

The report covers events and activities regarding both peace and anti-peace and political process in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in the newly merged districts. The report enhances connectivity among activists by providing them information in a holistic manner

Peace and Democracy in the Newly Merged Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Quarterly Report

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Quarterly Report on Peace and Democracy in The Newly Merged Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Chapter I

Introduction

During this quarter (May – July 2022) the Taliban militants started reappearing as an organized group claiming space and authority in many of the areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The militants targeted many common and influential people in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including young social and political activists, political workers, polio team members and police personnel. On the other hand, people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa started rising against the militant organizations and activities through protests, peace marches and sit-ins. Moreover, the recently made political parties' alliance hosted and managed by Awami National Party (ANP) successfully built a narrative against the Taliban and their activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This report covers the issues and challenges in the newly merged districts including topics of peace, anti-peace, governance, service delivery, social services and many more. The issue of 'peace' has been prioritized in this quarterly report over all other issues. Threat of the resurgence of Taliban was discussed in the previous quarterly report while this quarter has seen resurgence of Taliban in different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including Swat, Dir and the newly merged districts. The people of these districts out rightly rejected the resurgence of Taliban through demonstrations, protests and sit-ins. This nonviolent political response remained successful against this resurgence so far. Furthermore, the issue of target killing has remained at the top during this quarter throughout the borderland including Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Swat and Dir. Protests and sit-ins still continue demanding assurances for security from state's authorities.

The report uses national and international media, social media forums including pages of activists and influential as data sources. The news and analysis are divided into four chapters including introduction and conclusion chapter.

Chapter II

Peace and Anti-Peace

Peace

The people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in general and of borderland in particular are more concerned about establishment of 'Peace'. Peace is priority over other necessities of life which are also negligible in the region. The issues of target killing, kidnapping, missing persons, ransom, robbery and tribal enmities are at the highest throughout the borderland; from Swat to South Waziristan. Resurgence of militants' groups, TTP is on top, is an alarming situation for the people of Pakhtunkhwa, specifically, for the people of newly merged districts, Dir and Swat. The resurgence of terrorists' groups has been severely opposed by the people through continuous demonstrations, sit-in and protests which remained successful and compelled the miscreants to leave areas. This 'uprising' of the people of borderland also has compelled the state to take action against terrorism, however, still in vain.

For establishment of peace the people have held many jargas to curb the elements that are sabotaging peace. Talks were held with the administration, civil and military, to cope with the terrorism. These [jargas included representation](#) from all political parties, social activists, elders and religious figures.

The issue of missing persons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and New Districts is still at the top and families are [protesting for the release of their missing](#) demanding that the missing persons must be presented in court. The valid demand of the protesters is, "if anyone among the missing persons was involved in any wrongdoing, he should be produced before the court of law". Adding to the issue of missing persons, another issue of extreme concern is the issue of enforced disappearances. The Pakhtun Qaumi Amn Jarga, a syndicate of [Pakhtun political, nationalist and religious parties](#), demanded of the government to declare enforced disappearances a crime and empower civilian institutions in tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

An interesting feature was observed in these peace demonstrations and protests where all members of society, without their affiliation, political, religious or family background enthusiastically participate. This pluralism has been validated by an independent survey in Khyber and Orakzai districts. In [the survey](#), 80 per cent of the trained people revealed that they had been willingly cooperating with each other despite existing differences, which had been termed the best example of social cohesion. Similarly, another [joint sit-in of Dawar and Wazir tribes](#) of North Waziristan was held in Mirali and Miranshah which was also joined by the transporters with a wheel-jam strike against the increasing target killings in the region.

Such huge demonstrations and protests were rarely noticed by the government when police chief denied presence of any terrorist group. The Awami National Party provincial president said the

provincial [police chief's denial of the presence of militants](#) in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was surprising despite kidnapping of army and police personnel by terrorists.

Anti-Peace

Establishment of peace has become the only priority of the people of New Districts¹ where they hold continuous demonstrations and protests against resurgence of militancy. The people of the New Districts, Swat and Dir are facing target killing, kidnapping, IEDs and many more. The terrorists in new districts are not only attacking the civilians but the government officials too. A number of attacks have been observed in the new districts; for example, attacks on police check post in [Bajaur](#), targeting [police officials](#) in [Tank and Dera Ismail Khan](#), killing of police in [tehsil Bara](#) of district Khyber and attacks on Pakistan army personnel in [North Waziristan](#). These kinds of the attacks and targeting of the security personnel and police force occur in different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the new districts.

The life of the civilians has been sabotaged by the unidentified killers while none of the attackers has so far been arrested. There are grenade attacks, IEDs and firing with small arms and light weapons (SALW) which are not readily available with the common masses after military operations. For example, a [grenade attack on Hujra in Lakki](#). In [Kurram unidentified gunmen opened fire](#) on a vehicle and killed three persons and in [Mohmand there was an IED](#) explosion. Unidentified assailants shot dead a tribal [elder in Salarzai tehsil of Bajaur](#). Another tribal elder and a young man killed in [Laddah of South Waziristan](#). The attacks by 'unidentified persons' has become very critical. This can be seen in the increased number of incidents in new districts. For example, only in two days [five local people have been killed](#) in different areas of North Waziristan.

The lives of social, political activists and rights and health workers are also in danger in the new districts. A number of the social and political activists have been killed and many are receiving threats and their lives have been limited to their homes. Similarly, the health workers are also targeted in new districts; for example, polio vaccinators. For the security of their lives, hundreds of health workers staged protest demonstration in front of Miranshah press club, [North Waziristan against the fatal attacks on polio vaccinators](#) and the accompanying policemen during the recent anti-polio drive. In addition to the above, [many religious-cum-political leaders](#) of the new districts have been target killed by the unknown persons. A [tehsil chairman of Bajaur](#) who is associated with a religious political party, narrowly escaped an IED in Tehsil Salarzai. The residents of North Waziristan [held a protest against the targeted killings](#) and lawlessness in the area.

The IEDs and other explosive materials are spread throughout the new districts. The exploded IEDs are taken by the locals, especially children, as junk or scrap to the market for earning money. Two people were killed and four others wounded when a [mortar shell exploded at a](#)

¹ New Districts should be taken as Newly Merged Districts (NMDs)

[scrap shop](#) in Wana bazaar of South Waziristan. In another incident, four [children were wounded by hitting](#) IED near Wana tehsil of South Waziristan.

These incidents are not only taking lives of the civilians and police; it is also stopping other daily activities. After every incident, there are always search operations, arrests, suspension of mobile phone and internet services. The residents of new districts are not ready to accept the terrorist groups back in their area. The state is in negotiations with the banned terrorist groups but the residents are not happy with this move of the state and filed a case against the state's move of negotiations with the terrorists. The Peshawar High [Court rejected the petition](#) that was seeking court orders to stop the federal government from making a deal with the banned terrorist outfit Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan without the consultation of parents of those killed in the 2014 Peshawar Army Public School attack. There are progressive and secular political parties and persons who are in opposition of any negotiations, being held without parliamentary approval, with the TTP and other terrorist groups. The political parties are of the view that these negotiations will again provide space for these miscreants and again the region will be in their hands. Therefore, the [TTP issued a warning letter](#) of dire consequences against such political parties and persons.

Chapter III

Political and Social Activism

Political

Political activism has been observed in the new districts during the current quarterly report. The activism is in the form of protests, demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins or processions for election campaigns and jargas for settling the issues, disputes and conflicts. The people of the new districts are prioritizing formal political means to achieve their goals or interests.

The merger of NMDs of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was intended to [extend the whole political, legal and constitutional](#) frame to the districts. But unfortunately this took so longer which has started causing disappointment among the common people. But now the Federal Ombudsman Secretariat (FOS) (Wafaqi Mohtasib) is going to [open offices in the mentioned districts](#). With extension of the said office resolution of public complaints against federal agencies will be ensured.

The local government in new districts has been introduced for the first time in Pakistan history. To [train the elected members of local government](#) of the new districts the United States Agency for International Development and the United Nations Development Program have partnered with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Governance School (LGS) to train the newly-elected local body councilors on local government system.

On the other hand, the government is formulating policies to delimit the powers of the local elected bodies. Political and civil society activists expressed their concern on the [preliminary delimitation report](#) which was issued on Tuesday by Election Commission of Pakistan. They recorded their disagreement of the delimitation. The political and social activists expressed that the [proposed reduction in NA seats](#) was not acceptable to the people of the new districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The next day provincial government also expressed concerns on the delimitation issues. In this regard election commission of Pakistan has also faced criticism from [students who staged protest](#) in front of Peshawar Press Club. The protesting students were from the merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Three elected chairmen of three tehsils of Khyber have pledged to continue their protest against any move of the [provincial government to curtail their powers](#) besides moving court against the proposed changes to local government system. The elected bodies of the southern Pakhtunkhwa also [rejected the amendments and threatened](#) for a protest in front of former prime minister's house, Islamabad. The local elected bodies are also not receiving funds and they [protested against the provincial government](#).

Similarly, in opposition to the merger of former FATA, some of the *Malakaan* (privileged elders who took allowances in the pre-merger districts administration in ex-FATA) are [demanding reversal of the merger of the new districts](#) with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. They have been protesting against the merger for the last around two years. Recently these *Malakaan* observed the 31st May

as ‘black day’ in Jamrud of district Khyber. The event was organized by FATA Qaumi Jirga (FQJ) – which is an anti-merger forum – in Bab-i-Khyber. During the two years of activism these *Malakaan* could not mobilize even a small number of people.

The problems of IDPs caused during the military operations against militants are still unattended by the authorities. Many of the IDPs/TDPs are still passing displaced lives in other cities of Pakistan for years. The IDPs of Tirah valley have heard the good news of their return to their homes. The security forces had announced that [IDPs of Tirah valley return](#) to their area. According to the announcement the returning process of 5,000 displaced families starts from 13th of June 2022 which is going to be completed in phases. The [survey conducted by the government](#) for damages assessment is also rejected by the youth organization, Zwan Kukikhel Ittehad (ZKI), of Tirah on the basis that the survey registered non-deserving people of the area. The government is also [showing interest in resolving the issues of displaced persons](#) of Tirah valley but actions have not been seen in the valley.

On the other hand, the Temporarily Displaced Persons (TDPs) from North Waziristan tribal district continued their protest outside the Peshawar Press Club for the fourth consecutive day on Thursday, [demanding practical steps for resolution](#) of their problems. They lamented for living in camps since 2014 but government is not serious to resolve the grievances. In a similar vein, the people of Torkham, Khyber district, took out protest demonstration [against National Logistic Cell \(NLC\) for suspension of water supply](#) to the locals.

Another revelation is civil and military officials along with local elders (*Malakaan*) participated in a Jarga which was organized by the government. The participants of the [Jarga resolved to promote peace in JaniKhel area of Bannu](#). It is important to mention here that militants are present and active in JaniKhel for quite a long time where they attack people and disturb peace.

Social media is an easy and less expensive medium for spreading any message. Keeping in view the importance of social media, the [ANP to spread the party’s narrative](#) among the people, announced to form a strong network of social media activists in the party. The party is also active to [educate the locals](#) about human rights, Right to Information Act and Local Government Act to apprise the residents of their rights under these laws.

Governance and Service Delivery

Governance and service delivery is as the poor as the security sector in new districts. In this report we have tried to highlight the issues of the new districts and cover every announcement and commitment the government has made; either for the whole province of Pakhtunkhwa or specifically for the new districts. The promises and plan were made with the [new districts during merger not enforced](#) yet. The present provincial government is blaming federal government for not releasing the funds for new districts and, therefore, no developmental projects in these districts. Pakhtunkhwa province as whole and the new districts in particular are in need of assistance from federal government as well as of foreign aid agencies. In this regard, the United

States, in collaboration with the federal government, is [helping Khyber Pakhtunkhwa improve health and educational facilities](#), strengthen the rule of law, develop agriculture sector and ensure women's empowerment and economic development.

There are grievances of the employees of the government from different sectors who are not receiving their salaries for months or some receive delayed salaries. For example, the municipal administration of DI Khan [serving and retired employees protesting](#) and threatening for a sit-in against non-payment of salaries and pensions.

The free health-card facility, sehat sahulat card, has also been [abandoned for new districts](#) and the hospitals have refused to provide free service to the patients of new districts. The funding for sehat sahulat card is stopped by the federal government and hence the provincial government. Provincial minister for local government, elections and rural development has [condemned the federal government's](#) decision to stop funding the Sehat Sahulat Card scheme in the new districts.

Against the irregularities and corruption in government departments the youth of Bajaur staged a sit-in in front of civil colony, the government offices facility, for which the [local administration issued](#) order of the chairman arrest. Later, after negotiations, the arrest order was withdrawn. Social and political activists in Bajaur expressed their [concern over growing crime incidents and unchecked drug business](#) in the district and announced a joint fight against social evils. They alleged that some influential of the districts are backed by the anti-social activities.

The government of Pakhtunkhwa is trying to formulate laws and policies for curbing crimes and other social evils of drugs and protection of children abuse. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly passed child protection bill "[Child Protection and Welfare \(Amendment\) Bill, 2022](#)" on Tuesday. The bill expanded the scope of the law passed by the provincial assembly in 2012 and has declared [punishments for crimes against children](#), including sexual abuse, pornography, organ trade and trafficking, more stringent.

There are multiple governance issues in new districts; from security, health, law and order to education. The reconstruction of the destroyed infrastructure is yet to be rehabilitated. Many educational facilities that were [blown up by the terrorists in 2009 is](#) still unattended by the government in its reconstruction phase.

Among the basic facilities electricity and gas are fundamentals which are produced by the province itself but the province is lacking both of these facilities. The Awami National Party has asked the [government to provide gas facility to Tajazai](#), the district headquarters of Lakki Marwat, and the adjoining localities. "The SNGPL has laid the main pipeline through the town to provide gas facility to a cement factory and the DI Khan district," he said, adding huge gas reservoirs had been discovered in the Betanni tribal subdivision, and a large quantity of gas would be injected into the transmission system through pipelines.

Agriculture is one of the sources of income of the people at borderland. The provincial minister for social welfare and women empowerment has said that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is determined to [take steps for the development of agriculture](#) sector in merged districts by introducing modern equipment and scientific farming to help the growers. Officials of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said the Merged Areas Governance Project (MAGP) was making significant [improvement in the socioeconomic conditions](#) in the new districts. The officials said efforts were stepped up to further expedite the project activities.

The forceful and illegal occupation of land in new districts is an unattended issue. Large tracts of land have been forcefully and illegally occupied by the government for its infrastructure and other security forces check points across the new districts. The Fata Qaumi Jirga (FQJ) has shown reservations and displeasure over what it calls the '[forceful and illegal occupation](#)' of private properties by the government in different parts of Orakzai and Khyber tribal districts.

A bill has been passed by the provincial assembly to extend its authorities to the forests of new districts. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Forest (Amendment) Bill, 2022, was passed by the [provincial assembly to extend the existing](#) Forest Ordinance, 2002, with amendments to new districts for the regulation and management of the local forests. Under the amended act, Schedule III has been included in the existing forest ordinance that shall apply to tribal districts for a period of 10 years. Prior to this bill, there was a bill passed by the provincial assembly to extend its authority to the mines of new districts.

Borderland

The economy of new districts is dependent on the border known as Durand Line. The border management is getting restricted for passerby day after another after introduction of visa regime. The locals at both sides of the border Durand Line were earning their daily bread from crossing luggage which has now been controlled by the border police after introduction of visa regime. There used to be a token system for labors at Torkham border crossing point which is now not applicable. According to the local labors' representatives, the token system was favorable for them while helping passerby with their luggage. The labor union of Torkham gathered at Landi Kotal press club and said that the [new visa regime harmed their jobs](#) of around 8,000 daily wagers and labors. The labor representatives said that since daily wagers were unable to acquire the visa for their daily border-crossing that's why they could not work frequently.

There was a series of demonstrations and jargas in Bajaur under the umbrella of Awami National Party (ANP), Bajaur chapter. These demonstrations and jargas attended by all political parties, social activists and traders. A [Jarga was organized in Lagharai](#) area of Mamond tehsil for discussing the issue of border crossing points on Durand Line in Bajaur. The jarga was attended by local political leadership of different parties and of other forums such as All Bajaur Political Parties Alliance, traders' associations etc. All of the participants of the jarga anonymously passed a resolution to work for reopening of the three crossing points. They also demanded the

reopening for trade and people's mobility across the border. The [four routes including Ghakhi Pass, Nawa Pass, Kaga Pass and Letai Pass](#), have been remained trade routes for long time.

The protests, demonstrations and criticism over border management and visa regime brought the attentions of the governments of both Pakistan and Afghanistan to sort out some solution. The border security and customs official of Pakistan and Afghanistan [held a meeting at Torkham crossing point](#) and discussed prospects for bilateral trade between the two countries. In the meeting, the officials recommended separate gates for import and export at Torkham, to their respective governments. According to the officials, managing separate gates will enhance bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Moreover, they have agreed to further improve the system of goods clearance and to make the whole process easier for the trade.

The governments have now brought a slight relaxation in visa process. Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to take several measures for promoting trade and commercial ties that include quick clearance of commodities and launch of a luxury bus service by the end of August. A joint statement issued at the end of [three-day talks between senior officials](#) of the two countries in Kabul said that both sides would continue all-out efforts to remove problems through mutual cooperation and coordination. Reacting to the federal government's recent agreement with Kabul about the grant of six months [reciprocal visas to transporters](#) to facilitate cross-border movement of goods as 'too little and too late'. The locals said that currently the facility would not provide substantial financial benefits to traders. A similar move observed at Ghulam Khan pass, North Waziristan, where senior officials from Pakistan and Afghanistan met in Ghulam Khan area of North Waziristan district to discuss steps to facilitate smooth [cross-border movement](#) and trade activity between the two countries.

Social

The people of new districts lack basic facilities while on the other side they are further deprived with the appointment of non-local people on different government posts. In new districts, many protests were staged requesting government to stop such appointments. The Fata Qaumi Jirga (FQJ) has asked the government to [stop appointment of non-local people](#) on the vacant posts in tribal districts. In a news conference at Jamrud Press Club FQJ chairmen termed the appointment of residents of other districts on vacant positions in tribal districts as usurpation of the legitimate rights of the qualified and educated local youth. The government had promised to create job opportunities and appoint local people on vacant posts when tribal areas were being merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Both the federal and provincial governments have backtracked on their promises and deprived qualified local youth of their legitimate right of appointment on new posts.

Students along with the locals have appreciated arranging the [first-ever book fair](#) in district Orakzai. They called it positive results of the merger. Activities such as book fairs and other festivals indicate peace process and societal developments in the area.

A day-long conference on [women's right to inheritance in the new districts](#) highlighted the mentioned issue. The speakers related the denial from women's inheritance to social and administrative structures in the new districts. They said that it was not only the social structure but the absence of documentation of land record as the main reason of women's inheritance problems in the merged districts.

The report revealed that the [200 wildfires damaged 14,430 acres](#) area of forests and pastures in different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The whole time period of the damage was two weeks. According to daily situation report, 55 blazes were started by locals while 12 ascribed to dry weather conditions. Moreover, the cause of another 143 of these blazes is unknown. The report was compiled by the provincial forestry, environment and wildlife department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

After the fall of Kabul, [Afghan musician left Afghanistan](#) with the hope to take shelter in Pakistan but unfortunately, they were not welcomed. They faced problems in Pakistan with their documents too. On 28th May [four of the Afghan musicians were arrested](#) by Peshawar police, on the charges of not having valid documents which required for staying in Pakistan. Resultantly, local musicians and artists community in Peshawar along with organizations which are working on cultural issues recorded their protests against the arrest. The protest created a pressure and resultantly they got bail on 4th of June 2022 by a local court.

The transgender issue in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is yet to be addressed by the government as the society hasn't accepted transgender in the community yet. Their lives and livings are in danger in Pakhtunkhwa. In some districts, for example in Mardan, they have been asked to leave the area without any reason. Therefore, [the transgender community has expressed concern](#) about the violent incidents against it in different districts and demanded of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to ensure their protection. They are not accepted by the community as normal human being. [The transgender community members](#) declared they were against spread of obscenity in the society and blasted those of their colleagues who indulged in immoral activities.

In the new districts, which are already suffering from lacking many facilities, there is no room for entertainment for women as well. The religious political parties showed concern over the only tourists spot in Bajaur where women can also go with their male family members. Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl leaders expressed their concern over what they called ['unethical' activities in the name of entertainment](#) at Raghagan Dam and said these activities, including musical concerts, were against the local customs and traditions and should be stopped immediately.

Festivity, Poetic and Cultural Events

Culture activists, artists and musicians have called for steps to enlist rabab in UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list. A ceremony held in a local music academy to [mark the world day of classical music](#). First started in France in 1981, the day is celebrated worldwide on June 21 every year with an objective to keep alive the traditional music and to make it more inclusive

and praiseworthy. A young Rabab player, Abbas Hairat said that [Pashto folk music](#) should be preserved for future generations as it reflects aspirations of the Afghan people.

At a [literary session at Mohmand](#) district demanded of the authorities to extend financial assistance to the writers, who were affected by terrorism. The writers have demanded of the government to establish writers' club in Mohmand district and allocate funds for publishing the books of local poets.

The most venerable and internationally renowned [Thai Buddhist monk Arayawangso](#) said that Swat remained the land of Dhamma peace for mankind and it was high time to once again send the sound of peace from Swat valley to the entire world. He along with his disciples and Buddhist followers from Thailand was attending the inauguration of the 'bell of peace' on the birthday anniversary of King Rama X of the Kingdom of Thailand.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

As was revealed in the previous report, unfortunately, the merged districts are still far behind the other districts in terms of governmental attention and approach. Insufficient extension of institutionalization, lack of basic facilities, non-provision of funds for developmental projects and other services delivery remain secondary as the new districts are embedded in security challenges. The people of the new districts are facing severe issues of target killings, kidnapping, IEDs, target killings of police, missing persons, ransom and enforced disappearance. They are more concerned about resurgence of terrorism rather other basic facilities. In this quarter a series of protests, demonstrations and sit-ins have been observed against target killings and resurgence of terrorism. The people of borderland are trying to resolving these issues through political means; by jargas, demonstrations, protests and sit-ins which reveals an exemplary political education among the people of the region. Another most related topic of this report is the issue of borderland, Durand Line, which is of prime importance for the people of new districts. The imposed visa regime by the Pakistan has complicated the lives of the people living at borderland. However, a slight relaxation has been seen in visa regime after continuous criticism from the people, business community and traders who are associated with the Durand Line. In governance and service delivery, the new districts are staying at the same position as they were in 2018 as there is no improvement in the governance and service delivery since then. This is because the promises were made during merger of ex-FATA are not yet fulfilled. Although, cultural programs, literary gatherings and civic activism are now frequently seen in the new districts.

Appendix

List of Media forums

1. Dawn
2. The News
3. Mashriq
4. Express Tribune
5. Geo News and other TV channels
6. Social media pages [of activists, political workers, institutions and organizations]