

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	507
Land:	Pakistan
Kilde:	Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland), Legal Aid Board (RDC)
Titel:	Information on Sunni-Shia conflict including: occurrence in Punjab; occurrence nationwide; & available state protection
Udgivet:	29. januar 2020
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	26. maj 2020



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Pakistan - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Wednesday 29 January 2020

Information on Sunni-Shia conflict including: occurrence in Punjab; occurrence nationwide; & available state protection

In February 2019 the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia* issued a report which includes noting that:

“Pakistani Shi’a live throughout the country in urban centres, including Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Peshawar, Multan, Jhang and Sargodha” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia (20 February 2019) *DFAT Country Information Report Pakistan*, p.35).

This document also states that:

“...state protection in Pakistan is limited due to resource shortages, corruption, socioeconomic factors at the individual level, and political will. Despite measures introduced to curb violence across the country under the NAP strengthened powers for military and paramilitary security forces and the establishment of military courts successful prosecution for politically motivated or sectarian violence is rare. This is due in part to ineffective police investigations, forensics, prosecution and judicial legal understanding, and in part to threats levied against judges, lawyers and witnesses and their families” (ibid, p.62).

It is also pointed out in this report that:

“Large urban centres such as Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore have ethnically and religiously diverse populations, and offer some anonymity for people fleeing violence by nonstate actors...DFAT assesses that groups facing official discrimination...will face discrimination in all parts of the country” (ibid, p.66).

A publication in July 2019 by *Deutsche Welle* states that:

“Scores of Shiite Muslims have reportedly gone missing in Pakistan in the past few years. Activists claim that they have been picked up by the country's intelligence agencies after they returned from Syria and Iraq. Authorities say that many of the “missing persons” had gone to conflict-ridden countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and never returned to Pakistan. Those who did come back were allegedly taken into custody by security agencies, although their families say they are unaware about their whereabouts. Since the start of the Syria conflict in 2010, many people from across the world have traveled to the Middle East to fight for either the “Islamic State” (IS) terror outfit or Iran-allied President Bashar Assad. But Shiite organizations and activists in Pakistan say that the Syria connection is just an excuse for Pakistani authorities to target Shiites, who make up around 10% of the Muslim-majority country's 180 million population” (Deutsche Welle (9 July 2019) *Why are Pakistani Shiites ‘disappearing’?*, p.1).

In October 2019 the *European Asylum Support Office* states in a report that:

“Militant groups have continuously targeted religious minorities in Pakistan throughout the years. Shias, Hindus, Sunni groups, Christians and Ahmadiyya communities were the victims of sectarian violence...Religious minorities in Pakistan are also the victims of legal, institutional and social discrimination...Several sources stated that sectarian violence has been declining in the last two years...The efforts of the Pakistani state to combat militancy in Pakistan have been to some extent successful. However, despite the improved security situation, the government of Pakistan has done little to combat the challenge of growing extremism and religious intolerance...” (European Asylum Support Office (October 2019) *Pakistan Security Situation*, p.19).

This document also states that:

“According to PIPS, 12 incidents of sectarian-related violence occurred in 2018. Compared to 2017, PIPS counted 20 incidents of sectarian-related violence...In 2018, 51 were killed and 45 were injured in those 12 incidents...Most of the sectarian attacks and clashes (11) in 2018 were incidents of targeted killing or firing while one such attack employed suicide bombing...Six of these attacks occurred in Balochistan and the other six in the province of KP or former FATA...The sectarian-related attack with most fatalities in 2018 occurred in Orakzai tribal district on 23 November 2018 (35 killed and more than 50 injured) claimed by ISKP...Most people that were killed were Shia...In contrast, CRSS documented 198 sectarian-related casualties in 2018 with 91 killed and 107 wounded...According to CRSS, main perpetrators in 2018 were Sunni militant groups such as LeJ, IS, SSP and the TTP. Most of the violence was directed against Shias...From 1 January 2019 until 31 July 2019, PIPS documented 12 incidents of sectarian violence. In these incidents, 36 people were killed and 65 injured. Factions of LeJ, SeM and ISKP affiliates were the perpetrators...” (ibid, p.41).

Another source used in this report points out that:

“In terms of protection from sectarian violence, minority communities are inherently more vulnerable and require a higher degree of protection afforded to them by the state...” (ibid, p.49).

This document also points out that:

“CRSS counted 288 casualties (148 fatalities and 140 injured) in Punjab in 2018, a considerable decrease compared to 2017 (738 casualties)...According to different sources, most casualties were militants and civilians, followed by security forces and others...SATP recorded in 2018 in total 36 fatalities (12 civilians, 6 security force personnel, 14 militants and 4 not specified)...CRSS counted in total 136 casualties (75 fatalities, 61 injured) in the first and second quarter analysis report of 2019. In the second quarter of 2019, fatalities decreased in the province with 31 % (from 44 to 31 fatalities) compared to the first quarter of 2019. The number of injured increased during the second quarter of 2019...From 1 January until 31 July 2019, SATP counted 24 fatalities. Among those killed, SATP observed 10 civilians, 7 security forces personnel, and 7 militants...” (ibid, p.62).

In December 2019 *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* states that:

“The Shi’a community faces sectarian violence, systematic oppression, and persecution from extreme Sunni groups because of certain historical differences in

Islamic tradition" (Christian Solidarity Worldwide (10 December 2019) *Religious freedom under attack*, p.23).

This document also states that:

"Historically, the Shi'a community has rarely been considered a minority in Pakistan (at least in treatment, if not in number): Shi'as being targeted in the same way as other religious minorities is a relatively recent phenomenon. Though the government does not officially support discrimination against Shi'as, it is failing to effectively counter the influence of extremists and bring an end to violence against the community" (ibid, p.24).

The *Economist Intelligence Unit* in December 2019 states that:

"Tensions between Shia and Sunni groups often result in attacks on members of rival sects and risk stoking sectarian tensions" (Economist Intelligence Unit (24 December 2019) *Pakistan risk: Security risk*).

The *Associated Press* in January 2020 states that:

"Sectarian violence, mostly targeting Pakistan's minority Shiite Muslims, has left hundreds dead in recent years in Baluchistan" (Associated Press (7 January 2020) *Bomb hits security forces in SW Pakistan; 2 dead, 12 wounded*).

A publication in January 2020 by the *Pak Institute for Peace Studies* points out that:

"In 2019, Pakistan witnessed a further decline in the number of terrorist incidents and consequent casualties" (Pak Institute for Peace Studies (5 January 2020) *Pakistan Security Report 2019*, p.11).

This document also states that:

"In all, five (5) terrorist attacks took place in Punjab including two (2) in Lahore, one in Rawalpindi and two (2) in south Punjab's Rahim Yar Khan and Rajanpur districts. As many as 21 people lost their lives and 41 others were injured in these attacks" (ibid, p.22).

This document also states that:

"Posting an increase of about 17 percent from previous year, 14 sectarian-related terrorist attacks happened in 2019. The number of people killed in such incidents however decreased by over 25 percent, from 51 in 2018 to 38 in 2019. Rival Sunni and Shia violent sectarian groups as well as ISIS-affiliates were involved in perpetrating these attacks. A combined total of 11 sectarian-related attacks, or over 78 percent of the total 14 such attacks, happened in Karachi (6 attacks) and Quetta (5 attacks) alone. A major sectarian-related suicide attack targeted Hazara community members in Quetta causing significant casualties (21 deaths; 48 injured). Two sectarian-related attacks were reported from Ziarat in Balochistan that claimed five (5) lives, and one such attack happened in DI Khan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Out of the 14 reported sectarian attacks, as many as 10 targeted Shia religious community and scholars, another three (3) Sunni community members and leaders while one attack targeted Bohra community in Ziarat" (ibid, p.25).

This document also notes that:

“As many as 229 terrorist attacks took place across Pakistan in 2019 – including four suicide attacks – which is a decrease of about 13 percent from the year before. Launched by different militant, nationalist/insurgent and violent sectarian groups, these attacks claimed in all 357 lives – a decline of 40 percent from those killed in such attacks in 2018 – and injured another 729 people” (ibid, p.19).

It is also pointed out in this report that:

“The internal security dimension not only includes threats from hardcore radical and sectarian terrorist groups but also from groups that promote religious intolerance. The latter pose a different sort of critical challenge, because such groups can mobilise their support bases to cause more damage to the economy, social cohesion of society and global image of the country. An enraged mob in Ghotki town attacked properties worth millions of rupees and looted several shops belonging to the Hindu community after the owner of a school was accused of committing blasphemy in September last year...The episode was another indication of how blasphemy accusations could trigger a severe and extensive wave of violence, mainly against minority communities, before some legal action was taken or evidence produced” (ibid, p.12).

In January 2020 the *Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies* states that:

“Punjab witnessed exactly the same number of attacks in 2019 as were recorded in 2018. Five militant attacks were reported in the province in which 13 people were killed and 42 others were injured” (Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (9 January 2020) *2019 Annual Security Assessment Report*, p.48).

This document also states that:

“Two suicide attacks in the province once again suggest that the province continued to remain the focus of the militants but they could not have desired penetration primarily due effectiveness of counter-terrorism department (CTD) of police as it was seen quite effective in the province as numerous attempts of carrying out attacks were thwarted by CTD across the width and breadth of the province...” (ibid,p.48).

This document also points out that:

“Pakistan has been fighting against different kinds of militant groups for the last 18 years and perhaps one of the very few countries which has gained control over militancy to a large extent” (ibid, p.54).

The *Centre for Research & Security Studies* in January 2020 states that:

“As many as 203 persons were the victims of sectarian violence in the country (44 fatalities and 120 injuries). The people belonging to the Shia community were targeted the most (28 dead and 57 injured) followed by Sunnis (13 dead and 55 wounded), Ahmadi (2 dead), Sufi pilgrims (1 dead and 7 wounded), and a Christian (1 injury)” (Centre for Research & Security Studies (27 January 2020) *CRSS Annual Security Report 2019*, p.30).

This document also states that:

“Not a single region in the country remained safe from sectarian violence but Balochistan and Sindh had the highest number of sectarian conflict fatalities...” (ibid, p.31).

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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