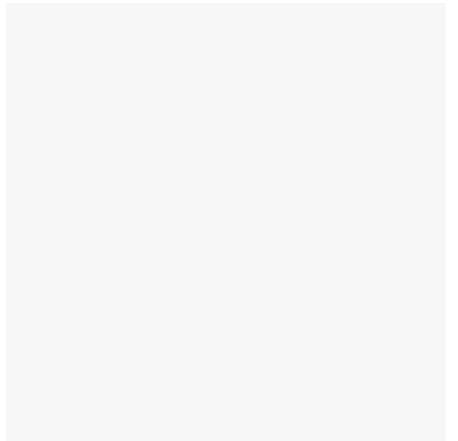
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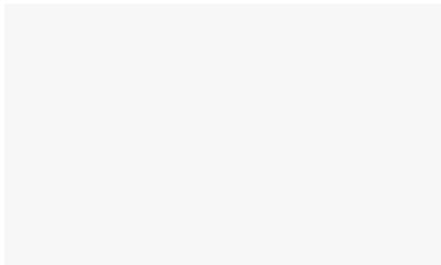


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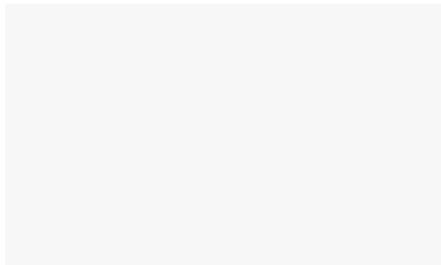


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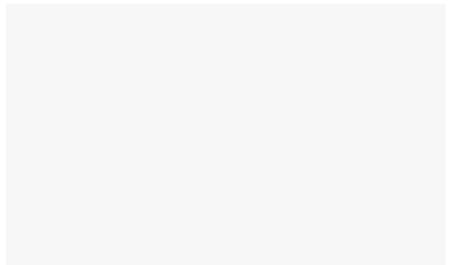
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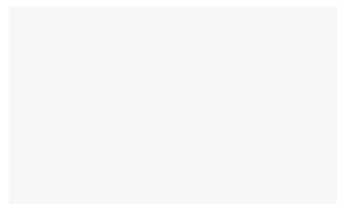


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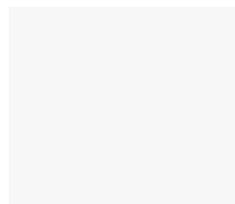
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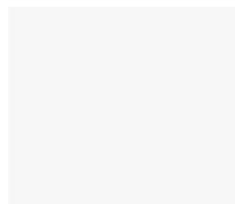


It is now apparent that Washington is fully behind the Israeli war on Gaza

The Gaza war has politically divided the US, with the majority of Americans wanting the war to end.

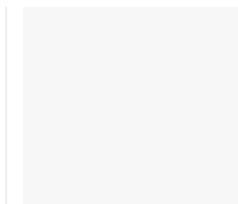


Editorial: With millions of customers overbilled, it seems that Nepra deserves more blame than anyone else

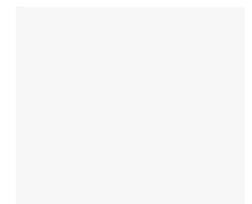


Kech chaos reflective of the larger Balochistan problem long ignored by the state

Kiyya Baloch



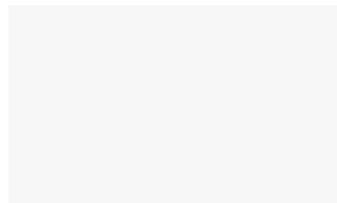
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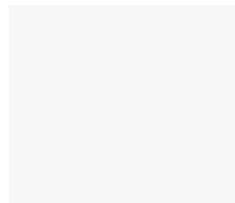
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Opinion



Women dying everywhere

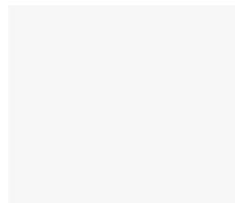
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All cultures have the ability to stop excusing male behaviour and



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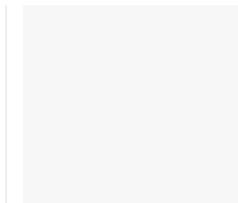
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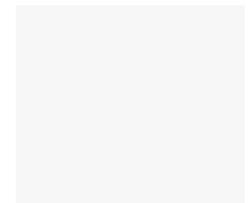
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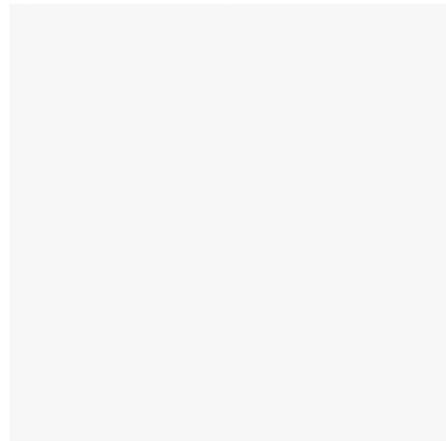
looking away from the suffering of women.

Editorial

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Abject failure

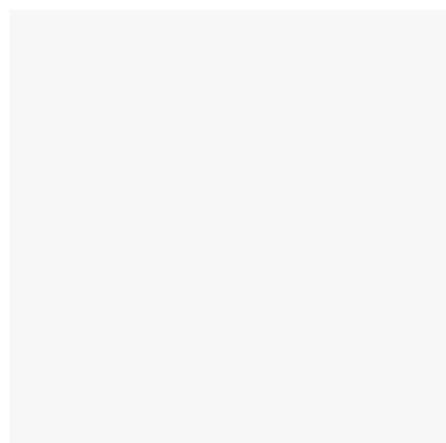
Nepra must also order an internal inquiry to determine why its own officials dragged their feet and failed to take appropriate action against overbilling.



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Chilas bus attack

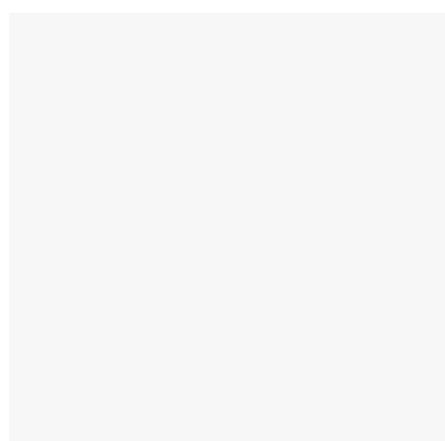
Locals, particularly in Diamer and Kohistan, need to be on board to ensure that militants have no place to hide.



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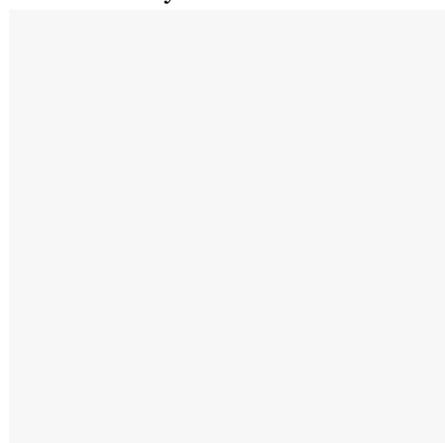
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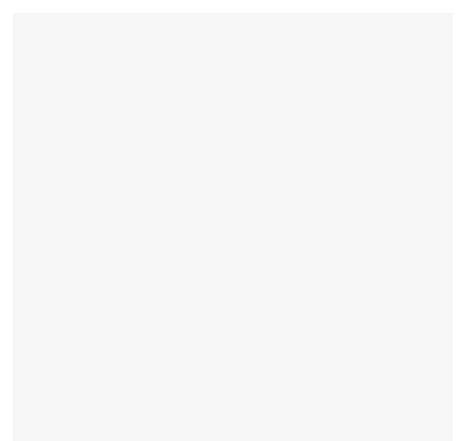
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