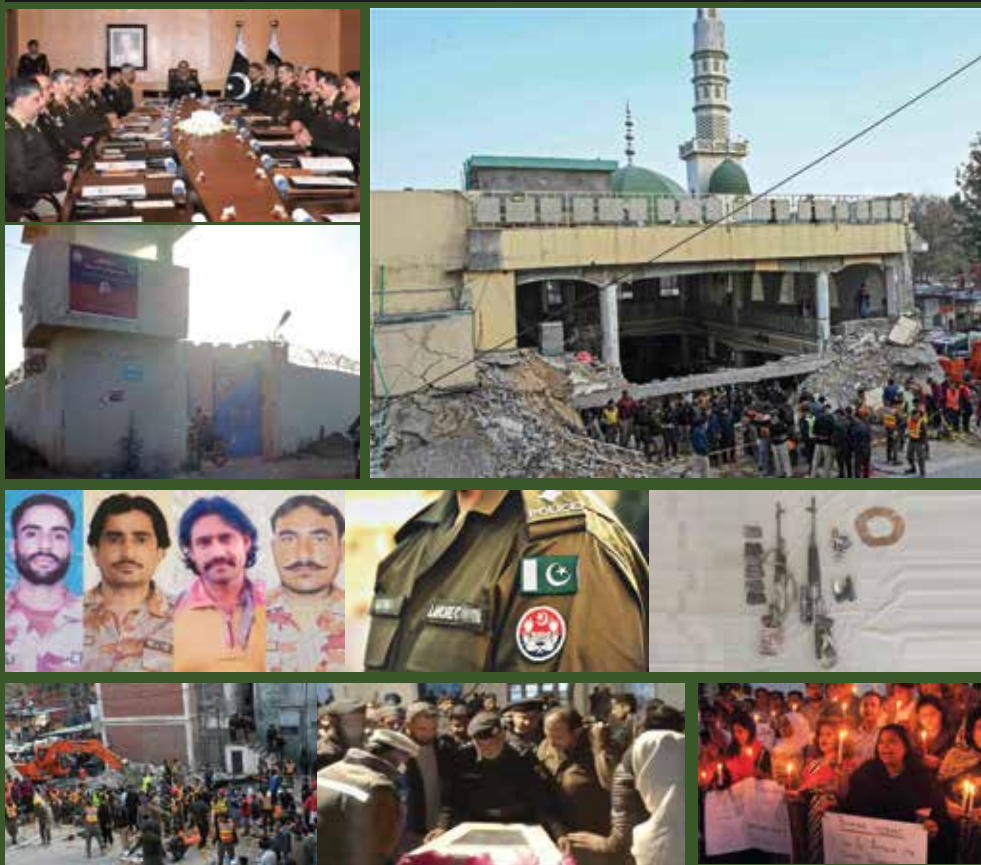


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# NIOC's 39th Advisory Board Meeting



The 39th Meeting of NIOC Advisory Board was held virtually on Friday 27 January 2023 at 3 pm. The following AB members participated: Tariq Parvez, Zahid Hussain, Samina Ahmed, Manzoor Ahmed and Jawaid Akhtar. Zubair Habib could not attend as he was travelling. NIOC directorate was represented by Tariq Khosa, Sarmad Saeed, Saroop Ijaz, Ali Nekokara, Nawaz Nadeem, Azam Khan and Hassan Sardar.

The following issues came under discussion:

- 1) UNTOC review update was presented by Director Khosa. A parallel report on the review process on behalf of Civil Society Alliance (CSA) will be released during February 2023.
- 2) CGR-NIOC notified a Working Group of Legal Experts on UNTOC and TIP Protocol. It will be convened by Barrister Umar Mahmood Khan of the Center for Human Rights, Lahore.
- 3) A Working Group of Experts on Transnational Organized Crime will be formed soon. It will be led by Tariq Parvez, President NIOC AB and former DG FIA.
- 4) A Working Group on Human Rights and Victim's Perspective will be formed soon. It will be convened by Saroop Ijaz of Human Rights Watch.

- 5) NIOC released an Issue Paper on Organized Crime in Pakistan on 27 January 2023. It is authored by Consultant Dr Syed Kaleem Imam, former IG Police.
- 6) A Scoping Study on Drug Smuggling to the UK via courier parcels is being undertaken by CGR-NIOC during February-March, 2023.
- 7) NIOC will try to create a profile of all the militant and proscribed organizations that are actively involved in the rising spate of militancy in Pakistan. This task will be undertaken in collaboration with NACTA.

# Journalists' safety

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A YEAR-END report by Reporters Without Borders sheds light on the dark reality of working as a journalist in countries where press freedom is constantly under threat. Spanning two decades, the report says 1,668 journalists have been killed across the world. Around 80pc of these deaths have taken place in 15 countries. Tragically, Pakistan is fifth on this list, with 93 journalists killed since 2003. Afghanistan saw 81 deaths of journalists in this period and India had 58, making them sixth and eighth on the list respectively. Nearly 80 journalists have been killed worldwide every year, with 2012 and 2013 being the years where violence peaked, largely due to the war in Syria. It says that reporters face the greatest risk in war zones, which explains why Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and Palestine are so prominent on the list. In Europe, Russia has Europe's highest death toll, and the report notes that press freedom has worsened in the years since Vladimir Putin came to power.

Pakistan's position on this list is a moment of humiliation for our leaders, and a testament to its weak democracy. It falls in the list of countries where no war is officially taking place, but where the situation is still not safe for reporters. The report notes that more journalists have been killed in "zones at peace" than war zones during the past two decades, "in most cases because they were investigating organised crime and corruption". In Pakistan, journalists have been killed not only by militants and insurgents but also by unidentified state actors. The common thread in these killings is that truth and justice are elusive, and killers walk free while families look in vain for answers. The recent killing of Arshad Sharif in Kenya under mysterious circumstances only underscores this fact, and points to a chilling reality that Pakistani journalists and dissidents are not safe from threats even outside the country. Not only is this a reason for our authorities to reflect on how badly successive governments have failed to protect journalists, but also the failure of all institutions – the government, law enforcement, the courts – to protect representatives of the fourth pillar of state. Freedom of press has been and still is under grave threat in Pakistan. The government must do more than issue token condemnations and investigation announcements. It must have the courage to name, try and punish perpetrators – or risk being seen as a democracy only in name.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 2, 2023**

# Addressing crime

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A STUDY conducted by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute has made important revelations about the incidence of religiously motivated and gender-based violence in Punjab, which ought to be the starting point for a serious discussion in parliament about reforming the Pakistan Penal Code. Researchers went to various prisons in Punjab, familiarised themselves with the cases of the convicts, and even spoke directly to some of them. After undertaking this exercise, the report writers made multiple recommendations, such as punishments for all those who participate in mob violence, trying religiously motivated crimes in anti-terror courts, not showing leniency to young offenders – to this effect even lowering the age of adulthood for such crimes from 18 to 16 years. Most importantly, it recommended that the provincial and federal governments both address the issue of security of sessions judges, who fear the consequences of their judgements. It also called on the PTA to shut down social media platforms that propagate hate speech by religious groups.

Whatever one's views of the recommendations, the research is important, as it underscores the factors that make a criminal in our society. Lack of education, no employment or meagre incomes, coupled with access to hate speech and weak deterrents, create the perfect storm in a society where crime and violence are on the rise. The report highlights that crimes in 2020 grew by 67pc, with Lahore recording the highest number of rape and domestic violence cases – something that should be addressed as a priority by the entire political class as it affects the country's most populous province. Sadly, our leaders are too busy politicking, playing power games and indulging in rival-bashing rhetoric to take note of these serious challenges. They must take note of these facts, and form a committee to address them on a priority basis. The report clearly points to the deprivation of socioeconomic rights as a common reason for criminality, which is something that the government must address by including all political parties in its quest for a solution.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 3, 2023**

# CT training

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WITH militancy rearing its head across the country once again, the civilian and military leaderships need to focus on imparting better counterterrorism training to our troops in order to reduce loss of life during antiterrorism operations.

Ever since the banned TTP rescinded the truce with the state in November of last year, there has been an alarming rise in the frequency of attacks in which security personnel have been martyred or wounded. In fact, according to figures collected by an Islamabad-based think tank, Pakistan lost over 280 security personnel last year, with December being particularly deadly. As things stand, the new year is not likely to be much different, unless the terrorist threat is uprooted.

Both in terms of intelligence gathering and counterterrorism training, there is a dire need for our security forces to stay two steps ahead of the militants. This is especially true for those on the front line in the battle against terrorist violence, namely the military units concerned and the counterterrorism departments of the provincial police forces.

The fact is that militants – whether they are religiously motivated and sectarian elements or separatists – are not conventional enemies that armies meet on the battlefield. They are irregular foes using asymmetric methods, and the state will have to master the necessary rules of engagement if it is to defeat the enemy and save the lives of our troops and police officers. For example, while IEDs may be tough to spot, there is no reason why such a high number of security men should lose their lives in intelligence-based operations.

The government, together with the military high command, needs to update CT training modules for both the military and the police forces. If need be, a special military unit can be raised that is specifically trained in the latest methods, and equipped with the requisite tools to fight terrorism. Or, existing formations can be trained to meet the threat. This is a decision security experts and the high command need to make in order to limit casualties within the ranks, and successfully counter terrorism. Indeed, the fight will not be a painless one, and many of our brave troops and police officers will be putting their lives on the line to protect Pakistan. It is the state's duty to provide them with the training and tools they need to defeat a shadowy and ruthless foe that has few scruples. If a high number of security men continue to lose their lives or suffer grave injuries during the course of antiterrorism operations, it will have a major demoralising effect on security personnel, while handing a psychological victory to the militants.

Terrorism may have made a resurgence due to the failed policies of the state, but those defending the country should not have to pay for these mistakes with their lives.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 3, 2023**

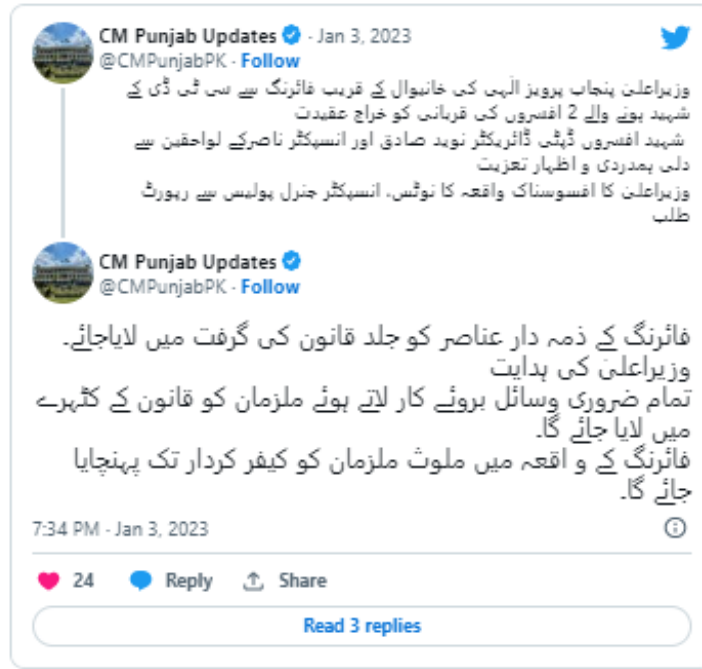
## 2 CTD officials shot dead in Khanewal

Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah expressed concern over the law and order situation in Punjab as two officials from the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) were gunned down by unknown assailants in Khanewal.

A statement issued by the Punjab police said Additional Inspector General Sahibzada Shahzad Sultan had departed for the crime scene after receiving information about the incident.

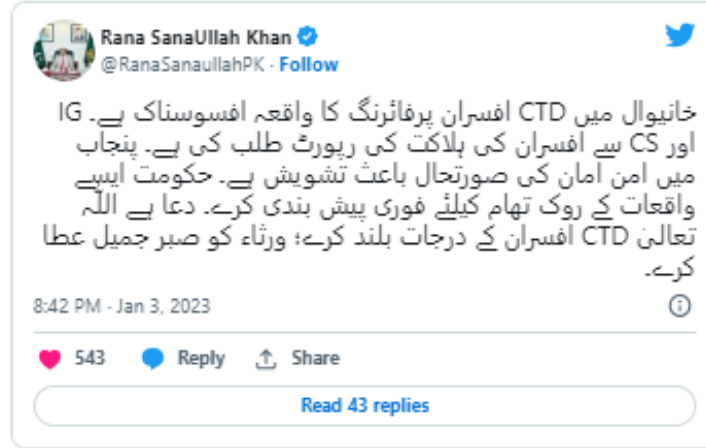
The perpetrators will be brought to justice, the spokesperson said, adding that further facts would be brought to light after the matter was investigated.

Punjab Chief Minister Parvez Elahi took notice of the incident, and paid tribute to the slain officials while extending his condolences to their families. Elahi also sought a report from the provincial police chief.



Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, meanwhile, said that he had summoned a report from the Punjab inspector general and the chief secretary.

"The law and order situation in Punjab is a cause for concern," he said. He called on the government to take steps to prevent such incidents.



SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 03, 2023



## NSC huddle

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THE nation's top civilian and military officials put their heads together in the just concluded National Security Council meeting to deliberate on two of Pakistan's foremost threats: terrorism and the dire economic situation. The results of the huddle were not unexpected, with both the elected leadership as well as the military top brass vowing to crush militancy with the full might of the state. Coming on the heels of last month's corps commanders' conference, the perception emerging from that meeting as well as the NSC conclave is that a kinetic operation is on the cards, especially in light of the increase in violent activities by the proscribed TTP. Considering that the TTP has for all intents and purposes launched an insurgency after it tore up the truce with the state, and that violence in Balochistan is increasing again, a military operation seems to be the only viable option to counter the terrorist threat. And striking now, when the militant insurgency is in its incipient phase, may be a wise move, before the terrorists gain potency. Without directly mentioning the Afghan Taliban rulers, the NSC meeting stated that "no country will be allowed to provide sanctuaries and facilitation" to anti-Pakistan terrorists. Other key decisions included the revival of provincial apex committees, and the resolve to improve training of security personnel fighting militancy.

While the state – both the civilian leadership and the establishment – made a mistake by attempting fruitless peace talks with the TTP, which the militants insisted should be held on their terms, the realisation has finally dawned upon the rulers that the fight must be taken to the terrorists. This will likely entail clearance operations in parts of KP and Balochistan where militant activity has seen a significant upswing, though the administration must also beef up the defence of cities, as the Islamabad suicide attack has shown. As for dealing with Afghanistan, the interior minister's threat of going after TTP sanctuaries across the western border has elicited a harsh response from Taliban officials. Pakistan should refrain from getting involved in a war of words with the Afghan Taliban, but otherwise the messaging should be clear: no TTP or other anti-Pakistan militant sanctuaries will be tolerated in Afghanistan. The Taliban claim that there are no TTP operatives on Afghan soil is hard to believe, and it is the responsibility of the Kabul regime to uproot elements in their country responsible for destabilising Pakistan.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 4, 2023**

# 11 'militants' killed, five cops injured in KP terror spat

- **Eleven, including key TTP commander and would-be suicide bombers, said to be among dead**
- **Locals, police repulse attack on Lakki Marwat police station**

PESHAWAR / D.I. KHAN: A day after Pakistan vowed to take pre-emptive measures to avert terrorist attacks, security forces killed 11 militants, including a key commander of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, in a raid in South Waziristan, while two separate attacks targeting police in Lakki Marwat and Dera Ismail Khan left five officials injured.

In an intelligence-based operation in Wana, the security forces raided a hideout of TTP militants and killed at least 11 terrorists, including TTP commander Hafizullah alongside two would-be suicide bombers, said the military's media wing.

The operation "foiled a major terrorist activity", the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement issued on Thursday evening.

"During intense exchange of fire, 11 terrorists, including terrorist commander Hafizullah alias Tor Hafiz, and two suicide bombers were killed.

"A huge quantity of weapons and ammunition was also recovered from the killed terrorists," the military's media wing said.

It added that the militants had remained "actively involved in terrorist activities against security forces and target killing of police in the district".

## Slain TTP commander

Local officials said that TTP commander Hafizullah had been involved in attacks on police stations in Azam Warsak, Raghzai, and Wana as well as extortion and kidnapping of locals.

The 40-year-old militant, who belonged to Tojay Khel, a Wazir sub-tribe, had joined Uzbeks in Wana before 2007, when Mullah Nazir, a local militant, and local people joined hands against Uzbek militants to force them out of the area.

"Hafizullah stayed quiet for a while but later joined the banned TTP and went to Afghanistan. He returned to Pakistan after Mullah Nazir was killed in a drone attack, local officials said,

claiming that the TTP affiliates had gone to Afghanistan but those who belonged to Wana were allowed to return.

Sources said that those who had returned to Pakistan grouped together after some time under Hafizullah's leadership.

"Hafizullah is believed to have been involved in attacks on security forces after the peace talks between the government and the banned outfit failed," the sources said.

They added Hafizullah escaped an attack following his return from Afghanistan when some unknown persons opened fire at him, leaving him seriously wounded. After his recovery, he started terrorising the district, they added.

#### DI Khan and Lakki Marwat attacks

In Lakki Marwat and Dera Ismail Khan districts, militants attacked police in separate incidents, resulting in injuries to at least five policemen.

The attacks, however, were repulsed by police forcing the insurgents to flee the scene.

In DI Khan, a police team deployed for the protection of an anti-polio team came under a gun attack in a remote part of town, resulting in injuries to five officials.

"Unknown militants armed with sophisticated weapons opened indiscriminate firing on the police party assigned to protect a team of the polio workers," a police official said, adding that condition of all the injured police personnel was satisfactory.

The official said that District Police Officer Muhammad Shoaib Khan along with a heavy contingent of the police immediately rushed to the spot; however, the militants had managed to escape the scene before the police arrived.

"A search operation was launched by the law enforcement agencies in the area [to arrest suspects]," he said. On Wednesday, a similar attack on polio workers left one police guard wounded in the district.

Meanwhile, an attack launched by militants on the Wargarey police station late Thursday night was repulsed by police officials and residents of the area.

Police said that militants attacked the police station located in the Bittani sub-division of erstwhile Fata with heavy weapons. However, local residents and police repulsed the attack, forcing the militants to flee. Police and local fighters remained unhurt in the attack.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 6, 2023**

## TTP's threat

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AS the country's leadership has vowed to crack down on terrorism without discrimination, the reaction from the TTP has been a familiar one: a threat to attack two of the leading political parties of Pakistan for fighting 'America's war'.

At the same time, the government has promised to take 'pre-emptive' steps to counter militancy, while also keeping the door for negotiations open for those fighters who lay down their arms.

Firstly, the TTP's threat against the PML-N and the PPP, specifically mentioning the prime minister and the foreign minister, is a chilling one and needs to be taken seriously, as politicians have in the past paid with their lives for standing up to terrorism. The security apparatus, therefore, needs to increase protection for political leaders, including those mentioned by the terrorist group.

The TTP claims that Pakistan is fighting them "to please America" and has blamed the government for launching a war against the group. This is but sophistry, for it is the TTP that abandoned the truce with the state last year, and began its campaign of terror against Pakistan anew. As for fighting America's war, though the US has offered this country help to counter the TTP, this is very much Pakistan's war, as the administration cannot yield any space to militant groups who wish to change the basic character of the state through the barrel of the gun.

In related developments, the interior minister says a new federal counterterrorism body is being created to coordinate with the provincial counterterrorism departments. This will be vital, for the terrorists have the capability to strike at targets across the country and it is only through coordinated efforts involving the civilian law-enforcement bodies, as well as the military and intelligence apparatus, that the war against militancy can be won.

As for the offer of talks with the militants, the state needs to mention clearly that along with laying down arms, Pakistan's Constitution must be respected for any negotiations to succeed.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 6, 2023**

## Street crimes' solution

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DESPITE the authorities' promises to get tough on perpetrators, there appears to be no let-up in the street crime epidemic that afflicts Karachi. Over the last few weeks there have been heart-breaking stories of promising young students gunned down for resisting armed muggers, people shot while out shopping, and shopkeepers attacked by armed thugs. In fact, the conventional wisdom in this forsaken city is to immediately hand over your valuables to criminals and offer no resistance. According to CPLC figures, there were around 85,000 cases of street crime reported last year in the city. Add up the number of unreported cases and the figures are frightful, indicating that every single day of the year hundreds of people in Karachi are deprived of either their cash, mobiles, vehicles or their lives. The solutions offered by the powers that be are mostly tried, tested and failed. For example, during last week's apex committee meeting there were promises to crack down on street crime, while later the chief minister called upon specialised police units to join the fight against violent crime, while the Sindh police chief asked people to install CCTV cameras outside their homes.

Clichéd as it may sound, out-of-the-box solutions are needed for a police force of a few thousand to protect a sprawling city of millions, as the typical methods have failed to deliver. During the apex committee meeting it was mentioned that over 1,600 criminals who had committed street robberies multiple times were bailed out between a week to six months of their arrest. Officials said a law is being considered to prevent repeat offenders from returning to the streets. Such efforts need to be sped up, while easy access to illegal weapons must be curtailed; these are amongst the many ways to crack down on crime. Moreover, those black sheep within the police department that patronise crime must be weeded out, and the police force reimagined along modern lines in order to bring a semblance of normality to Karachi's streets.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 10, 2023

# Revamping Nacta

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TARIQ PARVEZ

A COMMON question being asked these days is: why has the resurgence of terrorism, after the latter was significantly reduced during 2010-2020, not been prevented in 2021? The answer is simple: although we adopted the right short-term tactics to combat it, we erred in formulating and implementing a long-term proactive strategy.

During terrorism's decline, we continued with the short-term approach of depending primarily on the military for counterterrorism tactics and focusing on kinetic measures, when what we needed was a strategy to ensure sustained neutralisation of the threat through a two-pronged approach.

We needed to a) rely more on civilian CT departments whose role is to disrupt terrorist networks, and b) focus more on the non-kinetic dimension to address the factors that breed militancy.

Also, terrorism's evolving dimension in 2021 (after America's exit from Afghanistan) which required a change in strategy and tactics, wasn't correctly visualised. Thus, terrorism's resurgence, which is likely to escalate significantly in 2023, indicates a multidimensional failure on our part.

It was a failure of policy because we tried to appease the TTP through ill-advised negotiations in 2022, which only allowed the militants to return to their former strongholds and become active again.

This move was strongly resented by the local population, who participated in public demonstrations in Swat, Wana and elsewhere, on an unprecedented scale, indicating that our policymaking on crucial issues like CT was neither grounded in the people nor inclusive and transparent.

The question of who decided to start negotiations with the TTP, and allowed them to return, remains unanswered, exposing the opacity of policy formulation on CT in Pakistan.

Similarly, in recent years, we failed to correctly assess the impact of two new factors regarding the terrorist threat in Pakistan: one, the unification of all TTP factions under Noor Wali Mehsud, who became ameer in 2018, strengthened the organisation and enhanced its strike capability.

Mehsud reorganised the TTP's support network inside Pakistan, which had become dormant due to effective action. Either this escaped the intelligence agencies' notice or the latter were unable to check it.

Two, according to many analysts, the American exit from Afghanistan, and the Afghan Taliban's sympathetic approach to TTP boosted the latter. However, the groups concerned in Pakistan apparently believed, erroneously, that the Taliban would stop the TTP from carrying out terrorist acts inside Pakistan – a costly mistake.

This highlights the need to diversify input into our CT policy formulation and threat assessment process, making it more inclusive, transparent and accountable. The world over, this is done by civilianising internal security, instead of making it largely the military's domain. The military plays an important CT role, but by supporting civilian authorities, and not leading them.

The next question is, which is the focal civilian organisation at the national level, to coordinate the entire CT effort, bring all stakeholders into the fold and address all dimensions of CT and violent extremism (VE)? The only organisation with the legal mandate, through an act of parliament (Nacta Act, 2013), to perform that role is the National Counter-Terrorism Authority. It has, however, not been allowed to take off since its inception in 2009.

It is pertinent to mention here that the National Action Plan, formulated in 2014, was a unique document, enjoying the consensus of all political parties and the establishment, on how to deal with terrorism in Pakistan. A basic NAP recommendation was to strengthen Nacta. Eight years later, Nacta remains unable to play its legal role.

Learning from our earlier mistakes in dealing with the terrorist threat from 2010 to 2020, we must give long- and short-term measures equal importance.

For a long-term response, we should shift the CT strategy from being military-dominated to being led by civilians, through parliament and legally mandated civilian organisations led by Nacta. To make Nacta effective, the following steps are suggested:

**Empowerment:** To be an effective coordinator of all CT/extremism aspects and ensure unity of the national CT effort, Nacta has to be empowered. It is presently not being taken seriously by the powerful stakeholders with which it has to coordinate ie federal intelligence agencies, federal ministries, the provincial governments. Nacta's empowerment means it should be made directly responsible to the PM as laid down in the original Act. The recent amendment making it responsible to the interior minister must be repealed.

**Expertise:** If Nacta wants a place in the CT community, it should be able to add value to the efforts of individual agencies as well as to the federal and provincial governments.

This can be done in many areas, eg giving a more objective threat assessment prepared by professional threat analysts, instead of individual agencies with their own biases/ operational interests. Research in the complex field of counter violent extremism, in consultation with experts and civil society, is yet another area where it can add value.

**Whole-of-nation response:** From 2010 to 2020, when the terrorists were on the run, the focus should have been on capacity building of civilian agencies for combating terrorism and VE. This

was not done because there was no national organisation to devise a plan to do it, get the resources and then inform the governments about the progress in implementing these plans. Lack of policy implementation is a serious gap in our CT response. Addressing this weak area is part of Nacta's mandate.

On Jan 5, 2023, the Senate Committee on Defence recommended that a "coherent counterterrorism policy with Nacta in the lead role" be devised to deal with the terrorist threat. This advice merits serious consideration.

It should be remembered that while the ongoing military/ police campaign against the terrorists should continue relentlessly, we cannot lose sight of a long-term response. Though formulating such a response must be a collective national effort, Nacta, if given ownership by the government, as it must be, can coordinate the effort, under the guidance of the PM and parliament. Let us not repeat mistakes by ignoring a long-term plan to combat terrorism.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 14, 2023**



## Police officer among 3 martyred in late-night attack on police station in Peshawar

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The police station that came under terrorist attack in Peshawar.

**A senior police officer and two of his guards lost their lives giving chase to militants who staged a late-night attack on a police station on the outskirts of Peshawar, a senior official said.**

Senior Superintendent Police Operations Peshawar Kashif Abbasi told that Deputy Superintendent Police Sardar Hussain and his two police guards lost their lives in an exchange fire with terrorists in the Badhabir area.

The two martyred policemen were identified as Irshad and Jehanzeb.

Abbasi told reporters that the terrorists attacked Sarband police station at about midnight. Sarband is located near the Bara area of Khyber tribal district.

“It was coordinated from multiple directions and the [terrorists] used multiple weapons. They lobbed hand grenades and resorted to sniper shots and automatic guns,” he said.

The Peshawar police successfully repelled the attack, he added.

Abbasi said the slain police officer chased the fleeing terrorists and tried to encircle them but during an ensuing exchange of fire, he and two other policemen lost their lives.

The gunmen then took advantage of the darkness and fled.

Police said a search operation was launched in Sarband and nearby areas following the attack. It resumed on Saturday morning. No arrest was made so far.

Abbasi said the gunmen had come from the Khyber Tribal district bordering Afghanistan.

A funeral was held for the martyred police officials in Peshawar on Saturday that was attended by senior police and military officials.

Meanwhile, the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed the attack on Sarband police station.

TTP has stepped up attacks since the group called off the ceasefire in November which was agreed with the government in June and ordered its militants to stage attacks across the country.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 14, 2023**

## Crackdown on HDT

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It is unfortunate that rather than engaging with Balochistan's Haq Do Tehreek politically, the state is cracking down on its leadership. The movement has for over a year been highlighting what it says is an injustice with Makran, with Maulana Hidayatur Rehman serving as the HDT's face. The maulana and his movement were catapulted to the national stage in 2021 when he led a massive protest in Gwadar over various issues, including the presence of illegal trawlers off the Balochistan coast, obstacles in border trade with Iran and lack of civic facilities in what is supposed to be a key node in the CPEC network. The HDT's supporters were back on the streets of Gwadar last year due to what they said were the state's unfulfilled promises. After talks with the government broke down in late December, the administration and demonstrators faced off in a violent confrontation. A policeman was killed during the melee, resulting in the state going after the HDT leadership. On Friday, Mr Rehman was arrested from court in Gwadar in connection with the killing as well as other cases.

Lawyers present at the court premises say the arrest is illegal as the maulana had come to apply for bail, and the detention amounts to denial of Mr Rehman's right to seek bail. Moreover, the maulana says the crackdown on his movement is linked to the HDT's struggle for their rights. While the killers of the law enforcer must be punished, the state should not indulge in a political vendetta against the HDT. The maulana and his supporters must be able to defend themselves in court, and no politically motivated cases should be filed against them. As we have seen in the case of MNA Ali Wazir, the state has a particular expertise in keeping people it does not agree with behind bars by putting them through the legal rigmarole. This undemocratic attitude needs to change.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 16, 2023**

# Hounding journalists

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WHEN it comes to press freedom, the arrest of journalist Shahid Aslam highlights the weaknesses in our democracy and the state's failure to do the right thing. Mr Aslam was arrested by the FIA after the publication of an online story about retired army chief Gen Qamar Bajwa's taxes and wealth statements last November. According to the article, Gen Bajwa's family amassed billions of rupees in the last six years. It is alleged that Mr Aslam, who has been sent to jail on judicial remand, contributed to the story by leaking data, but the journalist who wrote the story later said Mr Aslam had no connection to it. Mr Aslam's lawyer, too, has told the court that the journalist committed no illegality. Yet he is being hounded.

Mr Aslam's arrest is part of an age-old pattern: the state cracks down on negative coverage of powerful quarters by arresting media personnel it holds responsible. All too often, journalists have been dragged to court, threatened and intimidated for publishing stories that have raised questions about military officers. This case again proves that the state prefers to shoot the messenger rather than open an inquiry about the message. Mr Aslam's arrest, the demands for his passwords and access to his phone and laptop violate the protections guaranteed to journalists by law. If the state is so concerned it should have focused on how the details were 'leaked' at the government's end, if indeed, it was an illegal action. But more important is the necessity of an investigation by the FBR and other relevant bodies of how the alleged vast amount was accumulated in the first place. Unfortunately, successive governments, even if elected democratically, have been only too happy to facilitate the persecution of journalists at the behest of a higher authority. To prove that Pakistan is not a democracy in name only, the state must release Mr Aslam and refrain from such knee-jerk reactions.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 17, 2023

# UN experts alarmed at rising cases of forced marriages in Pakistan

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**ISLAMABAD: UN human rights experts have expressed alarm at the reported rise in abductions, forced marriages and conversions of underage girls and young women from religious minorities in Pakistan, and called for immediate efforts to curtail practices and ensure justice for victims.**

“We urge the government to take immediate steps to prevent and thoroughly investigate these acts objectively in line with domestic legislation and international human rights commitments. Perpetrators must be held fully accountable,” the experts said in a statement issued in Geneva on Monday.

The experts are Tomoya Obokata, special rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; Mama Fatima Singhateh, special rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material; Reem Alsalem, special rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Nazila Ghanea, special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Fernand de Varennes, special rapporteur on minority issues; Siobhan Mullally, special rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; Dorothy Estrada-Tanck (Chair), Ivana Radacic (Vice-Chair), Ms Elizabeth Broderick; and Meskerem Geset Techane and Melissa Upreti, Working Group on discrimination against women and girls.

“We are deeply troubled to hear that girls as young as 13 are being kidnapped from their families, trafficked to locations far from their homes, made to marry men sometimes twice their age, and coerced to convert to Islam, all in violation of international human rights law,” the experts said.

“We are very concerned that such marriages and conversions take place under threat of violence to these girls and women or their families,” they said.

Noting Pakistan’s previous attempts to pass legislation that will prohibit forced conversions and protect religious minorities, the experts de--plored the ongoing lack of access to justice for victims and their families. Reports suggest these so-called marriages and conversions take place with the involvement of religious authorities and the complicity of security forces and the justice system.

These reports also indicate that the court system enables these offences by accepting, without critical examination, fraudulent evidence from perpetrators regarding victims’ adulthood, voluntary marriage, and conversion. Courts have on occasion misused interpretations of religious law to justify victims staying with their abusers.

“Family members say that victims’ complaints are rarely taken seriously by the police, either refusing to register these reports or arguing that no crime has been committed by labeling these abductions as love marriages,” the experts said.

“Abductors force their victims to sign documents which falsely attest to their being of legal age for marriage as well as marrying and converting of free will. These documents are cited by the police as evidence that no crime has occurred.”

The experts said it was imperative that all victims, regardless of religious background, were afforded access to justice and equal protection under the law

“Pakistani authorities must adopt and enforce legislation prohibiting forced conversions, forced and child marriages, kidnapping, and trafficking, and abide by their international human rights commitments to combat slavery and human trafficking and uphold the rights of women and children,” they said.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 18, 2023**

## 'Promises with minorities remain unfulfilled'



**LAHORE:** The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has fulfilled none but made partial progress regarding two of the five promises made in its election manifesto in 2018 regarding religious minorities, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) failed to implement nine of its 10 promises and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) partially implemented one of eight assurances.

This was claimed in a reported presented by an NGO, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), during a seminar on the political parties' priorities and minorities' rights. Representatives of political parties and the civil society attended the seminar.

The report titled 'Promises to keep and miles to go' and based on the analysis of pledges, actions and performance regarding minorities' rights contended that none of the parties had been able to fully implement their promises in the last three parliamentary tenures.

The study found that one-third of the pledges related to the issue in the parties' election manifestos in 2008, 2013 and 2018 were common. They included minorities' representation in the ETPB, establishing a statutory minorities commission, criminalising forced conversion, reviewing the curriculum, implementing job quotas and reviewing discriminatory laws. However, the pledges remain unfulfilled.

It revealed that the Punjab government had introduced 11 policy actions in this regard since 2008, followed by the federal government with nine actions, Balochistan eight, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa seven and Sindh six.

The majority of actions lacked a strong legal basis and implementation mechanism, which indicates a need for a serious re-examination of the administrative system.

The policy actions rely heavily on issuing notifications, which is a convenient use of administrative powers, while the government evidently faced difficulties in legislating and instituting rules of procedure regarding various measures. Concrete information on the utilisation of funds allocated for scholarship, places of worship and skill development was not made public, there was a lack of implementation due to an absence of notifications, or the purpose of the policy action was not fulfilled, it highlighted.

PTI leader Mahindar Paul said the party was committed to taking legal, policy and administrative measures to safeguard minorities' rights.

Legislators need to make more efforts to effectively address the barriers and challenges faced by minorities, and they must introduce and support meaningful actions dedicated to the protection of minorities' rights, he added.

PPP leader Barrister Amir Hassan said the electorate should not support the politicians engaged in spreading extremism.

CSJ executive director Peter Jacob said minorities' rights was not a sectoral but central issue of the politics of Pakistan. He urged the parties to build consensus for a credible population census and reforms in laws to ensure free, fair and transparent general elections. Rights activist Tanveer Jahan said a regressive model was being projected to the people.

**SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JANUARY 18, 2023**



## 4 terrorists killed during intelligence-based operation in Balochistan's Hoshab



A cache of weapons recovered by forces from slain terrorists.

Security forces gunned down at least four terrorists during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Balochistan's Hoshab, the military's public affairs wing said.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), an IBO was initiated "to clear a hideout linked with firing incidents on security forces along M-8, in general area Talsar, Hoshab" on a tip-off about the presence of terrorists.

"As a result of continuous intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) of the area, a location of terrorists was identified and security forces were heli inserted [to nab the terrorists]."

The statement said that while the forces were establishing positions to cut off escape routes, four terrorists opened fire on the troops.

During the heavy exchange of fire, all four terrorists were killed, while a cache of arms and ammunition including improvised explosive devices (IEDs) was also recovered from their possession, the ISPR added.

A day earlier, Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir visited Balochistan's Khuzdar and Basima areas where he was briefed on the prevailing security situation and the formation's operational preparedness, along with measures being taken to ensure a "peaceful and secure environment".

In a statement, the military's media wing quoted the COAS as saying that the Pakistan Army was aware of the "nefarious designs of external enemies of Pakistan" to disturb the peace in Balochistan.

Over the past few months, the law and order situation in the country has worsened, with terrorist groups executing attacks with near impunity across the country.

Insurgents in Balochistan have also stepped up their violent activities and formalised a nexus with the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

The year 2022 ended with December as the deadliest month for Pakistan as the country suffered as many as 376 terror attacks in the year that resulted in an increased number of casualties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 18, 2023**

## 4 security personnel martyred in terrorist activity from across Pak-Iran border in Balochistan

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This image shows the security personnel martyred during “terrorist activity” from across the Pakistan-Iran border in Balochistan’s Panjgur district.

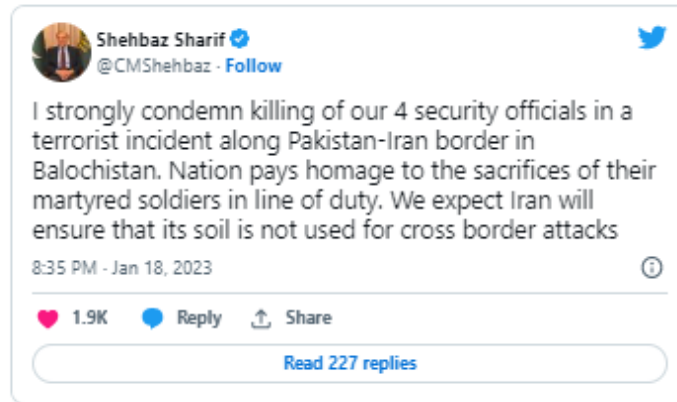
The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that four security personnel were martyred during “terrorist activity” from across the Pakistan-Iran border in Balochistan’s Panjgur district.

“Today, in a terrorist activity from across Pakistan-Iran border in Chukab sector, district Panjgur, Balochistan, four security forces personnel have embraced martyrdom,” the statement said.

It further said that the militants used Iranian soil to “target a convoy of security forces patrolling along the border”.

Iran has been asked to hunt down the terrorists on their side, the ISPR statement said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the incident. “Nation pays homage to the sacrifices of their martyred soldiers in [the] line of duty. We expect Iran will ensure that its soil is not used for cross-border attacks,” he said.



President Dr Arif Alvi condemned the attack, and paid tribute to the services and sacrifices rendered by the martyred officials.

He stated that the whole nation had resolved to fight terrorism.

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari also condemned the attack, and expressed grief and sorrow at the martyrdom of the security officials.

“Martyrs officials are the country’s heroes. The militant who carried out the attack will have to pay,” he said in a statement.

Last year in October, the Iranian authorities had closed the border with Pakistan at Taftan for two days after clashes between protesters and security forces in Zahedan, the capital city of Sistan-Baluchestan.

In February 2021, the border in Panjgur was closed after violent demonstrations and attacks on government offices in Saravan area of Sistan-Balochestan.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 18, 2023**

# Police to centralise organised crime cell

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LAHORE: Punjab Police has decided to establish an anti-organised crime cell at its central office, which will focus on detecting and investigating heinous crimes as well as apprehending hardened criminals.

Earlier, each district had such a cell, popularly known as CIA.

Inspector General of Police Aamir Zulfiqar Khan announced that a summary would be submitted to the government to create a post of deputy IG in grade 20 to centralise and coordinate the action against organised crime and hardened criminals across the province.

The decision was made in a conference of regional police officers.

To improve the investigation and follow-up of cases of heinous crimes in the province, the branch of organised crime should be established and a DIG appointed in the additional IG investigation's office for the purpose, Khan said. A summary in this regard should also be sent to the government soon, he added.

He said the new DIG would not only collect crime data through effective follow-up but also prepare weekly reports about the progress of investigation in cases in all districts.

He added that the organised crime branch would ensure close follow-up of the registered cases across the province and focus on arresting dangerous criminals through effective investigation, timely completion of challan and strict punishment to habitual and professional criminals.

Khan said the organised crime DIG would maintain close coordination with the regional monitoring units of the investigation wing.

After registration of a case, he will monitor all the stages of the investigation and bring the proceedings to their logical conclusion as soon as possible with effective follow-up.

Inspector General of Police Aamir Zulfiqar Khan said the main objective of establishing the separate branch was to improve the quality of investigation with effective follow-up and all possible measures in this regard would continue along with the provision of more resources.

He said that initially the monitoring AIG should submit a fortnightly report on cases of organised crime, including murder, robbery, dacoity and rape.

Khan on the occasion that the police should continue fulfilling their role across the province to prevent crimes and bring habitual criminals involved in cases of robbery, dacoity murder and rape behind the bars.

He also said data on the rate of conviction and acquittal in the cases of robbery and theft should be collected across the province to ascertain the average rate of bail in the cases in all the districts of Punjab. The report should be prepared in 10 days, he added.

Inspector General of Police Aamir Zulfiqar Khan directed that the district police officers in consultation with their RPOs should appoint competent and hardworking inspectors where the posts of organised crime DSP were vacant.

Khan also said that in each district, if cases of robbery, murder, dacoity and rape could not be investigated at the police station level, their investigation should be assigned to the in-charge of organised crime.

**SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, JANUARY 19, 2023.**

# Militants behead teenager in Lakki on spying charge

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LAKKI MARWAT: A teenager was found beheaded in a remote area of Lakki Marwat, police said.

They said that beheaded body of a teenager was found in Bargai village. The victim was identified as Raheedullah, 19. He was killed by unidentified armed men believed to be militants on charges of spying.

Murad Khan, an uncle of the slain boy, told police that his nephew had gone to the fields on January 15 but did not return home.

He said that they came to know that armed men took him away along with his motorcycle.

An official said that the militant group 'Ittehadul Mujahideen-i-Khurasan' had left a dagger and a hand written chit in Pashto language along the body, carrying a message that Raheedullah was found guilty of spying for army and counter-terrorism department.

**PUBLISHED IN DAWN, JANUARY 19, 2023**

## Forced conversions

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THE laments of Pakistani Hindu families losing one young girl after another to what they allege are forced conversions and marriage to Muslim men were bound to draw international attention at some point. Finally, that has come to pass. In a statement issued in Geneva on Monday, UN human rights experts expressed alarm over increasing reports of abductions, forced marriages and conversions of girls and young women in this country. They demanded immediate steps be taken to put an end to these depredations and ensure justice. The statement pointed out the institutional bias against the females placed in this predicament, with the police and judiciary often found extending support to the perpetrators instead of the victims.

The UN experts' concern is not misplaced. Although the issues highlighted constitute multiple violations of both Pakistan's domestic law and the country's international obligations, the fact of conversion appears to trump all other concerns in an increasingly conservative society. Time and again – most commonly in Sindh which is home to a majority of Pakistani Hindus – newly converted minors, rather than being handed over to their families, have been 'allowed' to live with their often much older 'husbands', thereby putting them at heightened risk of domestic abuse and childbirth complications. The undeniable element of coercion present in a situation where vulnerable communities are pitted against powerful groups with a triumphalist mindset, is often conveniently ignored. Certainly, there may be some doubt as to whether all the conversions by adult women are forced. But it is worth asking why new converts are almost always young women, rather than older ones? Or males of any age, for that matter? Neither the government nor the criminal justice system appear to have the spine to address the issue for fear of angering the religious lobby. In 2016, the Sindh Assembly did pass a bill stipulating that any conversion by a minor would only come into effect when they reached the age of majority, ie 18 years; it also provided for severe penalties for perpetrators of forced conversions. However, in the face of an uproar by the religious right, including individuals notorious for forced conversions, the provincial government shamefully capitulated and prevailed upon the governor to not sign the bill into law. It is high time lawmakers protected weaker segments of society from exploitation in the name of faith.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 20, 2023



## Confused policy

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RECENT statements by two major political leaders have underlined the perception that there is no political agreement on tackling resurgent terrorism. On the one hand, former prime minister Imran Khan – in whose tenure 'peace talks' were initiated with outfits operating from Afghanistan – has argued that the banned TTP were 'driven' to their old ways because Islamabad failed to live up to the promises made to them; on the other, incumbent Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has roundly criticised the PTI's policy towards the TTP as mere 'appeasement'. With so much confusion within our ranks, it is hardly surprising that the TTP has been able to exploit the situation to its advantage. It now threatens to start another violent chapter in Pakistan's war against militancy.

It must be said that Mr Khan's accommodating view of the TTP is starkly at odds with how the terrorist outfit sees Pakistan. The group has little respect or consideration for the Pakistani state or its sovereignty, which is reflected in its demand for the reversal of Fata's merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The TTP had made decoupling Fata a non-negotiable condition in its aforementioned 'peace talks' with the Pakistani state, presuming to dictate to Islamabad the limits of its dominion. After the talks broke down, the TTP's brutal attacks targeting Pakistani security forces and law-enforcement personnel only hammered home its disdain for the same land where it was being 'settled' despite locals' loud and angry protests. But even Mr Bhutto-Zardari, who has taken a tougher line on the TTP, has appeared softer on the Afghan Taliban even though Kabul is seen to be quietly patronising the TTP. Instead of taking a harder stance against the Afghan Taliban for failing to rein in the terrorists operating from their territory, the foreign minister wants to continue engaging with them. These conflicting messages are complicating Pakistan's response to its gravest existential crisis. Clearly, this is another area which desperately needs political consensus.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 20, 2023**

# Punjab CTD arrests 5 suspected terrorists, including 'key TTP operative'

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**The Punjab Counter-Terrorism Department has arrested five suspected terrorists belonging to banned organisations during intelligence-based operations across the province, the CTD spokesperson said.**

The press statement said the arrested terrorists belonged to the proscribed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Sipah-i-Sahaba (SS).

One of the terrorists arrested from Lahore was identified as Mehmood Musa – a “key operative of the TTP”, the CTD stated. Other terrorists, who have been rounded up, were identified as Abdul Hanan, Rahmat Ali, Muawiya, and Muhammad Arabi.

The department claimed that the terrorists had planned a “large-scale terror attack” in the province, adding that the operations to nab the outlaws were conducted in Lahore, Bahawalpur, and Sheikhpura.

Four cases have been registered against the suspects and they have been shifted to an unidentified location for investigation, the CTD said.

“On the instructions of IG Punjab, 458 combing operations were conducted this week.”

The statement added that 97 suspects were arrested during combing operations while 52 cases had been registered.

High alert

Last month, Punjab Police Inspector General Aamir Zulfiqar Khan had issued orders to put security on high alert across the province.

He had directed that the security arrangements of sensitive and public places should be tightened in all districts, including the provincial capital Lahore.

The inspector had also directed that the Special Branch and the CTD should beef up intelligence-based operations and provide all possible support to the district police teams in defeating criminals.

The heightened security measures were employed a day after a policeman was martyred and six people were injured in a blast in Islamabad I-10 neighbourhood.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 21, 2023

## Cop martyred in attack on Charsadda police post



**CHARSADDA: One cop was martyred and two others were injured when unidentified assailants attacked a police post in Dheri Zardad locality of Charsadda.**

Officials and residents said three attackers riding a motorcycle opened fire at the police post within the remit of Nissata police station before sunset.

The attack left three on-duty constables injured. They were identified as Imran, Yousaf and Rameez. One attacker was injured in the retaliatory fire by the police but was whisked away by his accomplices. The injured policemen were shifted to the district headquarters hospital and later moved to Peshawar in critical condition, where constable Imran succumbed to his injuries.

The area was cordoned off after the attack and a police contingent, led by District Police Officer Sohail Khalid, launched a search operation to arrest the attackers.

Since the talks with the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) broke down in November, the militant group has intensified its attacks, particularly targeting the police in KP and areas bordering Afghanistan.

On Thursday, three persons, including two policemen, were martyred when terrorists attacked a check post in Jamrud tehsil of Khyber tribal district.

Khyber DPO Mohammad Imran told journalists that the terrorists conducted a three-pronged attack at Takhtabeg check post on Peshawar-Torkham Highway.

Last week, a deputy superintendent of police and two constables were martyred when militants, armed with automatic assault weapons, targeted the Sarband police station on the outskirts of the province's capital, Peshawar late at night.

Officials said the militants, equipped with advanced weapons, including thermal weapon sights, carried out a 'coordinated' attack.

On Jan 10, unknown militants attacked the Yarik police station in Dera Ismail Khan with rifles and missiles. However, no loss of life was reported.

In November, the outlawed TTP called off its ceasefire with the government and ordered its militants to stage attacks across the country.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 22, 2023**

# Modern slavery?

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ZUBEIDA MUSTAFA

ON April 16, 2022, a teenager in Karachi stepped out of her home early in the morning to throw garbage in the public bin nearby. She never returned home that day. According to reports based on court and police proceedings, she was abducted by a young man and his companions from Lahore. A horrible experience awaited her.

The saga of the unfortunate girl must be quite familiar to those who followed the case. For others, I can sum it up in a few lines. She was allegedly seized forcibly by a young man called Zaheer, and taken to Lahore where a marriage was enacted, as claimed by the accused. Legal wrangling and police inaction slowed the case proceedings for over three months. During this period, she visited Karachi for a day on court orders, the Karachi police issued an interim challan levelling charges of “abduction, rape and forced marriage” against Zaheer, and a disputed medical examination of the girl was conducted in Lahore to determine her age.

Ultimately, the Sindh Police managed to bring her back to Karachi, where she was admitted to a child protection centre and assessed psychologically. Tests put her age somewhere around 15 to 16 years. Another five months of court proceedings finally led to her being handed over to her family in January after the magistrate ascertained her willingness to return home.

The social media and the so-called YouTubers kept public interest in the case alive by sustaining a parallel conversation. Its positive outcome has been a growing awareness of the curse of trafficking which is now recognised under international law as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of a threat or use of force or ... fraud [or] deception” for forms of exploitation.

Hopefully, people will also learn about the dignity of a child and the magnitude of the crime committed against children in Pakistan. The most victimised are the children of the poor, who do not have awareness and the kind of legal aid provided to the girl in question. If the case has sensitised society to the needs of the child – rich or poor – something more will have been achieved than the release of a teenager.

For this, we have to thank the girl’s father, who refused to accept an out-of-court settlement when it was offered, saying that he was acting for the many other trafficked girls in the country.

The fact is that this girl’s case is not unique, horrendous though it is. She was only one of the thousands (in 2021, the number was around 17,000, according to the Trafficking in Persons Report issued by the US secretary of state in July 2022) females to be picked up for “unspecified

exploitation” in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. What has drawn public attention is the role of her defence counsel, Jibran Nasir, whose knowledge of the law, courage and resolve has made it so prominent. He is fighting the case pro bono, and if he finally succeeds in getting the alleged traffickers convicted, it would be a red letter day for decency in Pakistan.

A quick reading of the US report’s section on Pakistan is an eye-opener and gives an idea of the magnitude of the task Jibran Nasir has taken on.

The report places Pakistan in Tier 2 because it “does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking...” The main criteria used to judge a government’s performance are the number of investigations and prosecutions under the 2018 Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (PTPA) and convictions.

Worse is the charge that “victim identification remained inadequate; and for a third year, the government did not take adequate action against credible reports of official complicity in trafficking. There are reports of victims being re-victimised soon after rescue, and corruption continued to hinder anti-trafficking efforts.”

The number of victims is quite ambivalently quoted. The 2022 report (reporting year 2021) gives the total number of female trafficking victims (for sex and unspecified exploitation) as approximately 17,000, constituting an overwhelming majority of the total trafficked people (21,253). Of this humungous number of cases, only 130 were investigated, 39 prosecuted and no one was convicted. The pattern has remained unchanged year after year.

Here, a mention should be made of the HRCP’s excellent report titled Modern Slavery: Trafficking of Women and Girls in Pakistan released in February 2022. It analyses the problem in a holistic context. This report describes trafficking as gendered business and confirms the double burden of women when it writes, “The trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation is one of the most prevalent forms of trafficking in Pakistan.” A significant number of women taken as bonded labour in agriculture and micro-enterprises suffer sexual abuse.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 27, 2023**

# Terrorist killed in North Waziristan IBO

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A terrorist was killed during an Intelligence-Based Operation (IBO) in the Mir Ali general area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district, the army's media wing said.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), security forces conducted the IBO, during which intense firing took place between troops and terrorists.

"Resultantly, one terrorist got killed," the ISPR added. "Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed terrorist."

The statement concluded that the "killed terrorists remained actively involved in terrorist activities against security forces and killing of innocent citizens".

Last week, an army soldier was martyred in a bomb blast in Bannu and a suspected militant was killed in a joint operation in Khyber tribal district.

A local official had told Dawn that an improvised explosive device (IED) was planted by militants in the Janikhel area of Bannu district and it exploded when it was being defused by the bomb disposal unit.

On January 18, security forces gunned down at least four terrorists during an IBO in Balochistan's Hoshab.

The ISPR had said that an IBO was initiated "to clear a hideout linked with firing incidents on security forces along M-8, in general area Talsar, Hoshab" on a tip-off about the presence of terrorists.

In the first week of the month, at least 11 terrorists, including a militant commander and two suicide bombers, were killed in an IBO in South Waziristan's Wana.

According to ISPR, security forces "successfully foiled a high-profile terrorist activity" during the operation.

"During intense exchange of fire, 11 terrorists, including terrorist commander Hafizullah alias Tor Hafiz and two suicide bombers, were killed," the ISPR had said.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 28, 2023

## IA gets access to Interpol database

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The government has decided to provide the police force access to the Interpol database, which would help the country's law-enforcement authorities fight crimes, especially sexual exploitation of children, cybercrimes and financial crimes.

In this regard, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) signed an agreement with the National Central Bureau-Interpol, Islamabad, (NCB-Pakistan). The agreement provided access to the Interpol data to three units of Islamabad police and the FIA.

The police forces and the other law-enforcement agencies of other provinces would also be given access to the database in a phased manner, officials said. Speaking at the ceremony, FIA Director General Mohsin Butt urged the law-enforcement agencies to use of Interpol data in their fight against crimes.

"Only by employing the latest technologies and strengthening our international police linkages, can the police in Pakistan effectively meet the challenges of modern-day law enforcement", Butt told the ceremony.



The FIA director general said that the agreements would enable the beneficiary agencies to access Interpol databases in real time, which would help them fight crime, especially the emerging crimes such as child sexual exploitation and cyber-enabled financial crimes.

Earlier, NCB-Pakistan Director Sikandar Hayat briefed the participants on the database programme and performance. "As a result of the signing of the agreements, the law-enforcement agencies will also be able to access various crime databases," he said.

On the occasion, an Interpol delegation briefed the participants about the 'iARMS' database. They mentioned that with over one million records, 'iARMS' could help identify firearms, smuggling patterns and smuggling routes, adding that such crimes could be controlled with the help of the police.

**SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE. JANUARY 29, 2023**

## 33 killed, 147 injured in blast at Peshawar Police Lines mosque



**A blast inside a mosque shook Peshawar's Police Lines area, with officials saying that at least 33 people were killed and 147 were injured.**

A list issued by the Lady Reading Hospital (LRH) around 7:20pm stated that 33 victims had died. According to a list shared by the hospital, the mosque's imam, Sahibzada Noorul Amin, was also killed in the blast.

LRH spokesperson Mohammad Asim had earlier told Dawn.com that 32 were dead while 147 were injured.

Peshawar Commissioner Riaz Mehsood said a rescue operation was under way inside the mosque as a number of people were buried under the rubble.

"An emergency has been imposed at hospitals across the city and injured persons are being provided the best medical facilities," the senior official said.

The outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the blast.

Speaking to the media, Peshawar Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Muhammad Ijaz Khan said that the roof of the mosque collapsed after the blast. "A number of jawans are still stuck under the rubble and rescuers are trying to pull them out."

He said the main hall of the mosque – which had a capacity of 250 to 300 people – had collapsed but the rest of the building was still intact.

In response to a question about the nature of the blast, the official said: "The smell of explosives has been detected but it is too early to say anything substantial."

Khan said between 300 to 400 police personnel were present in the area at the time of the blast. "It is apparent that a security lapse occurred," the CCPO told the media.

He added that the bodies and injured persons had been moved to the LRH.

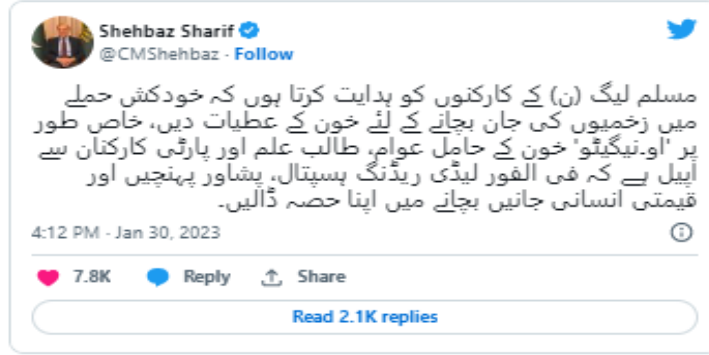
Standing alongside Khan, KP Governor Haji Ghulam Ali condemned the blast and urged the people of Peshawar to donate blood for the injured, saying that it would be a "huge favour for the police".

Former KP chief minister Mahmood Khan also called on PTI workers in Peshawar and adjoining areas to reach LRH to donate blood to the victims.



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called on PML-N workers to the nation to donate blood for those injured the blast, especially those with O negative blood group.

At the same time, he also urged the nation to reach LRH without any delay and play a role in saving precious lives.



Over the past few months, the law and order situation in the country has worsened, with terrorist groups executing attacks with near impunity across the country.

Since the talks with the TTP broke down in November, the militant group has intensified its attacks, particularly targeting the police in KP and areas bordering Afghanistan. Insurgents in Balochistan have also stepped up their violent activities and formalised a nexus with the outlawed TTP.

On January 22, a police vehicle narrowly escaped a bomb blast in Peshawar's Badaber area. A day earlier, a policeman was martyred and two others were injured when unidentified assailants attacked a police post in Dheri Zardad locality of Charsadda.

On January 14, a deputy superintendent and two constables were martyred when militants, armed with automatic assault weapons, targeted the Sarband police station on the outskirts of the province's capital, Peshawar late at night.

### **PM, COAS visit Peshawar**

PM Shehbaz and Chief of Army Staff Asim Munir visited Peshawar and were briefed on the blast. Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah were also present.

During the visit, the premier was given a briefing by the Peshawar Corps Commander about the motives behind the terror attacks while the provincial police chief presented an initial report on the blast. The prime minister was also shown CCTV footage of the blast.

Speaking on the occasion, the premier vowed to implement the National Action Plan in addition to enhancing the capacity of anti-terrorism institutions.

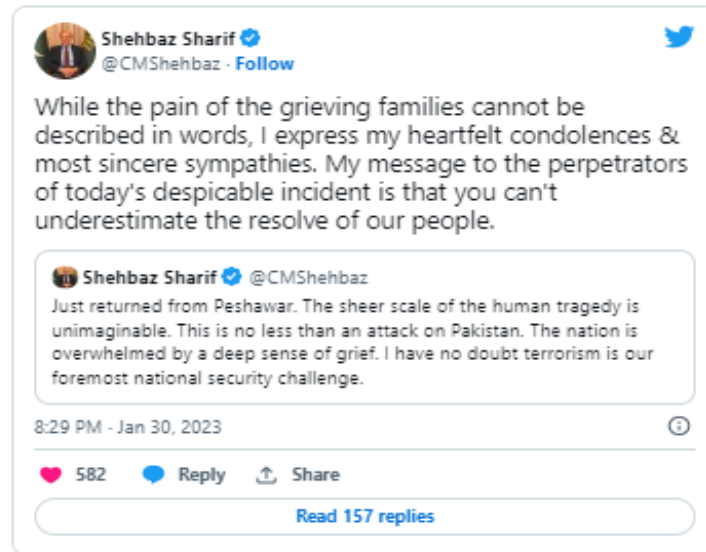
He said the cowardly terror attacks could not weaken the nation's resolve against terrorism, adding that miscreants and their facilitators would be punished for their heinous crimes.

PM Shehbaz later visited LRH to inquire about the injured. He toured different wards and directed the hospital administration to provide the injured with the best medical facilities.

Taking to Twitter after his visit, the prime minister said: “Just returned from Peshawar. The sheer scale of the human tragedy is unimaginable.

“This is no less than an attack on Pakistan. The nation is overwhelmed by a deep sense of grief. I have no doubt terrorism is our foremost national security challenge,” he said.

“While the pain of the grieving families cannot be described in words, I express my heartfelt condolences and most sincere sympathies. My message to the perpetrators of today’s despicable incident is that you can’t underestimate the resolve of our people,” he said.



### **'Knocked unconscious'**

The police headquarters in Peshawar is in one of the most tightly controlled areas of the city, housing intelligence and counter-terrorism bureaus, and is next door to the regional secretariat.

Dawn.com’s correspondent at the blast site said the explosion took place at around 1:40pm as Zuhr prayers were being offered. He said personnel of the police, army and bomb disposal squad were present inside the mosque.

The reporter said a portion of the building had collapsed and several people – especially those standing in the front row during the prayers – were believed to be under it.

Visuals run on television channels showed people gathered around the collapsed wall of the mosque. Meanwhile, roads leading to the Red Zone – the area housing Governor’s House, Chief Minister Secretariat, Corps Headquarters and important defence installations – were closed down.



Security personnel cordon off the site of a mosque blast inside the police headquarters in Peshawar on January 30.

A witness told Dawn.com that he was performing wudhu in the mosque's compound when a powerful explosion threw him onto the street. "My ears were blocked and I was knocked unconscious."

Another witness said that the windows of the building adjacent to the mosque shattered because of the intensity of the blast.

Shahid Ali, a policeman who survived, said the explosion took place seconds after the imam started prayers. "I saw black smoke rising to the sky. I ran out to save my life," the 47-year-old told AFP.

"The screams of the people are still echoing in my mind," he added. "People were screaming for help."

### **Condemnations**

In a statement issued later in the day, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif strongly condemned the blast and said that the attackers behind the incident "have nothing to do with Islam".

"Terrorists want to create fear by targeting those who perform the duty of defending Pakistan," he said.

The premier paid tribute to the martyrs and promised that their sacrifices would not be in vain. "The entire nation is standing united against the menace of terrorism."

PM Shehbaz also said that a comprehensive strategy would be adopted to counter the deteriorating law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the federal government will help provinces in increasing their anti-terrorism capacity.

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, while condemning the attack, said that "terrorist incidents before local and general elections were meaningful".



A tweet by PPP's media cell quoted Bilawal as saying that strict action would be taken against terrorists, their patrons and their facilitators.

Bilawal stressed that the National Action Plan was the only solution to the issue of terrorism and promised that it would be "implemented strictly".

He also called party workers to donate their blood to save the lives of the injured.

Later in the day, Bilawal took to his own Twitter to condemn the attack. "Deeply saddened at loss of innocent lives; my heartfelt condolences to the affected families. Such cowardly acts will not deter our resolve against acts of terrorism in Pakistan," he said



PTI Chairman Imran Khan also strongly condemned the “terrorist suicide attack” in Peshawar and expressed sympathies with the families of the victims.

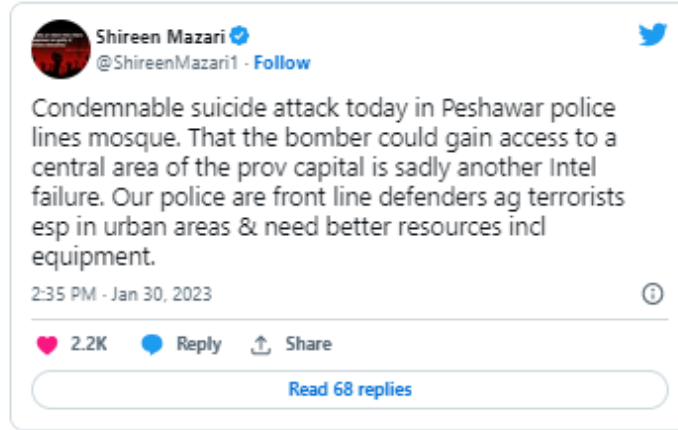


“It is imperative we improve our intelligence gathering and properly equip our police forces to combat the growing threat of terrorism,” he added.

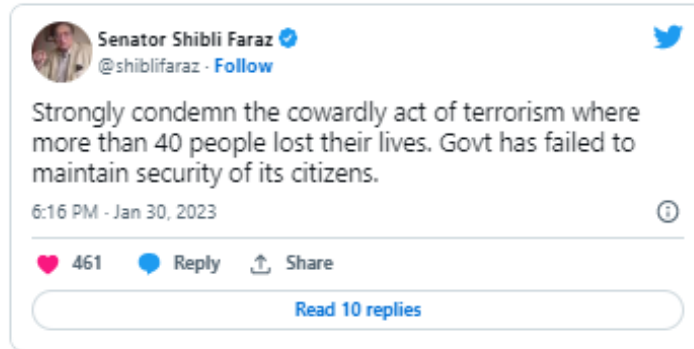
Ex-human rights minister Shireen Mazari termed the bomber’s “access to a central area of the provincial capital” as another “intel failure”.

“Our police are frontline defenders against terrorists, especially in urban areas and need better resources, including equipment,” she added.

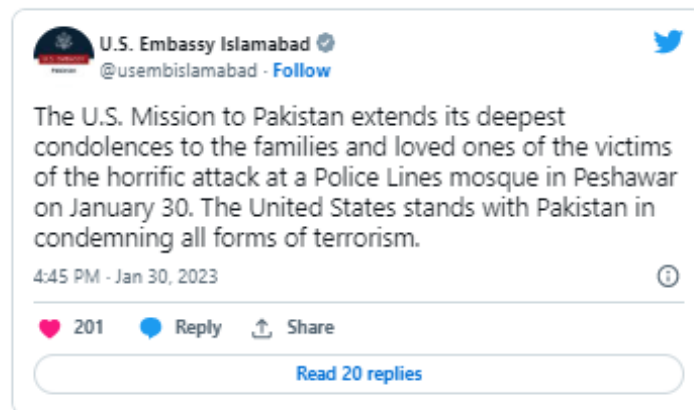




PTI's Shibli Faraz condemned the attack but said the government had "failed to maintain security of its citizens".



The US embassy in Islamabad extended its deepest condolences to the families of the victims. "The United States stands with Pakistan in condemning all forms of terrorism," the mission said on Twitter.



## Security high-alert in Islamabad, Sindh

Islamabad Inspector General (IG) Dr Akbar Nasir Khan issued directions for a “security high-alert” to be placed in the capital, a tweet by Islamabad Police said.



It said that security at all entry and exit points of the city has been increased and monitoring was being done through the “Safe City” system.

The police added that snipers had been placed at “important points and buildings” and the police were provided with thermal imaging facilities.

Meanwhile, Sindh IG Ghulam Nabi Memon issued a red alert for the province after the Peshawar blast.

“Security arrangements at mosques, imambargahs and other important religious places should be strengthened,” the provincial police chief said.

Memon also directed police to enhance patrolling and snap-checking. He said the crackdown against criminals should be made effective through monitoring and intelligence collection.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 30, 2023

## Death toll from attack on mosque in Peshawar's Police Lines rises to 92



Security personnel and rescue workers prepare to search for the blast victims in the debris of a damaged mosque inside the police headquarters in Peshawar on January 30, 2023.

**The death toll from the attack on a mosque in Peshawar's Police Lines area a day earlier rose to 92 after more bodies were recovered from the attack site, a spokesperson for the Lady Reading Hospital (LRH) confirmed.**

On Friday, 59 people, mostly police officials, were martyred and over 150 were injured after an explosion ripped through a mosque in Peshawar's Red Zone area.

The outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the attack. It later distanced itself from it.

In a statement issued today, LRH spokesperson Muhammad Asim said that all the deceased persons have been identified, while 57 of those injured are receiving treatment at the facility.

He added that a total of 158 injured people were brought to the hospital on Monday and most of them had been sent back home after medical aid.

Meanwhile, Rescue 1122 spokesperson Bilal Faizi said that a rescue operation at the blast site was under way for the past 18 hours.

“This morning we are going to remove the last part of the collapsed roof so we can recover more bodies, but we are not hopeful of reaching any survivors,” he said.

On the other hand, Peshawar police chief Muhammad Ijaz Khan said that more than 90 per cent of the victims were policemen, between 300 and 400 of whom had gathered in the compound's mosque for prayers.

Wajahat Ali, a 23-year-old police constable who survived, said that he had lost all hopes for survival. “I remained trapped under the rubble with a dead body over me for seven hours,” he told AFP from the LRH on Tuesday.

### **Nature of blast yet to be determined**

A police report issued after the attack, a copy of which is available with Dawn.com, said the explosion occurred inside the main hall of a mosque – which has a capacity of 300 to 350 men – located in the Police Lines area.

The locality comprises headquarters of the Capital City Police, Frontier Reserve Police, Elite Police Force, Counter Terrorism Department, Tele Communication Branch, RRF and SCU etc, it stated.

The statement said that the blast caused the roof of the mosque to collapse and a rescue operation was underway by the Pakistan Army and Rescue 1122, for retrieval of casualties.

“A severed head has been recovered from inside the debris. The use of explosives in the incident has been confirmed, while other factors are being evaluated to confirm the nature of the blast,” it said.

The report added that suicide bombing could not be “ruled out” and investigation by various teams was under way.

### **Funeral prayers for police martyrs offered**

Separately, funeral prayers for six policemen, including deputy superintendent of police Arab Nawaz and Ismatullah, were offered earlier today at the Police Lines area.



On Monday night, collective funeral prayers for 27 police martyrs were offered in Peshawar's Police Lines area with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police Chief Mauzzam Jah Ansari, army officers and officials of civil administration in attendance.



After the prayers, the coffins of the martyrs – lined in a row and draped with the national flag – were sent to their hometowns for burial with official protocol.

Speaking on the occasion, KP IGP Mauzzam Jah Ansari said that the KP police were always ready to sacrifice their lives for the protection of people's lives and property.

“As the head of this force, I salute the police officials who lost their lives in the deadly blast. These martyrs are our real heroes and their sacrifices will not be in vain,” he said, adding that the bereaved families would not be abandoned and their welfare would be the “prime responsibility” of the KP police.

### **Day of mourning in KP**

On Monday night, KP Caretaker Chief Minister Muhammad Azam Khan announced a day of mourning across the province today to condemn the deadliest attack of the year.

“The national flag will be at half-mast across the province,” he said, adding that the government shared the grief of the martyrs' families.

Khan further assured the aggrieved families that the provincial government would not leave them alone amid testing times in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Rabbani demands parliamentary inquiry into TTP's 'rehabilitation' policy

PPP Senator Raza Rabbani on Tuesday demanded a parliamentary inquiry into the previous government's “rehabilitation policy” of the proscribed TTP.

Condemning the Peshawar bombing in a Senate session, he stressed that Pakistan needed to review the causes of the rise in terrorism. “The TTP's rehabilitation policy, which was initiated by the [previous] government, is the foundation of this.”

After the fall of the US-supported Ashraf Ghani government in Afghanistan in 2021, the Afghan Taliban had facilitated peace talks between the government and the TTP.

While negotiations with the banned group reportedly began in October 2021 under the PTI government's watch, the process continued in fits and starts when the Shehbaz Sharif government took over.

In response, the banned outfit had declared a ceasefire and stopped its attacks on security forces, extending the truce in May. The government had also sent delegations of tribal elders and ulema to Kabul in order to persuade the TTP to end its activities and surrender its weapons.

The months-long negotiations, however, remained inconclusive and ultimately ended in November last year. Major sticking points included the TTP's demands to roll back the merger of the erstwhile tribal areas with KP, release hardened terrorists, as well as the group's refusal to lay down their arms. These were obvious red lines the state could not let the militants cross.

Addressing the upper house of Parliament today, Rabbani recalled that when the Taliban returned to Afghanistan, some thousands of people with weapons were allowed to enter Pakistan.

“It was said that they are good Taliban and they will work according to the law and Constitution [...] it was said they will be rehabilitated,” he said.

The senator pointed out that neither the public nor Parliament was taken into confidence over the matter. “Even at that time, Parliament had said that a joint session should be called and all these things should be presented before it so that the public’s opinion could be brought forward.”

Rabbani went on to say that permission was also not taken from the National Security Committee, instead, it was just told that negotiations with the TTP were under way.

“The negotiations were outsourced to a jirga. PPP and ANP had strong reservations about them,” he said, demanding that a parliamentary inquiry should be conducted into the matter.

The senator also said that the terrorism policy should be discussed in the joint sitting of the Parliament on Feb 8.

“All the stakeholders and political parties should be called to the Parliament for a dialogue. This is the question of life and death but parties are busy in doing politics,” he added.

Sherry calls for implementation of NAP

In a series of tweets on Tuesday morning, Climate Change Minister and PPP leader Sherry Rehman called for the swift implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) and national unity.

“The nation, all political parties and every partner should stand united in the fight against terrorism. The country cannot afford further division and terrorism,” she said.



Rehman said that terrorists got a chance to reorganise due to the “unclear policy of the previous government”.

“Now Imran Khan is saying that his government wanted to resettle the Taliban in KP. Such irresponsible statements are an attempt to create a soft corner in terrorist organisations,” she said, adding that the PPP had serious concerns over the new wave of terrorism before the elections.

Earlier this month, the PTT chief had said that his government had planned to resettle banned TTP fighters in Pakistan’s tribal districts with the help of the Afghan Taliban, but the plan hit a snag owing to the non-cooperation of provinces.

“The government had planned to relocate at least 5,000 TTP fighters and their family members which amount to about 35,000,” he had revealed in a virtual seminar, adding that the plan did not materialise as provinces refused to foot the bill.

### Surge in terrorism

Over the past few months, the law and order situation in the country has worsened, with terrorist groups executing attacks with near impunity across the country.

Since the talks with the TTP broke down in November, the militant group has intensified its attacks, particularly targeting the police in KP and areas bordering Afghanistan. Insurgents in Balochistan have also stepped up their violent activities and formalised a nexus with the outlawed TTP.

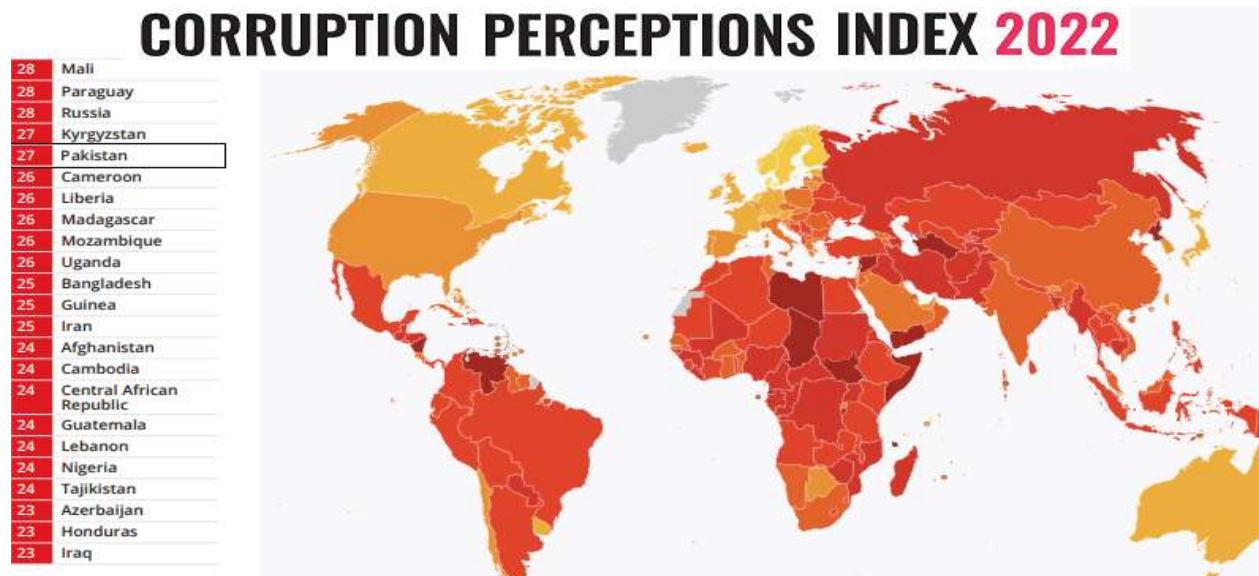


On January 22, a police vehicle narrowly escaped a bomb blast in Peshawar's Badaber area. A day earlier, a policeman was martyred and two others were injured when unidentified assailants attacked a police post in Dheri Zardad locality of Charsadda.

On January 14, a deputy superintendent and two constables were martyred when militants, armed with automatic assault weapons, targeted the Sarband police station on the outskirts of the province's capital, Peshawar late at night.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 31, 2023**

# Pakistan makes no improvement on corruption perception index, ranks 140 out of 180 countries: report



Pakistan failed to make any improvement on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in 2022 as the country ranked 140 out of 180 countries – a position unchanged from the last year, Transparency International said in a report.

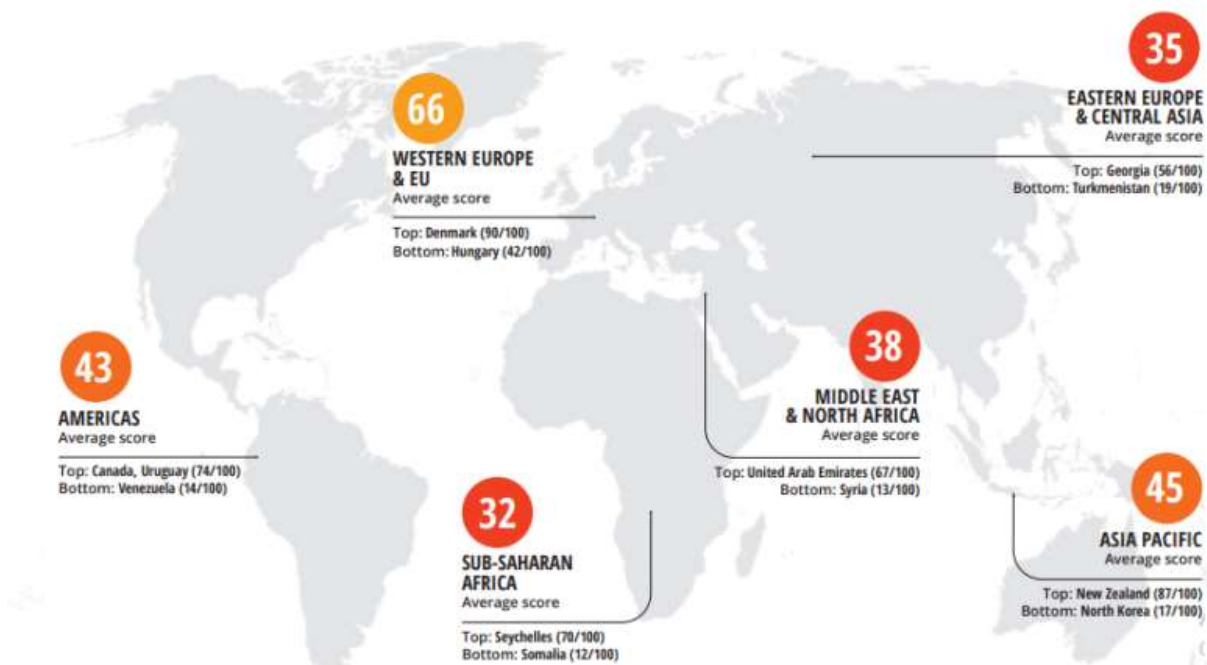
The CPI, which measures how corrupt a country’s public sector is perceived to be by its experts and businesspeople, uses a scale of zero to 100 where zero is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

While Pakistan’s rank was unchanged, its score dropped to 27 from 28 last year. There was no change in India’s score, while Bangladesh’s dropped to 25 from 26 last year.



In 2021, Pakistan dropped 16 places in the CPI compared to 2020, ranking 140 out of 180 countries. Under the PTI government, the ranking of Pakistan gradually slid. In 2019, it was 120 out of 180 countries, in 2020, it was 124, in 2021 it worsened further to 140. However, the PTI government lost power through a parliament vote in April 2021, paving the way for a new coalition government with representation from major political parties – the PML-N and the PPP.

### RESULTS BY REGION

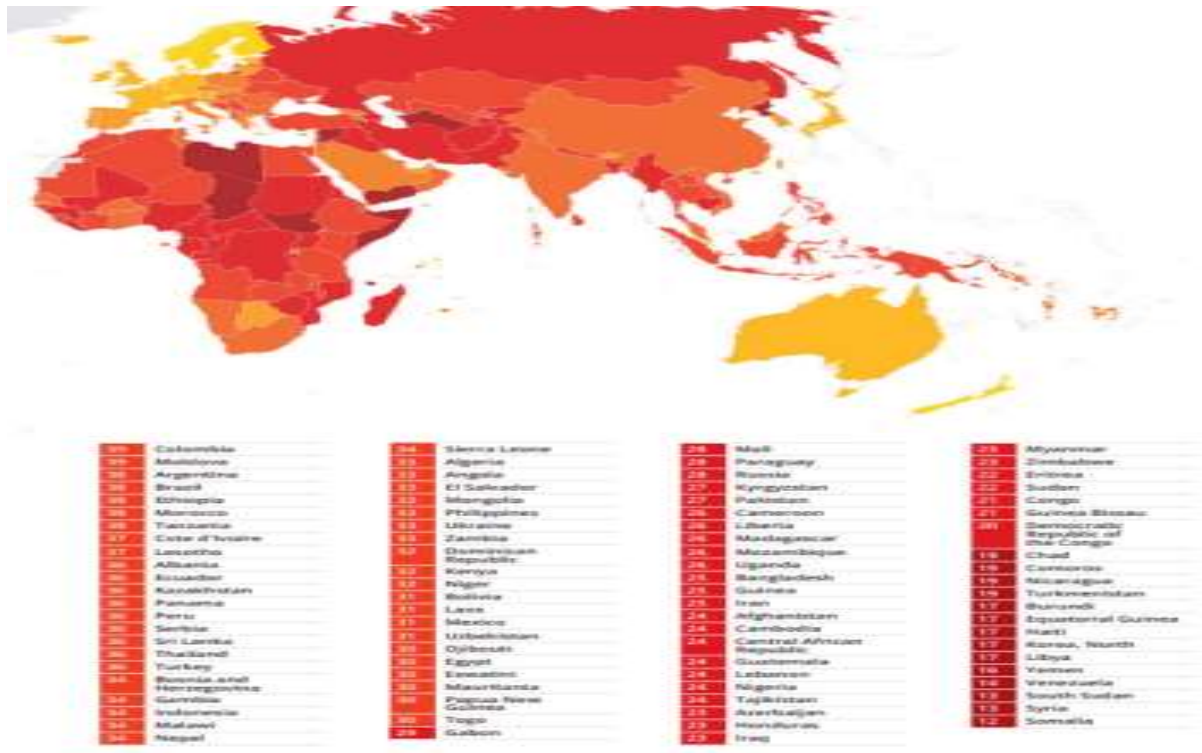


In 2018, during the PML-N government, Pakistan’s ranking was 117 out of 180 countries.

The 2022 edition of the CPI ranked 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, drawing on 13 expert assessments and surveys of business executives.

The scores reflect the views of experts and business people.

Denmark topped the index this year, with 90 points, followed by Finland and New Zealand with 87 points each. Somalia, Syria, and South Sudan are at the bottom of the chart with 12, 13, and 13 points, respectively.



In his message, Chief Executive Officer of TI Daniel Eriksson said leaders could fight corruption and promote peace all at once.

“Governments must open up space to include the public in decision-making – from activists and business owners to marginalised communities and young people.”

He opined that in democratic societies, people could raise their voices to help root out corruption and demand a safer world for us all,” he wrote in the report.

SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 31, 2023

# Army huddle vows to bring perpetrators behind Peshawar suicide attack to 'exemplary justice'

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NAVEED SIDDIQUI



The 255th Corps Commanders' Conference held at the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi on Tuesday. — Photo courtesy: ISPR

**The army's top brass on Tuesday vowed to bring the perpetrators responsible for yesterday's suicide attack on a mosque in Peshawar's Police Lines area to "exemplary justice".**

Monday's attack had blown away the wall of the prayer hall and an inner roof. So far, 100 people have died while dozens have been injured.

According to a statement issued from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the 255th Corps Commanders' Conference was held at General Headquarters and was presided over by Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir.

Participants were briefed in detail about "prevailing and emerging threats", the situation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu Kashmir (IIOJK) and ongoing intelligence-based operations being

undertaken by the army and law enforcement agencies (LEAs) for "breaking the nexus between terrorists and their support mechanism across the country".

The forum paid tributes to those martyred in the Peshawar attack and vowed that "the perpetrators will be brought to exemplary justice", the statement said.

The ISPR quoted the COAS as saying that such "immoral and cowardly acts" couldn't shake the nation's resolve and reinvigorated "our determination to succeed in [the] ongoing war against terror with zero tolerance for any terrorist entity."

The COAS directed all army commanders to continue focusing on anti-terrorist operations in coordination with intelligence and LEAs with "renewed resolve till the time we achieve sustainable peace".

The ISPR said the forum also took notice of human rights violations in IIOJK and "Indian design" to alter its demographics.

The forum reaffirmed the army's commitment to "Pakistan's principal support to [the] indigenous freedom struggle of brave Kashmiri people as per relevant UN resolutions and aspirations of the people of the Kashmir," the statement said.

**SOURCE: DAWN, JANUARY 31, 2023**

# TTP attack on Mianwali police station 'repulsed'

ASIF CHAUDHRY

**LAHORE:** A day after a deadly suicide bombing in Peshawar claimed over 100 lives, a police station in Mianwali came under a gun attack by a group of heavily armed militants belonging to banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakis-tan (TTP) on Tuesday night.

However, police claimed late at night the attack had been repulsed. The attack is significant in that terrorists — who had so far targeted police stations and check posts in Khyber Pakhtun-khwa and areas bordering Afghanistan — have set their sights on a police station in Punjab for the first time since the resurgence of terrorism in the country.



Punjab Inspector Gen-eral of Police Dr Usman Anwar confirmed to Dawn in the early hours of Wed-n-e-sday that armed attackers belonging to the ban-ned militant organisation, TTP, claimed the attack on the police station.

He said police teams from three regions — Mianwali, Dera Ghazi Khan and Sargodha — besides Lahore police and Punjab CTD had reached Mianwali for a 'grand operation' against the TTP.

According to social media reports, the attack started at around 9pm as militants unleashed heavy fire at Makkarwal police station using automatic weapons. This resulted in a heavy exchange of fire as police retaliated leading to a gun battle that lasted two hours.

### 'Attack repulsed'

However, there were no reports of any injuries to police personnel during the attack, the Punjab IG confirmed, as a senior Mianwali police official said personnel posted at the police station reacted swiftly, averting the attack.

Makarwal in the Isakhel tehsil, is a mostly hilly area known for coal mines, the official added.



The senior official said smugglers bringing contraband, arms and narcotics on foot from Darra Adam Khel in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa frequently use the area and the terrain also allows militants and terrorists to operate freely.



The Punjab IG said that highly-trained personnel of the police's Counter Terrorism Department and Elite Force also joined the operation. He said a high alert has been issued in the entire Mianwali region in the wake of the attack.

He said a search operation has been launched after police teams chased the attackers who apparently disappeared taking advantage of the complex and inaccessible terrain.

"We are also discussing the options to launch a massive search [operation] in Mianwali district to trace the terrorists' hideouts," Dr Anwar said.

He said a committee of senior police officers, including Additional IG (training) Zulfiqar Hameed, Additional IG Special Branch Punjab Sultan Chaudhry, Operations DIG Waqas Nazeer and Information Technology DIG Ahsan Younis.

Dr Anwar said the team would remain in contact with Mianwali RPO Shariq Kamal to prepare a new strategy to launch the search operation in hilly areas of the district. The IG said that a grand search operation and crackdown would be launched soon.

"I am also reaching there in the morning today," he said while teams with senior officers were well prepared for the crackdown.

**SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 1ST, 2023**

# Road to perdition

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A RECKONING is called for, a reckoning unlike that which this nation has ever seen. It must happen now – or, as surely as night follows day, more bestial acts of violence like that which took place in Peshawar on Monday will continue to claim the lives of innocent Pakistanis. And it must come from those who sowed the seeds of a disastrous policy that is once again reaping a harvest of blood.

There is not much to be gained in pointing the finger of blame at particular individuals, though some are indeed more culpable than others. The security establishment as a whole has since decades persisted with a myopic approach to militancy, one that could only lead to perdition.

Its disregard, bordering on contempt, for any input from the civilian leadership – which had to face the public's wrath as the body count rose – kept it insulated from what might have been wiser counsel.

Following the horrific APS attack in 2014, it seemed for a time that the state had seen the folly in its 'good Taliban, bad Taliban' strategy. The National Action Plan that was a response to that tragedy stipulated 20 steps towards eradicating extremism in society.

But while the civilians faltered in taking the measures they were responsible for, the establishment's inconsistent policy towards militants remained in play and negated whatever steps the government did take.

When the civilian leadership in 2016 warned that Pakistan risked international isolation unless it cracked down on militants of all stripe, it was ruthlessly – and very publicly – cut down to size, leaving no doubt as to who was calling the shots.

Some action against the 'good Taliban' was only initiated when Pakistan was about to be placed on the FATF grey list. As a result, 'charitable entities' that had earned an international reputation as fronts for extremist propaganda and militancy were forced to suspend their activities.

Nevertheless, some extremist groups continued to find space to hold press conferences and rallies, even field candidates in elections.

Contrast that with the persecution of individuals like Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement leaders Manzoor Pashteen and Ali Wazir, who were warning that militants were once again gaining a foothold in the tribal districts, some of them with the blessing of the state.

After the military-led 'peace talks' with the TTP failed and the terrorist outfit began to carry out countrywide attacks, it became clear who had gained from the exercise. In the fullness of time,

the state's missteps are plain to see. The glib platitudes, the doublespeak about 'zero tolerance' for militancy have been shown up for what they are.

A break from the past is needed, but for that the establishment must come clean so that we can start working to put behind us the confusion created by its dangerously muddled policy.

**SOURCE: DAWN, FEBRUARY 1ST, 2023**