25 September, 2025

Pakistan performs poorly in protection of juvenile offenders



Collected picture

Pakistan's juvenile justice system faces severe criticism for failing to protect minors, with cases of children as young as seven and even a nine-month-old facing terrorism or murder charges. Reports highlight torture, forced confessions, executions of juveniles, and misuse of blasphemy and anti-terror laws. Human rights groups accuse Pakistan of violating international child rights treaties and call the system inhumane, unjust, and deeply flawed.

The latest case of a 7-year-old boy from Balochistan, who was slapped with terrorism charges, reinforces the fact that Pakistan continues to be one of the world's most failing nations in safeguarding the rights of juvenile offenders. Pakistan has witnessed several similar cases in recent years, in which concerns were raised over the treatment of minors in Pakistan's legal system. Inadequate legal protections, misuse of Blasphemy and Anti-Terrorism Laws, lack of juvenile courts, treating minors as adults, and improper detention conditions have led the international community to consider Pakistan's juvenile justice system highly problematic.

The 7-year-old boy had just shared a post on the social media app TikTok, attracting anti-terrorism charges from the state of Pakistan. This sparked outrage among human rights defenders, even as the government tried to justify its actions. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) slammed the action, calling it a "gross violation of child rights and due process", and urged the government to protect the minor. "We demand the immediate withdrawal of charges, a thorough review of the FIR and accountability for the officials responsible for this alarming overreach," it said.

During this time, another minor Baloch student named Aman Tahir was said to have been forcefully disappeared by Pakistani security agencies. In May this year, Aimal was allegedly abducted by armed personnel after his home was raided. The frequent abductions of minors led to anger among people. "This is truly heartbreaking and what's even more devastating is the complete collapse of law enforcement and justice in Pakistan. When brutality goes unchecked, it's not just a tragedy, it's a national failure," said Pakistani national Syed Ashja Rohan. . In one video, Pakistani security forces were seen beating a minor and later stealing his father's bike.

Hania Riffat, a legal literacy and empowerment practitioner, said Pakistan failed to meet its international law obligations set under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). "A significant chunk of this criticism is premised on inhuman punishments awarded to juvenile offenders, which include death penalty, life imprisonment and corporal punishment," she said. "Pakistan has a long history of corporal punishment being legal for juveniles which has attracted sharp criticism from human rights organisations and institutions."

Shafqat Hussain was a juvenile when he was arrested for the crime of murder, which he allegedly confessed to under rigorous torture. His brother Manzoor said "His nails had been removed, and he was just saying to me that he was innocent and needed help. They burned cigarettes on him. I saw the marks." Shafqat was later executed without any medical tests to ascertain his age. "No one from the government has approached him – no one has gone to the jail to talk to him. And no one has come to us to find out about his age, either," Manzoor said.

A Christian boy Aftab Bahadur also met a similar fate. He was hanged despite appeals from the global rights organisations seeking mercy, as he was a minor when he committed the crime. Aftab would not have confessed if the police had not tortured him brutally, his brother said. Maya Foa, Executive Director at London-based human rights group Reprieve, called the hanging "a truly shameful day for Pakistan's justice system" as Aftab's lawyers were not permitted a few days needed to present evidence to prove his innocence. "This is a travesty of justice, and tragedy for all those who knew Aftab," Foa said.

Islamabad has been criticised time and again as a death sentence cannot be imposed on a defendant under the age of 18 as per the Pakistani laws and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, said Justice Project Pakistan (JPP), a human rights law firm. "Despite facing continued censure from the international diplomatic community, the

Government of Pakistan continues to sentence and execute juvenile offenders in violation of international legal standards," it said.
Taking the child abuse to another level, Pakistani police had charged a nine-month-old with attempted murder. The baby named Musa Khan was arrested for taking part in a riot in Lahore. Musa was made to provide his fingerprints on a legal document. While the case was withdrawn later, the incident showed the negligence and systemic flaws within Pakistan's criminal justice framework, particularly in areas of due process, child rights protection, and accountability of law enforcement.

LENS ASIA