

Human Rights Continue To Deteriorate In Sindh

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is may be the only mainstream leftist party in Pakistan, at least on paper. The party leadership has always supported – in words – the human rights, the freedom of expression and free media including other matters. The Sindh Human Rights Commission (SHRC) says in statement, "The Commission is guided by the definition of human rights as provided in

Pakistan needs to follow for its General Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) status for foreign trade. "With human rights norms evolving world over, PPP is committed to continue supporting human rights in the areas of promotion, protection and fulfillment in the country," says analyst Surendar Valasai. However, critics maintain that, the PPP is supporter of human rights merely on paper, and the

Pakistan, but it should be a great concern for the ruling party in Sindh but it doesn't seem to be the case.

According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), and Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances received 1643 enforced disappearances from Sindh in 2020.

"55 of them were found killed and 248 were traced to prisons in the province, while the com-

ricated in order to isolate masses from democratic and political process and to deprive them from their human rights," he adds.

Then there are two very popular incidents, happened in the province, first was the killing of Nazim Jokhio, and second was the release of Shahrugh Jatoi in the killing of Shahzeb Khan in Karachi. And unfortunately, PPP was linked, directly or indirectly, with both cases.

In the Jatoi case, the provincial government of Sindh provided facilities to the criminal in jail and even shifted him to a very comfortable private hospital room under the disguise of treatment. Also, the PPP provided the top lawyers including Farooq Naik for the case, provided VIP facilities in jail and even sought pardon of Jatoi.

Meanwhile, in the case of Jokhio, PPP leader Jam Abdul Karim was directly involved as he tortured and eventually killed Jokhio at his dera. And not surprisingly, the main accused was later granted bail on the grounds of out of court settlement. Although the mother of Jokhio later told court the settlement was done under pressure and coercion, still the case is pending in the court and accused is roaming freely. Critics, in their commentary on the situation, underline that it is easy to advocate human rights, but it is apparently impossible for PPP to follow its own manifesto.

"Till our laws won't change we can only do so much as a society and concerned citizens," asserts lawyer and activist Jibran Nasir. "The rich and powerful exploit provision of compromise in our legal system to get away with murder of the weak and poor."



the 2011 Act as, "the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and enforceable by the law".

And the provincial government has very recently passed the Sindh Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2022 to "serve as an alternative dispute resolution and accountability mechanism for business-related abuse of human rights and provide easy access to remedy."

The bill is in line with International obligations

reality is relatively different.

According to police data, around 2,093 cases of human rights violations were reports in Sindh in 2020. The media reports stated that these incidents pertained to the honour killings, female kidnappings, sexual assault, workplace harassment, underage marriages and forced labor etc. Although the SHRC claimed that only 700 such complaints were received during 2019-2020.

Another reports stated 1,200 people went missing from Sindh, although the situation is similar in other provinces of

mission traced 1029 missing persons by the end of the 2020," the report said. Furthermore, the kidnapping of men, women and children increased to 3599 in 2020 from 3285 in 2019. "Most of these forced disappearances were connected to political and nationalist links," the commission noted.

"The fabricated feudal fights into interior Sindh has posed potential threats to human rights, democracy, peace and development," notes Jameel Hussain Junejo, a researcher at Pakistan Fishfolk Forum. "Such fights are no doubt fab-

Growth And Change Go Hand In Hand

In today's fast-paced world, change is happening at an even more rapid pace, making Heraclitus' words even more relevant. Technology, society, and the world around us are constantly evolving, and it's important for us to adapt and embrace change in order to keep up. Change can often evoke feelings of fear and anxiety, as the unknown can be intimidating,

One of the key benefits of adapting to change is the opportunity it provides for personal growth. When we experience new situations and environments, we are forced to develop new skills, learn from our mistakes, and broaden our perspectives. This, in turn, leads to a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us. The change also allows us to break free from

sibilities and avenues for growth that we may not have encountered otherwise. This can lead to a more fulfilling and meaningful life as we experience new things, meet new people, and gain new perspectives. Meanwhile, it's important to note that embracing change doesn't mean blindly jumping into new situations without consideration. Change should

new opportunities and experiences that can lead to growth and self-discovery.

While complacency is another barrier. It's easy to become comfortable in our familiar surroundings and routines, but this can lead to stagnation and a lack of growth. It's important to constantly challenge ourselves, push past our comfort zones, and embrace new expe-



and leaving behind familiar comforts can be daunting. However, it can also act as a catalyst for growth and self-discovery. Embracing change can open up new avenues for growth, leading to a more fulfilling and meaningful life. Growth and change are interdependent. Without change, growth remains stagnant and limited. By taking the leap of faith and stepping outside of our comfort zones, we are challenged to adapt, learn, and grow. This continuous process of growth through change can be complex, but it is what enables us to reach our full potential and become the best version of ourselves.

old patterns and limitations, enabling us to take control of our lives and shape them in a more fulfilling way. However, it's important to note that growth through change is not a one-time event. It's a continuous journey that requires ongoing effort and commitment. This means embracing change not just once, but continuously. By continuously exposing ourselves to new experiences, we continue to grow and evolve as individuals. It can also bring new opportunities and experiences that we may not have had otherwise. By embracing change, we open ourselves up to new pos-

be approached with caution and a clear understanding of the potential outcomes. This means taking the time to understand the problem, considering the potential consequences, and making a well-informed decision. One of the biggest barriers to embracing change is fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of failure, fear of rejection. It's important to acknowledge these fears and understand that they are a natural part of the change process. However, it's also important to push past these fears and embrace change, even if it means stepping outside of our comfort zones. By facing our fears, we open ourselves up to

riences and opportunities. This will not only lead to growth but will also keep life exciting and engaging. In a nutshell, change is both inevitable and essential for growth. Without change, growth remains stagnant and limited. Embracing change can bring new prospects, experiences, and personal growth. It's important to approach change with caution and a clear understanding of the potential outcomes while pushing past our fears and complacency. Let us embrace change and all the growth opportunities it brings.

A Cliffhanger Where Things Seem Perpetually Suspended



"If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail" best describes the worst state of our current affairs. This apparently unending bumpy ride that we took last year seems to take us nowhere. Ever since the no-confidence motion was tabled against Imran Khan, clouds of political uncertainty started thickening with every passing moment. The political melodrama continues, with every power contender vying to wangle his way to the high offices. Skyrocketing prices, ballooning trade deficit, current account deficit and shrinking economic indicators may just be technical numbers but increasing crime ratio, deepening sectarian and ethnic divisions and a widening gap between the power elite and a common man are what can turn unimaginably disastrous if not seriously attempted to stop.

All of this has brought us to a cliffhanger where things seem perpetually suspended. According to the latest data from the Bureau of

Immigration, 765,000 educated Pakistanis left Pakistan in 2022, which is the most number of talented human resource export in any year. This number presents a bleak picture. Had there been all normal (a state which Pakistanis are

are constantly getting out of this tumultuous period is the genuine awareness which most of us were hitherto kept devoid of. Now everyone from a working class labourer to a white collar job holder, knows how much rotten and ruptured



unaccustomed to), these brilliant minds would have stayed and contributed to this country. This massive brain drain is all but concerning for the people who took the trouble to look and analyse.

Still the only good which we

our system is. And even better takeaway from this turmoil is that now Pakistanis are finally convinced that mere stitches won't work in order to bring long-term structural changes. They have now realised that promises made with them

every now and then are nothing but a facade. They are now familiar with the so-called conventional wisdom of going to the IMF or friendly countries for seeking bailout packages as stopgap measures which are mostly futile and actually do more harm than any good.

They now know it better than ever before that anyone who will lend us any financial support will do so by making us do unwanted compromises. Their overall political insight is well shaping up with every passing day. For the time being, uncertainties may prolong for a while, but one thing is quite certain that this mass awareness will finally jolt the power elites to surrender unequivocally.

This genie of awareness has come out of the bottle and it will definitely find its way to sort things out once and for all. Time and pattern are not guaranteed that when and how will it happen; hope is guaranteed that it will eventually

Sikhs Announce Another Pro-Khalistan Referendum On March 19 In Brisbane



On the heels of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gearing up to host Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, pro-Khalistan secessionist group Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) has announced to hold Khalistan Referendum voting in Brisbane, Australia, on March 19th after a strong show of over 55,000 Australian Sikhs at Federation Square, Melbourne two weeks ago. Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, Sikhs for Justice General Counsel declared that the March 19th “Battlefield – Brisbane” Khalistan Referendum Voting Centre is dedicated to Shaheed Bhai Harmeet Singh Bhaowal and Shaheed Bibi Baljinder Kaur who were bombed to death along with their nine months old son Pavittar Singh on December 05, 1992 by the Indian Police forces in Haryana.

“While Modi regime is pursuing Violence to crush the Khalistan Referendum, SFJ is using voting to resolve decades-old conflict between the Sikhs and the Union of India,” stated SFJ General Counsel Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in a video message. “We urge PM Albanese to edu-

cate Modi that in democracy, seeking secession and independence through voting cannot be labelled as terrorism,” added Pannun, the New York based Attorney at Law who has been leading a global campaign for the creation of Khalistan.

SFJ announced that scores of November 1984 Sikh

placed to death over 450 Sikh men and gang raped 100 plus Sikh women in broad day light in the presence of police.

Two weeks ago on 29 January, over 55,000 Sikhs voted for Khalistan Referendum at Melbourne’s Federation Square to raise demand for the creation of Khalistan in Indian Punjab.



Genocide victim families from 32 Block Tirlokpuri, Delhi will be travelling to Brisbane to campaign for March 19 Khalistan Referendum voting. Trilokpuri is the neighborhood of Delhi where during November 1984 Hindu death squads were led by Congress leader Bhagat and BJP leader Ram Jain, a close associate of PM Vajpayee, the then head of BJP. The death squads neck-

While over 55,000 Sikh men and women — over the age of 18 — were eligible to cast their votes, an estimated 15,000 voters were unable to cast their votes due to time limitations. An estimated 300,000 Sikhs live in Australian cities and the SFJ had announced that it will take the Referendum campaign to other cities to accommodate Sikhs wishing to express their

democratic right for the creation of Khalistan.

Outside the voting centres as Sikh youth and Hindutva supporters clashed and the local police arrested at least two people. Videos showed a group of Hindutva supporters attacking Sikh voters. Sikhs For Justice also released videos of a group of Indian men trying to vandalise Sikh Gurdwaras and actually vandalising three local Gurdwaras for supporting Khalistan Referendum.

The India govt has launched complaints with the UK, Canadian and Australian govts against Sikh groups, mainly Sikhs For Justice, for running pro-Khalistan campaigns. These govts have told Indians that no laws have been violated and while they stood by the Indian govt there is nothing they could do to stop their nationals from taking part in a democratic exercise.

Last week India told Canada that the Khalistan issue is of “national security concern” for New Delhi and that Ottawa should take stringent action against the Sikh groups. Sikhs For Justice says its activities are democratic and peaceful and covered by the local laws.

Balancing AI Breakthroughs With Data Privacy Concerns

Wajid Ali

“Data privacy is not an option, it’s a fundamental human right.” – Tim Cook

In today’s world, where technology is advancing at a rapid

pace, generate fake news, which can have serious consequences for society.

Navigating concerns

Another primary concern is the potential for these models to

that is being collected about them and to take steps to protect their privacy.

Lessons from scandals

The Cambridge Analytica scandal, which involved the

influence political campaigns, and the need for individuals and organizations to be more vigilant about how their data is used.

Conclusion



pace, privacy matters more than ever. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the most significant technological advancements of our time, and it has the potential to revolutionize the way we live and work. However, with the increasing use of AI comes a growing concern about data privacy.

Breakthroughs

One major breakthrough in AI is the development of AI models like OpenAI and ChatGPT. These models have the ability to understand and generate human language, making them incredibly powerful tools for a wide range of applications. However, as with any technology, there are potential risks associated with the use of these models. One of the biggest concerns is the potential for these models to be used to manipulate and deceive people. For example, OpenAI’s GPT-3 model has been used to

be used to invade people’s privacy. AI models are trained on large amounts of data, and this data can be used to build detailed profiles of individuals. This information can then be used for targeted advertising, which can be very effective and invasive. Additionally, the data used to train these models can also be used to identify and track individuals, which can be a violation of their privacy.

It is important to be aware that everything we post or comment on the internet is being saved in data and can be accessed by others. Companies and organizations have access to vast amounts of data on individuals, and they are using this data to build detailed profiles of people. This data can be used for a wide range of purposes, such as targeted advertising and political campaigns. It is important for individuals to be aware of the data

misuse of Facebook data, is a prime example of the risks associated with data privacy. The company harvested data on millions of Facebook users without their consent and used this data to influence political campaigns. This incident brought data privacy to the forefront of public consciousness, highlighting the need for individuals and organizations to be more vigilant about how their data is used.

Similarly, the Brexit scandal has shown how data can be used to influence political campaigns. In the lead-up to the Brexit vote, Leave.EU, the official campaign group for the Leave side, used data from Facebook to target potential voters. The group was able to identify and target individuals who were likely to support the Leave campaign, which helped to sway the vote in their favor. This incident highlights the potential for data to be used to

In conclusion, privacy is an essential aspect to consider in the AI world. The development of AI has the potential to revolutionize the way we live and work, but it also comes with potential risks associated with the use of these models. The misuse of personal data has led to a growing concern about data privacy and the need for individuals and organizations to be more vigilant about how their data is used. It is important for individuals to be aware of the data that is being collected about them and to take steps to protect their privacy. With the continued advancement of AI, it is crucial that we work to ensure that data privacy is protected and respected. It is important to recognize that privacy is not just a luxury but a fundamental right, safeguarding personal information and data is crucial to preserve trust and maintaining a healthy digital environment.

Career gap and how it affects the female professional paradigm

Beenish Zaheer

Given there are as many female graduates, why is the professional sphere yet to witness equal inclusion of females?

It is indeed refreshing to witness that now, more than ever, we see a large number of students who have been enrolled in colleges and universities, successfully graduating and quickly moving into the professional sphere. Especially during the year when convocations are taking place, one recounts various kinds of celebrations circulating on social media. While varsities might vary, convocation attires may be different, and disciplines numerous, one thing is constant among all: the equally ambitious faces of the men and women.

Amid the cheerful graduation stories, gratitude notes, and mortarboard-tossing photographs, the one thing that drives your optimistic vision for the coming days is the equal number of female graduates in the group photos. We



male education over female education. A significant proportion of urban society is convinced now that equipping girls with higher education is now a necessity. However, what remains an unresolved

not more, why is the professional sphere yet to witness equal inclusion of females in the prime workforce of Pakistan?

According to the World Bank report of 2021, females consti-

educated women lost in vanity or employed in typical jobs in academia? There are many factors contributing to this phenomenon but one major reason amounting to this is a career gap, which not only undermines one's resume but also one's self-confidence. It is still normal practice for women in our culture to take a career break for a few years while they raise kids and get back on the job hunt once the kids have at least reached their school-going age.

Unfortunately, we are part of a culture which sees graduation as the best time for a female to "settle down" and get married. The perception that a woman is officially ready for marriage as soon as she's earned her degree is still very common. However, what still remains as an underrated conviction is that marriage comes with its own challenges, commitments, tests, and multiple responsibil-



feel accomplished that finally, we, as a nation, have surpassed the mind set of prioritising

dilemma is that even though there are as many female graduates as their counterparts, if

tute only 20 per cent of the total workforce in Pakistan. Why do we still see highly

ities. This includes fulfilling various expectations of a husband as a wife, adapting to new roles as a daughter-in-law, and ultimately, a complete transformation as a human being, especially on an emotional level when a woman becomes a mother. All of these changes put together turn out to be an arduous deal for a young woman, yet none of this is spoken about.

Not every woman is resilient enough to come out of this trilogy as a committed, composed, and robust woman. Not

“Look at that self-driven woman in the magazine; she became director while her youngest baby was just four-months-old...”

But the women we see every day on social media, television programs, and even in our daily life hardly constitutes a small amount of female graduating every year and getting lost in the cultural stream of our country.

This doesn't necessarily imply that the girls who couldn't settle well into their career timely were incompetent in any way

for workouts and home remedies to get back the self-esteem pertaining to her physical appearance. The kids start school and she is good to kick start her career, but it's only then she realises that the corporate world possess a very disloyal nature. The market is no longer seeking old graduates like her. They have a queue of fresh graduates ready to join them on a single call. They won't wait for a woman to return after years of completing her last degree. Disappointedly, she moves to

should normalise the idea of allowing women time after graduation, at least to those who actually want to utilise their degrees and become self-reliant, to secure desired jobs and settle well into their respective career paths before pressuring them into another crucial phase of life by getting them married as a result of societal pressure.

The professional eco-system also needs drastic changes in order to facilitate and welcome new mothers back into the



everyone is blessed enough to have smooth pregnancies which allow them to continue working towards other goals simultaneously. Everyone has their own scenarios, physical conditions, family support systems, psychological strength, financial backgrounds, and journeys that determine their direction in the future.

It can't be denied that many women around us pursued their careers during the foundation years of their family life. They took their babies to their workplaces or academic institutes where they were enrolled in their postgraduate programs. We always hear that those who are determined just pave their way no matter what the circumstances are:

but there's a sheer possibility that they were just not resilient enough to handle the physical and psychological pressure they saw exerted on working women around them. There is no doubt about the fact that our culture does not have the most professional eco-system in which career-driven women are welcome. Sometimes, it's also just how the flow of circumstances pan out, particularly in the pursuit of becoming a mother and juggling married life, that often trudges a woman to a state of feeling lost.

Eventually, things settle, kids grow up and a woman gets some time to address things she overlooked previously. She can manage to spare time

the public sector to face another rough course of actions over her age.

Given the present economic depression we are facing as a country, it is high time to mobilise literate women towards stabilising their careers after graduation. Taking career breaks is not an option anymore for our female fraternity if they want to refrain from getting into a life-long tug-of-war between their professional and personal lives. On a practical level, it doesn't matter whether you got married at the age of 22 or 28, but what will define you as a woman of substance is where you stand in your life professionally and personally at that particular point in time. We

workforce. We can't mobilise the literate female population of our country without facilitating them as mothers. In-house day care setups, maternity leaves and shifting to a hybrid working system until the baby is at least six-months-old are a few of the primary steps needed to make things easier for working woman so that they don't have to make the complex decision of giving up their careers for rendering their maternal responsibilities. Simply educating our women will not bring the desired change on a grand and productive level unless they are not included as direct propellers of the dipping economy of

Scammers profit from Turkey-Syria earthquake

Hannah Gelbart

Scammers are using the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria to try to trick people into donating to fake causes, security experts have warned.

These scams claim to raise money for survivors, left without heat or water following the disasters that have killed more than 35,000 people.

But instead of helping those in need, scammers are channelling donations away from real charities, and into their own PayPal accounts and cryptocurrency wallets.

We've identified some of the main methods used by scammers, and tools you can use to double check before donating. On TikTok Live, content creators can make money by receiving digital gifts. Now, TikTok accounts are posting photos of devastation, looped footage and recordings of TVs showing rescue efforts, whilst asking for donations.

Captions include phrases like "Let's help Turkey", "Pray for Turkey" and "Donate for earthquake victims".

One account, which was live for over three hours, showed a pixelated aerial image of



Chinese. The video's caption is "Let's help Turkey. Donation". Another video shows a picture of a distressed child running from an explosion. The livestream host's message is "Please help

quakes. A reverse image search found the same image had been posted on Twitter in 2018 with the caption "Stop Afrin Genocide", referring to a city in north-western Syria where Turkish forces and their allies in the Syrian opposition ousted a Kurdish militia in that year. The picture used, however, is not real. Greek newspaper OEMA reports that it was created by the Major General of the Aegean fire brigade Panagiotis Kotridis using Artificial Intelligence software Midjourney. AI image generators often make mistakes, and Twitter users were quick to spot that this firefighter has six digits on his right hand. To ver-

ify this further, we asked colleagues from the BBC's tech research hub the Blue Room (part of BBC Research &

Development) to try to generate similar images using the same software.

They asked the software for an "image of firefighter in aftermath of an earthquake rescuing young child and wearing helmet with Greek flag", and were given these options:

Furthermore, one of the crypto wallet addresses had been used in scam and spam tweets from 2018. The other address had been posted on Russian social media website VK alongside pornographic content.

When the BBC contacted the person tweeting the appeal, they denied it was a scam. They said they had poor connectivity, but answered our questions on Twitter using

Google Translate.

"My aim is to be able to help people affected by the earthquake if I manage to raise funds", they said. "Now people are cold in the disaster area, and especially babies do not have food. I can prove this process with receipts."

However, they have not yet sent us receipts or proof of their identity.

Elsewhere on Twitter, scammers create fake fundraising accounts and post links to PayPal.

Ax Sharma, cyber security expert at Sonatype, says these accounts retweet news articles and reply to tweets by celebrities and businesses to gain visibility.

"They create fake disaster relief accounts that appear to be legitimate organisations or news outlets, but then drive funds to their own PayPal addresses,"



destroyed buildings, accompanied by sound effects of explosions. Off-camera, a male voice laughs and speaks in

Turkey earthquake rescue: How two sisters were saved from the rubble

"Merve! Irem! Merve! Irem," rescue worker Mustafa Ozturk is shouting. Everyone around us has been ordered to be silent. The team are looking for two sisters who other survivors say are trapped alive under piles of rubble.

With sensitive devices they listen for any response. Everyone is frozen in anticipation.

And then, a breakthrough. "Irem, my dear, I am close to you, you hear me, yes?" Mustafa says.

Those of us watching can't hear it, but it is clear now that she is responding. A small group of the girls' friends wait silently with us.

"You are superb! Now you stay calm and answer me. Ah ok, that's Merve. Merve dear, just answer my questions," he says. Merve, 24, and her sister Irem, 19, were trapped under the rubble of their five-storey apartment block in Antakya, southern Turkey, which was flattened by the earthquake. It had been two days, but for them those days felt like weeks.

"It's Wednesday. No! You weren't trapped for 14 days. Give us five minutes. You will be out."

Mustafa knows it will take hours, but tells us: "If they lose their hope they might not survive."

Collapsed apartment block
Image caption,

Rescuers can hear Merve and Irem who have been trapped for days under the rubble of their apartment block

Merve and Irem start to joke and laugh together. I can see a big smile on Mustafa's face: "If they had space they would probably dance," he says.

By the rescuers' calculations it is 2m (6.6 ft) to reach the sisters but Hasan Binay, the rescue team's commander, says digging a tunnel into the concrete is a very delicate operation. One wrong move could lead to a catastrophe.

A bulldozer is called to very slightly lift and hold the thick concrete to stop the building collapsing when they start digging.

"Girls, soon we will give you blankets." Mustafa tells the sisters. "Ah no, you don't worry about us. We are not tired or cold."

Mustafa says Merve is worried about the rescuers' situation. It is 20:30 local time and it is

After 30 minutes, Mustafa and three other rescuers go back to where they were digging.

"Don't be scared. Believe me we won't leave you here. I will bring you out and you will take us for a good lunch," Mustafa shouts. The girls thought they had been left to die.

Merve

Image caption,

Merve after being brought out the rubble asked: "Am I really

vision camera. They can see both Irem and Merve.

"You are so beautiful. Don't move too much. Irem pull the camera so we can see Merve better."

On the screen, we see that Irem is smiling. Luckily there is enough space for them between the concrete trapping them.

Relief floods everyone's faces. The girls look well and at least



very cold. This area has had one of the coldest winters that people can remember.

The rescuers start furiously digging and throwing the rubble away with their bare hands. Ceyda was 19 when the quake destroyed her building – the tragic story of a lost community

The collapsed buildings that were meant to withstand quakes

But after a couple of hours we feel the ground suddenly shaking under our feet. It is a strong aftershock. Operations must stop and we leave the devastated building.

"There is a brutal reality here. The safety of our team comes first," Hasan says.

alive?"

It is midnight now and the digging has resumed. The team have hardly slept for days. We have gathered around a small fire next to the building.

Every so often there is a shout: "sessizlik", meaning silence. The light goes off, total darkness now. They have made a small hole in the concrete to see if the girls can see the light coming from Mustafa's torch.

"Merve! Irem! Do you see the light? OK! Perfect! Now I am sending a small camera down. Once you see it tell me and I will tell you what to do."

It is a moment of elation for everyone. Hasan joins his team to see the girls on the small screen connected to their night

Irem has room to pull herself out if they make the hole bigger.

But almost immediately the team look concerned. Merve has told them that she has started to feel cold and there is something heavy on her feet.

The medics were worried: "Do Merve's feet have gangrene? Or is this the first symptom of hypothermia?"

It is around 05:00 now. The tunnel is big enough for the slimmest team member to crawl down. The rescuer was able to reach and hold Irem's hand for a few moments.

"Our mother's body has started to stink and we can't breathe properly," Irem tells the rescuers. The girls have been

lying next to their dead mother for days.

One sister caught on camera Image caption, Rescuers used a camera to see the women under the rubble. It is shocking. How awful that there can be moments in life when you would not want your mother next to you, we reflected.

Hasan asks one of Merve's friends - still waiting, stressed and silent - to show them the picture she has of the girls. They are trying to estimate the width they need to make the hole. The two girls are smiling, in party dresses, celebrating a wedding.

"Perfect! We can bring them out." The medical team gets ready with thermal blankets and stretchers. Everyone is excited. It is 06:30 and Irem comes first. She is laughing and crying at the same time.

"God bless you. Please bring Merve out too. Please," she begs the rescuers. "Merve will follow. I promise," Hasan tells her.

But bringing Merve out takes another tense 30 minutes. They need to free her feet from under the concrete without doing her harm. The operation is successful.

Once Merve is out, everyone

starts clapping and cheering. I hear Merve screaming in pain but then asking: "Am I really alive?"

"You are dear," Mustafa replies, smiling.

The friends who have been here all night start shouting in tears. "Merve! Irem! We are here. Don't be scared." The sisters were loaded into ambulances and transferred to a field hospital.

After this joyful moment comes a chilling one. The rescuers ask everyone to be silent again. This is the last call.

"If anyone hears me, respond.

If you can't respond, try to touch the ground."

Hasan repeats, imploringly, from different angles. Then sadly, with red spray he signs on the concrete, writing codes so other rescue teams will not search the building.

"Rescuing a human being is a beautiful feeling, but we wish there were no deaths." I can see the sadness in his face.

"Will you eat lunch with Merve and Irem?" I ask. He smiles: "I hope one day we can. But the most important thing is that they are alive and in good hands now."

Turkey earthquake: 113 arrest warrants connected to building construction

Officials in Turkey say 113 arrest warrants have been issued in connection with the construction of buildings that collapsed in Monday's earthquake.

Turkish police have already taken at least 12 people into custody, including building contractors.

Meanwhile, unrest in southern Turkey has disrupted rescue efforts in some places. The number of people confirmed to have died in Turkey and Syria has risen to more than 33,000.

More arrests are expected - but the action will be seen by many as an attempt to divert overall blame for the disaster.

The collapsed buildings that were meant to withstand earthquakes Islamic State blamed for Syria attack killing 11

For years, experts warned that many new buildings in Turkey were unsafe due to endemic corruption and government policies.

Those policies allowed so-called amnesties for contractors who swerved building regulations, in order to encourage a construction boom - including in earthquake-prone regions.

Thousands of buildings collapsed during the earthquake, raising questions about

whether the natural disaster's impact was made worse by human failings.

With elections looming, the president's future is on the line after spending 20 years in power.

Mr Erdogan has admitted shortcomings in the response,

as food supplies dwindle, one rescuer said.

"There is increasing aggression between factions in Turkey," Austrian Lieutenant Colonel Pierre Kugelweis said.

"The chances of saving a life bears no reasonable relation to the safety risk."

In Syria, the death toll now stands at more than 3,500 - but new figures have not been published since Friday. On Sunday, the number dead in Turkey rose to more than 29,000.

Hope of finding many more survivors is fading, despite some incredible rescues.

Among those rescued from the rubble on Saturday were a family of five in Turkey's Gaziantep province, and a seven-year-old girl in Hatay, who spent 132 hours under the rubble.

The quake was described as the "worst event in 100 years in this region" by the United Nations aid chief, who was in the Turkish province of Kahramanmaraş on Saturday.

"I think it's the worst natural disaster that I've ever seen and it's also the most extraordinary international response,"

Martin Griffiths told the BBC's Lyse Doucet in Turkey.

Mr Griffiths has called for regional politics to be put aside in the face of the disaster - and there are some signs that this is happening.

The border crossing between Turkey and Armenia reopened on Saturday for the first time in 35 years to allow aid through.



but, during one visit to a disaster zone, he appeared to blame fate. "Such things have always happened," he said. "It's part of destiny's plan."

On the sixth day after the quake hit, the situation is growing more desperate.

On Saturday, German rescuers and the Austrian army paused search operations because of clashes between unnamed groups in Hatay province. Security is expected to worsen

The search for survivors resumed under the protection of the Turkish army.

Across southern Turkey and northern Syria, millions are homeless and temperatures continue to drop below freezing on a nightly basis.

The UN has warned that more than 800,000 people are without adequate meals, and its aid agency on the ground is warning the final death toll from the quake is likely to double.

No country for women

Women's safety is not the priority in this country and that is the bitter truth we are forced to accept.

A Purniya Awan
s if the country's current economic status wasn't enough to shake up everyone's reality, not to mention the recent set of security threats and bomb blasts across different parts of Pakistan, the increasing incidents and cases of violence against women in the past few days has yet again made step-

Noor, Khadija, and countless others whose names we don't know. Yet, we are again reminded of the dreadful things we can become victims of at any given moment, simply as a result of our existence in this country as women. Islamabad, which is portrayed as one of the safest cities of this country has proved again just how false that portrayal is.

keep mum about the incident), "suggested" that women should not leave the house after sunset, and raised a series of questions regarding her relationship with her male friend.

A day before, on February 4th, another heinous rape crime was committed by a bus guard who raped an 18-year-old bus hostess at gunpoint in a mov-

culprits within days (though their justice system is just as weak as ours), but we seldom see that reaction now when it comes to rape cases. At best, there is a slight uproar on social media until the buzz dies down and the next news item is trending. It seems, perhaps, that we have, to some extent, become immune to such cases. Is it because they



ping out of the house, for women, a life-threatening task – whether that's for leisure or for work purposes.

As the news of the two horrid rape cases which happened on the same day has been spreading like wildfire on social media, a strong sense of insecurity and fear has settled amongst the women of this country, yet again. We have not yet gotten over what happened to our sisters, Zainab,

How can we forget what happened to Noor Mukadam?

On February 5th, a woman at F-9 Park in Islamabad was gang-raped while being held on gunpoint. The perpetrators physically assaulted the girl and her friend, threatened them with weapons and caught them while they tried to run away. Before leaving and after they had done the awful deed, these monsters gave the girl Rs1000 (to get home with and

ing bus which was travelling from Mailsi to Vehari with no passengers in the vehicle. The victim was then taken to a hospital in critical condition.

This reminds us of the gruesome Nirbhaya bus gang rape case in Delhi in 2012, which caused serious uproar globally, including in Pakistan. It led to dedicated protests all over the world, and ultimately pressurised the Delhi police to solve the case and arrest the

happen so frequently that we have, at some level, accepted them as part of society's flaws while we move on with our lives?

Both these cases make it crystal clear that there is no place for women in this country. It doesn't matter, whatsoever, what a woman does – whether she is at work or whether she is out to enjoy a few moments with her friends; it doesn't matter whether she is out dur-

ing the day or after sunset. Women are not safe outside their homes; neither are they safe inside their homes. What is it about women choosing to do what they want with their

because practically speaking they will never be able to relate to the anxiety and terror felt by women when they read such news. On the contrary, they will carry on with their

or how loudly we scream, things don't seem to be getting better. There will never be enough security in this country to protect its women from monstrous men, and no new

anti-rape bills and legislation will ever be enough to bring the perpetrators to justice. Women's safety is not the priority in this country and that is the bitter truth we must accept. What is deserving of utmost respect and

the state regarding what happened in the previously reported rape cases. To add fuel to the fire and prove its incompetence, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) has issued a notice to television channels to not cover this story because they think the identity of the victim is being compromised in this way. However, a better way to deal with this, instead of brushing their uselessness under the rug, would have been to ask the TV channels simply not to disclose the name of the victim.

I say this now, like I have said multiple times before, unless perpetrators are not dealt with swiftly, arrested, punished publicly and held accountable, there is no way an example can be set for these deranged people. There seems to be a resurgence of all sorts of crimes and it only makes things worse, as always, for people belonging to minority groups, regardless of what kind of intersectional identities they possess. As a Sunni Muslim woman, I cannot even begin to imagine the



lives that is so threatening to men? What is it about their existence in general that makes men think they can do with them as they please?

At the end of the day, regardless of the situation may be, when it comes to harassment, there is always a blatant blame that is thrown onto the woman, it is HER shame, respect, and reputation that is always questioned, and never of the man or men who are the real monsters, degenerates and shameful beings. It is exhausting to constantly have to preserve one's "honour" even though we know we are doing nothing wrong. It's been proven time and time again that nothing a woman does or wears is ever the cause of the violence she faces, it's always about patriarchy's notion of masculine control that drives this thought process and which, in fact, allows this kind of behaviour. In Pakistan, where a man always takes precedence over a woman, this is hardly anything new, but that certainly does not mean that it is okay. I've noticed how when news is posted about these incidents, women share it around questioning the bleak state of affairs, primarily because they're afraid they may be met with the same fate. Men, on the other hand, aren't as disgusted, furious or scared

daily tasks as if nothing has happened; they'll go about their day walking on the streets, harassing or cat-calling women, taking up public spaces, taking over the domestic sphere as the sole decision-makers over issues pertaining to literally everything. Their lives are seldom affected and their actions seldom require a second thought because they know they will be let off the hook, almost always. There is not much to be expected of

our judicial system because the very foundation of it, from top to bottom, is supported by men and in return it continues to support men. There is no hope, no matter how many women are raped, no matter how times we stand up to protest and cry,

applause is the courage shown by the victim of the F-9 Park incident. Despite her ghastly experience, she has shown strength and bravery in reporting the case to the police and



relevant authorities. Evidently, staying silent is not an option anymore.

Apparently, an investigation has been initiated but I don't have high hopes this time either as we have all been witness to the incompetence of

threat women belonging to different faiths and sects face on a regular basis, and that is truly terrifying. It's time to accept that whereas everyone is vulnerable right now, for women it's always worse.

Myanmar: Political Parties Law Shackles Opposition

Harsh New Measures Would Crush Party Participation in Politics

Myanmar's new political parties law will prevent key members of the political opposition from running in upcoming elections, Human Rights Watch said today. The law, announced on January 26, 2023, adds to concerns that the vote now slated for August will lack all credibility and be used merely to try to legitimize further military control.

The Political Party Registration Law, which repeals 2010 legislation, prohibits anyone previously convicted of a crime or serving a prison term from joining a political party. This disqualifies many senior members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), including the party leader, Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, both serving lengthy sentences on fabricated charges. The military overthrew the newly elected NLD-led government on February 1, 2021.

"Myanmar's junta adopted the Political Party Registration Law not only to rig the planned elections but to try to obtain legitimacy for a military-controlled state," said Manny Maung, Myanmar researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The junta is creating a system to crush all political opposition and derail any possible return to democratic civilian rule."

The new law states that existing political parties must reregister within 60 days of the law's enactment or risk being dissolved, and disqualifies any political group declared as an "unlawful association or terrorist organization under any existing law." The junta has already declared the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) and its parliamentary body, the

Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (the Union Parliament) as "terrorist organizations" for alleged attacks against the military since the coup.

The law requires political groups seeking to put forward electoral candidates to have at least 100,000 members within three months of registering, a huge increase from 1,000 in the previous law, and a prohibitive bar for most parties. It also requires national political parties to have funds of at least 100 million kyat (US\$47,000) to qualify for registration, far more than most smaller parties can afford. For regional or state

parties, the minimum amount required in the party coffers is 10 million kyat (\$4,700). These requirements will make it nearly impossible for smaller ethnic and minority parties to take part in elections, Human Rights Watch said.

The NLD responded that it "steadfastly" objected to any election under the military junta, and that it refused to register. Other smaller parties, such as the Kayah State Democracy and the Kayan National Party, also said they will not register and therefore face dissolution. Some ethnic minority parties such as the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party and the United Democracy Party have indicated they plan to register.

The People's Defense Forces, which are anti-junta militias, have indicated that they aim to disrupt preparations for the elections and have attacked

some junta personnel conducting a population survey that could be used to assemble voter rolls. This raises concerns that members of political parties that register under the new law could also be targeted.

On February 1, 2023, the junta extended the state of emergency in the country for six months. On February 2, the junta imposed new martial law

Registration Law fails to meet international standards in respecting the rights of political parties to organize and stand for election. Under international law, voters should have the right to freely choose their candidates, and any conditions placed on political party and candidate registration should be reasonable and non-discriminatory.

Establishing a credible, pluralistic, and rights respecting electoral system is essential to holding genuine democratic elections in which voters freely choose their representatives. Despite the limitations imposed by the 2008 Constitution, in November 2020, voters exercised their right to choose their government, a right that the military denied by staging a coup.

Concerned governments, including regional partners such as member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, and India, should condemn the political parties law and ensure that they do not lend credibility to the junta's attempt to legitimize military control through sham elections.

The United Kingdom, the United States, and European Union member states should coordinate with other like-minded governments to strengthen and enforce targeted sanctions against senior junta officials and military entities in Myanmar.

"The 2021 military coup strangled the hopes of the Myanmar people who had voted in credible elections in 2020," Maung said. "Concerned governments need to put concerted pressure on the junta to return to a democratically elected civilian government."



orders in 37 additional townships in Chin, Karen, Karenni, Magway and Mon States, and Bago, Sagaing, and Tanintharyi Regions. The orders impose curfews and curb freedom of association and movement, restricting political parties from organizing.

The military-drafted 2008 Constitution, although designed to perpetuate military control, requires the state to enact laws to allow political parties to organize for the "flourishing of a genuine, disciplined multi-party democratic system." Under the new law and additional martial law orders, any election would be dominated by junta-backed political parties and the military itself, which already holds 25 percent of seats in the national and local legislatures under the 2008 Constitution.

The Political Parties

Libya/US: Rights Concerns in Lockerbie Suspect's Extradition

Ensure Due Process; Allow Access to Family, Legal Counsel

(Washington, DC) – United States and Libyan authorities should clarify the legal basis for the abusive arrest and subsequent extradition to the US of a Libyan suspect in the 1988 deadly airplane bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland, Human Rights Watch said today. US authorities on December 12, 2022, announced that they had custody of and intended to prosecute Abu Agila Masud Kheir Al-Marimi, a former official of the government of the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, after an armed group seized him from his home in Tripoli.

“It appears that no Libyan court ordered or reviewed Masud’s transfer to the US, and he had no chance to appeal, raising serious due process concerns,” said Hanan Salah, associate Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “The political impasse and chaos in Libya don’t allow US authorities to disregard violations of fundamental rights.”

The Tripoli-based Libyan prime minister, Abdelhamid Dabeiba, said his Government of National Unity (GNU) collaborated with the US on the transfer, while Libyan judicial authorities have challenged the handover’s legality and opened an investigation. Libya and the US have no extradition treaty.

The US should uphold international fair trial standards and grant Masud access to his family members, including by promptly processing visas for them. US authorities should also grant him the right to challenge his extradition. As Prime Minister Dabeiba promised, Libyan authorities should

provide consular visits, help Masud get effective legal counsel, and coordinate his family’s visits. They should also investigate and hold

said they knew of no judicial procedures before he was sent from Libya, and spoke with him by phone for the first time on February 10, two months

ern division of Virginia, stands to represent Abu Agila Mohammad Mas’ud Kheir Al-Marimi, center, accused of making the bomb that brought



accountable members of the armed group responsible for violently seizing Masud from his home.

Masud is the third Libyan in the last decade transferred to the US under murky legal circumstances to stand trial on a terrorism-related charge.

The US had long sought Masud’s arrest for his alleged role in the Lockerbie bombing. The apparent basis for the charges are confessions he allegedly made in 2012 to a Libyan interrogator. A relative of Masud told Human Rights Watch that family members had no prior notification of the extradition, and learned about it from social media posts about his appearance in a US court on December 12. They

after his transfer to the US. He faces a maximum sentence of life in prison.

This artist sketch depicts Assistant US Attorney Erik Kenerson, seated from left, watching as Whitney Minter, a public defender from the eastern division of Virginia, stands to represent Abu Agila Mohammad Mas’ud Kheir Al-Marimi, center, accused of making the bomb that brought down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, in federal court in Washington, DC, December 12, 2022. Click to expand Image

This artist sketch depicts Assistant US Attorney Erik Kenerson, seated from left, watching as Whitney Minter, a public defender from the east-

down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, in federal court in Washington, DC, December 12, 2022. © 2022 Dana Verkouteren via AP On December 21, 1988, Pan Am Flight 103 exploded over Lockerbie, killing 270 people, including all of the passengers, 190 of them US citizens, and some people in the town. In November 1991, Scottish authorities and the US charged two Libyan intelligence operatives in connection with the bombing. Abdel Baset Ali al-Megrahi was found guilty in 2001 and sentenced to life in prison, but was released in 2009 on compassionate grounds due to advanced terminal illness and died in 2012. The other suspect, Lamen

Khalifa Fhimah, was acquitted.

Masud was not under an arrest warrant in Libya, said his relative, when he was seized on November 17 in his home in the Abu Salim district of Tripoli by an armed group whose members refused to identify themselves during the arrest, wore no insignias, and came in cars that were unmarked. They took him to an undisclosed location, his relative said. However, Abu Salim district is controlled by the Stability Support Apparatus, which also controls

and the General Prosecutor's Office to try to find out where he was, the family member said.

On November 24 or 25, a week later, Masud called to tell his family he was being held in Misrata, 200 kilometers east of the capital, by an armed group allied with Prime Minister Dabeiba known as the Joint Force, and under Omar Bughdada's command. The group permitted Masud to call his relatives and permitted the family to visit him twice in Misrata before his transfer to the US. On December 11,

In a Statement of Facts from 2020, the US Justice Department maintains that there is probable cause that Masud conspired with others, and aided and abetted them, in causing the destruction of Pan Am flight 103. This affidavit, submitted to support the charges, said that the US appears to build its case around a confession allegedly made by Masud to an unidentified Libyan operative on September 12, 2012, while Masud was detained in Libya. US authorities obtained an English translation of the transcript of the interrogation in

and international law, Human Rights Watch said.

Libyan authorities did not respond to the allegations that they participated in a possibly unlawful extradition until December 16, when Dabeiba stated on TV that he had cooperated with US authorities in the transfer. Dabeiba called Masud a "terrorist" but did not clarify the legal basis for the extradition. In a statement on December 14, Libya's general prosecutor confirmed that his office had not been part of the extradition and that he had opened an investigation into whether Masud was extrajudicially transferred.

While Prime Minister Dabeiba pledged in the TV statement that Masud would get consular and family visits and that the Libyan government would pay his legal costs, this has yet to happen. Masud's family has hired only a temporary legal counsel who met with Masud upon his arraignment in the US.

In October 2013, US authorities, with the support of Libyan armed groups, transferred Abu Anas Al-Libi, also known as Nazih al-Ruqhai, to the US to face prosecution for his alleged role in the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Tanzania that killed 224 people. Al-Ruqhai's Libyan-based family had tried to obtain visas to visit him after his extradition to the US, but the US did not approve them, his relatives told Human Rights Watch, and he died in 2015 while on trial.

Ahmed Abu Khatallah, also known as Ahmed Mukatallah, was seized in Benghazi in June 2014 and subsequently transferred to the US. Libyan judicial authorities at the time said his transfer had been unlawful. After being tried and convicted in a US court in 2017, he was sentenced to 22 years in prison for his role in the September 11, 2012, attack on a US embassy annex in Benghazi that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three US government personnel.

"Justice for the many victims of Pan Am flight 103 risks being tainted unless the US and GNU governments clarify the legal basis for Masud's transfer to US custody," Salah said.



parts of the Libyan capital and is aligned with the GNU prime minister.

Armed group members arrived at around 1:30 a.m., the relative said. The group stationed armed men in front of the homes of Masud and of other family members nearby, barring everyone from leaving. Members of the group shoved Masud's wife and beat his daughter, who needed medical attention for her hands after the incident, the relative said. They also beat one of Masud's sons with a rifle. They dragged Masud, 71, whose mobility was reduced due to illness, across the floor, refusing help from family members to carry him.

The Abu Salim police refused to record a kidnapping complaint brought by the family the next day, prompting the family to contact armed groups

authorities in Scotland announced that Masud had been taken into US custody.

On December 12, the US Department of State announced that Masud had been taken before a court in Washington, DC, to face two criminal counts, including destruction of an aircraft resulting in death, based on charges filed by the Justice Department in December 2020.

US authorities gave no details on Masud's arrest and transfer in the absence of an extradition treaty. The US Embassy in Tunis, which covers Libya, tweeted that Masud's transfer "was lawful and conducted in cooperation with Libyan authorities," and that it "followed Interpol publishing a Red Notice for Masud in January 2022," requesting member countries to arrest him for transfer to the US.

2017. Anti-Gaddafi fighters had detained Masud in 2011 after the revolution in Libya. In 2015, following a mass trial marred by serious due process violations, a Tripoli criminal court sentenced him to 10 years in prison for his role in booby trapping cars during the 2011 revolution and 31 other former Gaddafi officials to various prison terms. Masud was ordered released in 2021 on medical grounds.

During his years in Libyan custody, Human Rights Watch documented the use of torture, intimidation, and other abuses in Libyan facilities, often to extract confessions. Libya's justice system was and remains marked by serious due process violations. US authorities should ensure that no coerced confessions, including confessions made under torture, are used as part of the prosecution, in violation of US

How the Climate Crisis Affects Reproductive Rights

Skye Wheeler

Senior Researcher, Women's Rights Division

This reproductive health crisis, brought about by climate change, can look very different in different regions of the world

Around the world, the climate crisis is worsening the inequities surrounding who gets to have a healthy pregnancy and baby.

Esther McCant, who works as a doula in the US state of Florida, knows that pregnant people need more than a birth plan. They also need information to plan for heat waves, especially for families that can't afford running their air conditioning, and for extreme weather events such as hurricanes, storms, and floods, that are increasingly likely due to climate change.

So McCant, a mother of four and a Black maternal health activist, includes climate health education and activism in her already overpacked agenda for doula trainees since she knows that the most marginalized people are most affected by a changing climate. In the United States, myriad forms of racism already result in maternal mortality rates three to four times those of white women for non-Hispanic Black women. Preterm birth and low birth weight rates, which make it more likely a baby will die before reaching their first birthday, are twice as high for babies born to Black mothers than white ones. The latest US data shows increases in both maternal mortality and preterm birth, with widening racial inequities.

Extreme heat, which is projected to intensify in most parts of the world because of the climate crisis, will most likely make things worse. Pregnant people are more at risk for heat-related illnesses than others, and a growing pile of studies indicate that

exposure to extreme heat during pregnancy is associated with higher rates of premature birth, low birth weight, and stillbirth. Other studies suggest links between high temperatures and poorer maternal health, as well as dangerous complications like gestational diabetes, which develops dur-

ing. Massive flooding is exactly the type of disaster that threatens populations already at risk.

Pregnant people and newborns are both especially vulnerable to stress and the illnesses that flooding can heighten. In many areas the risk of malaria increases after floods because

— all to their own physical and mental detriment.

Pollution is another issue that affects pregnancy and newborns. The United Nations recently recognized the right to a healthy environment. Air pollution, worsened by wildfires and by heat, has long been linked with poor birth outcomes and childhood intellectual and developmental problems. More recently, studies have linked air pollution with higher rates of gestational diabetes and preeclampsia.

Additionally, studies suggest that plummeting sperm count in some men, as well as early menarche and fibroids in people with female reproductive organs, are linked to invisible endocrine disruptors, which are chemicals in our environment.

How can governments deal with the effects of climate change and a polluted environment? One important first step is to foster broad awareness that sexual and reproductive health and rights depend on a healthy environment.

Fulfilling reproductive health and rights are one reason among many for governments to cut carbon emissions dramatically. Adapting to the climate crisis will look different in different places. But what's clear is that birth workers like Esther McCant and those in Pakistan will be at the forefront. Better funding and training for community health workers around the world is key, as these workers visit and provide information to pregnant people. Whether in Florida or Sindh we should make sure they have the resources they need to protect pregnancy health in an increasingly unstable, dangerous world.



ing pregnancy, or preeclampsia, which, if left untreated, can lead to serious complications or death for both the woman and child.

Low-income people in the US who work in hot environments — some in fields, others in restaurant kitchens — are often people of color. They have less air conditioning, live in hotter, less-green parts of cities, and have higher rates of pre-existing respiratory and cardiac conditions. Their pregnancies will be most affected.

This reproductive health crisis, brought about by climate change, can look very different in different regions of the world.

In Pakistan, unusually heavy monsoon rains this year led to floodwaters covering one-third of the country. The country faces rates of warming considerably above the global average, which could lead to more extreme rainfall that could further increase the risk of flood-

ing. it is spread by mosquitoes that breed in stagnant water and it is more likely to kill you if you're pregnant or a newborn. And prenatal care, support for birth itself, newborn checkups, and vaccines cannot be provided when facilities are shut down or overstretched by disaster.

In Pakistan's Sindh province, a massive heat wave hit before the floods. Conditions associated with extreme heat are terrible for everyone, but because of a smaller surface area to body mass ratio and because the fetus generates heat too, among other reasons, pregnant people are especially at risk of overheating. So are newborns whose bodies can't yet regulate temperature well.

Infants there struggled to sleep or eat, and women struggled to breastfeed in the heat. Women waved hand fans over their infants so the newborns, and therefore the rest of the family, could sleep in the extreme heat

Prominent Pakistan Rights Lawyer Gunned Down in Court

Abdul Latif Afridi was Courageous Voice for Rule of Law, Democracy

Saroop Ijaz

Senior Counsel, Asia Division

The respected lawyer and human rights defender Abdul Latif Afridi was shot and killed inside the Peshawar High Court on Monday. Affectionately known as Lala (meaning elder brother in Pashto), Afridi, 79, was one of Pakistan's most courageous and outspoken voices for rule of law, democracy, and human rights over several decades.

The alleged gunman, a junior lawyer, was arrested at the scene.

Afridi's activist career began as a student leader in the 1960s when he was expelled from Peshawar University for denouncing sham elections under the military dictatorship of Gen. Ayub Khan. After becoming an attorney, he represented many victims of enforced disappearances and their families. He was a vocal critic of religious militancy and extremism. He was never intimidated into silence,



In 2007, he led a lawyers' protest against then-president Gen. Pervaiz Musharraf, and was struck by a police armored

vehicle. He was a member of the Frontiers Crime Regulation, a draconian British colonial-era law governing the former tribal areas

process rights, including the right to legal counsel. Thanks in part to his advocacy, the law was repealed in 2018.

He was a former member of the Pakistan's National Assembly and a former president of the Supreme Court Bar Association.

My introduction to Afridi was through Asma Jahangir and I.A. Rehman, late icons of the human rights movement in Pakistan. What struck me most about Lala was that despite working under great stress, he retained his wit and charm and always found time for the younger generation of human rights activists and lawyers. His loss is a devastating blow for the human rights movement in Pakistan and for all Pakistanis who stand for rule of law, equality, and democracy.

The most fitting tribute to Lala Latif Afridi is to continue his struggle for a tolerant, rights-respecting Pakistan.



despite numerous threats to his life and several times suffering imprisonment and torture.

personnel carrier, fracturing his leg. Afridi was a passionate oppo-

nent of the Frontiers Crime Regulation, a draconian British colonial-era law governing the former tribal areas of Pakistan that permitted collective punishments and denied defendants basic due

Pakistan: IMF Bailout Should Advance Economic Rights

Strengthen Social Protection, Mitigate Harm to Most Vulnerable

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) should work with Pakistan's government to protect the economically disadvantaged by broadening social protection systems and minimizing reform measures that risk further harm to the most vulnerable people, Human Rights Watch said today. With poverty, inflation, and unemployment soaring, Pakistan is facing one of the worst economic crises in its history, jeopardizing millions of people's rights to health, food, and an adequate standard of living. The Pakistani government began formal negotiations with the IMF on February 1, 2023, to discuss a plan to rescue the economy, including an installment of US\$1.1 billion in loans from a \$6.5 billion bailout that had been designed to ward off economic meltdown in 2019. "Millions of Pakistanis have been pushed into poverty and denied their fundamental social and economic rights,"



said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The IMF and the Pakistani government have a responsibility to address this crisis in a way that prioritizes and protects low-income people."

Pakistan's central bank's for-

ign exchange reserves decreased by 16 percent, to \$3 billion, in the week ending January 27, an amount covering less than three weeks of imports. Acute shortages of foreign currency mean that many imports, including essential medicines, are scarce

or unobtainable. Pakistan is facing its highest inflation levels since 1975, with the cost of perishable food items rising more than 60 percent in January. Inflation is expected to continue to rise. In response to IMF demands, on January 29, the government increased fuel prices and removed a cap on the foreign exchange rate, leading to a drastic depreciation of the Pakistan rupee's value, including a 9.6 percent loss in one day in January.

At least a quarter of Pakistan's population was living below the poverty line well before this crisis. The World Food Programme estimated that in 2018, 21 percent of Pakistan's population was undernourished and 44 percent of children under the age of 5 had stunted growth. The Asia Development Bank reported that for every 1,000 children born in Pakistan in 2020, 65 would die before their fifth birthday. Almost 25 percent of the population did not have access to electricity in 2020.

Pakistan's social protection system, the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), is a



government cash transfer program that targets women living in extreme poverty. The program was initiated in 2008 to mitigate the impact of then-record levels of food and fuel inflation and continues to be Pakistan's largest social safety net program. While the program is an important initiative assisting millions of households, it needs to be expanded significantly to protect large segments of the population from the added burden of potential additional IMF-mandated measures raising prices

conditions the IMF places on this loan could either exacerbate social and economic hardship or provide desperately needed relief to Pakistanis while addressing the crisis's underlying causes. Several adjustments proposed by the IMF as conditions for Pakistan to get the IMF loan and address the immediate economic crisis would have both a direct and indirect negative impact on low-income people.

The IMF, in addition to asking Pakistan to remove energy and fuel subsidies and move to a

on low-income people and adequately mitigate them, Human Rights Watch said. It should use part of the anticipated savings to strengthen social safety nets by including a structural benchmark to significantly broaden coverage and increase social spending. The IMF should urge Pakistan's government to enact policies to increase women's access to employment by reducing barriers, including by providing state-funded maternity leave and access to affordable menstrual hygiene.

gent and transparent accountability measures. The IMF should use its procedures to make needed funds available as soon as possible, putting into place safeguards to protect people's economic and social rights.

Pakistan's deepening economic crisis comes amid devastation caused by cataclysmic floods. Floods in August 2022 killed over 1,700 people and destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes and millions of acres of crops, affecting more than 30 million Pakistanis and



for necessities.

Pakistan's negotiations with the IMF, which continue through February 9, are meant to clear the IMF's ninth review of its Extended Fund Facility, aimed at helping countries with balance-of-payments crises. The IMF bailout installment would ease the crippling shortage of foreign exchange and unlock access to other funding, including from multilateral and bilateral donors. Pakistan is a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which protects the rights to health, food, housing, and an adequate standard of living, among others. The con-

market-based exchange rate, has asked Pakistan to increase its general sales tax rate to a minimum of 18 percent from 17 percent at present, to raise more taxes, media reported. However, a depreciating local currency, skyrocketing inflation, and the removal of subsidies for electricity and fuel have already made it harder for many people to meet their basic needs. Increasing value added taxes instead of imposing progressive taxes will hit hardest on the people already most heavily affected.

The IMF program should conduct a thorough assessment of the direct and indirect impact these adjustments would have

New tax measures should be progressive in nature and should not exacerbate inequality and increase the cost of living in ways that undermine rights. Any cuts in subsidies for electricity, fuel, and natural gas should be preceded by a comprehensive reform plan that ensures everyone is able to access energy supplies essential for basic rights.

The IMF's recommendations should encourage government spending on social services, such as education, health care, and poverty-reduction programs while shoring up government revenues by improving the tax collection infrastructure and adopting strin-

causing billions of dollars in damage. Forty percent of Pakistan's 230 million people faced food insecurity in 2020, yet only 8.9 million families received assistance to mitigate the impact of rampant inflation. Poverty is concentrated in rural areas, which were particularly hard-hit by the floods.

"Pakistan's government should use the influx of funds to expand support for those worst-affected by the economic crisis," Gossman said. "The IMF should provide Pakistan the time and flexibility to achieve a sustainable, inclusive, and rights-based recovery."