The Redress Review

A Weekly Legal Dispatch with Commentary by Sana Pirzada

❖ Editor's Note – Monday 26th May, 2025

This issue reflects on the pursuit of justice in the face of violence and impunity. At its centre is the Supreme Court's landmark decision to uphold the death sentence of Zahir Jaffer for the brutal murder of Noor Mukadam. In a country where justice for victims of gender-based violence is rare, this ruling offers a glimmer of hope—and a message that no one is above the law.

The Redress Review, is a weekly publication where I, Sana Pirzada, will delve into the most pressing issues of the week. Each article will begin by highlighting a grievance and will conclude with thoughtful proposals for change and pathways to justice. *The Redress Review* is part of the larger initiative known as VLA — Virtual Legal Advisory.

❖ Headline News

'Justice for Noor: When Power Couldn't Protect a Killer'

(Source: The Sunday Times)

On July 20, 2021, Pakistan was shaken by a murder so gruesome and senseless that it pierced through decades of silence around violence against women. Noor Mukadam, a 27-year-old woman and daughter of a former ambassador, was held hostage, tortured, and beheaded in the upscale F-7 neighbourhood of Islamabad. The man arrested at the scene—still blood-stained, still clutching the murder weapon—was Zahir Jaffer, heir to one of Pakistan's wealthiest families.

Now, almost four years later, in a case that has gripped the nation, the Supreme Court of Pakistan has upheld Zahir Jaffer's death sentence—a ruling many are calling a watershed moment in the country's fight against gender-based violence.

The Journey Through the Courts

The case began with public horror and immediate legal action. Just a day after Noor's brutal killing, Zahir Jaffer was arrested at the scene of the crime. The initial investigation quickly expanded to include his parents and household staff, who were accused of abetment and evidence tampering. Therapy Works, a counselling centre linked to Jaffer, also came under scrutiny. By October 2021, Jaffer and 11 others were formally indicted. Then, on February 24, 2022, a sessions court in Islamabad found Jaffer guilty and sentenced him to death for murder, while also giving him 25 years for kidnapping and 10 years for rape. His parents and other co-accused were acquitted. The verdict was later upheld by the Islamabad High Court in March 2024. On May 20, 2025, a three-

member Supreme Court bench—led by Justice Hashim Kakar and including Justices Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Ali Baqar Najafi—presided over Jaffer's final appeal. The Court upheld the death sentence, citing overwhelming direct evidence, including CCTV footage and forensic data. In court, Justice Kakar observed poignantly: *"A daughter was mercilessly murdered."*

A Landmark Verdict

This judgment is more than a legal milestone—it is a defining moment in Pakistan's reckoning with gender-based violence. The verdict signals that status, money, and influence can no longer be relied upon as shields against the law.

1. **Shattering Elite Immunity**

Zahir Jaffer's wealth, foreign education, and family connections represent the very privilege that has historically obstructed justice in Pakistan. This case—investigated, prosecuted, and adjudicated across all judicial tiers—defies that pattern.

2. **The Role of Public Outcry**

From day one, the Noor Mukadam case ignited a national conversation. Social media campaigns, street protests, and relentless civil society advocacy ensured the case stayed in the spotlight, making quiet dismissal impossible. This verdict is, in part, a victory for that collective vigilance.

3. **Setting Legal Precedents**

If Zahir's sentence is ultimately carried out, the case will stand as a precedent for future gender-based violence prosecutions. It reaffirms that forensic evidence, video footage, and survivor narratives *can* lead to conviction—even when the accused is powerful.

The Shadow of Clemency

Despite this decisive ruling, a final door remains open. Under Article 45 of the Constitution of Pakistan, the President holds the power to grant clemency or commute sentences. A mercy petition filed by or on behalf of Zahir Jaffer could still reach the President's desk. If granted, it would override the court's verdict and spare Zahir from execution.

Although rare in such high-profile cases, the mere possibility of a presidential pardon has cast a shadow over the finality of the judgment. Many fear that wealth and influence could once again tilt the scales at the last moment.

A Nation's Reckoning with Gender Violence

The Noor Mukadam case is emblematic of a larger, more painful truth: Pakistan remains unsafe for its women. From domestic abuse and sexual assault to honour killings and acid attacks, the spectrum of violence is wide—and so is the justice gap.

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, thousands of women are killed or assaulted each year. Yet, conviction rates remain dismal, and survivors routinely face threats, societal pressure, and police indifference.

This verdict, then, must be more than symbolic. It must spark reform—of law enforcement practices, trial procedures, survivor support systems, and societal attitudes. Noor's case must become the rule, not the rare exception.

Justice for One Must Mean Hope for Many

As her father, Shaukat Mukadam, said outside the court: *"I have always said that justice would be served, and it has been served."* His words are a balm to many families who never see justice for the women they've lost.

But Noor's legacy will only be fully honoured if her case ushers in systemic change—if other perpetrators, no matter how powerful, meet the same fate.

The court has spoken. The nation has heard. The question now is: will we remember?

❖ Global News

(Source: i24 News)

(Source: NBC News)

‘Conscientious Objection: The Price One Has to Pay for Speaking Up’

In an era where silence often feels safer than truth, acts of moral protest—especially when directed at powerful institutions—carry immense personal and professional risks. Conscientious objection today transcends traditional boundaries, emerging in boardrooms, military ranks, and legislative chambers. The cost of such dissent remains high, as exemplified by recent events involving prominent figures like Ben Cohen and Major General (Retd.) Yair Golan.

On May 14, 2025, Ben Cohen, co-founder of Ben & Jerry’s and a long-standing progressive activist, was arrested during a U.S. Senate hearing. Cohen interrupted Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s testimony on the department's budget proposal, protesting against U.S. military aid to Israel amidst the ongoing conflict in Gaza. Shouting, "Congress pays for bombs to kill children in Gaza," Cohen highlighted the juxtaposition of increased military spending abroad and proposed cuts to domestic programs like Medicaid. Capitol Police removed Cohen from the hearing room and placed him in handcuffs. After his release, Cohen stated, "I told Congress they're killing poor kids in Gaza by buying bombs, and they're paying for it by kicking poor kids off Medicaid in the U.S."

Cohen's protest underscores the personal cost of speaking out against policies perceived as unjust. His actions reflect a broader commitment to social justice, even when such stances lead to legal repercussions and public scrutiny.

Similarly, in Israel, retired Major General Yair Golan has publicly condemned his country's military actions in Gaza, describing the widespread civilian casualties as indicative of a "deep moral failure." Golan's critique challenges prevailing narratives and has provoked significant backlash, including accusations of being unpatriotic. Despite this, he remains steadfast in his conviction that true patriotism involves holding one's nation accountable to ethical standards.

These instances illustrate the profound challenges faced by individuals who choose to voice dissent against dominant political and military agendas. Conscientious objection today is not only about refusing to participate in actions deemed immoral but also about actively confronting and challenging systemic injustices.

As we consider the actions of Ben Cohen and Yair Golan, we are reminded of the enduring importance of moral courage. Their willingness to confront powerful institutions serves as a testament to the enduring human capacity for empathy and justice. In a world where conformity often seems the path of least resistance, their examples challenge us to reflect on our own responsibilities in the face of injustice.

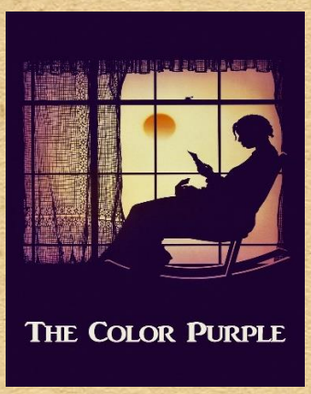
What binds these two stories—Ben Cohen’s dismissal and General Golan’s denunciation—is the immense personal and professional cost of truth-telling. Conscientious objection in the modern world is no longer only about refusing to bear arms; it is also about refusing to be complicit. It is about raising your voice in boardrooms, battlefields, and senates, knowing that the consequences will be severe, and often solitary.

There is something deeply paradoxical about this moment in history. While we increasingly champion freedom of speech and conscience, we continue to penalize those who exercise it with sincerity. Whether it's a businessman protesting unethical policy or a military leader condemning state violence, the objection itself becomes a target—one to be silenced, sidelined, or erased.

But why do they do it? Why risk reputation, comfort, and legacy?

Because for people like Ben Cohen and Yair Golan, conscience is not a luxury—it is a compass. To ignore it would be a far deeper betrayal than any accusation flung by critics. In their resistance, we see not just courage but clarity: that silence is complicity, and dissent, though costly, is sometimes the only form of moral survival. As we read their stories, we must ask ourselves—what are *we* willing to risk for truth?

❖ Literary Reflections



'In This Week's Literary Reflections: The Color Purple – A Universal Story of Survival and Selfhood'

In this week's Literary Reflections, we spotlight Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel The Color Purple—a powerful, haunting, and ultimately uplifting tale of a woman reclaiming her voice. While rooted in the specific historical and cultural experience of African-American women in the early 20th-century American South, the novel's core themes—abuse, resilience, sisterhood, and self-discovery—speak to women everywhere.

Told through deeply personal letters, the story follows Celie, a woman silenced by years of abuse from the men in her life. Through unexpected bonds with other women, particularly the bold and independent Shug Avery, Celie slowly begins to understand her worth, assert her independence, and build a life on her own terms. Her transformation from voiceless to empowered is quiet yet profound.

At its heart, The Color Purple is about the unbreakable spirit of women—how connection, love, and self-realisation can bloom even in the harshest conditions. Though set in a specific context of Black womanhood, its message resonates universally: that healing, freedom, and dignity are possible—even for those whom society has tried hardest to silence.

❖ Call for Articles: Voices for Change

If you are an aspiring writer with a passion for social, legal, or political issues, *The Redress Review* welcomes your voice. You are invited to contribute thoughtful articles that highlight injustices, propose solutions, or reflect on the pressing matters of our time.

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