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The EU should suspend its trade privileges. Why? Massive human rights abuses in April

The bad deal EU-Pakistan "Trade privileges in exchange of human rights progress" called The GSP+ should be suspended as long as an end is not put to the massive human rights violations.

HRWF (05.05.2025) - For a decade, Pakistan has been benefiting from a privileged access (reduced or zero duties) to the about 450 million consumers of the EU market. In this framework, **Pakistan's products enter the EU market with 0% duties across approximately 2/3 of all EU tariff lines.** From 2014 to 2022, Pakistan's exports to the EU almost doubled, from 8.3 billion EUR to almost 15 billion EUR.

In exchange, Pakistan pledged to sign and implement 27 international treaties regarding labour rights, good governance and human rights. This EU scheme is known as the GSP+.

Since the inception of this agreement, Pakistan has failed to demonstrate a tangible progress on the implementation of international human rights standards. Quite the contrary, the situation goes on worsening as this digest of human rights violations perpetrated in the sole month of April shows.

This is in addition to our monthly [report about the violations of religious freedom in March 2025](#).

It is time for the EU to take sanctions on Pakistan, such as the suspension of its GSP+ status as long as there is no robust progress in practice in the area of human rights. It is in the interest of the EU, the EU taxpayers, the EU enterprises and of course, Pakistani citizens.

Two Ahmadis killed in one week

[Bitter Winter](#) (29.04.2025) - Two members of the persecuted Ahmadiyya Community were killed in one week in Pakistan.

On April 18, 2025, Mr. Laiq Ahmed Cheema, a 46-year-old member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, was tragically murdered by unidentified assailants while en route to attend prayers.

Mr. Laiq Ahmed Cheema, a committed member of the Ahmadiyya Community and the father of seven children, was subjected to an assault while en route to a local place of worship in Karachi.

He was attacked with bricks and sticks and died later.

Having tracked his movements, the culprits fled the area unnoticed, even though it was a high-security zone overseen by the Shahrah-e-Noor Jahan Police Station.

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Panel in Pakistan approves bill for minority rights body

[Christian Daily Int'l](#) (22.04.2025) - In a significant move towards institutionalizing the protection of minority rights in Pakistan, a subcommittee of the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights last week approved a much-anticipated bill aimed at creating a minority rights body in accordance with international standards and regulations.

The commission established by the prime minister would consist of 13 members, including two minority members from each province – a woman and a representative of the largest minority in that province. Additionally, the commission would include one minority member from Islamabad, the federal capital, and one grade-21 officer each from the Ministry of Human Rights, the Ministry of Law and Justice, the Ministry of Interfaith Harmony and the Interior Ministry.

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Christian receives death sentence under Pakistan's blasphemy law

[Christian Daily Int'l/ Morning Star News](#) (22.04.2025) - A Christian accused of writing blasphemous content that sparked violent riots in Jaranwala, Pakistan in August 2023 was sentenced to death along with other harsh penalties on Good Friday (April 18).

Anti-Terrorism Judge Javed Iqbal Sheikh convicted Masih, alias Kodu, and sentenced him to the death penalty under Section 295-C with a fine of 2 million rupees (\$7,133 USD); to 10 years of prison and a fine of 1 million rupees (\$3,566 USD) in the offense registered under Section 295-A; to life imprisonment under Section 295-B; and five years in prison and a fine of 500,000 rupees (\$1,783 USD) under Section 9 of the ATA.

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Pakistani province marks historic civil service appointment of Christian woman as deputy commissioner

[Christian Daily Int'l](#) (20.04.2025) - A provincial government in Pakistan has appointed a Christian officer as the province's first-ever Christian Deputy Commissioner, assigning her to lead a major district, marking a significant milestone toward greater representation of religious minorities in Pakistan's civil service.

According to an official notification issued by the Chief Secretary Sindh on April 12, Sarah Javed, an officer of the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS) in Grade 18, has been transferred from the Chief Minister's Secretariat, where she served as Deputy Secretary, and posted with immediate effect as Collector/Deputy Commissioner, Sanghar District in the Sindh province of Pakistan.

A 2014 qualifier of the civil services examination, Javed brings more than a decade of field and administrative experience to her new role. She has remarkably served as an Assistant Commissioner in the provincial capital Karachi's Saddar and SITE areas, and in Hyderabad district. She also served for over a year as Additional Deputy Commissioner-I in Tharparkar, one of the most underdeveloped districts in Sindh.

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Mob attack on Ahmadiyya hall in Karachi claims the life of an innocent Ahmadi man

Int'l Human Rights Desk (18.04.2025) - On 18 April 2025, a violent mob affiliated with Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan rallied outside the Ahmadiyya Hall in Karachi while Friday prayers were under way. During the agitation, Laiq Ahmad Cheema, an Ahmadi man, was identified near the site and killed in a targeted assault. Police did not intervene.

The 18 April attack on Ahmadiyya Hall marks the third assault on this mosque since early 2023. Its minarets were previously demolished in separate incidents on 2 February and 4 September 2023.

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A Christian family was reportedly assaulted in Ghaffari Town, Malkhawala area

[Tribune](#) (08.04.2025) - Farooq Masih and his son Haroon were allegedly attacked following a dispute with a group of local residents.

The disagreement reportedly escalated after offensive language was exchanged. When the situation became tense, Farooq Masih called the police emergency helpline (15) seeking assistance. Instead of providing protection, the police handed over Haroon to the opposing party, who then took him to a nearby residence, where he was reportedly subjected to further physical assault.

The incident came to light when Akmal Bhatti, Chairman of the Minorities Alliance Pakistan, visited the family, recorded their statements, and presented Haroon before the area magistrate's court. He also revealed that the family's complaint submitted to Saddar Police Station three days earlier had not yet been registered.

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Pakistani court orders return of abducted 14-year-old Christian girl to her mother in landmark ruling

[Claas](#) (08.04.2025) - In a rare and significant legal victory for a persecuted Christian family, the Lahore High Court has ordered the immediate return of 14-year-old Ariaah Gulzar to her mother, Sumera Gulzar, months after the child was abducted from their home in Punjab.

Ariaah was kidnapped at gunpoint on January 20, 2025, from her home in Chak 55/2L village, Okara District, by 40-year-old Muslim neighbour Sajjad Baloch and two accomplices. The abductors later threatened the family with violence and warned of trafficking Ariaah if they pursued legal action. Despite the intimidation, the family remained resolute in their efforts to recover their daughter.

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Ahmadis face widespread restrictions on Eid prayers

[VoicePk](#) (02.04.2025) –

LAHORE

A wave of targeted restrictions and violent acts plunged the Ahmadiyya community into fear on Eid on March 31, as they faced widespread protests, intimidation, and threats, particularly concentrated around their places of worship.

The incidents, which spanned both Punjab and Sindh provinces, have raised serious concerns about the escalating persecution of the marginalized religious group.

Ahmadis in Pakistan have been facing immense difficulties in even visiting their places of worship, especially on Friday, and during Ramzan this trend rose to extreme levels. On Eid day, in multiple locations, Ahmadis were forcibly prevented from collecting at their places of worship over the allegation that they were (illegally) offering prayers. In various areas of Punjab and Sindh, the police did not allow Ahmadis to collect at their *ibadatgahs*.

Punjab

In Lahore, the situation was particularly tense, with Ahmadis being stopped from congregating at five locations, including the central worship place of the Ahmadiyya community in Garhi Shahu. The disruption at Garhi Shahu, a significant religious site for the community, underscored the severity of the restrictions. In Lahore, Ahmadis were stopped from gathering for Eid prayers at five locations, including the central worship place of the Ahmadiyya community in Garhi Shahu.

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Europe urged to copy Trump and weaponise tariffs to end child marriages in Pakistan

[Express](#) (02.04.2025) - Europeans urged to take a leaf out of Trump's book and use tariffs to combat religious persecution and child marriages in Pakistan, charities have said.

Pakistan should stop benefitting from preferential tariffs for exports to Europe until it makes significant improvements in addressing religious persecution of non-Muslims and child marriages, politicians and human rights groups have said. Karachi is the largest benefactor of lower tariffs on exports to the EU under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), a 1971 initiative intended to boost the economies of developing nations. A similar UK scheme, the Developing Countries Trading Scheme, allows it to export £250 million a year in bedlinen and £100 million in jeans to the UK for a 12% reduction in import duty.

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Hindu in Pakistan facing pressure to convert to Islam shot dead

[Christian Daily International/ Morning Star](#) (02.04.2025) - Days after a Christian's throat was slit in Pakistan over a false blasphemy allegation arising out of refusal to renounce his faith, a Hindu was shot dead after he refused to convert to Islam, sources said.

Nadeem Naath, a 56-year-old Hindu, was shot in the head by a Muslim, Muhammad Mushtaq in Peshawar city, the capital of the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, on Saturday (March 29). The suspect was arrested the next day following protests by local Hindus as well as Christians, the sources said.

In a statement to the Peshawar police, Naath's brother, Sagar Ameen, said that Mushtaq had been pressuring his brother to convert to Islam for several days.

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Armed robbers gang-rape Christian's wife in Pakistan

[Christian Daily International/ Morning Star](#) (02.04.2025) - Gunmen robbing a Catholic last week in Pakistan decided to tie him up and gang-rape his wife after learning the couple's faith, sources said.

Adnan Masih, a 34-year-old brick kiln worker in Faisalabad District's Chak 62-GB Channan village, and his wife were headed home on a motorcycle on the night of March 25 when two masked gunmen stopped them, he said.

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Christians among Afghan refugees deported by Pakistan

By [Edward Ross](#),

[Christian Daily](#) (01.04.2025) - Christians are among hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees that Pakistan was to begin forcibly repatriating on Tuesday (April 1) to Afghanistan, where the ruling Taliban has asserted they will kill any Christian, sources said.

There were more than 1.4 million registered and 700,000 unregistered Afghans in Pakistan, according to Jude Simion of refugee aid group Philoi Global.

"These families face life-threatening dangers because of their faith, ethnicity, nationality and political beliefs," Simion said. "Deportation would expose them to extreme persecution under both the Pakistani and Afghan regimes."

Many of the Afghan refugees had fled to Pakistan after the Islamic extremist Taliban returned to power in 2021. Concerned about Afghanistan harboring terrorist groups that have struck targets in Pakistan, and with international assistance for refugees dwindling due to freezes U.S. President Trump ordered on Jan. 20, Pakistan reacted quickly. In February officials announced that after March 31 Pakistan would repatriate at least 44,000 Afghans awaiting resettlement in Western countries, more than 800,000 holders of Afghan Citizenship Cards and an unknown number of undocumented Afghan migrants. More than 20,000 Afghan refugees and their families were awaiting resettlement in the U.S. under special immigrant visas for assisting U.S. and NATO forces, but President Trump's order paused all refugee resettlement in the United States except for individual cases – a process requiring time that refugees no longer have.

A decline in international assistance was a key factor in Pakistan's decision to increase deportations, a senior Pakistani diplomat told the [Financial Times](#) on condition of anonymity. Before Trump's order froze nearly all foreign aid, including refugee assistance programs, the U.S. last year accounted for 42 per cent of more than \$100 million in international aid Pakistan received for Afghan refugees, FT reported, citing the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

For Afghan refugees in the key cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, the Pakistani Prime Minister's Office on Jan. 29 issued a circular ordering the immediate repatriation of Afghans with Afghan Citizen Cards and Pakistan Origin Cards, Simion of Philoi Global said.

"These documents were meant to offer some protection, but now they are used to identify and deport vulnerable individuals," he said.

One Afghan without a visa told a Philoi Global worker that he did not know what he would do after March 31.

"The Taliban will definitely will kill me," the refugee said. "The main reasons are as I am Christian, and I worked with the previous government of Afghanistan as a military person."

Another Afghan refugee asked a Philoi Global worker to pray for renewal of his visa.

"The situation here has become really terrible, especially for those who are alone," he said. "No one lends a helping hand because I am single. If I cannot renew my visa, I will be forcibly deported, and I will be destroyed by the Taliban terrorist group, please pray in the name of the Holy Spirit on this matter."

Nearly 1,660 Afghans had been cleared for resettlement in the United States before Trump's order suspended refugee programs, and their flights were canceled, Simion said. Germany had deported at least 28 Afghan asylum seekers late last year, he said, adding, "We are observing increased pressure from right-wing parties, which are gaining influence in governments and advocating for the deportation of Afghans."

Iran has already indicated plans to send back Afghan refugees, and neighboring countries have begun deporting Afghans as well, Simion said.

The Taliban have said they will kill any Christians and have gone door-to-door to find them, according to Open Door's 2025 World Watch List report.

"Afghan church leaders were specifically targeted; many have disappeared, while others have been beaten, tortured and killed," the report stated. "Any existing house churches remain deeply underground, and Christians live under relentless pressure. If converts from Islam are discovered, the family, clan or tribe may try to preserve its so-called 'honor' and oppose the convert through pressure, violence or even murder."

One of Afghanistan's General Intelligence directorates last month raised specious accusations that some Shia Muslims had become Christians and ordered their arrest, according to the Afghanistan Women's Voice advocacy group.

In an order to intelligence directors in Daikundi and Bamyan directorates, the head of Directorate 376, which focuses on counterintelligence and secret policing, ordered the arrests of "a number of Shiite youths" who had served in the previous government.

"Now, in order to work for Jesus, they have been given privileges and plans by European countries," the director, identified only as Dr. Bashir, stated in the order. "Therefore, the matter as it was, was shared for your understanding. Investigate and investigate in the field, and by stabilizing the issue, catch the perpetrators."

In a Facebook post, the Afghanistan Women's Voice called the accusations a pretext to defame and suppress young Hazaras, one of Afghanistan's largest tribes.

"Now it remains to be seen how many Hazara youth are arrested for the crime of [supposedly being] 'Christian missionaries' by adhering to this letter," the group stated. "It is evident that the name of Christianity has not even been mentioned among the youth of Daikundi in Bamiyan, let alone to promote it."

Shia Muslims make up an estimated 10 to 15 percent of the country's nearly entirely Muslim population.

More reading

[Pakistan: Opaque 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' targeting Afghan refugees must be withdrawn](#) (Amnesty International)

[Pakistan expels tens of thousands of Afghans](#) (BBC)

[Why is Pakistan sending Afghan refugees back to face the Taliban?](#) (Deutsche Welle)

Former EU Special Envoy on FORB spoke about human dignity in Pakistan at the UN

On 26 March, CAP/ Liberté de conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers organized a side-event about the situation of Human Rights in Pakistan. The keynote speaker was Mr Jan Figel, EU Commissioner for Education (2004-2009) and former EU Special Envoy of Freedom of Religion or Belief (2016-2019). Here are the main insights of his presentation.

HRWF (19.04.2025) – “Pakistan is a big country with a big potential. It's a nuclear power but also a relatively poor state. The European Union has a special relation with this country due to the GSP+ trade agreement which is normally or basically oriented towards the least developed countries to facilitate their exports to Europe. In this regard, Pakistan is by far the largest partner of the European Union and the biggest beneficiary of this arrangement. The impact of the European Union policy should and can therefore be significant.”

The EU, freedom of religion or belief and human dignity in Pakistan

“Freedom of religion or belief is a very central human right. It's in the centre of the whole list of the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The centrality of Article 18 is very important and the content is very particular. It is in fact freedom of thought, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion.

It speaks about human rationality, morality and spirituality. It is important for all, believers, non-believers, for people from A to Z, which means from Atheists up to Zoroastrians. It is for all, not only some, not only majorities, not only minorities. It is for all.

And it is actually a litmus test of all human rights because it is internal, it is the deepest freedom of a human being. In addition, there is a very close or deep nexus between religious freedom and human dignity.

As I said, Article 18 speaks about rationality, morality and spirituality of each human person. And human dignity is the basis of freedom, peace, justice and equality. It's the precondition of a dignified life.

And of course, human dignity is a fact from which human duties and human rights are derived.

It is mentioned five times in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and also in many constitutions, including the constitution of India, Pakistan and my country, Slovakia. The problem is that for many people in Pakistan human dignity is not respected today.”

The roots of the disregard of human dignity

"The reasons are mostly linked to the state policies which started or were inherited from the time of Zia ul Haq's government in Pakistan and the military junta which came with the Islamisation of the state to keep the ideology in power, not only with guns. For example, the penal code was moved to an extreme level. It is indeed very exceptional to have a penal code providing for death penalty or lifelong imprisonment on blasphemy charges. It's unique and mandatory. It means a lot of damage for peaceful coexistence and cohabitation. I would say politically that the legacy of Zia ul Haq in Pakistan is today more important than the legacy of Ali Jinnah, the founding father, the dreamer, the visionary of a future Pakistan being a tolerant and pluralistic country.

Unfortunately, I have seen personally, being there several times, that extremist movements are stronger than political parties. They can paralyse the state, state authorities and law enforcement in the country.

The justice system is functioning but it is slow and relatively weak. Education, which is so important, is marked by ideology, intolerance, supremacy of one religion. It serves or works against inclusion of all. Madrasas are institutions of radicalisation."

The impact of the disregard of human dignity

"Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus and other minorities are under pressure and discrimination in Pakistan. There are extensive attacks on a daily basis and of course there are damages on places of worship, cultural heritage and so on. Pakistan is regrettably very often in the leading group in negative rankings about the situation of human rights or religious freedom reports.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom put Pakistan in the CPC category, Countries of Particular Concern. Also Aid to the Church in Need or Open Doors and other NGOs.

Positive change or difference is however possible. I was several times in Pakistan. When I was there, it was not to interfere into domestic issues but it was for a dialogue between mature partners, with respect but also with clear principles: mutually beneficial and win-win policies, working together and even achieving some improvements.

The GSP+ was and remains a very important and great instrument as it grants enormous trade privileges to Pakistan. My message was mainly that in Pakistan a status quo is not enough and cannot be taken for granted and with satisfaction. Justice delayed is justice denied. It's a general principle.

It's not only in Pakistan but it is everywhere. And therefore, to modernise, mobilise and work on justice for all is important. A personal experience as an example.

A lady was sentenced twice to death and spent nine years on the death row. Her family who was under enormous threats was taken care by another family. In 2019, we managed to save the caretaking family with the kids first, then the mother, her husband and also another family, a Muslim family which was also under existential threat as they had helped me as interpreters in the Punjab.

So, this religious intolerance or hatred is damaging for all, not only for minorities, but also for majorities. I wanted to mention this case to stress that the European Union did life-saving work. The EU can do it, it can help, it can really make a difference even in countries like Pakistan but it must be more systematic."

Pakistan's controversial school education system

"Ladies and gentlemen, the silence of the European Commission in times of persecution and violent extremism is often painful, which is the case with Pakistan. The promotion of societal segregation from early childhood is against human rights, peaceful coexistence and social inclusion of minorities. EU's financial assistance to detrimental religious education in Pakistan should therefore be stopped immediately. We too often hear soft words and messages from the European Union and United Nations agencies but courageous and efficient action and deeds are missing or fail to follow.

From 2004 to 2009, I was an EU Commissioner for Education. My input to the current or next generations of the world 20 years ago was the [Erasmus Mundus](#) Project, the best ever university exchange and mobility program. I also implemented the Bologna Process which aims to make it possible for academic qualifications to be recognized EU-wide and 16 years ago I launched the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, a life-long learning program.

The message of this program was that 'education unites.' This sort of education is needed in Pakistan for Pakistani, for people living and struggling there. Not in exile or elsewhere in the world but at home in Pakistan." They could hereby be better off, they could be richer and they should be richer."

A call to the EU and the UN

"I call on the UN agencies, the European Parliament and the Commission to review their education support for Pakistan and I call on the EU to review its GSP+ agreement with Pakistan, this year, with an unquestionable commitment to human dignity for all and human rights for all, including for religious and ethnic minorities. It is now without delay that it must start."

The EU should suspend its trade privileges. Why? Massive human rights abuses in March

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It is time for the EU to take sanctions on Pakistan, such as the suspension of its GSP+ status as long as there is no robust progress in the area of human rights. It is in the interest of the EU, the EU taxpayers, the EU enterprises and of course, Pakistani citizens.

US body recommends sanctions on Pakistan for rights violations

[Christian Daily International](#) (27.03.2025) - A bipartisan U.S. government body that monitors religious freedom worldwide this week recommended imposing sanctions on Pakistan for human rights violations, particularly abuse of harsh blasphemy laws and treatment of religious minorities in the country.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) stated that religious freedom in Pakistan continued to deteriorate in 2024, according to its annual report released on Tuesday (March 25).

Religious minority communities – particularly Christians, Hindus and Shia Muslims and Ahmadis – continued to bear the brunt of persecution and prosecutions under Pakistan's strict blasphemy law and to suffer violence from both the police and mobs, while those responsible for such violence rarely faced legal consequences, the report stated.

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Rights group slams 'alarming abuses' faced by Pakistani minorities

[UCA News](#) (27.03.2025) - A human rights group says action must be taken to address impunity and a lack of justice amid a series of abuses leveled against members of religious minorities – mostly Christians – in Pakistan.

In a March 26 statement, Human Rights Forum [Pakistan](#) (HRFP) said a recent survey and fact-finding missions it conducted revealed that religious minorities continue to face “a consistent and alarming pattern of abuse and persecution.”

The group listed 16 such cases against minorities in the first three months of this year and said most were not independently investigated and justice remains wanting.

Most cases involved abduction, forced conversion of Christian girls to Islam, forced marriage, and allegations of blasphemy against Christian men and women.

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Pakistan, Ahmadis detained for praying remain in jail, including minors

[Bitter Winter](#) (25.03.2025) - “[Bitter Winter](#)” reported that on March 5 bail was denied to 22 members of the Ahmadiyya community, who had been arrested on February 28 in Daska, Punjab, just for praying inside their house of worship on Friday. The arrests followed a campaign instigated by the extremist religious-political organization Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), to which “Bitter Winter” devoted [a series of seven articles](#).

Twenty days have passed since, and despite protests by international organizations the Ahmadis remain in jail, including several minors and one person with intellectual disability.

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Mass desecration of Ahmadi Muslim graves in Kotli, Azad Kashmir

[APPG Ahmadiyyah Muslim Community](#) (25.03.2025) - On the early morning of 21 March, an Ahmadi Muslim cemetery in Kotli, Azad Kashmir, was targeted by unidentified individuals who defaced or destroyed 76 gravestones. The attack occurred during a reported power outage, making it easier for the perpetrators to operate undetected.

The cemetery, established prior to the 1984 anti-Ahmadi laws, is enclosed by a boundary wall.

Local authorities have not made any arrests, and investigations into the culprits have been inconclusive so far.

This incident is part of a broader pattern of grave desecrations: **169 Ahmadi Muslim graves** have been vandalised in eight separate attacks across Pakistan in 2025 alone.

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Christian labourer's throat slit in Sheikhpura Factory after blasphemy allegation and faith dispute

[CrosswayTV](#) (22.03.2025) - A 22-year-old Christian worker was critically injured in what appears to be a religiously motivated attack at a paper mill in Sheikhpura. The victim, Waqas Masih, was reportedly assaulted by a Muslim colleague following alleged false accusations of blasphemy and pressure to convert to Islam.

The incident occurred on Friday afternoon, March 21, when Riyasat visited his son at the factory. While the two were conversing in a private room, Zohaib Iftikhar, a shift in-charge at the mill, allegedly called Waqas over under a pretext. Eyewitness accounts suggest that Zohaib questioned Waqas about his religion and whether he had accepted Islam. Upon receiving a firm refusal, he allegedly pulled out a sharp cardboard-cutting blade and slashed Waqas's throat, aiming for the jugular.

Waqas collapsed on the spot, gravely wounded and covered in blood. His father described the scene as "horrific," saying his son sustained deep injuries to the neck. The suspect, Zohaib, reportedly fled immediately.

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Bail denied to Ahmadis arrested in Pakistan for praying on Friday

[Bitter Winter](#) (13.03.2025) - Under the pressure of the radical Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, members of the Ahmadiyya community are now prohibited even from praying in their own houses of worship.

Members of the heavily persecuted Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan are now being arrested just for praying inside their houses of worship. This is part of a campaign instigated by the extremist religious-political organization Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), to which "Bitter Winter" devoted [a series of seven articles](#). While it is true that the Pakistani government tries to contain TLP extremism, it is also intimidated by its threats of riots. In the case of the Ahmadis, police and courts often end up siding with TLP.

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Pakistan: Report claims religious minorities' situation is becoming worse

[Bitter Winter](#) (12.03.2025) - The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan notes that discrimination, forced conversion, blasphemy accusations, and violent attacks increased in 2023 and 2024.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's report "[Under Siege: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2023/24](#)," released last week, highlights ongoing attacks on religious minorities, including mob violence, desecration of Ahmadiyya graves, arbitrary detentions, and forced conversions of Hindu and Christian women and girls. It notes that the situation worsened in 2023 and 2024 with respect to previous years.

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Christian laborer publicly humiliated by landlords in Faisalabad over wood-cutting dispute

[Claas](#) (10.03.2025) - In a shocking incident of mob injustice, a 30-year-old Christian laborer, Wasif George, was brutally humiliated by local landlords in Chak 110 GB, Chak Jhumra district, Faisalabad, after being accused of cutting wood unknowingly. The victim was allegedly tortured, forcibly shaved, blackened in the face, and paraded through the village on the back of a donkey.

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Pakistani Christian girl's forced marriage annulled in win for religious freedom

[ADF International](#) (10.03.2025) - Shahida Bibi is now free to return home to her father and to her Christian faith after a court in Pakistan annulled her forced conversion and marriage to her stepfather's brother. Bibi was 11 years old when her mother eloped with a Muslim man, who then "gave" Bibi to his brother. Bibi went on to give birth to two children, and the brother contracted Islamic Nikah, or a marriage union, to Bibi when she turned 18 in order to escape prosecution under the anti-child marriage law.

In February 2025, a civil court in Bahawalpur, Pakistan issued a decree in favor of Bibi and ordered that Bibi's forced marriage be dissolved on all identification documents. Bibi was issued new documents that correctly state her religion as Christianity. ADF International and allied attorneys supported Bibi's legal defence.

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Police free Christian girl from kidnapper in Pakistan

[Christian Daily International](#) (10.03.2025) - A 12-year-old Christian girl reunited with her parents last week after she was abducted two months prior by a Muslim neighbor who forcibly converted her to Islam and coerced her into marrying him, sources said.

Lahore Police with help from Sindh Police on 5 March raided an outhouse in a village of Shaheed Benazirabad, recovered Saba and arrested Ali, the sources said. Officers brought her back to Lahore the next day.

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Justice Prevails: 14-Year-Old Christian Girl Rescued and Reunited with Her Family in Sialkot

[Claas](#) (10.03.2025) - After nearly two months of legal battles and uncertainty, 14-year-old Christian girl Saneha Sharif has been rescued and reunited with her parents.

Saneha was kidnapped on January 9, 2025, in the Korpur area of Sialkot, Punjab, by a group of individuals. According to her father, Sharif Masih, an eyewitness saw the abductors forcing Saneha into a vehicle before fleeing the scene.

Following the registration of a First Information Report (FIR), police arrested Muhammad Shabbir, who was placed under six-day physical remand for interrogation.

Weeks of legal proceedings and advocacy led to a breakthrough when police recovered Saneha on February 19, 2025, in a late-night operation. She was immediately placed under protective custody and presented before a magistrate's court the following morning. However, due to the psychological trauma and intimidation she had endured, she was unable to articulate her experience clearly. Instead of being released to her parents, she was sent to Darul Aman, a government shelter home, pending further legal proceedings.

[Read more...](#)

Demolition of minarets and attacks on Ahmadis in Bahawalnagar

International Human Rights Desk (08.03. 2025) - On 8 March 2025, authorities demolished the minarets of an Ahmadiyya mosque in Chak No.166 Murad, Bahawalnagar District, under pressure from an aggressive mob led by Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) activists.

The incident began when a local resident named Amjad died following a dispute between two groups unaffiliated with the community. Despite the complete absence of Ahmadi involvement in the death, the TLP exploited the situation to incite violence against the community, resulting in the demolition of religious structures, looting of Ahmadi homes, and fabricated criminal charges against community members.

14-Year-Old Christian girl rescued and reunited with her family in Sialkot

[Pakistan Christian Post](#) (07.03.2025) - Sialkot: After nearly two months of uncertainty and legal battles, 14-year-old Christian girl Saneha Sharif has been successfully rescued and reunited with her parents. Her case, which has drawn significant national and international attention, underscores the challenges faced by religious minorities in Pakistan and the crucial role of legal advocacy in securing justice.

Saneha was kidnapped on January 9, 2025, in the Korpur area of Sialkot, Punjab, by a group of individuals, including Samina (wife of Muhammad Usman), Muhammad Dildar Hassnain, and Muhammad Shabbir. According to her father, Sharif Masih, an eyewitness saw the abductors forcibly placing her into a vehicle before fleeing the scene. In response, the Edge Foundation, a human rights organization advocating for persecuted minorities, stepped in to assist the family in their pursuit of justice.

[Read more...](#)

Christian in Pakistan beaten, shaved and paraded through village

[Christian Daily](#) (06.03.2025) - Muslim landowners in Pakistan abducted a Christian laborer, shaved his head and facial hair, blackened his face and paraded him on the back of a donkey for allegedly stealing wood from their property, his brother said.

On the assumption that impoverished Catholics in Muslim-majority Pakistan have little chance of obtaining legal defense, at least seven Muslims attacked Wasif George, 34, of village Chak 110-GB Chak Jhumra in Faisalabad District, Punjab Province, after he had gone to gather wood the evening of Feb. 27.

[Read more...](#)

Christian mother in Pakistan abducted, forcibly converted/married

[Christian Daily International](#) (05.03.2025) - A Muslim in Pakistan, Muhammad Asif Sadiq, who twice abducted a Christian mother raped her, fraudulently converted her to Islam and fabricated an Islamic marriage.

She said Sadiq took her to some place to fill out some forms and fraudulently got her thumb impression on documents.

"I'm not literate, so I had no idea that he had obtained my thumbprints to prepare false religious conversion and marriage certificates," she said. "He then forcibly took me to his house, where his wife and two children were also present. He locked me in a room where I was kept hostage for eight days."

[Read more...](#)

Assassinated lawmaker in Pakistan honored on anniversary of death

[Christian Daily International](#) (04.03.2025) - Christian rights activists and church leaders in Pakistan vowed to step up efforts to protect persecuted Christians as they honored the memory of assassinated Christian politician Shahbaz Bhatti on Sunday (March 2), the 14th anniversary of his death.

Bhatti, an ardent advocate for a diverse, multicultural and multireligious society, was assassinated on March 2, 2011, by Taliban militants outside his mother's home in the federal capital, Islamabad.

The Catholic government minister was a vocal critic of the misuse of the blasphemy laws and was known as a champion of religious freedom. He was also instrumental in creating 5-percent job quotas in government departments for religious minorities.

[Read more...](#)

Minorities Alliance Pakistan calls for justice and equal rights on Shabaz Bhatti's death anniversary

[The White Posts](#) (04.03.2025) - The Minorities Alliance Pakistan (MAP) reaffirmed its commitment to justice, democracy, religious freedom, and the right of minority parliamentarians to be elected, emphasizing the need for constitutional reforms to ensure equal rights for all citizens. Speaking at a conference marking the 14th death anniversary

of former Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, MAP Chairman Akmal Bhatti criticized the ruling elite for neglecting marginalized communities, particularly religious minorities, in the 26th Constitutional Amendment.

Bhatti pointed out the absence of minority representation in the newly constituted judicial commission and the recent appointment of judges in all high courts. He argued that decision-making institutions have effectively become “no-go areas” for minorities, further marginalizing them in national governance.

[Read more...](#)

WIN in Pakistan for Christian fraudulently “converted” by employer in attempted enslavement

[ADF International](#) (04.03.2025) - Sufyan Masih, a 24-year-old Pakistani Christian, was fraudulently designated as a Muslim on his National Identity Card by his employer to falsely “convert” and enslave him.

Authorities in Pakistan systemically deny and delay changes to ID cards with significant human rights implications. Backed by ADF International, Masih’s identity card has been corrected to “Christian” after a 6-year legal ordeal.

[Read more...](#)

Intensifying religious persecution in Punjab threatens mass violence

[HR Committee](#) (01.03.2025) - The International Human Rights Committee (IHRC) is urgently appealing to Pakistani authorities and members of the international community to intervene as Ahmadi citizens face unprecedented threats to their religious freedom and right to life itself.

A seemingly coordinated series of expulsions from mosques and arrest warrants for Ahmadis 28 February has resulted in Ahmadi citizens afraid not only to worship and displaced from their homes for fear of violence.

Sargodha

A case has been registered under the accusation of offering the Friday Prayers against 23 Ahmadis of Ahmadiyya Community Chak 71 Janubi (South), district Sargodha on 28th February 2025 under FIR No. 200 under Section 298-B and 298-C. The complaint, filed by Furqan Zahid, accused the Ahmadis of gathering unlawfully for worship. As of this writing, no arrests have been made. Extremists have staged a sit-in outside the Police Station Bhagtanwala, demanding that the Worship Place be sealed along with registering the case.

[Read more...](#)

The systemic abuse of minority girls undermined by law and a retrograde educational curriculum

HRWF (28.03.2025) - On 26 March 2025, three NGOs - CAP/ Liberté de conscience, Human Rights Without Frontiers and Global Human Rights Defence – organized a side-event at the UN in Geneva in the framework of the 58th Session of the Human Rights Council.

The keynote speaker was Mr Jan Figel, former EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief (Slovakia)

The other speakers were

Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers (Belgium)
Bert-Jan Ruissen, Member of the European Parliament (EU/ Netherlands)
Anwar Mehmood Rehman, Swiss Ahmaddiyya politician (Switzerland)
Inna Chevranova, Executive Director of European Facilitation Platform (Belgium)

The moderator was: Christine Mirre, Director of CAP/ Liberté de conscience (France)

Here is the text of Inna Chevranova's presentation:

Undermined by law and education, the systemic abuse of minority girls in Pakistan

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this important side event.

I would like to draw your attention to a pressing human rights concern: the forced conversions and marriages of girls from religious minority communities in Pakistan.

This issue cannot be viewed in isolation.

It is deeply linked to systemic discrimination embedded in the country's legal framework, social structures, and crucially, its education system.

Pakistan's Constitution, in Article 22, clearly states that no individual attending an educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction or participate in religious activities not related to their own faith.

Yet, this principle is routinely violated. The introduction of the Single National Curriculum was presented by the government as a means of reducing educational disparities.

In practice, however, it has embedded a singular religious ideology throughout the education system, marginalising non-Muslim students and reinforcing a hierarchy of faith that directly undermines the rights of religious minorities.

These curricular changes do not remain confined to classrooms—they shape public attitudes and normalise exclusion.

Within this environment, young Hindu and Christian girls are particularly vulnerable.

Many are abducted, forcibly converted to Islam, and married off to men sometimes decades older than them.

This is not a phenomenon occurring in the shadows; it happens in full view of institutions that are either unwilling or unable to intervene.

Only last year, in Faisalabad, a ten-year-old Christian girl named Laiba was abducted by a man in his forties and forced into marriage after conversion.

Her family's search for justice was met not with legal support, but with indifference. In another case, Arzoo Raja, a 13-year-old Christian girl, was forcibly married to a much older man. The court initially upheld the marriage on the grounds of her religious conversion, ignoring her age and the circumstances of her disappearance.

These are not exceptional events; they are the product of a broader culture that accepts the subjugation of minority girls as an unfortunate norm.

This culture is reinforced from an early age through education.

Curricula and textbooks frequently promote religious superiority and gender stereotypes.

Girls are routinely depicted in limited domestic roles, and non-Muslim identities are either ignored or portrayed with suspicion.

This erasure of diversity in educational content not only undermines critical thinking and equality but helps create an environment where forced conversions can be rationalised or ignored.

Where discrimination is taught, persecution often follows. This is not merely a domestic issue.

The European Union has, since 2014, granted Pakistan preferential access to its market under the GSP+ trade arrangement, conditional on the country's adherence to international human rights conventions.

Yet serious concerns remain as to whether Pakistan intends to meet its obligations.

While trade has grown, progress on human rights—particularly in protecting religious minorities and women—remains minimal.

A rights-based approach to trade must mean more than the signing of conventions. It must translate into institutional reform, accountability, and protection for those most at risk.

The international community, and particularly the European Union as a key trade partner, should not turn away from these issues.

The GSP+ mechanism includes a monitoring process, but monitoring without consequence cannot protect vulnerable communities.

If the EU is serious about its human rights commitments, it must ensure that economic partnerships are not maintained at the expense of human dignity.

What we are witnessing is not only the violation of individual rights, but the failure of a system to uphold the values it claims to represent. Minority girls in Pakistan face threats to their identity, freedom, and security, not only from those who perpetrate these acts directly, but from the structures that allow them to continue unchecked.

Their education, their protection under the law, and their right to live free from coercion are all under threat.

We cannot speak of inclusive development or international partnership if these realities are ignored.

The issue of forced conversions and marriages is emblematic of deeper failures in Pakistan's education system and legal enforcement.

These are challenges that require more than statements—they require coordinated pressure, transparent evaluation, and the political will to insist on reform.

About the misuse of EU taxpayers' money to finance controversial school education programs

HRWF presentation at a side-event co-organized by CAP/ Liberté de conscience, Human Rights Without Frontiers and Global Human Rights Defence on 26 March 2025

By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (27.03.2025) - Pakistan's Constitution guarantees freedom of religion for all Pakistani citizens. Yet, as Mr Jan Figel, former EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief has just told us, reality tells a different story.

Since 2014, the European Union has tried to help Pakistan improve its human rights record with trade incentives. A win-win proposal: the privileged access to the EU market in exchange of the ratification and implementation of 27 international conventions to improve human rights and the rule of law. This mechanism is known as the GSP+, the Generalised Scheme of Preferences.

In this framework, **Pakistan's products enter the EU market with 0% duties across approximately 2/3 of all EU tariff lines.**

From 2014 to 2022, Pakistan's exports to the EU almost doubled, from 8.3 billion EUR to almost 15 billion EUR.

For 10 years, Pakistan has been the winner in this operation and the EU has been the loser. Indeed, over the years, many parliamentary questions and resolutions have highlighted Pakistan's disregard for human rights and the lack of political will to prioritize its human rights record.

By accepting de facto this situation and by failing to sanction Pakistan's non-implementation of the GSP+, the EU has misused the money of the EU taxpayers and has lost its credibility as a commercial power guided by human values. Indeed, the list of persistent egregious human rights violations has remained unchanged for 10 years:

- the fabrication of blasphemy cases against Christians, Ahmadis and other religious minorities
- the sentencing to heavy prison terms and even the death penalty on such blasphemy charges
- the impunity of false accusations, acts of violence and mob violence against members of minority religious communities, places of worship and communal buildings
- the controversial funding of schools in an environment of religious extremism
- the persistence of madrassah religious schools, beacons of indoctrination and extremism, which are out of control of the state, etc.

The 2021 Single National Curriculum

The 2021 Single National Curriculum (SNC) in force in state schools has institutionalised religious bias, embedding Islamic teachings across core subjects and forcing non-Muslim students into an environment of indoctrination and exclusion.

The Curriculum in force in state schools drew strong criticisms from education experts and human rights defenders for its lack of inclusivity, the over-emphasis on Islamic religious content at the expense of religious minorities, the subliminal ideology of Islamic supremacy and poor pedagogy.

Alarmingly, in the province of Punjab, which has a bit more than 50% of the total Pakistani population, extremist religious clerics now hold power over curricula of state schools, censoring content and restricting academic freedom.

The persecution of open-minded teaching staff

In October 2023, Islamic clerics forced a college professor to publicly renounce teaching Charles Darwin's theory of evolution as against Islamic law. A video showing his academic recanting was posted on social media and got viral.

In May 2022, the car of that professor had already been attacked with a magnetic bomb, leaving him in a wheelchair for several months.

Such serious incidents orchestrated by extremist clerics and spread around in social media clearly pursue the objective to terrorize any teacher who would decide to support Darwin's theory of evolution rather than the Islamic theory of creationism. This is Inquisition.

The EU funding of Pakistan's questionable school education system

According to the 2024 Report "*Pakistan, Education System, Curriculum and EU Funding*" supported by several Members of the European Parliament, the money of European taxpayers of the 27 EU Member States has been misused to finance such questionable school education programs in Pakistan. The amount is enormous: between 100 and 150 million EUR from 2016 to 2024

The question is "Should European taxpayers finance a public education system the implementation of which largely remains in the hands of extremist Muslim clerics who terrorize broad-minded teachers and professors? Would European taxpayers and political

leaders accept that their State finances Muslim faith-based schools at home where Creationism would be taught?"

I think the answer is obvious and the conclusion of the European Union should be "Let us stop financing Pakistan's school education system as long as..." but there is no such answer.

Maybe the various UN institutions financing school education in Pakistan should also strengthen their oversight to ensure that their financial assistance does not contribute directly or indirectly to religious indoctrination and Islamization.

In Brussels, the co-chair of the Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the Dutch member of the European Parliament Bert-Jan Ruissen recently submitted a written question to the European Commission on this matter wondering if the EU funding "is not being used in Islamic madrassas." In his answer the EU Commissioner failed to reply to this concern as well as the two following questions of MEP Ruissen that are worth quoting:

What mechanisms does the Commission have in place to determine which curricula have Islamic religious content that seeps into general subjects in state schools to which non-Muslim children may be exposed? NO ANSWER. And what restrictive measures or sanctions does the EU have at its disposal for such cases? NO ANSWER.

Does the Commission intend to make public any breaches of the provisions of the agreement signed with Pakistan, with a view to safeguarding the faith of non-Muslim children from any form of indoctrination in schools? If so, in what context and when will this be done. NO ANSWER.

[See HERE](#) the common full written statement of CAP/ Liberté de conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers (25.02. 2025) submitted to the 58th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Three Ahmadi mosques attacked in Punjab within ten days

The authorities seem unable to resist the pressure and threats of the extremist organization Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan.

By Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (03.03.2025) - "Bitter Winter" devoted [a series of seven articles](#) to Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a violent political-religious Islamic organization that Pakistani authorities try unsuccessfully to contain, more often than not surrendering to its pressure. This is especially true when TLP threatens or demands action against the persecuted Ahmadiyya community.

In February three incidents happened in Punjab within ten days.

On February 11 in Lubbay, Sialkot district, police demolished the niche of an Ahmadiyya Muslim Mosque after detaining the local Ahmadiyya president. Community members had refused to carry out the act themselves.

On February 20, at 12:00 PM, as captured on the first video, a group associated with Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) entered Throoh Mandi, Pasrur tehsil, Sialkot district. The mob destroyed the minarets and arch of the local Ahmadiyya mosque, shouting

slogans against the Ahmadis. Law enforcement officers were present but did not intervene. TLP members threatened to return to destroy the Ahmadi graveyard.

Mob action in Throoh Mandi. From X. <https://x.com/i/status/1894103805211340890>.

At Chak No. 20NP, district Rahim Yar Khan, TLP told the authorities that they should demolish the minarets of the Ahmadi mosque by February 23, failing which TLP would carry out the destruction itself. The authorities contacted the Ahmadiyya Community and told them that they would prevent any violent action. However on February 22 the same authorities, intimidated by TLP, directly demolished the minaret and niche of the Ahmadi mosque, as shown in Video 2.

Ahmadi mosque vandalized in Rahim Yar Khan. From X. <https://x.com/i/status/1894135488761544814>

These incidents show that Pakistani authorities, unable to resist TLP pressure, are now actively supporting religious persecution. Extremist groups are shaping policy, and fundamental rights of religious minorities are being systematically dismantled, raising serious concerns about freedom of religion or belief in the country.

Side-event on "Human Rights in Pakistan"

organized on 26 March from 12:00 to 13:00 at the UN in Geneva by CAP/ Libert  de conscience & Human Rights Without Frontiers.

Keynote Speaker: Jan Figel, EU Special Envoy for FORB (2016-2019)

For more information, contact w.fautre@hrwf.org

Pakistan's faith-based organizations among those hit by US funding freeze

In 2023, USAID disbursed \$43.79 billion in global assistance, supporting development efforts in over 130 countries

By **A. S. John**

[Christian Daily](#) (18.02.2025) - Yasir Talib was writing a project report at his office in Lahore on Jan. 27 when he received disturbing news: the research and advocacy organization where he worked would not renew his contract due to a funding freeze announced by the Trump administration.

Talib, project coordinator of the **Minority Leadership Development (MLD)** initiative at the Lahore-based **Center for Social Justice (CSJ)**, which was financially supported by the **National Endowment for Democracy (NED)**, was among 10 employees laid off "until further notice" following President Donald Trump's unexpected decision to pause all foreign aid and cut funding for organizations such as the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**.

"The **MLD project** was crucial as we were conducting consultations and **lobbying on important issues such as the legislation against forced conversions and establishing a proactive National Commission for Minority Rights**," Talib told Christian Daily International.

He said the sudden suspension of the project affected him and 10 other team members working in 10 districts.

"It's not just about my job; the project's suspension is a setback to all the hard work we have done in the last two years," Talib said.

CSJ Executive Director Peter Jacob could not be reached for comment.

Christian Daily International has learned that **NED was funding at least 22 organizations in Pakistan working in democracy, education, and minority rights advocacy, among others.**

Christians True Spirit (CTS), another non-governmental organization, has also been affected by Trump's decision to block funds.

"Several CTS projects, including **legal aid to vulnerable groups, healthcare, and education** that were being carried out with the financial support of the American government will likely be shelved for an indefinite period due to this funding pause," said Katherine Sapna, executive director of CTS.

Speaking to Christian Daily International, Sapna said several organizations in their network that worked in partnership with USAID and NED were forced to lay off staff and shut down projects due to the decision.

"Suspension of crucial programs, especially in healthcare, will put the lives of millions at risk," she warned.

Sapna added that organizations still operating on funds from other donors, including church bodies, were conducting internal assessments on how to sustain operations until the situation with U.S. funds became clearer.

"We are in panic mode! Our church donors are also very concerned, and though they have assured us they will try to fill in the funding gap, we are not sure yet how we will navigate through this crisis," she said.

Mohammad Dittal Kalhoro, executive director of the **Sindh Rural Support Organization, one of USAID's implementing partners in Sindh province**, said his organization was **forced to shut down all three of its U.S.-sponsored health initiatives**—two of which were in full swing, while the third had barely begun.

"This decision will undoubtedly have a highly negative impact, particularly in a country like Pakistan, where **numerous programs across various sectors relied on USAID funding**," Kalhoro said.

He added that **the suspension affects not only healthcare but also humanitarian assistance, refugee support, nutrition, education, energy, trade, economic growth, infrastructure, and climate change efforts.**

"We are among dozens of organizations that have already started firing or suspending employees since the end of January," he said.

According to media reports, **Trump's cuts have suspended \$845 million in funding for USAID projects in Pakistan.**

Among **the most significant suspended projects** is **the Integrated Health Systems Strengthening and Service Delivery Integrated Health System Program, an \$86 million initiative aimed at improving Pakistan's healthcare infrastructure.**

The Global Health Supply Chain Program, valued at \$52 million, was designed to ensure the **availability of essential medical supplies.**

In education, the Merit and Needs-Based Scholarship Program, worth \$30.7 million, was set to support underprivileged students pursuing higher education.

The Inclusive Democratic Processes and Governance, a \$15 million initiative, was intended **to enhance democratic governance and transparency.** The suspension has also affected development efforts in Pakistan's recently merged tribal areas.

The Merged Areas Governance Program for former Federally Administered Tribal Areas, valued at \$40.7 million, was improving governance and administrative systems.

Additionally, **the Building Peace in Pakistan program, worth \$9 million,** aimed at **fostering religious, ethnic, and political harmony,** has been put on hold.

The freeze has also halted the Pakistan Private Investment Initiative program, worth \$43.5 million, which was focused on **generating employment opportunities.**

One of the most critical projects affected is **the Mangla Dam Rehabilitation Project, a \$150 million initiative essential for Pakistan's energy and water security.**

The decision to suspend these aid programs is part of a broader restructuring of U.S. foreign assistance under Trump's "America First" policy.

USAID, established in 1961 under President John F. Kennedy, has long been a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy, **administering approximately 60% of the country's aid budget.** In the 2023 fiscal year alone, **USAID disbursed \$43.79 billion in global assistance, supporting development efforts in over 130 countries.** It has garnered controversy, however, due to a number of projects that made headlines and were criticized as wasteful spending and overt support for progressive priorities.

Trump's administration is now seeking to consolidate USAID into the State Department, a move aimed at reducing government expenditure and redirecting funds toward domestic priorities.

Human rights progress needed to preserve Pakistan's trade privileges, EU says

By Ayaz Gul

[VOA](#) (31.01.2025) - The European Union is linking Pakistan's access to European trading markets as a duty-free exporter to progress on the country's "most pressing" human rights issues.

Olof Skoog, the EU's special human rights envoy, issued a warning Friday following a weeklong visit to the South Asian nation, where authorities have faced increasing accusations of suppressing civil liberties, political dissent, and free speech.

"The trade benefits under [the human rights development plan known as] GSP+ depend on the progress made on addressing a list of issues, including on human rights, and tangible reforms remain essential," a post-visit EU statement quoted Skoog as saying.

He referred to the Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus, commonly known as GSP+, which grants developing countries, including Pakistan, tariff-free access to the EU market in exchange for its adherence to specific human and labor rights obligations.

The EU statement noted that its envoy highlighted areas of concern during meetings with Pakistani leaders, including blasphemy laws, enforced disappearances, freedom of expression, media independence, impunity for rights violations, due process, fair trials, civic space, and the death penalty.

"As we approach the midterm of the current monitoring cycle, we encourage Pakistan to continue on its reform path as it prepares for reapplication under the upcoming new GSP+ regulation," Skoog stated.

The declaration noted that "Pakistan has become the largest beneficiary of GSP+" since the implementation of the trading plan in 2014, with Pakistani businesses increasing their exports to the EU market by 108%.

EU issues warning to Pakistan about human rights

By [Christian Daily International / Morning Star News](#)

Christian Daily (31.01.2025) - Pakistan's preferential trade status could be jeopardized if it does not address human rights concerns, including controversial blasphemy laws, forced marriages/conversions of minority girls and freedom of religion, a European Union (EU) delegation said on Friday (Jan. 31).

The delegation led by EU Special Representative on Human Rights Olof Skoog warned in a press statement that Pakistan should not take its Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status for granted. The delegation noted that Pakistan's trade benefits depend on progress made in addressing concerns about human rights, which also include freedom of expression.

“As we approach the midterm of the current monitoring cycle, we encourage Pakistan to continue on its reform path as it prepares for reapplication under the upcoming new GSP+ regulation,” the EU delegation stated. “The trade benefits under GSP+ depend on the progress made on addressing a list of issues, including on human rights, and tangible reforms remain essential.”

It added that Pakistan remained a key partner for the EU in South Asia and that relations with the bloc were built on shared values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, guided by the principles of the U.N. Charter and international norms.

“The EU welcomes the fact that Pakistan has become the largest beneficiary of GSP+, with Pakistani businesses increasing their exports to the EU market by 108 percent since the launch of the trade scheme in 2014,” the delegation stated.

The EU is Pakistan’s second largest trading partner, with the GSP+ status allowing the country to enjoy duty-free or minimum duty on European exports. The scheme, however, is conditional on beneficiary countries demonstrating tangible progress in implementing 27 international conventions on human and labor rights, environmental protection, climate change and good governance.

According to the press statement, the EU mission, which is on a weeklong visit to Pakistan ahead of a key GSP+ monitoring mission in June, aimed to engage the country on the most pressing human rights and labor rights issues and discuss Pakistan’s plans to address them, including the ongoing assessment under the GSP+ trade scheme.

The delegation met with senior officials, including Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Chief of Army Staff Gen. Asim Munir, Minister of Law, Justice and Human Rights Azam Nazeer Tarar, Federal Minister of Commerce Jam Kamal, and Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch. In those meetings Skoog highlighted application of blasphemy laws, women’s rights, forced marriages and conversions, enforced disappearances, freedoms of expression, religion or belief, independence of media, impunity for rights violations, due process and the right to a fair trial, civic space, and the death penalty.

In a meeting with Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi, the focus was on judicial backlog as well as the integrity and independence of the judiciary.

Throughout Skoog’s visit, the special envoy acknowledged the important role of the National Commission of Human Rights (NCHR) and underlined the need to preserve its independence, the statement added.

“In the context of the upcoming GSP+ monitoring mission, the special envoy encouraged Pakistani authorities to ensure the implementation of all relevant international conventions,” the EU delegation stated.

Skoog also visited Lahore to meet with Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif and Minister for Minorities Affairs in Punjab, Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora and representatives of the Christian and Ahmadi communities. Discussions centered on freedom of religion or belief, the protection of minority rights, and accountability for violations and abuses of human rights.

None of the four Christian lawmakers in the Punjab Assembly, however, were invited to the meetings with the visiting EU delegation, Christian Daily International-Morning Star News learned.

“Neither the EU mission in Pakistan nor the Pakistan government informed us about the delegation’s visit,” said a Christian lawmaker who requested anonymity for fear of backlash. “We don’t even know which Christian representatives were chosen to meet with Ambassador Skoog. It’s quite obvious that the government handpicked those people who would tout the official narrative of ‘all is well’ and refrain from presenting the real picture.”

The lawmaker said that they had conveyed their reservations to the EU mission and hoped that it would arrange their meeting with the delegation before the end of the visit.

Speaking to journalists in the federal capital Islamabad on Wednesday (Jan. 29), Skoog emphasized the EU’s commitment to democracy, human rights and international humanitarian law.

“There are ongoing discussions about freedom of expression and media freedom in Pakistan,” Skoog said.

He added that he wanted to use his mandate to foster direct engagement with countries, moving beyond standard formal dialogues to address core issues in the absence of a dedicated human rights dialogue at his level.

The EU’s GSP+ framework, as detailed by Skoog, serves as a strong platform for collaboration on human rights, with Pakistan as a major beneficiary.

“The GSP+ is a significant economic boost, facilitating Pakistan to become the EU’s largest export market, surpassing both China and the U.S.,” the ambassador said.

He emphasized the substantial economic impact of nearly a billion dollars in tariff exemptions, underlining its importance to Pakistan’s economy. The GSP+ framework demands adherence to international human rights obligations, and its scope extends beyond labor conditions and child labor to encompass a broader range of human rights issues.

Foreign Office spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan acknowledged the EU’s warning at a weekly press briefing on Thursday (Jan. 30).

“The GSP+ status is just one aspect of the Pak-EU partnership,” Khan said. “The visit of the EU’s special envoy is also part of the routine.”

Pakistan was awarded GSP+ status on Jan. 1, 2014 after the country ratified 27 international conventions and committed to implement them. The EU GSP+ serves as a special incentive arrangement to promote good governance and sustainable development by facilitating trade. The incentive grants Pakistan zero-rated or preferential tariffs on nearly 66 percent of tariff lines, enhancing the country’s ability to export to the EU market.

GSP+ has proven to be pivotal for EU-Pakistan bilateral trade ties. From 2014 to 2022, Pakistan’s exports to the EU increased by 108 percent, while imports from the EU increased by 65 percent and total trade volume increased from 8.3 billion euros in 2013 to 14.85 billion euros. Pakistan’s garments, bedlinen, terry towels, hosiery, leather, sports and surgical goods and similar products enter the EU market availing the GSP+ concessions, according to the EU website.

“Don’t take GSP+ for granted,” says EU Envoy

By Absa Komal

[Dawn](#) (30.01.2025) - The focus of his visit is to engage with the government on pressing human rights issues and learn about Pakistan's plans to address them ahead of the upcoming GSP+ monitoring mission, due in June 2025.

Olof Skoog urges Pakistan not to try civilians in military courts, limit freedom of expression merely to protect individuals from criticism.

The envoy's insights will be crucial to securing continued access to the Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+), given Pakistan's reliance on the scheme, which provides preferential access to EU markets.

The EU has previously [expressed concern](#) over the sentencing of protesters being tried over their role in the events of [May 9](#) – when riots broke out following the arrest of PTI founder Imran Khan.

In a statement issued after the announcement of sentences handed down by military courts, the EU said "these verdicts are seen as inconsistent with the obligations that Pakistan has undertaken under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)".

Talking to *Dawn*, Mr Skoog reiterated the same concerns, saying: "We have expressed [our] apprehensions and concerns about the use of military courts against civilians."

"I had that conversation and will continue having those conversations. Our view is that for civilians, there should be a civilian court system applicable... We have raised our concerns when there is an expansive use of military courts in response to demonstrations," he said, clarifying that this was their general stance and that he would not comment on individual cases.

Freedom of expression is another GSP+ condition, he said, even as journalists and opposition parties protested the passage of controversial amendments to the country's cybercrime laws.

"This is happening while I am visiting the country... I have been discussing [this] with government officials. Our view is there should be very limited restrictions on freedom of expression," Mr Skoog said.

"You can't restrict freedom of expression just to protect the politicians, authorities or the system from being criticised, and these are the conversations we are having with Pakistan right now about where to draw the limits," the special envoy said.

Mr Skoog said that the next round of the GSP+ scheme hinges upon what Pakistan does in terms of complying with the various international obligations they have made, adding that it "cannot be taken for granted that [GSP+] will be there for the next round".

So far, the EU official has met Deputy PM Ishaq Dar, COAS Gen Asim Munir, CJP Yahya Afridi, law and commerce ministers, other officials, as well as civil society, media and human rights defenders.

"I have and I will use my visit to convey to the concerned authorities that I have heard from civil society in Pakistan, and they relate to the problems we have discussed: freedom of expression, labour rights, death penalty, and people lingering in jail with no trial and sentencing. Those are part of the issues that we raised with Pakistan," Mr Skoog told *Dawn*.

More reading

[EU: Human rights progress needed to preserve Pakistan's trade privileges](#)

Woman charged with desecrating Quran in Pakistan wins bail

[Christian Daily](#) (17.01.2025) - A Christian woman in Pakistan wrongly charged with blasphemy by a mosque leader won bail on Thursday (Jan. 16), her lawyer said.

Gojra Additional Sessions Judge Waseem Mubarak granted the bail to Shazia Younis, a 50-year-old Catholic mother of three children, in [the case](#) registered under Section 295-B of Pakistan's controversial blasphemy statutes relating to desecration of the Quran, punishable by life in prison, said attorney Javed Sahotra.

"The judge accepted my arguments that the woman had been falsely accused of blasphemy by the complainant – the First Information Report [FIR] shows that there was no ill intent behind her act," Sahotra told [Christian Daily International-Morning Star News](#).

Sahotra said police had wrongly charged Younis because Section 295-B clearly requires a suspect to have "deliberately or intentionally" desecrated the Quran; intent must be shown for a blasphemy conviction.

"In this case, the complainant has admitted that Younis had unknowingly burned the holy pages along with waste paper," he said. "Therefore, her act does not constitute a case under Section 295-B."

The complainant did not witness the alleged incident, nor had police recovered any incriminating material from the woman's possession, he added.

Sahotra said the judge ordered the release of Younis against surety bonds of 50,000 rupees (\$180 USD).

"Younis will be released from prison in a couple of days, after we get the court's written verdict," he said, adding that soon he would file an application for dismissal of the case against her.

Gojra Saddar police in Toba Tek Singh District, Punjab Province, arrested Younis on Dec. 21 on the complaint of Atta Ul Mustafa, prayer leader of a mosque in her village, Chak No. 180-GB Mongi Bangla.

Mustafa stated in the FIR that he was in a market on Dec. 21 when two local Muslims, Muhammad Imran and Rab Nawaz, informed him that the woman had set fire to books outside her doorstep.

"The material set ablaze included a book of *Islamiyat*, which contained Islamic scripture," Mustafa stated in the FIR, claiming also that Younis had admitted desecrating the pages to him. "Shazia has hurt the religious sentiments of Muslims, and she should therefore be punished as per the relevant law."

UNHRC Urges Amending Laws

Expressing alarm over an increase in false blasphemy accusations in Pakistan, the U.N. Human Rights Committee on Nov. 7 urged repeal or amending of the country's harsh blasphemy laws.

The committee noted that false blasphemy accusations led to Islamist mob violence and recommended amending the laws in accordance with requirements of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

In its concluding observations of the committee's second periodic report on Pakistan, it stated concern over sections 295 and 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code, which carry severe penalties, including the death penalty, and have a disproportionate impact on religious minorities.

"It is also concerned about the increasing number of persons incarcerated under blasphemy charges, the high number of blasphemy cases based on false accusations, violence against those accused of blasphemy, fostering vigilante justice, and allegations of entrapment of persons, in particular young persons, on accusations of on-line blasphemy under cybercrime laws," the committee stated.

It emphasized ending use of cybercrime laws, such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, to prosecute and detain those accused of breaching blasphemy laws online. The committee also urged the government to investigate allegations of massive abuse of blasphemy laws in connection with cybercrime laws and publish the results of the inquiries.

"[The committee] is also concerned about the chilling effect that criminal defamation laws, blasphemy, sedition and counter-terrorism laws, and other recently passed legislation have on the exercise of freedom of expression by journalists, activists, human rights defenders and members of ethnic and religious minorities," it stated.

Urging Pakistan to take all necessary measures to guarantee prompt and fair trials for all persons charged with blasphemy or other offenses against religion, the committee highlighted jail conditions, stating that it was "also concerned about reports of abuse of women prisoners, including sexual violence, and that individuals accused of blasphemy are often placed in solitary confinement for extended periods of time. It remains concerned about the widespread recourse to prolonged pretrial detention."

Pakistan ranked eighth on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of the most difficult places to be a Christian.

Two MEPs appeal to EU human rights envoy on behalf of persecuted Christians

An initiative of MEPs Bert-Jan Ruissen and Miriam Lexmann, co-chairs of the European Parliament's intergroup on religious freedom

[Nederlandse versie](#)

[SGP](#) (23.01.2025) - MEP Bert-Jan Ruissen (SGP) has urged the EU human rights envoy, Mr. Olov Skoog, to call particular attention to the difficult position of the Christian minority in the country during his visit to Pakistan. The EU envoy is visiting Pakistan later this month. Ruissen is making this appeal together with Slovak MEP Miriam Lexmann, in their capacity as co-chairs of the European Parliament's intergroup on religious freedom.

Ruissen: "The situation of Christians in the country is quite troublesome. I think, for example, of the very sad case of Shagufta Kiran, a Christian and mother of four children. She was sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws. It is imperative that the EU envoy press for her, and others, to be released."

Christians are fiercely persecuted in predominantly Muslim Pakistan. The country ranks high on Open Doors' 2024 Christian persecution ranking. Alleged blasphemy is punishable by death. Moreover, many incidents are known in which angry crowds attack or even kill Christians and other religious minorities. Ruissen: "Keep in mind that Pakistan receives around 100 million euros a year in development aid from the European Union, in addition to contributions from individual member states.

There is no need for the EU to be cautious. The EU envoy can and should exert considerable pressure to protect Christians." The SGP MEP continued: "Less well known is that in Pakistan many Christian girls are kidnapped, forced to convert to Islam and then sold and married off to older men. Pakistani authorities rarely act against this, but the suffering is immense. The EU must not turn a blind eye on this."

In addition to development aid, the European Union has allocated about 100 to 150 million euros for Pakistani schools and teaching materials in recent years. Research shows that these EU-funded teaching materials actually encourage discrimination against Christians and other minorities. Ruissen and Lexmann also urge a review of these teaching materials.

The European Union has long supported global education initiatives overseas, including in Pakistan

EU funding for education in Pakistan sparks concerns over religious indoctrination

By Joseph Janssen

[EU TODAY](#) (08.01.2025) - In 2022, the EU allocated €10 million to Sindh province to strengthen provincial education policies, as part of broader funding under the EU Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2021–2027.

While this financial assistance is aimed at improving educational standards and accessibility, recent concerns have emerged over the potential misuse of these funds, raising questions about transparency and accountability.

EU Funding for education in Pakistan and its Intent

The EU's financial support to Pakistan's education sector seeks to address critical challenges, including improving access to quality education and promoting equitable learning opportunities. The funding is part of the EU's broader commitment to supporting sustainable development goals, particularly those related to education. Sindh, one of

Pakistan's most populous provinces, has historically struggled with low literacy rates, outdated infrastructure, and poor teacher training.

The €10 million allocated to Sindh was intended to strengthen the implementation of provincial education policies.

However, concerns have surfaced about how these funds are being utilized. Critics argue there is insufficient oversight to ensure that EU taxpayers' money is spent on improving secular education rather than supporting institutions that promote religious indoctrination.

Concerns Over Curriculum and Religious Content

Reports suggest that Pakistan's single national curriculum, applied in state and private schools, includes significant Islamic religious content across subjects such as Urdu, English, civic education, and history. This curriculum is mandatory even in schools attended by non-Muslim children, raising concerns about the potential for religious indoctrination.

The inclusion of religious content in subjects unrelated to theology poses a particular challenge for non-Muslim students, who may be compelled to learn material that conflicts with their personal beliefs. This issue has sparked broader concerns about religious freedom and inclusivity within Pakistan's education system.

Moreover, there is no guarantee that EU funds are not being used to support Islamic madrassas, which are often criticized for focusing heavily on religious instruction at the expense of broader academic subjects.

While madrassas play an important role in providing education to underserved communities, they have also faced allegations of promoting sectarian ideologies.

According to the [New York Times \(Jan 3rd 2025\)](#) the madrassas represent a potential threat. The institutions have long been accused of contributing to violence and radicalization, supplying recruits for the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other militant groups.

Previously, in 2021, the NYT reported that "[Darul Uloom Haqqania madrassa](#), one of Pakistan's largest and oldest seminaries, has educated more Taliban leaders than any school in the world."

Questions to the European Commission

In light of these concerns, [Bert-Jan Ruissen](#), a member of the [European Conservatives and Reformists](#) (ECR) group in the European Parliament, [has submitted questions to the European Commission](#). He seeks clarity on the mechanisms in place to monitor the use of EU funds and ensure that they are not contributing to religious indoctrination.

Specifically, Ruissen has asked the Commission to outline any measures it employs to identify Islamic religious content that permeates general subjects in state schools. He has also inquired about restrictive measures or sanctions that the EU could impose in cases where breaches of funding agreements are identified.

Additionally, Ruissen has called on the Commission to commit to transparency by making public any violations of agreements with Pakistan. This would aim to safeguard the rights of non-Muslim children and ensure that education funded by the EU aligns with its principles of inclusivity and respect for diversity.

The Broader Implications

The concerns surrounding EU funding for education in Pakistan highlight the complexities of international development aid. While financial assistance can play a critical role in addressing systemic challenges, ensuring that funds are used appropriately is equally important.

The case also underscores the broader challenges of promoting religious freedom and pluralism in countries with deeply ingrained religious influences in education. The EU must strike a delicate balance between supporting Pakistan's development goals and upholding its own values of human rights and religious tolerance.

Moving Forward

The European Commission's response to Ruissen's questions will likely set the tone for future funding agreements with Pakistan and other countries facing similar challenges.

Enhanced monitoring mechanisms, stricter accountability measures, and greater transparency will be essential to ensure that EU funds achieve their intended goals without inadvertently supporting activities that undermine the principles of equality and inclusivity.

As the EU continues to support education initiatives worldwide, the situation in Pakistan serves as a reminder of the importance of vigilance, oversight, and a steadfast commitment to upholding the values that underpin international aid.

A long fight to keep a closer eye on madrasas unravels in Pakistan

In a deal with Islamist parties, Pakistan is abandoning a requirement that religious seminaries, long seen by Western officials as a potential threat, register with the government.

By Zia ur-Rehman

[New York Times](#) (03.01.2025) - They draw millions of poor Pakistani children with the simple promise of free education, meals and housing. For devout families, they offer Islamic learning rooted in ancient tradition.

But to the Pakistani government and Western counterterrorism officials, the religious seminaries known as madrasas also represent a potential threat. The institutions have long been accused of contributing to violence and radicalization, supplying recruits for the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other militant groups.

Now, Pakistan's Islamic schools are at the center of an intense political clash — one that jeopardizes years of hard-won progress toward bringing the seminaries under the government's regulatory umbrella.

The conflict goes back to 2019, when the government enacted a sweeping overhaul requiring madrasas to register with the Ministry of Education. The effort, meant to increase accountability for institutions that have historically operated with minimal state

oversight, was strongly backed by Pakistan's military but faced vehement resistance from Islamist political parties.

In October 2024, the largest of those parties, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, secured a deal with the government to end the registration requirement. Under the agreement, madrasas would be registered as they had been before 2019, under a colonial-era law governing charitable, scientific and educational groups. That law provides little oversight of curriculums, activities or funding.

In exchange, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam agreed to support unrelated constitutional amendments on judicial appointments that had set off a firestorm of controversy.

Maulana Abdul Wasay, senator and leader of the Islamist party Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, addressing students at a graduation ceremony in Chaman, Pakistan, on Wednesday. Akhter Gulfam/EPA, via Shutterstock

As the end of the year approached, however, the government had still not implemented the change. It cited concerns that reverting to the older system could undermine counterterrorism efforts, weaken oversight and breach international commitments to combat money laundering and terrorism financing.

The delay triggered threats of anti-government protests in Islamabad, the capital, adding to the government's challenges amid frequent marches by supporters of Imran Khan, the ousted prime minister.

"We are firm on the agreed madrasa registration terms and will ensure they are upheld," Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the chief of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, warned in Parliament last month. "If the government deviates, the decision won't be made in Parliament, but on the streets."

Late last week, the government finally approved the new registration provision, allowing madrasas to choose between modern oversight and the colonial-era framework. The move, in effect, discards the 2019 efforts to reform religious schools in favor of short-term political stability.

When Pakistan was created 77 years ago, madrasas numbered in the dozens. They gained prominence and grew significantly in the 1980s, when U.S. and Arab funding transformed them into recruitment hubs for Islamic volunteers to fight Soviet forces in neighboring Afghanistan. Today, there are about 30,000 madrasas in Pakistan.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the chief of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, center, during a news conference in Dera Ismail Khan District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, last month. Saood Rehman/EPA, via Shutterstock

Many future Taliban leaders were educated in these institutions, where some teachers endorsed the anti-U.S. ideology of Al Qaeda.

Pakistan came under increased pressure to regulate the religious schools after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, said Abdur Rehman Shah, a madrasa affairs expert affiliated with Tongji University in Shanghai.

"The post-9/11 war on terror and events like the 2005 London bombings raised global concerns about the lack of effective madrasa monitoring," Mr. Shah said.

After militants attacked a military-run school in northwestern Pakistan in 2014, killing more than 145 people — mostly children — observation of madrasas became central to counterterrorism efforts. Security agencies used GPS to map the schools and carried out raids and interrogations targeting seminaries suspected of militant links, Mr. Shah said.

In 2019, the government established the new regulatory framework to curb Islamist parties' influence over the seminary boards that govern madrasas. More than 17,500 madrasas enrolling 2.2 million students were registered with the Ministry of Education, according to official data.

Registration streamlined visa processing for international students, as madrasas attracted increasing interest not only from the Pakistani diaspora but also from students in African and Southeast Asian countries.

However, many seminaries, particularly those aligned with Islamist parties, including the country's largest and most prominent ones, resisted integration into the formal system, citing fear of government interference in religious education.

After the government agreed last October to end the requirement for registration with the Ministry of Education, officials hesitated to move forward in part because of intensified scrutiny from the Financial Action Task Force, a global watchdog based in Paris.

At the graduation ceremony in Chaman on Wednesday. Akhter Gulfam/EPA, via Shutterstock

The task force had placed Pakistan on its "gray list" from deficiencies in combating money laundering and terrorism financing — a 2018 to 2022 for designation that often leads to reduced foreign investment and heightened financial oversight.

"F.A.T.F.'s main demand was a crackdown on terrorism financing, particularly targeting U.N.-designated individuals and entities, including their madrasas," said Sanaa Ahmed, an assistant professor of law at the University of Calgary who researches illicit financial flows and terrorism financing.

To comply with the task force's requirements, Pakistan in 2019 seized control of several madrasas linked to banned militant groups such as Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

But after more than two decades of increased examination of madrasas, education experts argue that the efforts overlook a deeper crisis: the country's struggling public education system, which fails to meet the needs of millions of children, particularly from low-income families.

Pakistan has the second-highest number of out-of-school children globally, with 22.8 million ages 5 to 16 not attending school — 44 percent of this age group, according to UNICEF.

Madrasas, supported by private donations, partly fill the gaps in the public system. For many poor families, they are the only viable option.

A boy studying the Quran in Balakot in 2019. Saiyna Bashir for The New York Times

One recent day, in a modest building in a low-income neighborhood in southern Pakistan, the air was filled with young voices reciting verses from the Quran.

Inside, hundreds of young men — some barely in their teens — sat cross-legged on woven mats. Their heads, covered with cotton-knit caps, were bowed over Islamic books, fingers tracing the Arabic script. Some were memorizing the holy verses.

Madrasas emphasize Islamic theology, often with sectarian leanings, and Arabic, a language not widely spoken in Pakistan. While not all of the schools are linked to militancy, many promote a narrow interpretation of Islam, emphasizing doctrinal purity and the defense of Islam against other faiths.

Critical thinking and open dialogue are not primary focuses. Madrasas' resistance to incorporating subjects like computer science or mathematics leaves graduates ill-equipped for the contemporary job market.

For many families, it is not poverty, but religious conviction, that drives them to enroll children in madrasas.

"I could send my children to private schools to study computers and science, but I'm sending them to a madrasa because I want them to study Islamic education," said Abdul Wahab, a real estate dealer in Karachi, in southern Pakistan.

A religious school student getting ready to mark the birth anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad in Karachi in 2021. Akhtar Soomro/Reuters

Like many devout people in Pakistan, Mr. Wahab believes that a child who memorizes the Quran will bring blessings to the family, including the promise of taking 10 others to paradise in the afterlife.

Despite concerns over radicalization, madrasa administrators say they are unfairly blamed for militancy. "There are many people who go to liberal schools and are radicalized," said Qari Shahid Gul, a teacher at a madrasa in Karachi.

He cited Saad Aziz, a graduate of a prestigious business school who was sentenced to death after confessing to involvement in several terrorist activities, including the killing of 45 members of the Ismaili sect of Shiite Islam.

"Terrorism must be curbed, but scapegoating madrasas is not the solution," Mr. Gul said.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 4 of the New York edition with the headline: In Pakistan, the Long Fight to Keep a Closer Eye on Madrassas Is Faltering.