



COVER STORY

Page 1

No govt that purports to be a democracy should curtail protests — Kenneth Roth

2,400

arrests have been made as pro-Palestine protests sweep US campuses

ENVIRONMENT

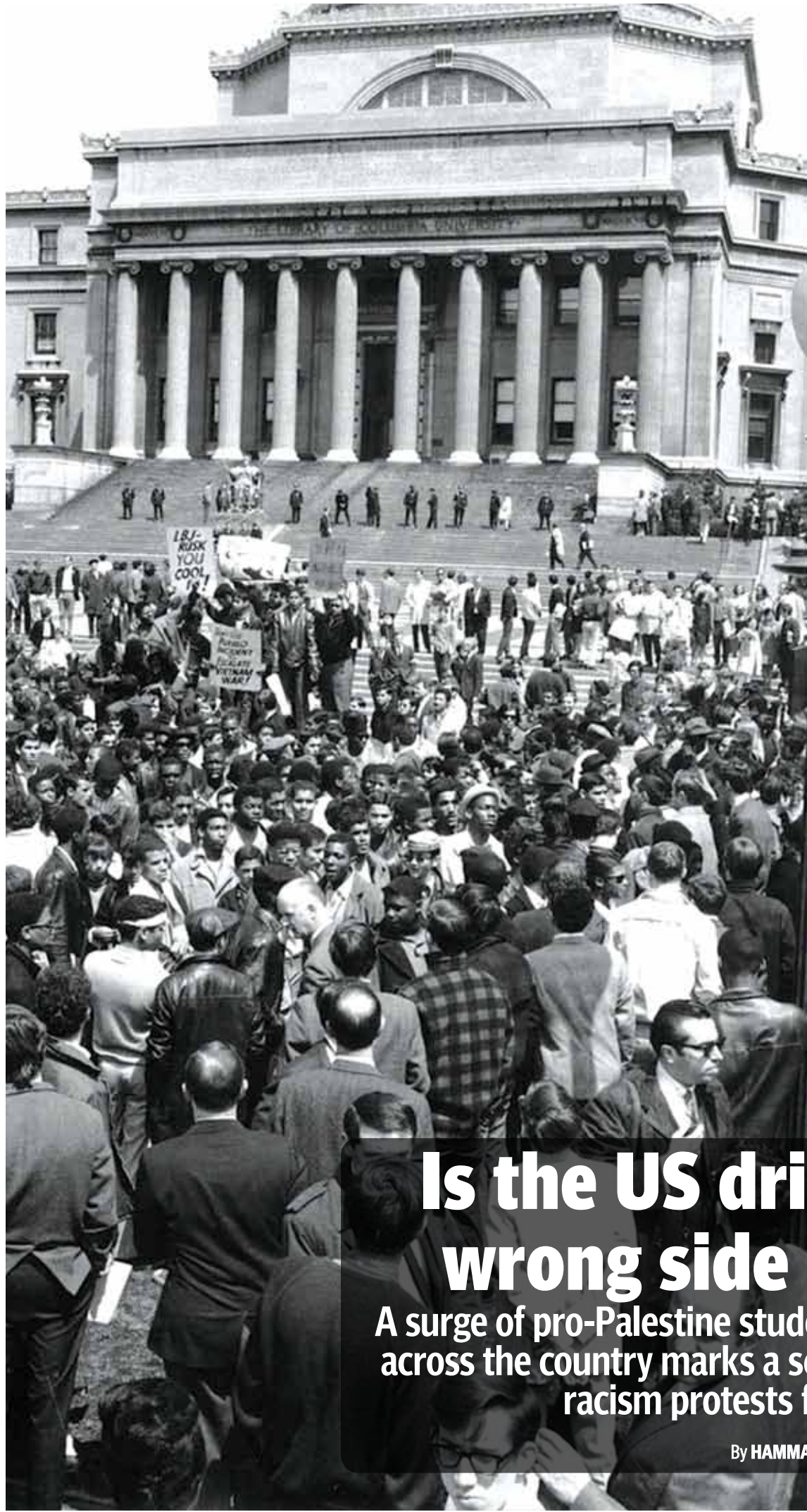
Page 3

Restoring the karez can address water scarcity in Balochistan — Zafar Iqbal

CULTURE & SOCIETY

Page 4

Nothing would have happened even if we had complained — Asma



Is the US drifting to the wrong side of history?

A surge of pro-Palestine student activism in universities across the country marks a scale unseen since the anti-racism protests four years ago

By HAMMAD SARFRAZ

The conflict in Gaza has ignited an unprecedented surge of student activism at universities and colleges across the United States, marking a scale unseen since the anti-racism protests that swept the country four years ago. From coast to coast, campuses have witnessed chaotic scenes. So far, over 2,400 arrests have been made, yet this has not deterred the pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

Their demand is simple: Academic institutions must sever ties with Israel and organisations supporting its nearly seven-month military offensive in Gaza, which has claimed the lives of over 34,600 people and pushed the enclave to the brink of starvation.

What began as the Gaza solidarity encampment at Columbia University, where students rallied for their institution to divest from corporations profiting from Israel's war, has transcended into a nationwide movement, spanning from California in the west to Massachusetts in the east. For university administrations, the timing couldn't be more precarious, as these protests coincide with preparations for end-of-year graduation ceremonies.

Even as most universities grapple with the challenges posed by the protests, Columbia University finds itself at the epicentre of this controversy. Minouche Shafik, the university's president and the first woman to head the Ivy League institution since its 18th-century inception, faced intense scrutiny during a charged Congressional hearing. In the wake of similar hearings where other university presidents were chastised for their management of student protests surrounding the Gaza conflict, Shafik's tenure became increasingly precarious.

The fallout from these hearings was swift. Harvard President Claudine Gay resigned following her congressional testimony, as did University of Pennsylvania President M. Elizabeth Magill. Shafik herself faced a barrage of criticism during her testimony, with lawmakers accusing her of inaction against what was described as a 'hotbed of anti-Semitism and hatred' on campus.

The congressional scrutiny precipitated a crackdown on students. A day after Shafik pledged to quell unauthorised protests and address instances of anti-Semitism, she summoned the New York Police Department to dismantle the student encampment on campus. The resulting police intervention in mid-April led to the temporary

“Attempts to stifle protests show that they are necessary, because colonialism is not just 'over there' – it's right here at home, in Europe, and Europeans have a duty to challenge it

dismantling of the encampment and the arrest of over 100 protesters on trespassing charges. However, within the university's faculty, this move was widely viewed as a 'monumental failure' by the administration, inviting further disruption rather than mitigating it. Journalism professor Zeynep Tufekci was among those who aired their discontent on social media platform X. “From the very beginning, calling in the police quickly has been an escalatory dynamic. It almost always is,” Tufekci said in her post.

After weeks of silence, Shafik, now facing mounting demands for a vote of no confidence and her resignation, finally spoke out. In a video message, she described the Israel-Palestine conflict as too complex for Columbia to resolve 'single-handedly'. However, her message, much like her actions, backfired, triggering backlash even on social media platforms like Twitter. Academics and students alike took to the platform, targeting Columbia University's official account and demanding her resignation within minutes of the message's posting.

Amidst these demonstrations, one constant has emerged: unwavering support for the students. At Columbia University and its affiliated Barnard College, nearly 170 faculty members have signed an open letter condemning the backlash against students. Elsewhere, as university administrations cautiously turned their attention towards graduation ceremonies, students continued to set up encampments, organise rallies, and, in some instances, intensify their protests by occupying university buildings, echoing the actions seen at Columbia.

From Austin to Atlanta, university presidents have called upon campus police, city riot officers, and even state

troopers to confront the civil disobedience of students who have established tent encampments on campus to protest the US-backed Israeli offensive in Gaza.

The conduct of law enforcement has, yet again, cast a harsh glare on police brutality and a lack of regard for the First Amendment rights safeguarding freedom of assembly, speech, and the press. As officers have aggressively confronted protesters and carried out questionable mass arrests, they have also subjected journalists and even university professors to physical force.

This stark contrast is particularly noteworthy, especially when juxtaposed with the restrained response witnessed during the January 6 attack by Trump supporters on the US Capitol. During that tumultuous event, lawmakers, including then Vice President Mike Pence, found themselves barricaded inside the Capitol as violent mobs breached its halls.

Across the country, academics have been hauled to the ground and detained and other demonstrators tasered. In a disturbing incident captured by CNN, Professor Caroline Fohlin of Emory University found herself in a violent altercation with law enforcement during a pro-Palestine protest on campus. The incident resulted in Fohlin facing charges for battery against a police officer. In the video footage, Fohlin was seen approaching a group of police officers as they wrestled with a protester, forcefully pushing their head into the concrete sidewalk. “Oh my God, what are you doing?” Fohlin could be heard asking, visibly shocked by the unfolding scene. Despite her appeals for the officers to disengage from the student, one officer aggressively seized her wrists and ordered her to the ground. Disregarding Fohlin's protests, the officer then forcefully pushed her onto the pavement, causing her head to collide with the sidewalk. As Fohlin cried for help, another officer joined in to assist in restraining her, ultimately securing her hands with zip ties. Throughout the ordeal, Fohlin repeatedly identified herself as a professor of economics, yet her pleas were met with continued force from the officers.

In response to inquiries, Fohlin maintained that she had not been actively participating in the protest on April 25, stating, “I emerged from my office, concerned solely about the treatment of students on the Quad.” Her lawyer, Gregory Clement, confirmed her intention to vigorously contest the charges in court.

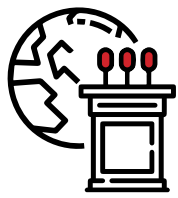
Fohlin's experience is not an isolated incident. Achintha Sivalingam, an Indian-origin student, has also faced repercussions for her involvement in student-led pro-Palestine encampment protests at Princeton University. Sivalingam was arrested and subsequently banned from the university pending a disciplinary process. Similarly, Hassan Sayed, a fifth-year PhD candidate in economics, found himself barred from Princeton for his participation in the demonstrations. These incidents have exposed a broader trend of academic institutions responding to activism with punitive measures, sparking debates over freedom of expression and the right to protest on college campuses.

“There should be no Israel exception to free speech. Germany is probably the worst offender, and that is because it is drawing the wrong lesson from the Nazis' responsibility for the Holocaust

On the other hand, tensions have reached a boiling point on university campuses across the United States as student protests in solidarity with Palestinians continue to gain momentum. Earlier this week, at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), a protest opposing Israel's military offensive in Gaza descended into chaos.

A vigilante pro-Israel group launched an assault on a solidarity encampment occupied by peaceful pro-Palestinian demonstrators, triggering a serious confrontation. Witnesses recounted that the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) intervened only after nearly four hours of the attack. Masked pro-Israel counter-demonstrators, estimated to number in the hundreds and arriving from off-campus locations, launched fireworks into the encampment, exacerbating the volatile situation. According to media reports, the assailants, carrying Israeli flags, subsequently attempted to dismantle the pro-Palestinian camp, attacking students with pepper spray, sticks, stones, and metal fencing.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“Despite the escalating violence, law enforcement officers failed to provide adequate protection to the students, who resorted to utilising the metal fencing hurled at them as makeshift shields for self-defence,” said a UCLA student, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Rights activists worldwide have condemned university administrators in the US, particularly Columbia and now UCLA. When asked to comment on the reaction by universities and the state of freedom, Kenneth Roth, former executive director of Human Rights Watch (HRW), stated, “The response to the protests does show a disturbing intolerance toward criticism of the Israeli government. That reflects in significant

to correct misguided governmental policy. “No government that purports to be a democracy should curtail protests even if – especially when – the government is the target of the protests,” he added.

Anti-Semitism vs right to protest

Pro-Israel groups on campuses across the US claim that demonstrations in support of Palestine are veering toward anti-Semitism. Students advocating for Israel have also alleged feeling threatened by these protests and exposed to attacks from those affiliated with the encampments. Last month, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel’s Prime Minister, echoed similar sentiments in a televised speech. While describing pro-Palestinian students

visited the area at other campuses.” “It is 100% clear to me that they are not anti-Semitic or even close to it. Anyone who suggests otherwise is deceiving you,” he posted on X.

When asked about the discourse surrounding the Gaza conflict, Ken Roth said: “Some supporters of the Israeli government are using charges of anti-Semitism to try to stifle criticism of Israel. That cheapens and undermines the important fight against anti-Semitism. Of course, some critics of the Israeli government are anti-Semitic, but most people are critical of Israeli government conduct in Gaza because it is killing so many civilians and causing so much civilian suffering. That is not anti-Semitism.”

“It is wrong to weaponise charges of anti-Semitism to try to stop this



“The lesson from the Holocaust should not be to support the Israeli government regardless of what it does, but to uphold international human rights standards even when it is the Israeli government that is violating them

Kenneth Roth

part pressure from donors who are willing to sacrifice academic freedom in the name of defending Israel from criticism.”

“It should be the responsibility of university leaders to reject such pressure and uphold academic freedom regardless of the subject. Short of violence, intimidation, or harassment toward other members of the university community, free speech should be prioritised even if some people are uncomfortable with the topic,” added Roth, who serves as a visiting professor at Princeton School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA).

Responding to a question about the state of democracy in the US, the long-time head of Human Rights Watch remarked, “We shouldn’t overstate the threat to US democracy. Yes, some university administrators have been too quick to shut down encampments established by students protesting US support for Israeli war crimes in Gaza, but those censorship efforts have backfired, sparking more protests.”

On comparison with protests that rocked the US universities during the Vietnam War, Roth said: “For-

as anti-Semitic, the Israeli leader urged the US government to stop the demonstrations. “What’s occurring on America’s college campuses is deeply concerning,” Netanyahu said, echoing sentiments primarily expressed by supporters of Israel regarding the safety of Israeli or Jewish students and faculty amidst escalating protests. “Anti-Semitic mobs have taken over leading universities. They call for the annihilation of Israel. They attack Jewish students. They attack Jewish faculty,” claimed Netanyahu. “It’s unconscionable. It has to be stopped.” The Israeli leader argued the “response of several university presidents was shameful” and said more needed to be done.

While the Biden Administration remained silent, US Senator Bernie Sanders delivered a scathing rebuttal. In a video posted on X, the progressive Jewish senator from Vermont – accused Netanyahu of “insulting the intelligence of the American people” by using anti-Semitism to divert attention from his government’s military offensive in Gaza.

“No, Mr. Netanyahu, it is not

legitimate and much-needed criticism,” Roth added.

Biden’s silence

President Joe Biden, amid mounting pressure and criticism for his prolonged silence on the ongoing protests sweeping university campuses, finally addressed the issue this week. “In America, the right to protest is fundamental, but it does not justify violence,” said the president. Observers note that Biden may face intensified scrutiny come November, with a growing number of students either voting against him or abstaining altogether. “This could certainly impact President Biden’s prospects, especially considering his efforts to court young voters, particularly university students, through recent loan forgiveness measures,” commented one expert.

But it’s not just Biden’s silence that will haunt him in the upcoming presidential election; his administration’s support for Israel throughout the conflict is also under scrutiny. When asked about the impact of US support on its image as a champion of rights, Ken Roth said, “The US



civilians. President Biden has repeatedly pressed Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu verbally for greater care for civilian life and an end to Israeli obstruction of humanitarian aid, but Biden has undercut his words by continuing to fund and arm Israel’s military campaign in Gaza,” the former executive director of HRW added.

Describing Biden’s actions as complicity in war crimes, Roth remarked, “That’s what former Librarian President Charles Taylor was convicted of and is now serving a 50-year prison term in a British prison because he armed an abusive rebel force in Sierra Leone.” “No one thinks that International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Karim Khan will charge Biden, but Biden is in-

ing the students to continue their sit-in. But on Friday, French police entered the university and evicted student activists who had occupied its buildings. Unlike on college campuses across the United States, the French protests remained peaceful, with no signs of violence as the students were removed from the premises. Crackdowns against pro-Palestinian protestors are becoming increasingly common in Europe. At Humboldt University’s main building in central Berlin, protesters wearing keffiyehs in solidarity with the Palestinians occupied the premises until Friday, when German police arrested several demonstrators and students. The group had been chanting slogans such as ‘Free Gaza’ and ‘Germany, stop supplying arms

have abandoned all pretence and curtailed fundamental rights to shield Israel from criticism while it engages in genocide.” The façade of European exceptionalism, she added, will never be put back together.

While much of the world criticises the US for its handling of pro-Palestinian protesters, Europe has not lagged far behind in its use of force to disperse or suppress demonstrations. When questioned about Europe’s response, Daly remarked, “What we’re witnessing is that Israel and Europe are part of the same system of violence, and when Europe’s complicity with Israel’s colonisation of Palestine is confronted, force is wielded to defend it.”

Expressing disdain, the EU law-



“What we see is that Israel and Europe are part of the same violent apparatus, and when Israel’s right to colonise Palestine is challenged in Europe, force is deployed in Europe to protect it

Clare Daly



fortunately, so far, there has been nothing approaching the use of lethal violence in the police response to the current round of campus protests. However, the lesson of the protests of the 1960s and 1970s against US involvement in the Vietnam War is that students can change a misguided US government policy. I hope the Biden administration similarly reconsiders its unconditional support for the Israeli government as it commits war crimes in Gaza.”

The protests, Roth said, show the importance of democracy as a tool

anti-Semitic or pro-Hamas to point out that, in a little over six months, your extremist government has killed over 34,000 Palestinians and wounded more than 78,000, 70% of whom are women and children,” Sanders said in a clip posted on X.

In the midst of efforts to label the protests as anti-Semitic, an increasing number of academics have come forward to refute such claims. Udi Ofer, a visiting professor at Princeton SPIA, said: “I’ve visited the Gaza solidarity encampment at Princeton and have talked to plenty of people who

Congress just approved \$26 billion in new military aid for Israel, on top of the \$3.8 billion that it already sends Israel each year. Biden’s refusal to condition any of that aid on an end to Israeli war crimes in Gaza is seriously harming US credibility as it tries, for example, to curb Russian war crimes in Ukraine or China’s mass detention and persecution – crimes against humanity – targeting Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang.”

“The Israeli military is clearly committing regular war crimes in Gaza as it bombs and starves Palestinian

creasingly facing a political cost for his unwillingness to back his words with action toward Israeli war crimes in Gaza,” he added

“With the presidential election coming in November, Biden cannot afford to continue to ignore popular discontent with his soft-glove approach to Israel,” cautioned Roth.

Global movement

Pro-Palestine demonstrations have now transcended national borders. In France, Sciences Po has emerged as the epicentre of student-led anti-

to Israel,’ while holding placards that read: ‘There is no academia without truth’ and ‘When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty.’ Apart from that, Europe has witnessed large-scale street protests amid arrests and clashes with police.

When questioned about Europe’s response to protests in favour of Palestine and its implications for the continent’s reputation as a bastion of freedom, Clare Daly, an Irish Member of the European Parliament, remarked, “It entirely undermines Europe’s claim to champion freedom of speech, the rule of law, and fundamental rights. It is no secret that Europe’s concern for human rights in its external relations is subject to a double standard: human rights for the victims of Europe’s adversaries, but they can be overlooked for the victims of Europe’s allies. It is also no secret that civil rights and fundamental freedoms have been under attack in Europe for some time.”

maker urged Europeans to stand up against the unjust actions. “These protests are essential because colonialism isn’t just happening ‘over there’—it’s right here at home, in Europe, and Europeans have a responsibility to challenge it.”

The ongoing protests and subsequent reactions are increasingly framed as a clash over free speech. Echoing Daly’s perspective, Ken Roth, former executive director of Human Rights Watch, emphasised, “There should be no Israel exception to free speech.” Roth criticised Germany in particular, stating that it is perhaps the most egregious offender in this regard. He argued that Germany is drawing the wrong lesson from the Nazis’ responsibility for the Holocaust. “The lesson from the Holocaust should not be to support the Israeli government regardless of its actions, but to uphold international human rights standards even when the Israeli government is violating them,” he added.



KAREZ TO THE RESCUE

Could a millennia-old engineering tradition hold the key to eroding water insecurity in Balochistan?

By SHABINA FARAZ

Alvina Bibi, a 35-year-old mother of six, lives in the village of Kili Surkhanuzai. Her days were exhausting, starting before dawn and stretching into the late hours of the night. Yet even with such long hours, Alvina often found herself pressed for time because much of her day was consumed by the arduous task of fetching water.

"But that's not the case now," Alvina explained. "Since the Alusai Karez, which runs through our village, has been restored, it's much easier for us to fetch water, wash clothes and do other household chores." Her face lit up with joy as she pointed out that the Karez water collection point is only a few meters from her home. "I can now spend the extra hours, previously spent on fetching water, on things I enjoy," Alvina added.

Kili Sarkhanuzai, a village located 20 kilometers north of Pishin city, Balochistan, is home to 800 families with a total population of 8,500. Agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry are the primary sources of livelihood in this large village, with a small portion of the community also engaged in small businesses. However, both agricultural and animal husbandry activities rely heavily on water, and despite the village's expansive agricultural land, the lack of water has left much of it barren.

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province by area, is often associated with drought, poverty and tribal conflicts. However, few people are aware that it is also home to a centuries-old karez irrigation system. This system, if restored, has the potential to turn millions of acres of Balochistan's arid land into fertile ground and could even help resolve local tribal disputes related to water scarcity.

3,000 years of water engineering

A remarkable feat of indigenous water engineering that dates back to 3,000 years ago, the karez system is essentially a network of underground canals fed by groundwater. According to the UNESCO website, they are constructed as a series of well-like vertical shafts, connected by sloping tunnels, which tap into subterranean water in a manner that efficiently delivers large quantities of water to the surface by gravity, without need for pumping.

The first well where the water is tapped for a karez is called the mother well, and there is a zone of roughly 1,200 feet in diameter where it is forbidden to dig new wells or otherwise threaten the quality and quantity of the groundwater. The vertical shafts along the underground channel are purely for maintenance purposes, and water is used only once it emerges from the daylight point.

Karez allow water to be transported over long distances in hot dry climates without loss of much of the water to evaporation. The system has the advantage of being resistant to natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, and to deliberate destruction in war. Furthermore, it is almost insensitive to the levels of precipitation, delivering a flow with only gradual variations from wet to dry years. A karez is environmentally sustainable as it has no additional energy requirement and, thus, has low life cycle operation and maintenance costs.

Karez irrigation is practiced in as many as 22 countries around the world, with prominent examples outside of Pakistan found in Iran, Chile, Afghanistan, Palestine, North Africa, and the Arab region. These countries share a common heritage of using this ancient underground water channel system



for irrigation and agriculture.

According to UNESCO, Karez irrigation technology was developed in arid and semi-arid areas from India and western China through the Middle East into North Africa. The technology is believed to have originated in the 1st millennium BC in Persia from where the knowledge travelled east and westward along the Silk Route, throughout the Muslim world, arriving in Xinjiang in China during the Han dynasty (206 BC–24 AD) and in Balochistan somewhat earlier.

In Pakistan, the Karez method is confined to the province of Balochistan, which has as many 1,264 such underground canal networks dispersed across its length and breadth. Experts estimate that each karez can transfer 200 liters of water per second, which is sufficient to support the agricultural needs of approximately 200 families within a given area.

Reviving the karez

The Balochistan Rural Support Program (BRSP) recently tested the concept of reviving this ancient technique by rehabilitating two karez: the Alusai Kariz and the Thaimrak Kariz in Pishin district. These successful restorations demonstrate the potential to reclaim vast areas of farmland and foster greater harmony among local tribes by addressing water-related issues.

Over 26,592 individuals have reaped the benefits of this project across three Union Councils in Pishin district: Dab Khanzai, Sarkhanzai and Kamalzai. The impact has been substantial, with an expansion of agricultural activities and cultivated land in the region. Notably, the quality of orchard crops has shown marked improvement. Moreover, the most significant achievement is the near eradication of tribal conflicts over water, fostering greater cooperation and harmony among local communities.

Dr. Tahir Rasheed, CEO of the Balochistan Rural Support Program (BRSP), underscored the significance of the Karez irrigation system in Balochistan's agricultural framework. This age-old system, embodying traditional wisdom and innovation, has been a cornerstone for the region's agriculture. However, it now confronts considerable threats due to societal shifts, a move toward tube wells, and the effects of climate change.

Dr. Tahir stated, "At BRSP, we understand the gravity of the situation and are committed to taking action. Our partnership with local communities, demonstrated by the successful revitalization of the Alusai Karez in Pishin district, showcases the impact of collaborative efforts in combating water scarcity.

By implementing innovative solutions like underground pipelining, we have not only minimized water loss but also rejuvenated agricultural lands, encouraging sustainable practices. Our efforts to address water distribution issues have fostered community harmony and inclusive growth."

Dr. Tahir also emphasized the importance of adopting climate-smart agricultural methods, including cultivating low delta crops to optimize water use and ensure the longevity of the Karez system. He concluded by noting that these initiatives are crucial for the long-term sustainability of this valuable resource and the welfare of local communities.

Tradition and community management

Balochistan is home to various tribes, each with unique customs and systems, including those related to the distribution of water from the Karez irrigation system. In some villages, families traditionally hold proprietary rights to the water from the Karez and distribute it among themselves based on an established framework of equality.

For example, in the village of Kili Khanuzai, where Alusai Karez runs through, there are 34 families with documented rights to the Karez water. They are entitled to use the water on a "Shabana Roz" basis—a Persian term meaning day and night, or 24 hours a day. This system grants them constant access to wa-

ter, which they use to cultivate their land and carry out other activities.

Families without such rights to continuous water access can use Karez water for drinking but need to negotiate to obtain additional water for agricultural purposes. The families with full access sometimes sell water hours to other villagers, allowing them to cultivate their lands or use the water for other needs.

To maintain order and ensure fair distribution, a dedicated individual is appointed to manage the water accounts. This person tracks the use and allocation of water among families, ensuring that everyone receives their fair share and helping to resolve any disputes that may arise. This system fosters a balance in water distribution, contributing to community cohesion and resource management.

A lifeline for Balochistan's women

The BRSP's water management project to restore the Alusai Karez produced remarkable results. Groundwater recharge improved, the amount of cultivated land grew, and new, more productive crops were identified. This led to sustainable poverty alleviation, resolved conflicts over water scarcity in the region, and most importantly, made life much easier for local women.

Alvina Bibi recounts that before the restoration of the Alusai Kariz, the water flow was so weak that it took over an hour to fill a single pot, and the water itself was quite dirty.

However, since the Karez has been rejuvenated, the water flow has not only increased significantly, but the quality has also improved, becoming much cleaner.

Additionally, dedicated "women's points" have been established at various locations along the Karez route, where women can gather water, wash clothes, and carry out other tasks. These spots are designated exclusively for women, ensuring that men do not intrude, which allows women to complete their chores without compromising their modesty or veil. This arrangement provides women with a safe and comfortable environment to manage their daily activities.

Sustainable future

Interviews with villagers indicated a significant increase in wheat cultivation this season, almost doubling from the previous year. They also mentioned plans to sow even more wheat and anticipate vegetable production in the village will double in the coming year due to the enhanced water availability in spring and summer. This rise in agricultural output will boost farm family incomes and contribute to the village's economic growth.

However, the most notable impact of increased water availability will be the reduced reliance on tube wells, which will help replenish groundwater levels. This shift not only promotes sustainable water use but also helps to stabilize the area's overall water ecosystem, benefiting both the environment and

the community in the long run.

Restoring hope

The BRSP initiative to restore Alusai Karez and Thaimrak Karez involved three key tasks: construction of trap-ezoidal channels, repair and restoration of existing stone masonry channels, and repair of distribution points.

Water expert Zafar Iqbal believes that restoring the traditional karez system is the key to addressing water scarcity in Balochistan. He points out that Balochistan relies heavily on precipitation and is divided into two main regions: arid and semi-arid. Climate change has altered weather patterns, leading to reduced rainfall or increased irregular downpours. As a result, about 12 million acre-feet of surface water is lost due to insufficient water storage infrastructure.

He noted that three decades ago, Balochistan had 1,600 to 2,000 liters of water available per capita, but that has dropped to just 300 liters per person, a significant decline and cause for concern. Additionally, Balochistan receives only about three per cent of the Indus Basin Irrigation System's water, exacerbating its water crisis.

Given these challenges, he believes that the only viable solution for Balochistan's survival is to restore the traditional karez system. Zafar explains that the karez system is a centuries-old, tested and proven method that prevents water loss because it eliminates evaporation. This ensures minimal water wastage. Furthermore, if the groundwater level rises in one karez, it can positively impact other karez systems in the vicinity, contributing to broader recovery.

Despite such advantages, tube wells were unfortunately commonly used by those who saw Karez as an antiquated system. The process of karez drying and underground water has been steadily decreasing as a result of the massive volume of water extracted from the ground began, and karez eventually dried out. Fortunately, as mentioned earlier, if just one karez can change people's lives, there boasts over a thousand more karez in Balochistan whose restoration can surely change people's lives. Their revival holds immense promise for the region.

Shabina Faraz is a freelance journalist and contributor

All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the author





The helpless help

Story by: YUSRA SALIM

They work in our homes, often living in cramped spaces with the families they serve. Behind closed doors, they often confront rampant abuse, their desperation and lack of awareness leaving them with little recourse

Pakistan has many legislations for the protection of women and safeguarding women's rights but the burning question is the implementation of those laws and delayed justice. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) approximately 1,000 women are killed in honour killings annually. These figures differ and do not fully reflect the scope of honour killings because these crimes are often underreported and stigmatised in society. The majority of the cases are reported from low-income households and the lower class of society, and the culprits are the same men who send their wives, sisters, and daughters to work as house help or domestic workers.

Asma has been working in Defence since she was nine, along with her mother. Once she turned 13, her mother started sending her to houses on her own so that they could get earn more. "At first I used to accompany my mother and she used to ask for little help. Then gradually she made me work, it was like training me to learn household work and take charge," said Asma, now 29 years old.

She worked in six houses at one time from 9 am till 6 pm every day until a few years back she was offered a full day of work by one of her employers. "They asked me to stay at their house for 12 hours and paid me more than the amount I was getting from all the six homes in total. So, my father and mother thought this was the best thing where I have less work and more money. And I will get food and clothes as well," she narrated how her journey from a maid to a domestic worker changed.

The family was caring and Asma was also happy with the work, but then a relative of the family visited them over holidays and asked if Asma or any of her relatives could be sent with them as house help abroad.

"The idea of getting a chance to go out of the country was appealing, so my uncle sent off his 12-year-old daughter with them. For two years she didn't return. After the girl's family inquiring after about her persistently, the employers brought her back and said that they would not take her back as their house help," Asma narrated.

The girl later shared that she was molested and mishandled by the employer family, and especially by their driver. Her family didn't bother about this much because they were pocketing money every month in exchange.

After a few weeks, Asma's cousin's mother started looking for an eligible match for her daughter. "Her mother feared her being pregnant and nobody would marry her if they knew she was molested multiple times and was living in the same house for two years," the domestic worker explained.

The girl was only 15 when she was married off to her uncle's friend who was around 26 years old at that time just so that the family didn't have to explain her situation to anyone. "My father tried intervening but couldn't do much," said Asma. "Her husband found out later about the assault she suffered and used to beat her even when she was pregnant," she said, adding that even in this condition she went to work in houses to do cleaning and dishwashing work.

Cases such as Asma's cousin aren't rare but many domestic workers if asked shared horrific experiences and the problem is they do not speak about the harassment and do not believe in the judicial system.

"Nothing would have happened if we had complained too because the family had money and we hardly earn 20,000 a month. Also with all the police intervention and court hearings everyone in the surrounding who doesn't know would also find out what had happened," Asma said.

The Punjab Domestic Workers Act 2019 of Pakistan encompasses various provisions aimed at safeguarding the rights and entitlements of domestic workers. Here's a summary of the key protections and rights guaranteed by the act:

Prohibition on child labour: No child under the age of 15 years is allowed to work in a household, and domestic workers under 18 years can only be engaged in light work.

Protection from forced labour: Domestic workers cannot be employed under bonded labor or forced labor systems.

Non-Discrimination: Domestic workers are protected from discrimination based on various grounds such as religion, race, gender, etc.

Dignified Working conditions: Employers must provide dignified working conditions and occupational safety and health measures.

Social security benefits: Domestic workers are entitled to social security benefits including sickness benefits, medical care, injury benefits, disablement pension, and survivor's pension.

Leave entitlements: Domestic workers are entitled to weekly holidays, sick leave, festival holidays, and maternity leave.

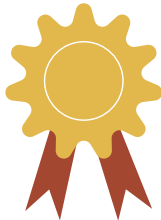
Minimum wage: Domestic workers must be paid wages not less than the minimum rates specified by the government.

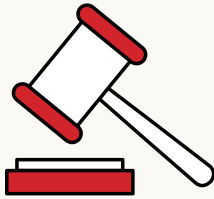
Termination of employment: Termination of employment requires one month's prior notice in writing from either party, with one month's wages paid in lieu of notice.

Accommodation: Employers must provide accommodation for live-in domestic workers who stay at the place of work voluntarily.

Resolution of disputes: Disputes or complaints are resolved through Dispute Resolution Committees, with an option for appeal to the Appellate Authority.

Fund for welfare: A Domestic Workers Welfare Fund is established to provide social protection, safety, and welfare measures for domestic workers.





What does the law say?

In such cases where does the loophole exist and isn't there anything that can help such workers? Laws exist, there are articles in the constitution, international labour laws, and domestic workers laws at the federal and provincial levels but what are all of these for when more than a million people are associated with the domestic work web and get molested, mishandled, and assaulted now and again.

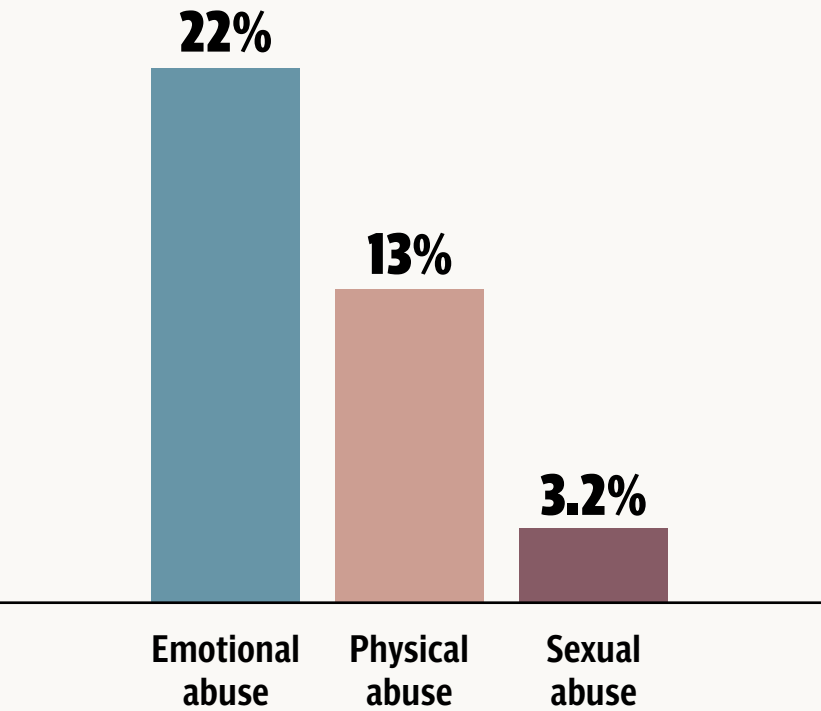
“There are many legislations on the rights and legalities of the domestic workers but the implementation is nowhere to be seen. The state in such cases is not totally at fault but also the workers and their families do not come out to complain,” said family lawyer Fatima Butt.

She explained that the families of girls who are being molested and mishandled do not know the complexities of the judiciary system. They don't know how to file a complaint and they fear that it won't help them as they can lose work due to such cases.

Pakistani and international labour laws both are very strong and talk about the rights of the workers, be it equal wages, maternity leaves, contracts and agreements for work, union and trade rights, and many more but, similar to the situation of all other sections of the country, the judicial system in the country is very slow and doesn't favour the poor. “Many do not report as they fear losing their job because the whole family mostly work in the same household or area. Speaking up can lead to losing their bread and butter but many articles in the laws support their rights. Article 4 of International Labour laws talks about prohibition of slavery, article 5 makes mention of torturing and mishandling of the worker and article 23 specifies equal pay and trade unions,” explained Butt, adding that what is going on nowadays is more of modern slavery. According to the Constitution of Pakistan Article 11, slavery and forced labour is not allowed while article 17 talks about freedom and unions and article 25 is against discrimination.

Other than the constitution and international laws, the provinces have also addressed domestic workers' rights. “Punjab in 2019 passed the Domestic Workers Act that talks about almost all the rights that workers should get and are getting in the Western countries. Similarly, Sindh and Islamabad also have legislation on the said topic,” she said. However, despite such strong laws, the cases aren't decreasing and that is all because of awareness and education.

Proportion of different types of abuse suffered by children engaged in child labour in domestic work in Sindh, 2017 (n=63)



SOURCE: Mesha Iqbal et al, “Malnutrition and food insecurity in child labourers in Sindh, in Pakistan”

“The laws are clear about contracts and agreements that include holidays, work details, maternity leaves, etc., but workers themselves avoid this paperwork because they don't want to be bound legally. Hence, cases of molestation, rapes, mishandling, and physical assaults are done away with easily,” the family lawyer told.

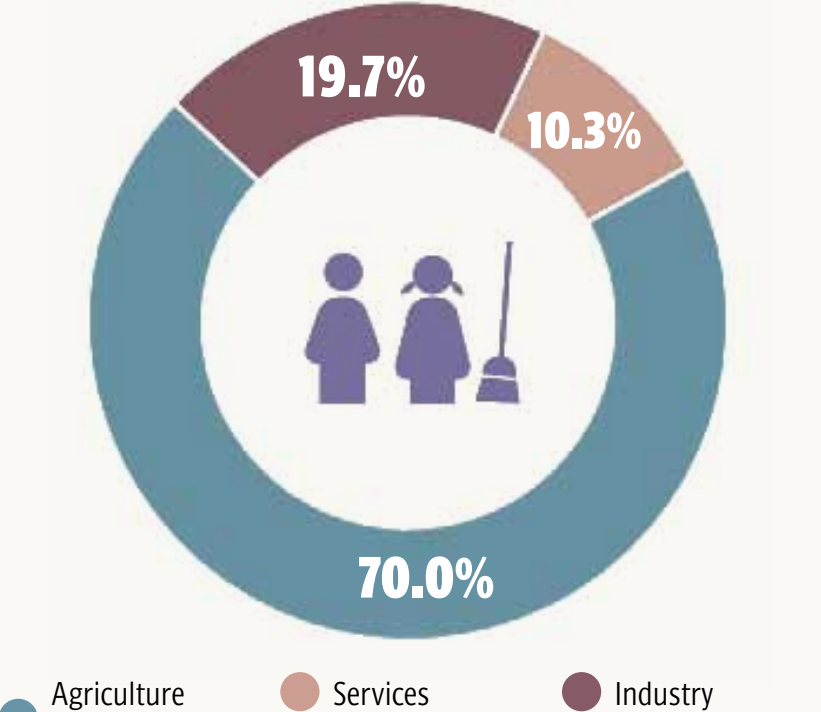
The state can play a part in such cases but only when the case is reported. Majority of the time, such cases are not reported directly by the family but by a third person via social media. In major cases, families settle out of court and take money for their silence.

“Families of domestic workers are usually concerned with money so in many cases they take a one-time huge amount and give away their daughters as live-in maids where mostly they are mishandled but they don't speak up against the crime for the sake of a running source of money,” she explained. She added that the situation of the country where educated and middle-class people don't even get justice in time such workers avoid getting into court cases.

The other main factor is the fear of losing their job. They also fear monetary problems and shelter which they get while being live-in maids. If they have knowledge and awareness on how to complain maybe cases will increase in terms of reporting but then mostly their elders take money in exchange for taking back the complaint.

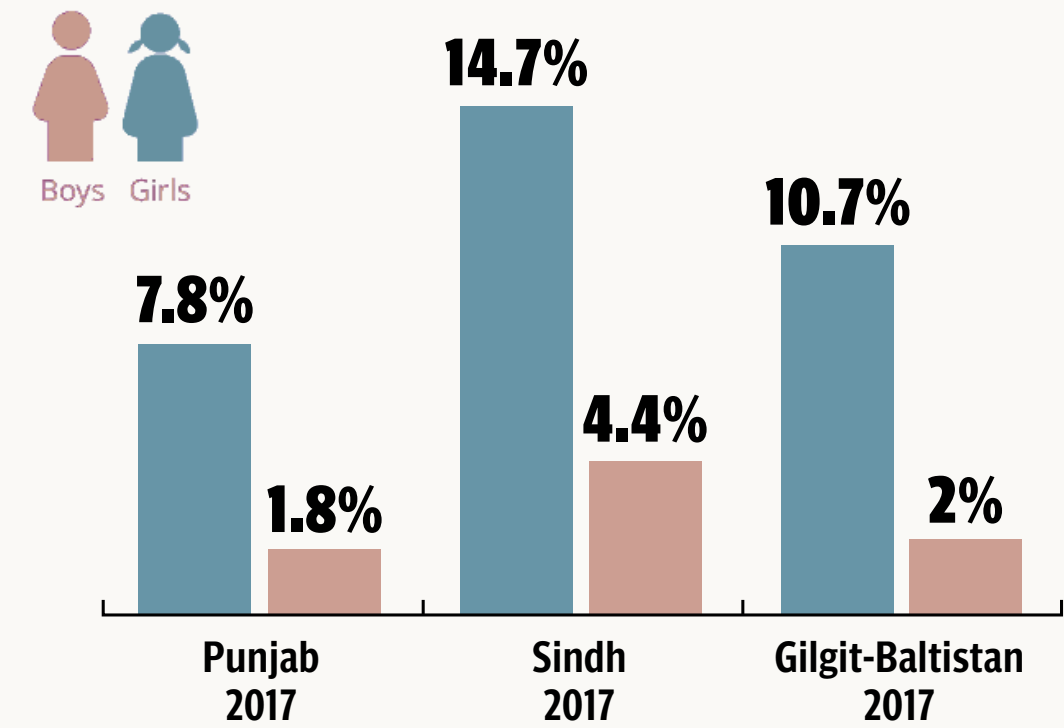
According to a report issued by the Hari Welfare Association, the Institute of Social Justice Pakistan, and the Institute of Labour Education and Research between 2010 and 2020, a total of 140 cases were reported of child worker abuse out of which 44 were murdered and 96 were tortured and raped. “The country has separate strict laws about murder and rape but nothing is done in such cases as well. Hundreds of cases aren't even reported because families bring in the concept of honour in this and don't report rape and molestation specifically,” Butt explained. She also said that in cases where in-house molestation and incest happen where family members are involved, the number of reported cases is very low because the factor of honour comes in. Parents mostly marry their daughters off and never report the crime because litigation is expensive. In cases where a report is lodged they settle it out of court.

Percentage distribution of children, aged 5 to 17 years old, engaged in child labour in the world, by sector of economic activity, 2020



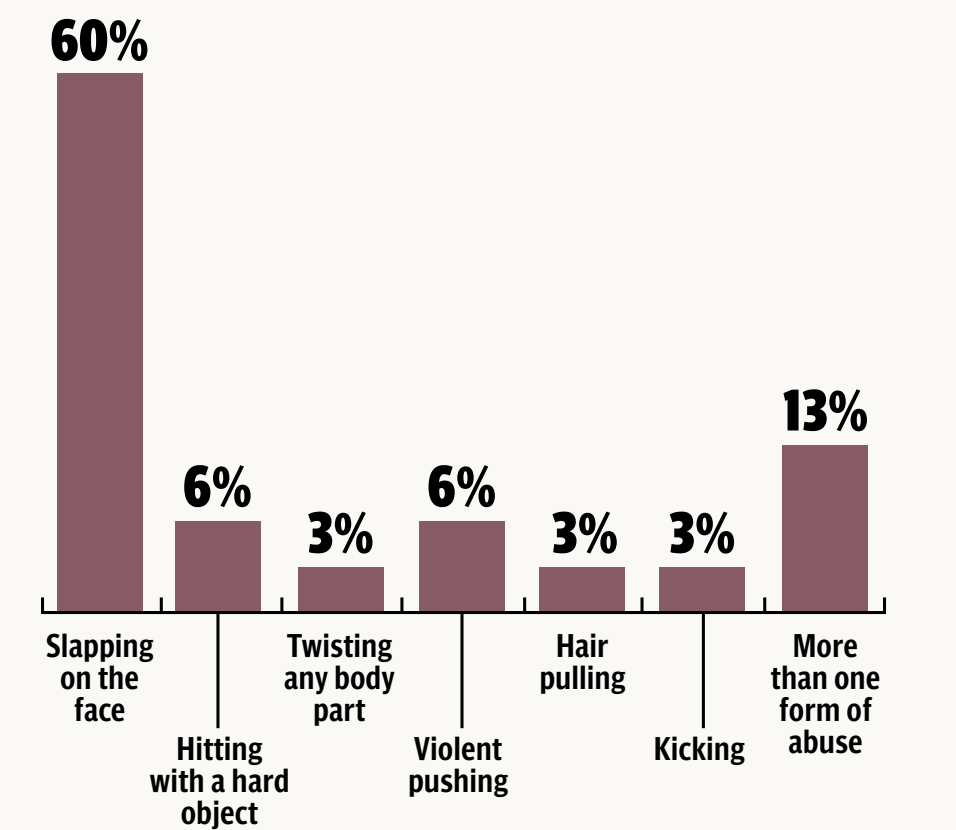
SOURCE: Adopted from ILO and UNICEF, Child labour: Global Estimates 2020. Trends and the road forward. Executive summary 2021

Proportion of girls and boys involved in households chores in Punjab, Sindh and Gilgit-Baltistan, 2017-2018



SOURCE: MICS data for Punjab (2017), Sindh(2018) and Gilgit-Baltistan(2017)

Types of physical abuse among children engaged in child labour in domestic work in Sindh, 2016 (n=212)



SOURCE: Salma Zainab & Masood Kadir, “Nutritional Status and Physical Abuse among the Children Involved in Domestic Labour in Karrachi Pakistan, A Cross-sectional Survey

Naureen Azeem narrated to Express Tribune what befell her 15-year-old maid. “One day my house help rang the bell and when I opened the door, she was standing perspiring and breathless. Upon inquiring, she said that two men followed her to my main gate and were trying to grab her from behind,” she said.

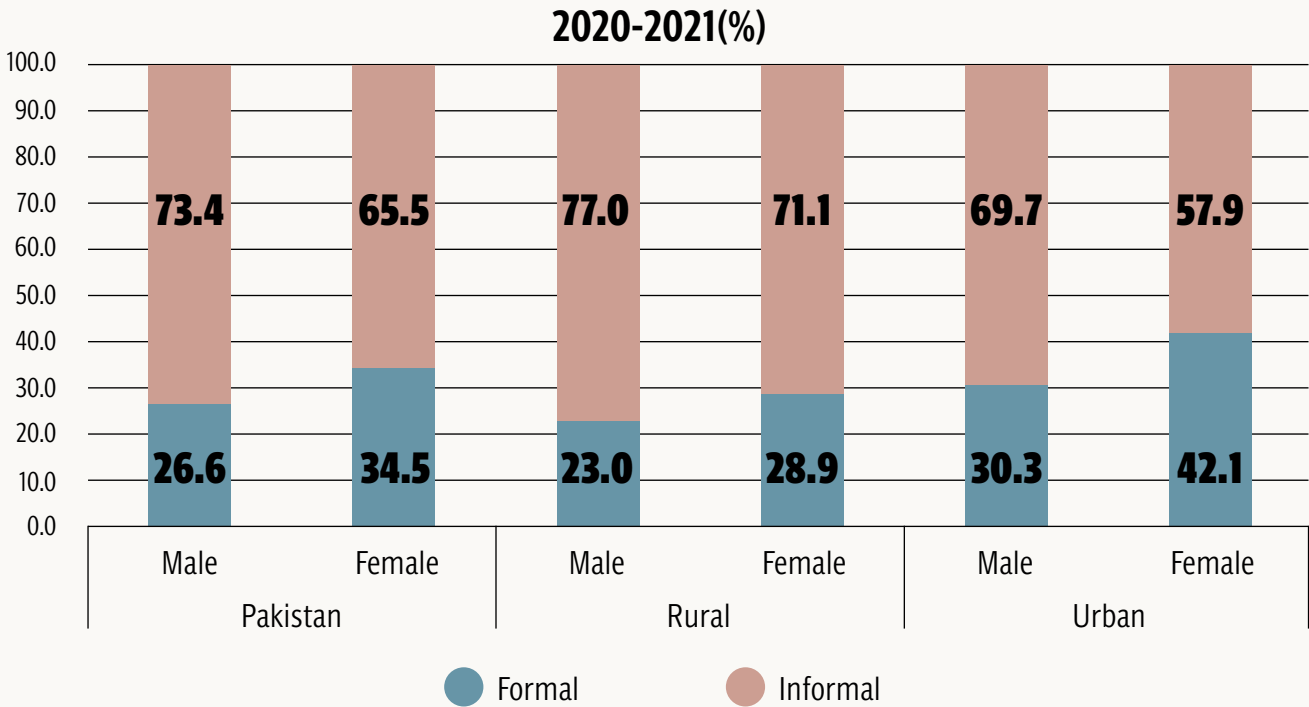
The two men had been following the girl for the last two weeks and used to tease her. “The next day, I informed my guard to keep an eye on those men and to stop them if they followed my maid. When the guard caught one of them, the neighbouring men questioned him. He was blunt and responded that she is just a maid and it doesn't matter to her and they like this attention,” she said, lamented that men think it's easy to molest or harass domestic workers as they are vulnerable in many ways, and the men in their families do not believe them and never lodge a complaint to the police on these women's behalf.

Butt shared that Punjab has the highest number of cases with around 79 percent, Islamabad six percent, and then Sindh while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan hardly have any reported figures. “Education and awareness are the best way to curb this menace. Their thoughts are just for bread and butter and nothing else above and beyond that,” she said.

There has been some progress in the implementation of laws. The Domestic Workers Union was formed in 2015 and it has been vocal about many issues and many have joined the union. This has helped in more cases being reported but there still is a long way to go for domestic workers.

Asma stopped working for the family through whom her cousin was sent abroad but a neighbour of hers worked there. Through her neighbour she found out that the family that molested Asma's cousin took another girl after a few years under the same condition of paying some money to the maid's family. “I think there should be check and balance from government in such cases because the cycle doesn't break neither do the maids have the awareness to talk about what they go through in the homes they work in,” Asma said.

Informal employment by sex





MALALA’S FALL FROM GRACE

Malala’s public image has long kept shrinking in Pakistan even as it expanded in the West. A collaboration and photo-op with Hillary Clinton was the straw that broke the camel’s back

By FAIZA SHAH

Malala is firmly stuck in a quagmire of bad PR.

‘Sellout’ is the meekest term fans have dubbed her after her badly timed photograph with Hillary Clinton at the premier of a Broadway musical Suffs. While Gaza erupts in flames, the Muslim world and sympathisers of peace in Palestine are high on emotion shouting for ceasefire, Malala is rubbing shoulders and co-producing a musical about the suffragette movement with literally the face of America’s hawkish policies in the Middle East. Someone who was called a war criminal by her students just recently during a lecture.

It was the straw that broke the camel’s back for the few Pakistanis who tolerated Malala. There’s no coming back from this photo op.

It’s not that Malala has not ever spoken out against the Israeli oppression of Palestine; she has even donated millions in the past for schools in Gaza. In 2014, she gave away all her prize money upon receiving the prestigious World’s Children’s Prize. The entire amount of US\$ 50,000 “will go to help students and schools in an especially difficult place – in Gaza,” she had announced.

Last October, she directed



300,000 dollars to three charities helping Palestinians under attack. However, her pledge for the Palestinian cause has been muted in the public realm. Nothing of the fiery freedom rhetoric that shot her to fame, nothing defiant or rousing against Israel’s genocidal regime.

From ruling the hearts of her admirers and those who listened to her articulate and powerful address at the UN in 2013, Malala’s

public image kept shrinking in Pakistan while it expanded in the West. She was a lion heart at the age of 16, when she called upon the world to put education first, “One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world.”

Once she started college at Oxford she showed that she wanted to live like a normal teen for a while. Not returning to Pakistan also meant her connection with her admirers in the homeland faded some more. However, her connection with the West grew. She was going places. Especially with her appearances on famous late-night talk shows and then after marriage her presence at most red-carpet events including the Oscars and Wimbledon and film premiers. The rights activist was having a little fun seeing the sights and scenery of Hollywood and the celebrity life either side of the pond, with her new husband on her arm.

Her loyalists continued to cheer her on, she was representing a modern and progressive face of a Pakistani Muslim woman who is cool enough to hobnob with superstars.

The current photo of her and Hillary has drawn a line. It really sticks in the craw of public sentiment because of who Clinton is and what she not only represents but has actively has done. The name is synonymous to war-mongering, Benghazi and drone strikes. Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Afghanistan are all conflict zones that were Hillary’s boardgame once she was secretary of state.

When we see her, we don’t think of the Hillary Doctrine which argues that women’s rights and violence against women should be considered national security issues. If that was her legacy then we would forgive Malala’s blind spot.

A review of The Hillary Doc-

trine: Sex & American Foreign Policy, by Valerie M. Hudson and Patricia Leidl offers a succinct insight: “Clinton was vocal about women’s rights and empowerment in some countries (for example, Afghanistan) but silent about others (Saudi Arabia, China). In a close examination of USAID’s work they (the authors) found that the rhetoric at the top did not often match the reality on the ground. An interview with a gender adviser on a USAID-funded project revealed that “too few in-country USAID employees fully understand why gender programming is so critical”.

So too Malala has failed to bridge the gap of equal human rights for all across borders, not just American ‘colonies’ dependent on US aid. What little connection she has to her homeland is through Malala Fund which runs totally on US donor money. She has become today a textbook example of Western NGOs co-opting indigenous movements and social changemakers to exploit them for imperialist prerogatives. A commenter on X wrote, “Your handlers must love you. You never stray from your talking points.”

In her acceptance speech in Oslo she said her Nobel “is for those voiceless children who want change. I’m here to stand up for their rights, to raise their voice.” But her silence is precisely what has disillusioned her fellow Pakistanis today. That is those who idolised her as a young hero despite the majority of the nation that called her a western puppet from the get go.

Malala has forgotten her own words. “When the whole world is silent even one voice becomes powerful,” she had said, giving the world another epic quotable quote for Goodreads. Thus she has rendered hollow the rhetoric she built to reach lofty ideals of



world peace and equality.

In November last year, the philanthropist put forth an unequivocal demand for a full ceasefire, stating, “We must keep speaking out for them (children in Gaza) — for a full ceasefire and more humanitarian aid. The needlessness suffering must end.” The activist articulated her take as a quote reply to her October 20 post where she urged people to sign a petition against Israel’s military strikes on children.

The post read, “Join me in adding your name to this petition demanding that Israel halt its assault on schools and places where children are seeking shelter and that leaders reach a deal to release all children being unjustly held hostage or imprisoned.”

In Pakistan, Malala was always a grey character as she was looked upon with suspicion by the Pashtuns. Locals had shared unfavourable views of her father Ziauddin as soon as he and his daughter’s names entered the mainstream media. The two came to symbolise the tussle between conservative and liberal views in the country. Each end of the spectrum scoffing at the other and casting aspersions on their intelligence to accept the ‘truth’. The liberals disgusted at the scepticism of the conspiracy theorists, who claimed the father was an agent of Jewish and American powers, were in turn maligned for having a colonial mindset and being slaves to Westernisation.

Interestingly, Malala herself has never been asked by the Western media to address this di-

chotomy and the scepticism her nation has for her celebrity. The foreign media has only glowing praises for the child who stood up to its enemy, the Taliban.

Of course, as a nation we are loath to give recognition to the marginalized members of society. Pakistan’s father of physics Abdul Salam was forced to self exile when his religious community was ruthlessly persecuted in the 1950s. Despite working and living abroad, Salam founded Pakistan’s space program. It takes hard work for a state to willfully forget the huge legacy and contribution made by its own citizen. Like the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala, Salam gained acknowledgement for his endeavours in Physics upon the world stage. Then he was forgotten even in Pakistan’s textbooks.

Salam had a career before he left the country and it only flourished. Malala’s contribution in Pakistan is less visible. She mostly provides fodder for the debate she personifies. Her career is activism and her legacy the Malala Fund, which did not originate in Pakistan or with Pakistani stakeholders. With her latest debacle of shaking hands with supporters and funders of Israel, and largely keeping mum about the genocide, Malala has further eroded her connection with her nation and its sentiments. It remains to be seen whether the Western media will defend her silence or finally confess some disappointment in a Pakistani girl it adopted to fight for human rights.

T Magazine’s picks



Listen this week:
Neverender
by Justice

Song



With their new album Hyperdrama finally out, the reliably hedonistic French blog-house duo Justice yet again shows how music can still be something more than just a radio hit for the dancefloor. The album opener “Neverender” made with Tame Impala has Kevin Parker singing in falsetto over a lush, expansive Justice track. A little choppy and spacier, but Parker’s harmonies have a starry-eyed prog sensibility, while Justice builds tension with smooth ramp-ups and disorienting bursts of silence, so that the song still feels like a strikingly smooth ride.



Binge this week:
Dead Boy Detectives

TV Show



Netflix’s new series, based on the DC comic series by Neil Gaiman and Matt Wagner, is part of the Sandman Universe. A ghost boy from the 1910s is best friends with a ghost boy from the 1990s; they solve ghost mysteries! With many continuing storylines that underpin episodic mysteries, it follows a case-of-the-week format. Silly, dramatic, heartfelt, and weird as ghosts can travel through mirrors yet cat scratches hurt them, there’s a real magic shop in this otherwise normal town, and the proprietor is a walrus cursed to have human form.



Watch this week:
Honeymoonish

Movies



The first original Netflix film from Kuwait is charming, well-acted, easy breezy and kinda predictable. This Kuwaiti version of the enemies-to-lovers trope offers stunning scenery and a glimpse into parts of Kuwaiti culture through a Western lens. Unlike a traditional rom-com, Noor and Hamad start with a marriage of convenience, and plan to work on the love side later. But both have two different motivations behind tying the knot and on their honeymoonish they realise how different they actually are. You’ll watch it to find out if opposites really attract.

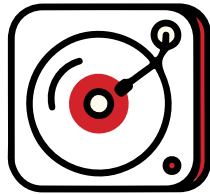


Read this week:
Hold On To Your Kids
by Gordon Neufeld
and Gabor Maté

Books

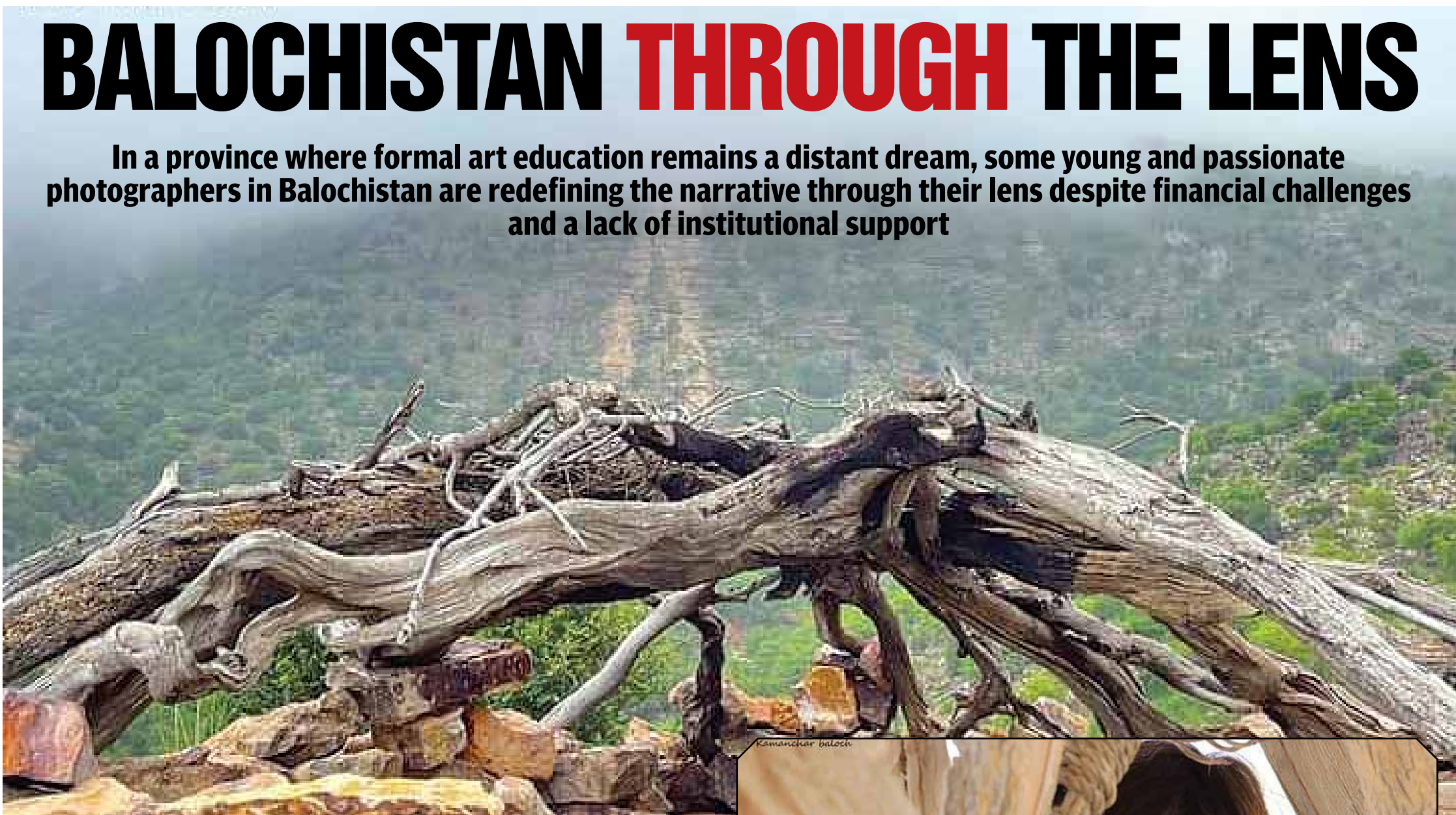


Not a how-to book on parenting but a well-written and intelligent psychology book that helps parents understand the importance of attachment in their relationship with their children. The writers who are both doctors, and fathers, delve into the phenomena of peer orientation — when children form stronger attachments to their friends and become secretive, unreachable and hostile around their own parents even from a very young age. It offers a better understanding of the youth culture, and its aggressive behaviours such as bullying, teen suicides, heightened sexuality, music, and dialogue.



BALUCHISTAN THROUGH THE LENS

In a province where formal art education remains a distant dream, some young and passionate photographers in Baluchistan are redefining the narrative through their lens despite financial challenges and a lack of institutional support



By **TABISH FEROZ**

Since the time when man lived in caves, art has been used as a way to express his thoughts and emotions. Ancient civilisations such as Aztecs, Egyptians, Mayans, and the Indus Valley civilisation used art to create drawings and sculptures to depict their culture. The essence of aesthetics and creativity in a society can be seen through its art, craft, design and motifs.

While Baluchistan boasts of several artists, poets, actors and singers, recently, a new and distinguished dynamic has emerged that exhibits the extraordinary spirit of the people of Baluchistan. Some distinctive portraits by Baloch photographers, have grabbed the attention of the entire province, giving a new dimension to the art of photography.

Kamanchar Baloch, who hails from Mand has done some inspirational and extraordinary portrait work.

"I believe that it is God's gift to me that I'm able to illuminate all of Baluchistan inside my camera," says Baloch. "I feel a deep happiness when I capture the beautiful and majestic panorama of this land."

From Makran to Koh-e-Sulaiman, he has photographed many historical places and ruins. Baloch believes that some of the diverse images that he has captured have never been seen or imagined by the people in his province.

Weaving together images and words that reflect the conflicts and contradictions shaping the Baloch narrative, Baloch's photography is an embodiment of the past and present experiences of the people of Baluchistan.

His photography has been showcased in exhibitions across different parts of Baluchistan and other cities across the country, including Karachi. Due to the uniqueness of his art, his fans in Baluchistan have titled his exhibitions "Baluchistan in Frames."

Every image tells a unique story — of poverty, culture, and resistance. Through his lens, Baloch explores different perspectives, emotions, and ideas captured in a single frame. "I feel that every historical place in Baluchistan is worthy of being captured through my lens," he says.

Through the last fifteen years of his photography career, Baloch has never felt inclined to sell his work, except when he needed money for medical expenses. "Unfortunately, my diabetic issues became exacerbated, and I had no option but to sell some of my photographs to be able to afford a good doctor and the hospitalisation that followed."

Previously, he did not think about exhibition or sale of his portraits. He would upload his work on social media, and people from different walks of life, including students and professionals, would use his photographs for which he readily gave permission. "I still do the same," he says. "But now I want to be able to take care of my medical treatment through my work."

The reality of Baluchistan is bleak. Countless families live on the poverty line and do not even have access to everyday necessities. Baloch also belongs to an underprivileged family, and his financial hardships are just one example of the deteriorating economic situation of the province.

Amidst an ongoing financial crisis in an unsupportive environ-

ment, Baloch continues to enhance his talent in photography. "I have never received any support from government or society," he laments.

Mehrab Khalid, is another emerging photographer and film editor from Turbat who began his journey in 2021. "Initially, I used my mobile phone to take pictures as I did not have a camera," says Khalid, who has been passionate about photography since he was in high school. "I still don't own a camera but borrow one from my friends when I want to work."

Steadfast in his optimism, Khalid continues to capture images of Baluchistan, that he uploads on social media.

"People find my work inspirational but they keep reminding me that I don't have a future in it as it does not generate a significant or steady income," says Khalid. "But I believe that true passion always finds a way

to succeed."

Khalid has not only worked as a cameraman for song videos and films, he also edits, and assists in film direction, such as the recently released *Lolan* by Zahoor Fazal and another upcoming short film *Darwazag* by Azum Saleh.

Currently, he is working as a director for Thaheer Production, a social media platform that produces short films for songs.

Khalid's family supports his passion for photography. "I want to formally study photography, but there are no photography institutes or art clubs in Turbat. Ideally, I would like to be able to study at the National College of Art in Lahore but I cannot afford it."

Khalid is inspired by several photographers including Kamalan Bebagr, a senior and renowned cinematographer. Born in Alandoor, Baluchistan, Bebagr got his primary education in Turbat, where he



also graduated from. He started his film career in 2014 with a short film *May Jawaan* [Our Youth], after the success of which, he continued his journey and gave several hit short movies.

Turbat, with its 200,000-plus population, has only one insufficiently equipped art centre. It is not possible nor practical for aspiring artists with meagre finances to be able to travel to the bigger cities in the country to learn art and photography.

Despite the presence of numerous universities in Baluchistan, none seem to offer opportunities for art education and exploration. Currently, art is not included in their curriculum, and they lack dedicated art departments. This is noteworthy considering the significant interest among young individuals in the region who aspire to pursue and delve into the field of art.

Consequently, young people who want to pursue art or photography have to compete on a national level for a small quota of seats in institutions across the country. This also means that if they find admission in these institutions to study art, they have to be able to financially bear the move to another province.

Even though, Shakeela Naveed, a politician from Baluchistan who has been a member of the provincial assembly, promised to present a bill in the assembly for introduction of Fine arts as an intermediate level subject in Baluchistan, it has still not materialised.

"The boys and girls of our province do not lack skills," says Bebagr. "It is the absence of fine art education in our educational institutions and the unsupportive environment in Baluchistan that is wrecking their talent."

Perhaps the Higher Education Commission has a solution for students in Baluchistan who wish to pursue fine arts. Since the relevant authorities have never paid heed to this issue, many young artists and photographers had no choice but to abandon their hopes and passion and move on to pursue other occupations to earn a livelihood.

"Since 2012, when I began photography, I have been supported by



my family," shares Israr Shoukat, a senior photographer from Sharak. "Unless the Baloch society sees it as something worthy of being promoted, photography will continue to decline in Baluchistan," he says.

Khalid concludes the discussion on an optimistic note. "Initially, the society might discourage you, but seeing you work with diligence, people begin to motivate you."

Tabish Feroz is a freelance journalist based in Turbat. All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer.





THE MICHELANGELO OF CAMEL FUR

In Thar, the woolly coat of this ever dependable beast of burden is traditional artists' canvas of choice

By KHALID KUMBHAR

Fifty-year-old Rano Nuhrio, a primary school teacher is also hair-dresser for camels in Thar. Intrigued? Read on. Using different types of shears and scissors, Nuhrio like any passionate artist, works with deep concentration. People gather around him to stand or even sit and watch as he transforms camel fur into patterns, motifs and designs on the animal's body. The designs are intricate, and the labour time-consuming.

The artist

Working on countless camels for consistency for thirty years has affected his eyesight due to strain on his eyes. But it didn't stop him, because now he works wearing prescription glasses. Nuhrio is a resident of village Panj Pura, 15km away from Mithi that lies in the north of his village. Mithi is the central city of Thar Desert and the headquarters of district Tharparkar Sindh. Drawing remains his childhood passion. As a primary school student in Kaloi town, he loves making pencil and pen sketches in his notebook. His Brohi teacher in school would tweaked his drawings and groom him in art. After school, Nuhrio would draw on the white sand with his fingers. "I can easily reproduce any design on a camel's body," he says. "But first I try to visualise what kind of design will look beautiful on the camel's fur and then I start working on it." As he adorns the camel's body with unique drawings of flowers, animals, birds, the camel owners applaud him for his deft work. Us-



his work and this way Gul found an opportunity to learn the artistic skill. "As my ustad worked, I would watch him and gradually began to learn. Now after three years, we work together and I can make the same designs as him, but his work touches perfection," says Gul with admiration in his eyes. **The best time to work** March and April are the ideal and favourable months for fur-cutting and making designs on camel's bodies. The reason for this is that designs made during this time period remain intact for three or four months on the camel's body as these months, fur growth is slow. But if the patterns are made after or before these months, the designs re-

sign is known as Gulkari [floral], and Kongri, which has multiple designs including flowers, birds, trees, and any other motif. The motifs are often surrounded by waves. Kongri takes two or three days to complete as it requires care and consistency. The final phase of completing the design is to snip off tiny hair with a small pair of scissors from the entire pattern. This gives a finished, and tidy look to the pattern made. "Before making the designs, most designers make a circle on the camel's body with scissors, and the design is made inside the circle," says Rano Nahrrio. "But that is the easier way of making a pattern. I make a square and then proceed with the pattern, because making a square is difficult."

Since the camel's knees and chest are difficult areas to work on, henna and hair colour are often used here for decorating instead of shears and scissors. Henna and hair colour is also used on the camel's neck, cheeks and legs. Nuhrio also likes to design and make ornaments for decorating camels.

An endangered tradition

As there is no fixed price for making designs on camels, it depends on the camel owner and what he wants to pay the designer. For two- or three-day's work, the cost is between two thousand to three thousand. Since it is not enough for the time and labour that goes into their work, designers are not satisfied with the remuneration, but continue to work for their love of art and camels. With the increased use of motor cycles and vehicles, the camel use for transport has reduced in Thar. Now, they are only used for cultiva-



the camel's fur is an investment prior to selling the camel, in the same way that people spruce up their cars before selling them. **The medium** Camel fur is of two main types; it could be soft or coarse. Soft fur is ideal for making designs but a camel whose fur is tough and coarse, it is difficult to cut through it to make patterns. For this kind of camel fur, designers are reluctant and on the insistence of the camel owner, may only agree to make one or two motifs that would take two or three hours, and not intricate designs that would take days. **The designs** Among the designs common in Thar, there is Lehar [wave], the Patri [railway track] which are the relatively simpler ones. The most popular de-



ing his scissors at different angles, he works through the fur on different body parts such as the legs, knees, cheeks, neck, and chest. He enhances the clever cutting and shearing by use of black hair colour and henna. Nuhrio's student Gul Mohammad is also a relative and lives in the same village. "My ustad was my class teacher in school," shares Gul Mohammad. "I remember that after school, he was seen outside the school courtyard working on camel fur. Even at that time, the villagers would stand or sit around him watching him create patterns. People showed a lot of interest in his work, and admired and encouraged him. Nuhrio often asked Gul to help in

main for not more than twenty days or a month and slowly wear out, as May onwards, camels shed fur, so it thins out for summer. Before March, the camel fur growth is fast so again the designs would be affected. Therefore, before March and after April, design work is avoided. But some camel owners and traders still want their camels adorned with patterns and motifs even before March and after June because they wish to take their camels to different festivals and social events in the area. Shrine festivals are the biggest market for camel traders. With designs on the camel's body, the camel looks very beautiful, and this beauty increases the price of the animal. For this reason, design on



tion and field work during the rainy season or for carrying loads, and bringing water from wells. But despite that, camels are still an important part of Thar-village culture and tradition. People love to see camels in wedding ceremonies, shrine and social festivals, and still enjoy camel rides and races. As long as camels are around, this Thari art will flourish, because it cannot work the other way round. Sadly, there is no support, recognition or acknowledgement of the amazing skills of these camel fur artists of Thar, at government or NGO level. *Khalid Kumbhar is a freelance contributor*
All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the author