**[On two athletes](https://www.dawn.com/news/1767584/on-two-athletes)**

[Muna Khan](https://www.dawn.com/authors/1320/muna-khan) Published July 31, 2023

LAST month, I had the good fortune of travelling to Mexico City to visit my family but I also went with the intent of seeing whether I could relocate there. (Short answer: I can’t due to the language barrier.) My survival mode for Pakistan is to take a break from it. I am an anomaly, a nomad and Karachi is home. I am aware my privileged position and father’s support allows me to leave, find employment and return. I do not share anything in common with the innumerable people desperate to leave Pakistan except perhaps, the dread that comes with the uncertainty that plagues this country.

That uncertainty is felt in Mexico too.

Border police last year detained at least 744,000 Mexicans trying to enter the US, the highest number since 2008. They are leaving due to rising inflation and violence.

Migrants are a cornerstone of the Mexican economy, and, according to the Economist in April, Mexico receives more remittances than China; India is the largest beneficiary.

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But like so many migrants’ stories, Mexicans risk death in their attempt to leave. Incidentally, many migrants come to Mexico, some with the hope of crossing the border into the US. Afghans were the seventh highest nationality to make Mexico’s top 10 list of migrants, according to the country’s refugee agency COMAR.

At least 50,000 migrants “are known to have died” worldwide since 2014, according to the Missing Migrants Project by the International Organisation of Migration in 2022. It said “the nationality for over 30,000 people is unknown … which means that more than 60 per cent of those who die on migratory routes remain unidentified”.

Imagine how devastating it is for the families left behind. To say goodbye to someone in the hope that they’ll make it safe, never having to return to a country that just doesn’t have anything promising to offer. Unless you’re wealthy and male.

Earlier in March, Pakistani hockey and football player Shahida Raza — only 27 — died in a shipwreck off the coast of Italy.

She made the dangerous journey because she wanted to get treatment for her three year- old son, who is partially paralysed and cannot be adequately treated in Pakistan, according to an interview her family gave to the BBC after her death.

I was reminded of Raza while reading about Sachini Perera, the 24-year-old Sri Lankan athlete known as the “[pole] vaulting queen” who has been working as a maid in Dubai since July last year. She put her “athletic dreams on hold”, she told The National recently, so she could earn and care for her mother who is partially paralysed. She sends most of her salary back home to pay for her mother’s treatment but has not given up on her dream. “I want to be the one girl from Sri Lanka who wins an international medal for the pole vault,” she said.

Sri Lankans were upset to hear of her situation and blamed the authorities for not retaining sporting talent. Sri Lanka’s consul general told The National they were making efforts to find her a sports-related job in the emirate.

I was struck by how both women athletes were forced to leave their countries to care for their families and how uncanny it was that both their son and mother, respectively, are partially paralysed. Perera’s mother can now walk a few steps with help, according to The National. I could not find any news about Raza’s son. Such is the nature of the news cycle or social media hashtag campaign — tragedies are quickly forgotten because new space is needed for new tragedies.

According to the World Bank, Sri Lanka issued an all-time high of 900,000 passports in 2022. At least 300,000 Sri Lankans left the country last year and 73,000 left in the first three months of this year, reported the Economist, saying there was evidence that “middle class professionals have join ed the exodus”.

I’m sure you’re also hearing about Pakistanis leaving the country — studying abroad, migrating to Canada or wherever will take our fourth worst passport, getting jobs in the GCC, buying properties to get citizenship in Portugal. Or taking the illegal route.

I wonder if we’ll get the figure for the exodus from Pakistan, though we’ll never know about the undocumented who hand their lives over to agents promising them safe passage. Journalist Waqas Ahmed reported last year that 765,000 people left Pakistan in 2022, triple the number from the year before.

I do not blame them. Everyone knows what can be done to arrest the exodus and everyone knows nothing will be done.

Maybe the prime minister will order an inquiry into it. Politicians and their patrons are too busy keeping one man out of the election. And by the time they succeed, I wonder if anyone will be left to cast their vote.

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*Published in Dawn, July 31st, 2023*