

Private schools in Pakistan's troubled north-western Swat district have been ordered to close in a Taliban edict banning girls' education. Militants seeking to impose their austere interpretation of Sharia law have destroyed about 150 schools in the past year (2008). Five more were blown up despite a government pledge to safeguard education, it was reported on Monday, January 2009.

A seventh grade schoolgirl from Swat chronicles how the ban has affected her and her classmates. The diary first appeared on BBC Urdu online.



SATURDAY 3 JANUARY: I AM AFRAID

I had a terrible dream yesterday with military helicopters and the Taliban. I have had such dreams since the launch of the military operation in Swat. My mother made me breakfast and I went off to school. I was afraid going to school because the Taliban had issued an edict banning all girls from attending schools.

Only 11 students attended the class out of 27. The number decreased because of Taliban's edict. My three friends have shifted to Peshawar, Lahore and Rawalpindi with their families after this edict.

On my way from school to home I heard a man saying 'I will kill you'. I hastened my pace and after a while I looked back if the man was still coming behind me. But to my utter relief he was talking on his mobile and must have been threatening someone else over the phone.

MONDAY 5 JANUARY: DO NOT WEAR COLOURFUL DRESSES

I was getting ready for school and about to wear my uniform when I remembered that our principal had told us not to wear uniforms - and come to school wearing normal clothes instead. So I decided to wear my favourite pink dress. Other girls in school were also wearing colourful dresses and the school presented a homely look.

My friend came to me and said, 'for God's sake, answer me honestly, is our school going to be attacked by the Taliban?' During the morning assembly we were told not to wear colourful clothes as the Taliban would object to it.

I came back from school and had tuition sessions after lunch. In the evening I switched on the TV and heard that curfew had been lifted from Shakardra after 15 days. I was happy to hear that because our English teacher lived in the area and she might be coming to school now.

WEDNESDAY 14 JANUARY: I MAY NOT GO TO SCHOOL AGAIN

I was in a bad mood while going to school because winter vacations are starting from tomorrow. The principal announced the vacations but did not mention the date the school was to reopen. This was the first time this has happened.

In the past the reopening date was always announced clearly. The principal did not inform us about the reason behind not announcing the school reopening, but my guess was that the Taliban had announced a ban on girls' education from 15 January.

This time round, the girls were not too excited about vacations because they knew if the Taliban implemented their edict they would not be able to come to school again. Some girls were optimistic that the schools would reopen in February but others said that their parents had decided to shift from Swat and go to other cities for the sake of their education. Since today was the last day of our school, we decided to play in the playground a bit longer. I am of the view that the school will one day reopen but while leaving I looked at the building as if I would not come here again.

THURSDAY JANUARY 15: NIGHT FILLED WITH ARTILLERY FIRE

The night was filled with the noise of artillery fire and I woke up three times. But since there was no school I got up later at 10 am. Afterwards, my friend came over and we discussed our homework.

Today is 15 January, the last day before the Taleban's edict comes into effect, and my friend was discussing homework as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

Today, I also read the diary written for the BBC (in Urdu) and published in the newspaper. My mother liked my pen name 'Gul Makai' and said to my father 'why not change her name to Gul Makai?' I also like the name because my real name means 'grief stricken'.

My father said that some days ago someone brought the printout of this diary saying how wonderful it was. My father said that he smiled but could not even say that it was written by his daughter.

FRIDAY 18 JANUARY: NO POLICE IN SIGHT

My father told us that the government would protect our schools. The prime minister has also raised this issue. I was quite happy initially, but now I know but this will not solve our problem. Here in Swat we hear everyday that so many soldiers were killed and so many were kidnapped at such and such place. But the police are nowhere to be seen.

Our parents are also very scared. They told us they would not send us to school until or unless the Taleban themselves announce on the FM channel that girls can go to school. The army is also responsible for the disruption in our education. Today a boy from our locality went to school and he was told by the principal to go back home because a curfew was to be imposed soon. But when he reached home he came to know that there was no curfew, instead his school was closed down because the army was to move through the road near his school.

MONDAY 19 JANUARY: ARMY IN THEIR BUNKERS

Five more schools have been destroyed, one of them was near my house. I am quite surprised, because these schools were closed so why did they also need to be destroyed? No one has gone to school following the deadline given by the Taleban.

Today I went to my friend's house and she told me that a few days back someone killed Maulana Shah Dauran's uncle; she said that it may be that the Taleban destroyed the schools in anger at this.

She also said that no one has made the Taleban suffer but when they are hurt they take it out on our schools. But the army is not doing anything about it. They are sitting in their bunkers on top of the hills. They slaughter goats and eat with pleasure.

THURSDAY 22 JANUARY : VERY DANGEROUS SITUATION

I am quite bored sitting at home following the closures of schools. Some of my friends have left Swat because the situation here is very dangerous. I do not leave home. At night Maulana Shah Dauran (the Taleban cleric who announced the ban on girls attending school) once again warned females not to leave home.

He also warned that they would blow up those schools which are used by the security forces as security posts.

SATURDAY 24 JANUARY: NO NAMES ON THE HONOURS BOARD

Our annual exams are due after the vacations but this will only be possible if the Taleban allow girls to go to school. We were told to prepare certain chapters for the exam but I do not feel like studying.

As from yesterday the army has taken control of the educational institutions for protection. It seems that it is only when dozens of schools have been destroyed and hundreds others closed down that the army thinks about protecting them. Had they conducted their operations here properly, this situation would not have arisen.

Muslim Khan (a Swat Taleban spokesman) has said that those schools housing the army would be attacked. We will be more afraid of having the army in our schools than ever. There is a board in our school which is called the Honours Board. The name of the girl achieving the highest marks in annual exams is put on this board. It seems that no names will be put on it this year.

SATURDAY 24 JANUARY: 'MAKING A GRAVE'

The only good thing that has come out of the war in Swat is that our father has taken us away from Mingora (the largest city in the Swat valley) to many other cities. We arrived in Peshawar from Islamabad yesterday. In Peshawar we had tea at one of our relative's houses before travelling to Bannu.

My five-year-old brother was playing on the lawn. When my father asked him what he was playing, he replied 'I am making a grave'.

SATURDAY 31 JANUARY: WHO WILL AVENGE THOSE KILLED?

On our way back to Peshawar from Bannu I received a call from my friend.

She was very scared and told me that the situation in Swat was getting worse and I should not come back. She told me that the military operation has intensified and 37 people have been killed only today in the shelling.

We arrived in Peshawar in the evening and were very tired. I switched on the TV and there was a report on Swat. The channel was showing empty-handed people migrating on foot from Swat.

I switched the channel and a woman was saying "we will avenge the murder of Benazir Bhutto". I asked my father who would avenge the deaths of hundreds of people of Swat.

MONDAY 2 FEBRUARY: SCHOOL CLOSED ON TALEBAN ORDERS

I am upset because the schools are still closed here in Swat.

Our school was supposed to open today. On waking up I realised the school was still closed and that was very upsetting. In the past we used to enjoy ourselves on school closure. But this is not the case this time because I am afraid that the school may not reopen at all on the orders of the Taleban.

SUNDAY 8 FEBRUARY: SCHOOL MEMORIES

I am sad watching my uniform, school bag and geometry box.

I felt hurt on opening my wardrobe and seeing my uniform, school bag and geometry box. Boys' schools are opening tomorrow. But the Taleban have banned girls' education.

The memories of my school flashed before me, especially the arguments among the girls.

My brother's school is also reopening and he has not done his homework. He is worried and does not want to go to school.

My mother mentioned a curfew tomorrow and my brother asked her if it was really going to be imposed. When my mother replied in the affirmative he started dancing with joy.

FRIDAY 13 FEBRUARY: FAZLULLAH CRYING

Today the weather is good. It rained a lot and when it rains my valley looks more beautiful. As I got up in the morning, my mother told me about the murder of a rickshaw driver and a night watchman. Life is getting worse with the passage of each day.

Hundreds of people are arriving daily in Mingora from surrounding areas while residents of this city are moving to other areas. The rich have moved out of Swat while the poor have no place but to stay here.

We asked our cousin on the telephone to take us around the city in this splendid weather. He picked us up but when he came to the bazaar we found out that the markets were closed and the road wore a deserted look. We wanted to head towards the Qambar area but somebody told us a big procession has been brought out there.

That night Maulana Fazlullah (a pro-Taleban cleric) came on his radio and kept crying for a long time. He was demanding an end to the military operation. He asked people not to migrate but instead return to their homes.

SUNDAY 15 FEBRUARY: DON'T BE SCARED

Some guests from our village and Peshawar came today. When we were having lunch, firing started outside. I had never heard such firing. We got scared, thought that the Taleban had arrived. I ran towards my father who consoled me by telling me 'Don't be scared - this is firing for peace'.

He told me that he read in the newspaper that the government and the militants are to sign a peace deal tomorrow and the firing is in jubilation.

MONDAY 16 FEBRUARY: REOPENING?

Today I was very happy because the government and the militants were to sign a peace deal. Today the helicopters were flying very low too. One of my cousins remarked that with the gradual return of peace the choppers were coming down too.

In the afternoon people started distributing sweets. One of my friends called me to greet me. She said she hopes she could go out of her home now because she was imprisoned in her room for the last several months. We were also happy hoping the girls' schools might open now.

THURSDAY 19 FEBRUARY: PEACE NOT WAR

My father prepared breakfast today because my mum is not feeling well. She complained to my father, asking why did he tell her about the journalist's death? I told my brothers that we will not talk of war but peace from now on. We received the information from our school headmistress that examinations will be held in the first week of March. I have stepped up my studies.

'Strong young woman'



January 2013 , BBC News

Malala Yousafzai, now 15, was being treated at Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham (QEHB) after being transferred following the attack in October.

She will continue rehabilitation at her family's temporary West Midlands home.

The Taliban said it shot Malala, a campaigner for girls' education, for "promoting secularism". The shooting, in a school bus, sparked domestic and international outrage. Malala was returning home from school in the north-western Swat district on 9 October 2012 when gunmen stopped her vehicle and shot her in the head and the chest.

She received immediate treatment in Pakistan where surgeons removed a bullet which entered just above her left eye and ran along her jaw, grazing her brain.

The teenager was then flown to the UK and was admitted to the QEHB on 15 October to receive specialist treatment.