



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice Pakistan

Pakistan – PAK37893 – Shias in Karachi,
Rawalpindi and Islamabad – Returnees
from western countries

17 December 2010

1. Can you please provide me with information regarding the current situation for Shias in Karachi, Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

The US Department of State has advised that, while violence stemming from Sunni-Shia sectarian strife occurred with greatest frequency in the regions bordering Afghanistan, attacks targeting the country's major urban centers, including Karachi, Rawalpindi and Islamabad, continued to increase.¹ In its recently released report on religious freedom in Pakistan, the US Department of State observed that sectarian violence continued during the reporting period, including attacks on the Shi'a minority. According to the report:

Sectarian violence between Sunni and Shi'a extremists continued during the reporting period, and several religious minority individuals and communities were the targets of religious violence across the country. Examples of these cases include the following:

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On December 27, 2009, a roadside bomb exploded near a Shi'a religious procession in Karachi. At least 26 persons were injured. The bombing was attributed to the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. On December 29, 2009, a suicide bomber attacked a second Shia religious procession in Karachi, killing 25 persons and injuring more than 50. Following the attack, protestors rioted, destroying private businesses and government property. This attack was also attributed to the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.²

The report noted that targeted assassinations of clergy remained a key tactic of several groups, including the banned sectarian organization Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP) and the terrorist organization Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ), which targeted both Shias and Barelvis.³ Some Sunni Muslim groups reportedly published literature calling for violence against Shias.⁴

The US Department of State's report on human rights practices in Pakistan in 2009 also noted that – along with Ahmadi, Christian, and Hindu communities – Shia Muslim communities reported significant discrimination in employment and access to education, including government institutions, as well as facing societal violence.⁵

¹ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, August – Attachment 1.

² US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Pakistan*, November, Section II – Attachment 2.

³ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Pakistan*, November, Section II – Attachment 2.

⁴ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Pakistan*, November, Section III – Attachment 2.

⁵ US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Report – Pakistan*, March, Section 2c – Attachment 3.

In 2010, it has been reported that the Pakistani Taliban has been expanding its activities into previously non-militant areas, with Karachi and central and southern Punjab identified as newer areas of Taliban operations.⁶ Militants from the FATA reportedly have been moving to Karachi “and perhaps forming a new Taliban safe haven in Pakistan’s largest city.”⁷

An article from July 2010 has indicated that there is growing “Talibanisation” in Karachi, particularly in Pashtun neighbourhoods like Sohrab Goth. Shias make up approximately 30% of Karachi’s Muslim population and most of a spate of targeted killings in Karachi during the previous four to five months had been directed at Shia professionals. According to the article, Taliban fighters are moving to Karachi in increasing numbers, but it is unlikely they would be involved in the targeted killings as Karachi is a sanctuary for them and they would not like to be the main focus of law-enforcement agencies. The involvement of sectarian anti-Shia organisations closely allied with the Taliban was considered possible.⁸

In August 2010, an article on The National Interest website reported that “[p]rominent Shia technocrats – politicians, doctors, architects, bureaucrats and judges – have been singled out for assassination in all major cities, while in December 2009, 43 Shias were massacred by Sunni extremists in Karachi”. According to the article:

the Pakistani Taliban have a two-pronged offensive: the first is to politically undermine the state and its organs through terror; the second is to commit sectarian violence against all those they believe are not true Muslims. This intolerance has developed deep roots in Pakistan over the past three decades, and it has now been boosted by the jihadist policies of al-Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban. The government’s inability to deal with sectarian threats has led to some Muslim groups arming themselves and taking the law into their own hands.⁹

The current situation for Shias in Pakistan is reportedly one of heightened risk, with sectarian violence expected during Muharram, a holy month for Shia Muslims, which began on 8 December 2010. Sources have indicated that “Sunni militant groups often attack Shi’ite [Shia] gatherings during this period”, and that Pakistan has been bracing for such sectarian violence.¹⁰

A Shia Muslim religious leader was shot dead by unidentified militants in Karachi on 30 November 2010.¹¹ The *Daily Times* reported this killing and that of another Shia man in separate attacks in Karachi as Muharram approached, noting that “incidents of sectarian killings are becoming a routine in the metropolis”.¹²

⁶ Shah, T.A., ‘The Deobandi Debate Terrorist Tactics in Afghanistan and Pakistan’ in The Jamestown Foundation 2010, *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume VIII, Issue 21, 28 May, pp. 4-5
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,...PAK,,4c7228003,0.html> – Accessed 11 October 2010 – Attachment 4.

⁷ Kronstadt, K.A. 2010, ‘Pakistan: Key Current Issues and Developments’, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 1 June, p. 16 – Attachment 5.

⁸ Shah, T.A., ‘Karachi Emerges as Pakistan’s New Tinderbox of Violence and Extremism’ in The Jamestown Foundation 2010, *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume VIII, Issue 26, 1 July, pp. 5-6
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,...PAK,,4c72280112,0.html> – Accessed 11 October 2010 – Attachment 6.

⁹ Rashid, A. 2010, ‘The Anarchic Republic of Pakistan’, The National Interest website, 24 August – Attachment 7.

¹⁰ Factbox – Security developments in Pakistan’ 2010, *Reuters News*, 11 December – Attachment 8.

¹¹ ‘Pakistan: Security and Militancy Report – Week Ending 7 December 2010’ 2010, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 8 December – Attachment 9.

¹² ‘Sectarian killings arise as Muharram approaches’ 2010, *Daily Times*, 30 November – Attachment 10.

2. Can Shias obtain effective state protection from any harm in these particular urban areas?

Sources indicate that police effectiveness in Pakistan varies greatly,¹³ and that the criminal justice system as a whole is ineffective in the face of grave internal security challenges.¹⁴

The US Department of State's current report on human rights practices in Pakistan notes that the police have primary internal security responsibilities for most areas of the country, under the control of the Ministry of Interior which also has under its authority a paramilitary organisation known as the Rangers. The armed forces, responsible for external security, are at times also assigned domestic security responsibilities. The report noted that low salaries and poor working conditions are contributing factors to rampant corruption within the police force. According to the report:

Police effectiveness varied greatly by district, ranging from reasonably good to ineffective. Some members of the police committed human rights abuses or were responsive to political interests. Frequent failure to punish abuses created a climate of impunity...

Police often failed to protect members of religious minorities from societal attacks, including Christians, Ahmadis, and Shias.¹⁵

A recently released report by the International Crisis Group has observed that the ineffectiveness of Pakistan's criminal justice system has had serious repercussions for the country's domestic security. According to the report:

In 2009, Pakistan was worse hit by terrorist violence than in any previous year, with civilian casualties outpacing those in Iraq and Afghanistan, with this pattern continuing in 2010. Indeed the enormity of the problem is the direct consequence of the criminal justice system's failure to pre-empt, investigate and convict militants. A significant number of militant attacks have targeted civilian law enforcement agencies. Although they are the frontline of the fight against terrorism, these civilian agencies remain too under-resourced to counter such attacks and to bring militant groups to justice. Terrorist violence is not confined to the north-western tribal belt bordering Afghanistan. It is rampant in urban centres such as the federal capital Islamabad, Karachi, Quetta and Lahore and other major cities, particularly in the most populous province, Punjab [within which falls Rawalpindi].

Police investigations are undermined by the absence of professional autonomy, poor training and reliance on blunt investigative tools. In 2002, then-President Pervez Musharraf promulgated the Police Order 2002 to transform an ineffective, brutal and politicised force into an efficient, service-oriented one. Drafted with the input of many senior police officials, the ordinance could have made the police a more autonomous and accountable institution. However, the military regime's extensive amendments in 2004 diluted many of the provisions for internal and community oversight and limited operational and political independence.¹⁶

¹³ US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Report – Pakistan*, March, Section 1d – Attachment 3.

¹⁴ International Crisis Group 2010, *Reforming Pakistan's Criminal Justice System – Asia Report N° 196*, 6 December, p.i – Attachment II

¹⁵ US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Report – Pakistan*, March, Section 1d – Attachment 3.

¹⁶ International Crisis Group 2010, *Reforming Pakistan's Criminal Justice System – Asia Report N° 196*, 6 December, p.1 – Attachment II

The International Crisis Group also reports that Pakistan's police stations are inadequately equipped, sometimes lacking proper premises and often lacking other basic requirements:

In one sector in Karachi, for example, the local police station was a makeshift structure located under a major bridge, without proper walls and encroaching on public land. Police budgets do not cover individual stations. Instead, allocations for arms and ammunition, transport, maintenance, stationery and other necessary items are centralised in provincial police budgets and then distributed to stations. Many stations do not have their basic requirements met and their monthly expenditures outpace their allocation. Most stations are self-financed to a significant extent. For example, police pay for their own stationery, and maintenance of vehicles, including petrol.¹⁷

Such operational constraints aside, recent media reports indicate that the Interior Minister, Rehman Meli, has directed that security forces be on red alert in a number of cities, including Karachi, Rawalpindi and Islamabad, "to avert possible terror attacks during Muharram".^{18 19}

In Karachi, an advisor to Chief Minister Sindh announced that the Sindh police had devised "a counter-terrorism strategy in order to check the wave of terrorism in the province during Muharram". Arrangements made to counter religious extremism and violence included close surveillance, restricting the movement and preventive detention of extremist leaders, and proactive policing before and during Muharram days. The advisor stated that "police will also ensure strong coordination with other agencies (CID, SB, Rangers, Intelligence Agencies etc) for effective and timely communication of intelligence".²⁰

The police reportedly started search operations in sensitive cities of the Punjab, including Rawalpindi, "to thwart possibility of any terrorist attack", and that "the services of Pakistan Army and Rangers would also be taken in the sensitive points/districts" if required. Special directives have reportedly been issued to all Regional Police Officers and District Police Officers to "chalk out a comprehensive security plan for the maintenance of peace and sectarian harmony during Muharram". Volunteers also would be utilised, "to ensure the security measures".²¹

The Interior Minister was reported to have "ordered increased security arrangements in the country, with special focus on Islamabad security during Muharram":

Islamabad Deputy Commissioner Amer Ai Ahmed told media that during a meeting it was decided that Rangers and Frontier Constabulary (FC) would be deployed for the security of Muharram processions and majalis to ensure peace. He said they had requested the elders of Shia ulema to ensure the timing and route of the processions. Amer said the ICT administration had held collective and individual meetings with the religious scholars belonging to different schools of thought. He said they had also reactivated the vigilance and peace committees. The police stations and relevant assistant commissioners have been made

¹⁷ International Crisis Group 2010, *Reforming Pakistan's Criminal Justice System – Asia Report N°196*, 6 December, p.10 – Attachment 11.

¹⁸ 'CCPO vows to thwart terrorists' activities' 2010, *The Financial Daily*, 13 December – Attachment 12.

¹⁹ Khan, A. 2010, 'Precautionary measures: Ambulances to register or be impounded', *The Express Tribune*, 11 December – Attachment 13.

²⁰ 'Counter-terrorism strategy devised for security in Muharram: Sharmila Farooqui' 2010, *Pakistan Official News*, 12 December – Attachment 14.

²¹ Bhatti, A. 2010, 'Strict security measures in place for Muharram', *The Nation*, 5 December – Attachment 15.

responsible for peace in their areas, he added.²²

3. Do people who have studied in the West in countries such as Australia face any particular difficulties on return to Pakistan and areas such as Karachi, etc?

No information was found specifically on whether people who have returned to Pakistan after having studied in a Western country face particular difficulties on return, including in areas such as Karachi, Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

4. Are they targeted by extremist groups because of the potential influence the West may have had on them?

No information was found on the subject of extremist groups targeting persons who have returned from study in Western countries.

The most recent Freedom House report on Pakistan has noted that the expanding influence of Islamist militants over territory in the North-West Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas “has led to severe practical restrictions on local inhabitants’ dress, social behavior, educational opportunities, and legal rights”,²³ however no information was found that relates more specifically to returnees to the cities of Karachi, Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Attachments

1. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, August.
2. US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Pakistan*, November.
3. US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Report – Pakistan*, March.
4. Shah, T.A., ‘The Deobandi Debate Terrorist Tactics in Afghanistan and Pakistan’ in The Jamestown Foundation 2010, *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume VIII, Issue 21, 28 May, pp. 3-5 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,PAK,,4c7228003,0.html> – Accessed 11 October 2010.
5. Kronstadt, K.A. 2010, ‘Pakistan: Key Current Issues and Developments’, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 1 June.
6. Shah, T.A., ‘Karachi Emerges as Pakistan’s New Tinderbox of Violence and Extremism’ in The Jamestown Foundation 2010, *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume VIII, Issue 26, 1 July <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,PAK,,4c72280112,0.html> – Accessed 11 October 2010.
7. Rashid, A. 2010, ‘The Anarchic Republic of Pakistan’, The National Interest website, 24 August. (CISNET Pakistan CX251351)
8. ‘Factbox – Security developments in Pakistan’ 2010, *Reuters News*, 11 December.

²² ‘Muharram security arrangements, Registration of private ambulances with ICT admin ordered’ 2010, *Daily Times*, 11 December – Attachment 16.

²³ Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Pakistan (2010)*, June – Attachment 17.

9. 'Pakistan: Security and Militancy Report – Week Ending 7 December 2010' 2010, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 8 December. (CISNET Pakistan CX254708)
10. 'Sectarian killings arise as Muharram approaches' 2010, *Daily Times*, 30 November.
11. International Crisis Group 2010, *Reforming Pakistan's Criminal Justice System – Asia Report N°196*, 6 December.
12. 'CCPO vows to thwart terrorists' activities' 2010, *The Financial Daily*, 13 December.
13. Khan, A. 2010, 'Precautionary measures: Ambulances to register or be impounded', *The Express Tribune*, 11 December.
14. 'Counter-terrorism strategy devised for security in Muharram: Sharmila Farooqui' 2010, *Pakistan Official News*, 12 December.
15. Bhatti, A. 2010, 'Strict security measures in place for Muharram', *The Nation*, 5 December.
16. 'Muharram security arrangements, Registration of private ambulances with ICT admin ordered' 2010, *Daily Times*, 11 December.
17. Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Pakistan (2010)*, June.