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ANNUAL REPORT

TEAM PAKISTAN

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Annual Report for Team Pakistan 2024

The year 2024 has been marked by profound political, social, and environmental challenges in Pakistan. From escalating human rights violations and environmental crises to heightened regional tensions and political suppression, the nation faced a multitude of difficulties. While the entire year was eventful, **January, July and August were the most significant months**, witnessing critical developments in human rights, political repression, and international scrutiny. This report presents a detailed analysis of key events, focusing on their implications for governance, human rights, and stability.

Moreover, this report is structured chronologically, providing a month-by-month analysis of key events. Each section examines the most prominent incidents of the respective month, their broader implications, and the responses from domestic and international actors. It also discusses wide themes, such as political instability, environmental crises, and systemic challenges, to offer a comprehensive view of Pakistan's complicated year.

The structure of this report is as follows:

January to June 2024: The first half of the year is explored through major political and security-related events, such as escalating tensions with Iran, Imran Khan's legal battles, delayed elections, and regional insurgencies.

July and August 2024: These pivotal months are analyzed in detail, focusing on the detention of political leaders, enforced disappearances, and the international outcry over human rights violations.

September to December 2024: The final months of the year cover sectarian violence, judicial reforms, escalating protests, environmental crises, and a rare positive development in the resumption of international flights.

Through this structured approach, the report aims to provide a holistic understanding of the critical events of 2024.

January 2024: Rising Tensions and Political Conflicts

Escalation Between Iran and Pakistan

On January 16, Iran conducted multiple strikes targeting alleged militant hide outs in Balochistan, killing two children and injuring several civilians. This triggered retaliatory Pakistani strikes on Iranian soil, further straining diplomatic ties. The Pakistani ambassador to Iran was recalled, while Iran's envoy to Islamabad faced expulsion. The attack tragically resulted in the deaths of two children and injuries to several civilians on Pakistani soil. In retaliation, Pakistan launched military strikes within Iranian territory, targeting bases of the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) and Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), both militant groups operating in the region (IISS, 2024).

This confrontation further deteriorated already fragile diplomatic relations between the two nations. The historical Sunni-Shia divide, which has shaped the geopolitical identities of Pakistan and Iran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, fueled the tensions. Diplomatic ties were further strained as both countries recalled their ambassadors, with Pakistan banning Iran's envoy in Islamabad (IISS, 2024).

The incident not only highlighted the complex interplay of sectarian and geopolitical conflicts but also underscored the precarious balance in regional stability. Continued clashes or escalations could pose significant challenges to peace and security, not just for Pakistan and Iran but for South Asia as a whole.

Imran Khan's Sentencing

January also marked a critical juncture in Pakistan's domestic politics, as former Prime Minister Imran Khan faced multiple convictions that reshaped the political landscape. On January 29, Khan was sentenced to 10 years in prison for allegedly revealing state secrets. The next day, on January 30, both Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, were sentenced to 14 years in jail on corruption charges linked to the Toshakhana case (Al Jazeera, 2023).

Background: The Toshakhana case accused Khan of failing to report gifts received during his tenure as Prime Minister, allegedly selling state-owned items worth an estimated \$500,000. These legal challenges added to a growing list of approximately 150 cases Khan faced, including charges of inciting violence and corruption (Dawn, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2023).

Political and Public Reaction: Khan's sentencing marked the seventh time a Pakistani Prime Minister had been arrested or convicted, reflecting a broader pattern of political instability and the contentious role of the judiciary in the country's governance. His supporters viewed the convictions as politically motivated and part of a wider effort to suppress opposition, especially as Khan's PTI party continued to challenge the ruling coalition (Dawn, 2024).

The backlash from these convictions was swift and significant. Protests erupted in major cities, including Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, as Khan's supporters took to the streets demanding justice. These demonstrations highlighted deepening political polarization and widespread dissatisfaction with the government (Al Jazeera, 2023).

February 2024: Disputed General Elections and Flooding

Delayed General Elections

The postponed general elections, originally scheduled for October 2023, took place in February amidst allegations of rigging. Confessions from the Commissioner of Rawalpindi regarding manipulation, along with bombings in Balochistan that killed nearly 30 people, marked the electoral process. Protests erupted nationwide, fueled by perceptions of injustice and disenfranchisement (Dawn, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2024; BBC, 2024).

Severe Flooding

Heavy monsoon rains caused widespread flooding in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, displacing thousands and destroying infrastructure. The disaster highlighted Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change and the urgent need for effective disaster management strategies (UNHRC, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024).

March 2024: Security Threats

Attack on Gwadar Port

Baloch separatists launched an attack on the Gwadar Port Authority on March 20, leading to the deaths of eight militants and two soldiers. This incident emphasized the persistent threat of insurgency in the region and its implications for Pakistan's economic projects (IISS, 2024).

Suicide Bombing Targeting Chinese Engineers

On March 26, a suicide bombing targeted a convoy of Chinese engineers traveling to the Dasu Hydropower Project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The attack killed five Chinese engineers and a Pakistani driver, with several others injured. This incident marked one of the deadliest assaults on Chinese nationals in Pakistan since the start of CPEC-related activities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2024).

April 2024: Period of Quiet Amid Lingering Challenges

No major incidents were reported during April, though the nation continued grappling with the fallout from February's contentious elections and March's security challenges (Dawn, 2024).

May 2024: Economic and Security Crises

Wheat Crisis

The Punjab government's decision to slash its wheat procurement target by 50% caused prices to plummet, leading to widespread protests by farmers. The crisis underscored vulnerabilities in Pakistan's agricultural policies and food security infrastructure (Dawn, 2024).

Increased Violence

Militant activities surged in May, with bombings and clashes in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa claiming numerous lives. Schools and infrastructure were targeted, highlighting ongoing instability in these regions (Al Jazeera, 2024; IISS, 2024).

June 2024: Legal Challenges and Environmental Concerns

The Iddat Case and Judicial Polarization

In June 2024, the legal proceedings against former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, continued to dominate Pakistan's political and judicial discourse. The controversial **Iddat case**, which accused the couple of entering into an invalid marriage under Islamic law, became a focal point of public debate.

Timeline of Events:

June 9: Bushra Bibi filed a petition with the Islamabad High Court (IHC), seeking to suspend her conviction and sentence.

June 11: The IHC questioned the legitimacy of a judge's recusal from the case, implying potential bias or procedural irregularities.

June 13: The IHC directed an additional sessions court to resolve the appeals of both Khan and Bibi within a month.

June 27: The appeals court upheld the convictions, prompting the couple's legal team to file further appeals (Dawn, 2024).

Implications:

Polarization of the Judiciary: Critics viewed the case as part of a broader effort to discredit and politically neutralize Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. Supporters of Khan alleged that the judiciary had become a tool of the ruling coalition. Regarding Procedural Concerns: Legal experts highlighted inconsistencies in the judicial process, including allegations of bias in court proceedings and the reassignment of judges handling the case (UNHRC, 2024)

July 2024: Human Rights and Political Repression

Imran Khan's Detention and Enforced Disappearances

The month of July brought international scrutiny to Pakistan's handling of political dissent, particularly the detention of former Prime Minister Imran Khan and the pattern of enforced disappearances targeting members of his PTI party.

UN Involvement: The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued **Opinion No. 22/2024**, after its adoption during the 99th Session. This opinion condemned the arbitrary detention of Khan, highlighting significant procedural violations and politically motivated charges. The opinion outlined three categories of arbitrary detention:

Lack of legal basis for detention: The Toshakhana and cipher cases were deemed politically motivated, violating Articles 3 and 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Suppression of political freedoms: Khan's detention was identified as an attempt to silence his political leadership, violating his rights to freedom of expression, opinion, and association under the UDHR and ICCPR.

Grave violations of fair trial standards: The absence of arrest warrants, summary judgments in absentia, and restrictions on legal representation were seen as gross violations of due process (UNHRC, 2024).

Key Developments:

PTI Leadership Targeted: On **July 22**, security forces raided PTI headquarters in Islamabad, arresting key party leaders, including Chairman Gohar Khan and Information Secretary Rauf Hasan. Amnesty International and the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) documented 197 cases of enforced disappearances targeting PTI affiliates (Amnesty International, 2024).

Election Manipulation: Khan's conviction and subsequent detention effectively barred him and the PTI from participating in the February 2024 general elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan further disqualified PTI from running under its electoral symbol, forcing candidates to run independently or under smaller political alliances. However, in a **landmark ruling** on July 12, the Supreme Court declared PTI's electoral disqualification unconstitutional and reinstated its legitimacy as a political party (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Government Response: Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar dismissed the UN findings as interference in Pakistan's internal affairs. Despite the July 13 appeals court ruling that acquitted Khan and Bushra Bibi of unlawful marriage charges, the government signaled its intention to prolong his detention under the guise of maintaining "economic stability" (Dawn, 2024).

August 2024: Continued Persecution and Refugee Challenges

The Need for Long-Term Solutions for Afghan Refugees

Pakistan's treatment of Afghan refugees came under intense scrutiny in August, as the government's **Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP)**, launched in September 2023, resulted in the forced deportation of over 700,000 Afghans by July 2024 (CERD, 2024). While Pakistan hosts an estimated 1.35 million registered Afghan refugees under the UNHCR, the actual number, including undocumented individuals, is believed to exceed 2 million.

Human Rights Concerns:

Lack of Individual Assessments: The IFRP was criticized for failing to evaluate the risks of persecution or refoulement, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children.

Harassment of Undocumented Refugees: Undocumented Afghan nationals remained at high risk of police harassment and forced return, raising concerns of human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2024).

International Engagement: A visit by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in August led to the government extending the validity of **Proof of Registration (PoR) cards** until June 2025, granting temporary relief for documented refugees. However, calls for more comprehensive, long-term refugee policies remained unmet (UNHRC, 2024).

Persecution of the Ahmadiyya Religious Minority

The **Ahmadiyya religious community**, declared non-Muslims in 1974, faced a surge in persecution during August, with national and international human rights groups condemning these developments.

Incidents of Violence:

Extrajudicial Killings: On July 8, two Ahmadis were murdered in Saad Ullah Pur in targeted attacks (CERD, 2024).

Desecration of Religious Sites: Ahmadi places of worship were vandalized, with attackers facing little to no repercussions.

Hate Speech and Social Media Campaigns: Personal information of Ahmadis circulated online, inciting violence and discrimination (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2024).

Government Response: While the National Human Rights Commission of Pakistan initiated some investigations, the government's broader inaction reflected systemic discrimination. The Ahmadi community's appeals for stronger legal protections remained largely ignored.

September 2024: Sectarian Violence and Blasphemy Law Misuse

Blasphemy-Related Killings

The misuse of Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws once again came under the spotlight in September, following high-profile extrajudicial killings in Sindh and Balochistan. On **September 19**, Dr. Shahnawaz, a physician in Umerkot, Sindh, was accused of posting blasphemous content on Facebook—a claim he denied, asserting that his account had been hacked. Despite being in police custody, he was shot dead by an officer amidst mob unrest. After his death, an angry mob desecrated his body and set it ablaze, further exposing the law enforcement's failure to protect the accused (CNN, 2024).

A similar incident occurred in Quetta, Balochistan, where another individual accused of blasphemy was killed while in custody. These killings underscored systemic failures in ensuring due process and highlighted the societal pressures faced by law enforcement. Human rights organizations, including the Sindh Human Rights Commission (SHRC), condemned these extrajudicial killings and demanded reforms to prevent further misuse of the laws (UNOHCHR, 2024).

Implications:

Judicial Failures: The inability to protect individuals accused of blasphemy revealed significant systemic weaknesses in law enforcement and the judiciary (Dawn, 2024).

Resistance to Reform: Calls for reforms to the blasphemy laws by civil society groups faced stiff resistance from religious hardliners, further polarizing public opinion (UNOHCHR, 2024).

Sectarian Violence in Kurram District

Sectarian clashes erupted in **Kurram District** between Sunni and Shia communities, leading to over **46 deaths**, widespread displacement, and the closure of schools and businesses. The violence, initially reported as tribal disputes, was rooted in long-standing sectarian tensions. Armed groups used heavy weaponry in residential areas, displacing families and exacerbating instability (Dawn, 2024).

The government deployed additional troops to restore order, but the measures were criticized as reactive and insufficient. Local leaders called for sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms, including interfaith dialogues and increased community policing (Amnesty International, 2024).

October 2024: Judicial Reforms and Continued Violence

26th Constitutional Amendment

The **26th Constitutional Amendment**, passed in October 2024, introduced significant changes to Pakistan's judicial system. Key provisions included:

Limiting Chief Justice's Powers: The Chief Justice's tenure was capped at three years, and their discretionary powers, such as those to take suo motu actions, were restricted.

Restructuring Judicial Appointments: The amendment expanded the Supreme Judicial Commission and established a 12-member parliamentary committee responsible for judicial appointments.

Constitutional Benches: New rules mandated equal provincial representation in constitutional benches and set procedures for addressing underperforming judges (Tribune, 2024).

Critics argued these reforms weakened judicial independence, alleging that they increased the executive branch's influence over the judiciary. Civil society groups and opposition parties feared the changes were designed to prevent the judiciary from challenging the government's authority (Dawn, 2024).

Continued Violence

Renewed sectarian clashes in Kurram and targeted attacks in Balochistan exacerbated regional instability. On **October 10**, a terrorist attack in Daki, Balochistan, killed 20 coal miners, including Afghan nationals. The attack highlighted the deteriorating security situation and the government's inability to protect vulnerable workers (Al Jazeera, 2024).

November 2024: Protests and Environmental Crises

Protests for Imran Khan's Release

Nationwide protests demanding the release of former Prime Minister Imran Khan escalated in November. Thousands of PTI supporters took to the streets in major cities, including Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad. The government's response, which included roadblocks, mass arrests, and the use of tear gas, was widely criticized by civil society groups as excessive and undemocratic (Al Jazeera, 2024).

These protests deepened political polarization and highlighted the government's struggle to maintain control amidst growing dissent.

Environmental Challenges

Smog Crisis: Severe air pollution gripped cities like Lahore and Islamabad, with air quality reaching hazardous levels. The crisis, attributed to crop burning, industrial emissions, and vehicular pollution, caused a spike in respiratory illnesses. Schools were forced to close, and local authorities implemented temporary measures, such as halting construction activities, but failed to address the root causes (Dawn, 2024).

Water Scarcity: Sindh faced an acute water shortage, threatening agriculture and drinking water supplies. Critics pointed out the lack of long-term water management strategies, emphasizing the need for equitable water distribution and infrastructure improvements (Dawn, 2024).

December 2024: A Glimmer of Hope

PIA Resumes European Flights

In a rare positive development, **Pakistan International Airlines (PIA)** announced the resumption of flights to Europe after a four-year suspension. This milestone was seen as a step

forward in restoring Pakistan's aviation reputation and international connectivity, offering a brief respite from the country's otherwise challenging year (Dawn, 2024).

Conclusion

The events of 2024 underscored a tumultuous year for Pakistan, marked by political repression, environmental crises, and regional instability. The months of **July** and **August** emerged as pivotal, drawing international attention to issues of human rights violations and political suppression. The misuse of blasphemy laws, escalating sectarian violence, and judicial reforms further exacerbated the nation's challenges. Moving forward, comprehensive reforms focusing on governance, human rights, and climate resilience are essential for Pakistan to navigate its multifaceted crises effectively. The events of 2024 demonstrate the urgent need for comprehensive reforms across multiple sectors. Strengthening democratic institutions, ensuring judicial independence, and protecting human rights must be prioritized to rebuild trust in governance. Additionally, proactive environmental policies and sustainable resource management are essential to mitigate the impact of climate change. On the security front, fostering dialogue and inclusive policies can help address long-standing grievances and reduce regional disparities.

Moving forward, a collaborative approach involving policymakers, civil society, and international stakeholders is crucial for addressing Pakistan's multifaceted challenges. The lessons of 2024 underscore the importance of resilience, accountability, and inclusivity in shaping a more stable and equitable future for Pakistan. Without meaningful reforms, the patterns of repression and crisis observed this year risk becoming entrenched, undermining the nation's potential for progress.

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