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This year we are actively engaged with the UNODC in participating in the UNTOC Constructive Dialogues being held in Vienna. Our contributions have earned acclaim and recognition from international stakeholders.



Director's Message



Centre for Governance Research (CGR) is an independent think tank, committed to making a difference in areas related to crime prevention, criminal justice, rule of law, serious and organized crime and good governance.

We launched the National Initiative against Organized Crime (NIOC) in November 2019. Since then, we have tried to make a humble contribution and got due recognition both at the national and global levels.

In response to the National Security Policy of Pakistan launched in 2021, NIOC came up with a National Strategy against Serious and Organized Crime in early 2022.

We are also recognized by the Government of Pakistan as the focal point on behalf of the civil society in collaborating with the National Focal Person on UNTOC Review Process initiated in early 2022 and came up with an annual report 2022 on the implementation of review process on behalf of the Civil Society Alliance of Pakistan.

This year we are actively engaged with the UNODC in participating in the UNTOC Constructive Dialogues being held in Vienna. Our contributions have earned acclaim and recognition from international stakeholders.

CGR also participated in the annual Commission on Crime Commission and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) in Vienna on 22-26 May 2023.

Early this year CGR carried out a study on Drug Trafficking through Couriers and Parcels.

We are determined to make a difference as the only dedicated and focused NGO dealing with Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) in Pakistan.

I am truly grateful to NIOC's Advisory Board comprising Tariq Parvez, Zahid Hussain, Samina Ahmed, Manzoor Ahmed, Zubair

Habib and Jawaid Akhtar for their commitment to the cause of dealing effectively with Organized Crime in Pakistan. Their guidance and advice have always been invaluable.

Our team of deputy director Sarmad Saeed and manager administration Hassan Sardar has made a great difference. Our consultants Kaleem Imam, Saroop Ijaz, Ammar Jaffri, Azam Khan, Nawaz Nadeem, Ejaz Minhas, Shehryar Fazli, and research associates Mehwish Aziz and Fatima Saif have made great contributions. I owe them all a debt of gratitude.

Tariq Khosa

Director CGR-NIOC

6 June 2023

Attacks on journalists rise by 60pc

ISLAMABAD: At least 140 cases of threats and attacks against journalists, media professionals and media organisations were reported in Pakistan over the past year, a report showed on Sunday, indicating an annual increase of over 60 per cent.

The annual Pakistan Press Freedom Report, prepared by the media rights watchdog Freedom Network, showed that Islamabad was the riskiest place to practise journalism in Pakistan, as 56, or 40pc, violations took place in the city.

Punjab was the second worst, with 35 (25pc) cases of violations, followed by 32 (23pc) cases in Sindh.

The report, released ahead of the World Press Freedom Day celebrated on May 3, noted that the country's media environment became riskier and more violent in recent months, as the number of attacks surged 63pc to 140 between May 2022 and March 2023 from 86 in 2021-22.

The report also documented the killings of at least five journalists in Pakistan in the period under review.

"The escalation in violence against journalists is disturbing and demands urgent attention," said Iqbal Khattak, the executive director of Freedom Network, which tracks press freedom violations around the year and publishes the annual report.

"Attacks on independent journalism block access to essential information, which is especially damaging during the ongoing political and economic crises when the public needs reliable news to understand the issues and respond to them," he said.

"It is ironic that Pakistan in 2021 became the first country in Asia to legislate on the safety of journalists, but one and a half years later, the federal and Sindh journalists' safety laws have not helped a single journalist resulting in increasing violence against them," Mr Khattak said.

In a statement, he said Freedom Network urged Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to urgently fulfil his promise made at an international conference in Islamabad on Nov 2, 2022, marking the international day to combat impunity of crimes against journalists, to notify the safety commission required under the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021 so the law passed with bipartisan support by parliament can start helping journalists. The commission's absence continues to promote impunity of crimes against journalists.

He also urged Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah to equip its notified provincial safety commission under the Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act 2021

with resources so that it could help journalists and empower them to combat the impunity of crimes against them in the province.

One violation every two days

The 140 attacks against journalists in the 11-month period in Pakistan showed that there were 13 cases a month, or a press freedom violation almost every other day.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 1, 2023

Slight rise observed in militant attacks in April, says PICSS report

ISLAMABAD: The month of April this year witnessed a slight increase in the number of terror incidents, as there were 48 militant attacks, which resulted in 68 deaths and 55 injuries, said a report released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) on Monday.

The previous month saw 39 militant attacks which led to 58 deaths and 73 injuries. There was a 23 per cent increase in militant attacks, a 17 per cent increase in deaths, and a 25 per cent decrease in the number of injured people. Human losses among security forces also witnessed a 35 per cent increase.

The report claimed that security forces responded by increasing their operations against militant groups. Last month, they killed at least 41 militants and arrested 40 others.

Security forces focused their efforts mainly on the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, where they killed 30 militants and arrested 14 others.

“The KP remained the most affected province, with 49pc of the total attacks reported during the month. In KP, the militants carried out 33 attacks which led to 45 deaths, including 23 security forces personnel, 17 militants and five civilians. Thirty-two people were injured, including 17 personnel of security forces and 10 civilians.

Within KP, 19 militant attacks were reported from the mainland province, while 14 were reported in tribal districts of KP (former Fata),” report said.

Tribal districts saw a 100pc rise in militant attacks. In March, PICSS had recorded seven attacks, while in April, the number increased to 14.

Balochistan witnessed 13 attacks which caused 21 deaths, including 11 security forces personnel and nine civilians. Twenty-three people were injured, including 21 civilians and two security forces personnel. Punjab and Sindh witnessed only one attack each in April, the report said.

According to the Director General of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), security forces conducted approximately 70 intelligence-based operations daily. During the first four months of the year, they arrested around 1400 suspected militants and killed more than 188.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 2, 2023

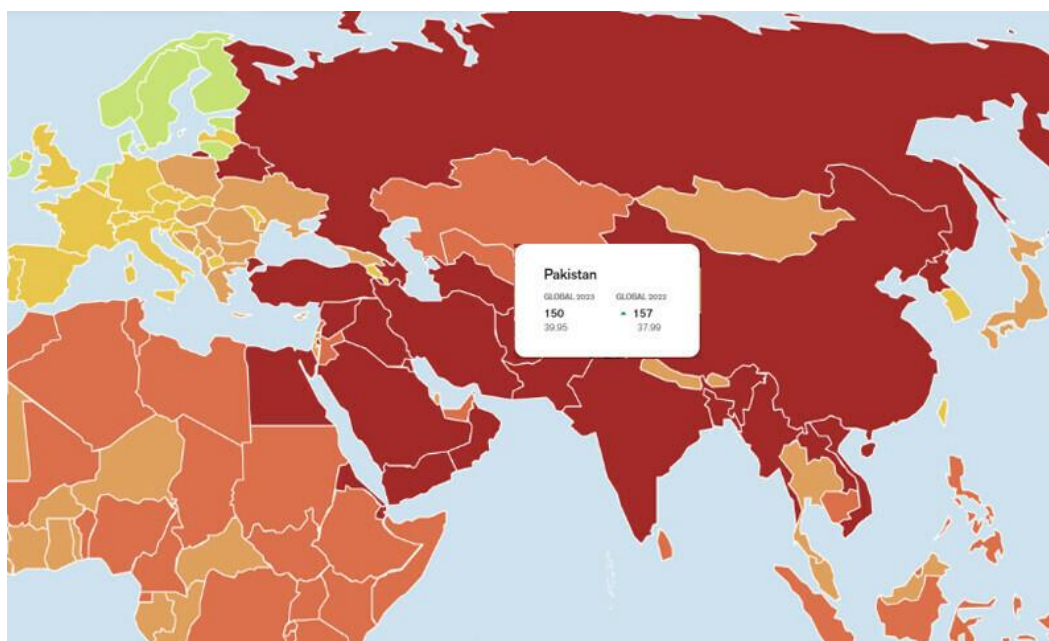
Press freedom

It says much about the quality of democracy in a country when media persons cannot do their job without fearing for their safety. Even more so when there are two laws – one on the federal and another on the provincial level – that are supposed to protect those belonging to this profession. Today, on World Press Freedom Day, there is little for journalists in Pakistan to celebrate. The right to free speech, which underpins their profession, continues to be imperilled and the landscape is evolving in new and disturbing ways. The Freedom Network, an award-winning independent national media watchdog, documented no less than 140 cases of attacks and violations against journalists and other media professionals between May 2022 and March 2023. As its latest report says, this amounts to “a staggering two-thirds increase in the number of violations in the preceding year, when the number of cases was 86”. Five media professionals were killed and unsuccessful attempts were made on the lives of 10 others. Women journalists, as always, continued to be the target of vile, sexualised attacks on social media.

The nature and source of the threats have also registered a significant change and reflect the highly polarised atmosphere in the country. Of all the violations against journalists, assault was the most common at 36pc, with 22 out of the 51 cases in this category resulting in injuries. In the previous corresponding period, assaults numbered 7pc of the total violations. Another finding of note is that although state actors continue to be among the main assailants of press freedom in the period under review, political parties narrowly beat them to the top spot. In 21pc of the total cases, victims or their families pointed the finger at political parties; last year the figure was 4pc. This points to a precipitous degradation in the quality of public discourse and growing intolerance for differing political opinions. Media persons are getting caught in the middle. With 40pc of the violations, Islamabad remains the riskiest place to be a journalist. Punjab, the scene of particularly ugly government-opposition clashes, comes in second with 25pc of the violations; last year, the province was in third place with 13pc. In a country where the right to inform and be informed has never been accepted in its true spirit, worse times may lie ahead for the beleaguered media.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 3, 2023

Pakistan moves up 7 places in RSF's press freedom index



Pakistan moved up seven spots in RSF's annual press freedom index.

Pakistan moved up seven places in 2022 according to the annual World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

According to the index published to coincide with Press Freedom Day by the RSF, a non-profit that defends and promotes freedom of information, Pakistan now ranks 150 out of 180 countries, whereas it stood at 157 in the previous year's index.

In its country profile, the RSF said "under the guise of protecting journalism, Pakistani law is used to censor any criticism" of the powers that be and that the regulator Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Pemra) "is concerned less with regulating the media sector than with regulating the content it publishes".

It also mentioned that media houses, even privately owned, "are dependent on state sector ads and legal announcements for their funding, resulting in information ministries at the provincial and national levels threatening to withdraw advertising in order to influence editorial policy".

The index said Pakistan "is one of the world's deadliest countries for journalists, with three to four murders each year that are often linked to cases of corruption or illegal trafficking and which go completely unpunished".

These findings were backed by the Pakistan Press Freedom Report prepared by the Freedom Network released on Monday, which said at least 140 cases of threats and attacks against journalists, media professionals and media organisations were reported in Pakistan over the past year, indicating an annual increase of over 60 per cent.

India, on the other hand, dropped to 161 in the index compared to its 2022 ranking of 150, falling from “problematic” to “very bad”, thanks to “media takeovers by oligarchs close to Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi”.

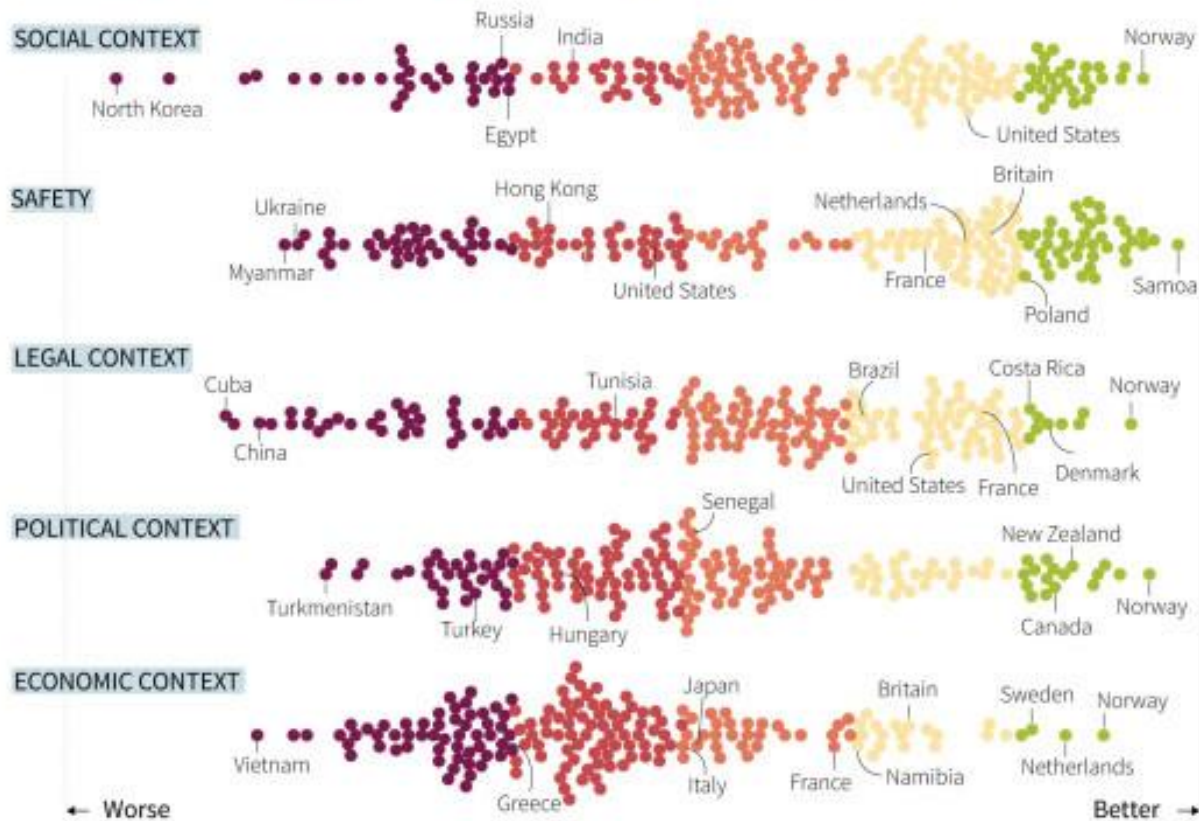
Norway and North Korea remain best and worst, respectively, for press freedom, according to the 21st annual report, which was published on World Press Freedom Day.

Overall, the environment for journalists was rated as “bad” in 70 per cent of the 180 countries in the NGO’s annual ranking, and “good” in just eight countries.

Global press freedom

Of 180 countries evaluated by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), only Denmark and Norway are classified as in a “good situation” for each category

Situation ■ “Very serious” ■ “Difficult” ■ “Problematic” ■ “Satisfactory” ■ “Good”



Source: Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 2022 index published on May 2023



he worst countries in the new ranking, apart from North Korea, were Vietnam, “which has almost completed its hunt of independent reporters and commentators,” and China, “the world’s biggest jailer of journalists”.

The United States fell three places to 45th, in part due to a deteriorating security situation for journalists.

The biggest falls were seen in Peru (down 33 places to 110), Senegal (down 31 to 104) and Haiti (down 29 to 99th).

Major improvement was seen in Brazil, up 18 to 92 thanks to the departure of far-right president Jair Bolsonaro.

The Middle East and North Africa remain the most dangerous region for journalists, RSF said, while Europe remains the safest, though attacks on journalists in Germany saw it drop five places.

The ranking is compiled by combining data on abuses committed against journalists with hundreds of surveys sent to journalists, academics and human rights activists.

Misinformation and AI

Journalism is being battered by propaganda and increasingly sophisticated fakes, aided by AI software and a failure of oversight from tech companies, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said Wednesday.

This year, RSF put a spotlight on the myriad forms of misinformation that are “drowning out” trustworthy news – a problem compounded by the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence.

“It is the tech industry that allows disinformation to be produced, distributed and amplified,” RSF secretary-general Christophe Deloire told AFP.

“Reliable information is drowned in a deluge of disinformation,” Deloire added.

“We are less and less able to perceive the differences between the real and the artificial, the true and the false.”

He said a prime example was Elon Musk, who took over Twitter in late 2022.

The report criticises his new paid-for verification system, saying Musk was pushing “an arbitrary, payment-based approach to information to the extreme”.

The report used the example of Midjourney, an AI programme that generates high-quality images that are “feeding social media with increasingly plausible and undetectable fake ‘photos’”, such as those of Donald Trump being manhandled by police and a comatose Julian Assange in a straitjacket that recently went viral.

Systematic propaganda

Traditional forms of political interference are also gaining ground in many countries, RSF said.

Some two-thirds of countries have political actors who are “often or systematically involved in massive disinformation or propaganda campaigns”, it said, highlighting the cases of Russia, India and China.

They are assisted by a vast disinformation industry.

RSF recently supported a consortium of investigative journalists working on “Forbidden Stories”, a project which uncovered the activities of Israeli firm “Team Jorge” which specialises in producing disinformation.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 3, 2023

6 soldiers martyred in exchange of fire with militants in North Waziristan

IFTIKHAR SHIRAZI



Six Pakistan Army soldiers were martyred during an exchange of fire with militants in the Dir Duni area of North Waziristan district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the army's media affairs wing said.

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that an exchange of fire took place between terrorists and Pakistani army troops on May 4.

"Own troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location and three terrorists were sent to hell, while injuring another two," the ISPR statement said.

However, six soldiers were martyred during the "intense exchange of fire". The deceased were identified as 36-year-old Havaldar Saleem Khan, 37-year-old Naik Javed Iqbal, 26-year-old Sepoy Nazir Khan, 25-year-old Sepoy Hazrat Bilal, 22-year-old Sepoy Syed Rajab Hussain and 22-year-old Sepoy Bismillah Jan.

“Sanitisation of the area is being carried out to eliminate any terrorists found in the area. [The] security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve,” the ISPR said.

The attack comes amid a surge in terrorist activities across the country, especially in KP and Balochistan, since the outlawed militant group Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan ended its ceasefire with the government in November.

In his maiden press briefing last month, ISPR Director General Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said that at least 293 people were martyred and 521 were injured in 436 terrorist incidents over the past year.

In KP, 192 people were martyred in 219 terror activities, while 80 people lost lives in 206 incidents in Balochistan, 14 people in five attacks in Punjab, and seven in six terrorism incidents across Sindh.

He had said that the army and law enforcement agencies carried out 8,269 intelligence-based operations during the previous year in which 1,378 suspected terrorists were apprehended and 157 were killed.

The DG ISPR had also said that overall 137 security personnel were martyred and 117 injured in anti-terror operations in the ongoing year.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 4, 2023

5 teachers among 8 killed in Kurram firing incidents: police



People gather outside the district headquarters hospital in Kurram

At least eight people, including five teachers, were killed in separate incidents of firing in the Parachinar area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Kurram district , police said.

Upper Kurram District Police Officer (DPO) Muhammad Imran told Dawn.com that the first shooting incident took place on a road near the Shalozan area and the second at Teri Mengal School – which a Dawn.com correspondent present in the area said was at a distance of around six kilometres from the site of the first incident.

Later, he said while speaking to the media that one person, a teacher, was killed in the first incident and seven in the school shooting. He added that those killed at the school included four teachers and three drivers.

Separately, Rescue 1122 official Syed Ghayyur Hussain told Dawn.com that bodies of the school shooting victims were taken to district headquarters hospital, Parachinar.

Security beefed up

DPO Imran told the media that measures were being taken and negotiations being carried out with tribal leaders to bring the situation back to normalcy after the attacks.

He said the Kohat division deputy inspector general of police and commissioner had reached Parachinar after the incidents, adding that security had been beefed up and routes blocked in the area.

The official said a probe into the incidents was under way.

Earlier, Zahid Hussain, a representative of the Teacher Union, told Dawn.com that they had decided to keep schools in the area closed until the culprits were caught.

Staging a protest outside the Parachinar Press Club, he urged teachers across KP to close schools from tomorrow.

Reports sought

State broadcaster Pakistan Television Corporation reported that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the incidents and had sought a detailed report from relevant authorities on the attacks.



Separately, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah said in a tweet that he, too, had sought a report from the interior secretary and assured that the perpetrators would be punished.



Meanwhile, a statement issued by the office of KP caretaker Chief Minister Mohammad Azam Khan attributed the killings to a property dispute.

The statement said the CM had taken notice of the matter and sought a report on the incidents from police and the relevant administration.

It carried his instructions to take immediate measures for the arrest of those involved in the incidents.

“Nobody will be allowed to take the law into their hands. Those sabotaging peace in the area will be dealt with iron hands,” the CM said, vowing that the perpetrators of today’s incidents would be taken to task.

The statement said he issued directives for taking all the needed measures for ensuring peace in the area and the provision of timely treatment for the injured.

It added that the CM expressed grief over the loss of lives, terming the firing incidents “very unfortunate and condemnable” and extended condolences to the heirs of the victims.

Condemnations

President Arif Alvi condemned the attacks, grieving the killing of “on-duty teachers”.

“The attack on teachers by the enemies of knowledge is condemnable,” a statement on Twitter quoted him as saying.

The president said he hoped that the “suspects will be arrested soon and punished according to the law”.

He offered prayers for the slain individuals and extended condolences to their heirs.



In his condemnation, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari also demanded punishment for those behind the attacks and an “immediate and complete investigation of the matter by police and the administration”.

A statement on the PPP’s Twitter quoted him as saying that such incidents could not be tolerated at any cost and that their prevention should be ensured.



Another statement on the PPP's official Twitter said the party's co-chairperson and former president, Asif Ali Zardari, had termed the "killing of on-duty teachers" an act of "terrorism".

The statement quoted him as saying that the perpetrators of the attack should be taken to task.

He offered prayers for the deceased and extended condolences to the bereaved.



Meanwhile, a statement on the National Assembly's Twitter said Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Deputy Speaker Zahid Akram Durrani had termed the attacks a "heinous act by elements working against humanity".

The statement quoted them as saying that these elements wanted to "sabotage peace in the country".

Expressing grief over the deaths of slain individuals, they demanded the "strictest punishment" by law enforcers for elements involved in "such heinous atrocities and terrorism".

Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Sajid Hussain Turi, Shia organisation Anjuman-i-Hussainia's secretary Inayat Hussain and Syed Tajammul Hussain, president of Shia organisation Tehreek-i-Hussaini, also condemned the incidents.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 4, 2023

TTP forging nexus with Baloch separatists, militant groups

ISLAMABAD: Experts at a discussion warned that banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was forging nexus with Baloch separatists and local militant groups based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, a development which will likely exacerbate the already precarious security situation in the country.

Unlike the past, this is for the first time that TTP has started carrying out terrorist attacks in Pashtoon areas of Balochistan, which is very disturbing, they said.

There is no clarity about Pakistan's policy for Afghanistan and the ruling coalition in the centre is also unclear how to deal with the TTP since talks with the proscribed group failed last year, they added.

The consultation on "Afghan peace and reconciliation: Pakistan's interests and policy options" was organised by Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS).

The representatives of political parties and civil society, academics, and journalists, among others, participated in the discussion. The main themes of the consultation included "Pak-Afghan bilateral relations: challenges and way forward" and "Emerging Afghan situation and its implications for the region."

The speakers said TTP and other local militant groups were filling the space left by mainstream and nationalist political parties in KP as they were no longer only jihadi-religious groups. They said these militant groups now promoted political and nationalist thoughts to achieve their vested interests.

The Islamite militants, including TTP, and separatists have increased their attacks in Balochistan since Taliban took over Kabul in August 2021, said Adnan Aamir, a Quetta-based journalist who writes for international media.

He said the group for the first time has started carrying out attacks in the Pashtoon areas of the province.

"TTP has increased its footprints in the province as at least three local Baloch militant groups have recently joined it," added Mr Aamir. He said the banned group was promoting its political agenda in the province by showing its sympathies for the people of Balochistan, which demonstrated that it wanted to increase its presence in the province.

Aqeel Yousafzai, Peshawar-based expert on Afghan affairs, said recent statements of TTP chief Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud were political in nature and there was no mention of jihad in these. He added that the group had been introducing itself as a Pashtoon nationalist group for the last four years.

“The rhetoric of nationalist parties and militant groups like TTP is now the same,” he said, adding that this should be very alarming for the policymakers.

Mr Yousafzai said local militant and separatist groups had entered into some sort of understanding with TTP. He argued that the government should open its door for talks with all militant groups.

President International Research Council for Religious Affairs Mohammad Israr Madani said they would have to enhance people-to people contacts and trade to decrease hostility of Afghans towards Pakistan.

“There is a need for religious diplomacy and involvement of religious scholars in this regard,” he said.

Mr Madani said Pakistan should hold talks with Afghanistan continuously on different issues and these should not be limited to a single sitting. He also said Pakistan should make its border management policy people-friendly to facilitate the Afghan people.

Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) leader Hafiz Munir Ahmed opined that Pakistan’s Afghan policy should be led by civilian set-up and parliament. “Political parties should be given an opportunity to make such a policy.”

Director News and Current Affairs Pakistan Television (PTV) Aoun Sahi said there was confusion in Pakistan who would make a new Afghan policy as the previous one failed to produce results. “It is also unclear who is now leading any Afghan policy.”

Programme Adviser at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Pakistan Hamayoun Khan added that there was an issue of mistrust between the two countries. He said Central Asia was a huge potential for Pakistan and Afghanistan and both countries could benefit from it if they improve their bilateral relations.

PIPS Joint Director Safdar Sial said that Pakistan’s engagement with Taliban-led interim government in Kabul was the ultimate solution to all problems. He suggested that the civilian government in Pakistan should take the ownership of Afghan policy, which should be led by parliament. He added that security agencies must have their input in it.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 6, 2023

An unlikely nexus



TTP forging nexus with Baloch separatists, militant groups

THE enemy of my enemy is my friend, goes the ancient proverb which likely explains many an improbable alliance between disparate groups fighting a common enemy. The same logic would explain the contention that the TTP are forging a nexus with Baloch separatists (and with militant groups in Balochistan and KP), a view that has found space since several months on mainstream and social media.

Most recently, it was aired at a consultation in Islamabad on Pakistan's policy options on Afghanistan. However, despite a spike in violence by both TTP and Baloch separatists across the country, no concrete evidence has yet been presented on such an alliance taking shape, let alone an instance being cited where the two militant actors have cooperated in any capacity.

Baloch separatist groups have maintained a tactical silence on possible collusion with the TTP; after all, why debunk claims that make them appear a more formidable foe? The TTP, meanwhile, has been actively promoting the claim that it has forged a nexus with Baloch militant outfits.

In December, it announced that a group led by Mazar Baloch had pledged allegiance to the TTP chief Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud and that this would strengthen the TTP in Balochistan.

Since the umbrella organisation announced the end of the ceasefire agreed with the government, there has been a perceptible shift in its narrative towards a more political and nationalist rhetoric – likely an attempt to gain more acceptance among the Pakhtun population.

Its appeal to Baloch nationalist sentiment also fits into the same strategy, as a propaganda tactic. Experts at the aforementioned consultation in Islamabad also noted that the TTP and other local militant groups were filling the vacuum left by mainstream and nationalist political parties in KP.

In Balochistan, the exclusively security-centric lens through which the province has long been viewed, and which is also responsible for the lack of a truly representative government there, has created a fertile landscape for all manner of violent extremist outfits to proliferate and wreak havoc on the people.

These groups – some of which were once given carte blanche to hunt down Baloch separatists – are the TTP's natural allies. The Baloch separatists, notwithstanding their demonstrated capacity for violence, are on the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. One common factor, however, is that Afghanistan has become a safe space for both these adversaries of Pakistan.

But, as history is witness, contradictory alliances do happen: the lack of conclusive evidence at this point does not preclude the possibility of some sort of 'working arrangement' between the TTP and the Baloch separatists in the future. To prevent this, the state must without delay take the only path that has the prospect of long-term dividends – empower Balochistan in the true spirit of the 18th Amendment.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 8, 2023

2 terrorists killed, 2 soldiers martyred in attack on FC camp in Balochistan

Two terrorists were killed while as many soldiers were martyred in an attack by terrorists on a Frontier Constabulary (FC) camp in Balochistan’s Muslim Bagh town, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said.

In a press release, the ISPR said that a “group of terrorists attacked an FC camp in Muslim Bagh area in northern Balochistan”.

“In the process of clearance operation, two soldiers have embraced shahadat (martyrdom) while another three are injured,” it added.

“So far, two terrorists have been sent to hell by the security forces, who continue to maintain pressure on the terrorists.”

The statement said that an operation by the security forces was “under way to capture the terrorists who have been cornered into a building complex” while a heavy exchange of fire was also taking place.

The ISPR further said: “Commander 12 Corps is supervising the security forces operations being conducted at Muslim Bagh area in Balochistan where terrorists have been cornered.”

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 banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) broke down in November last year, the outfit has intensified its attacks, particularly targeting the police in KP and areas bordering Afghanistan.

Earlier this month, experts at a discussion warned that the TTP was forging a nexus with Baloch separatists and local militant groups based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan – a development that will likely exacerbate the already precarious security situation in the country.

On April 1, four soldiers were martyred in a terrorist attack along the Pak-Iran border in the Jalgai sector of Balochistan’s Kech district.

On March 10, five terrorists were killed by security forces in intelligence-based operations (IBO) carried out in North and South Waziristan. On March 8, six terrorists were killed by security forces in an IBO in North Waziristan’s Datta Khel general area.

According to statistics released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, an Islamabad-based think-tank, January 2023 remained one of the deadliest months since July 2018, as 134 people lost their lives – a 139 per cent spike – and 254 received injuries in at least 44 militant attacks across the country.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 12, 2023

6 terrorists killed, 7 including soldiers martyred as clearance operation in Balochistan concludes

Six terrorists were killed in a clearance operation in Balochistan's Muslim Bagh town, a day after terrorists attacked a Frontier Constabulary (FC) camp there, while seven – including soldiers – were martyred in the process, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said.

In a press release, the ISPR said it completed the clearance operation it began a day ago – when it had already killed two terrorists – earlier this morning. “All six terrorists in the compound who were well equipped have been sent to hell,” it stated.

The statement further said, “In the process of clearance operation, seven sons of the soil, including a civilian, have embraced shahadat (martyrdom) while another six individuals, including a woman, have been injured.”

Moreover, a hostage rescue operation was also conducted to save three families from a residential block, the ISPR said. “The terrorists had not even spared children from their horrendous approach,” it added.

“Necessary intelligence follow-up will continue to trace their (terrorists’) linkages, arrest facilitators and expose their sponsors,” the ISPR vowed.

The press release stated: “Security forces, in step with the nation, remain determined to thwart all attempts at sabotaging peace, stability and progress of Balochistan.”

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed “deep grief and sorrow” over the martyrdom of six soldiers of Pakistan Army and one civilian, Radio Pakistan quoted him as saying.

In a statement, he commiserated with the bereaved families and prayed for the higher ranks of martyrs. Praying for the early recovery of the injured, the prime minister directed to provide them best possible medical treatment.

Shehbaz Sharif said the armed forces are determined to completely eradicate the menace of terrorism. He said the entire nation stands by the security forces.

A day ago, Balochistan Chief Minister Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo had condemned the attack and had expressed grief over the martyrdom of two soldiers till then.

The same day, in a separate incident, five militants were killed in a heavy exchange of fire with security forces during an operation in the Hoshab area of the Kech district after militants opened fire at a security checkpoint there.

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Earlier this month, experts at a discussion warned that the TTP was forging a nexus with Baloch separatists and local militant groups based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan – a development that will likely exacerbate the already precarious security situation in the country.

On April 1, four soldiers were martyred in a terrorist attack along the Pak-Iran border in the Jalgai sector of Balochistan's Kech district.

In March, 11 terrorists were killed in separate intelligence-based operations in North and South Waziristan.

According to statistics released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, an Islamabad-based think-tank, January 2023 remained one of the deadliest months since July 2018, as 134 people lost their lives – a 139 per cent spike – and 254 received injuries in at least 44 militant attacks across the country.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 13, 2023

Indigenous recipes

MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

ALMOST every society is infected with the virus of extremism. Push and pull factors vary from one area to another; hence there is no standard recipe to deal with this phenomenon. Indigenous recipes have higher chances of effectiveness and local ownership.

Norway's EXIT programme values the role of parents in countering growing radicalisation. In our context, in poor families, the father is usually away from home, so the mother's role becomes more important. But what about the capacity of rural mothers to perform such a role? Tracking the second generation of global jihadists is another priority area. This is also relevant in Pakistan's context, where it is difficult for law enforcement agencies to track the second generation of militants.

The Swedish approach is multi-dimensional, including legal changes, preventive diplomacy, community-based schemes, and the promotion of open dialogue. The country encourages moderate 'imams' and appointed 100 'peace agents' to actively work with Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

The UK's countering extremism (CE) model is based on the three I's (ideology, individuals and institutions). Its Prevent programme involves former extremists, combatants and activists in countering radicalisation. In Northern Ireland too, the role of former extremists is included in the counter-narrative.

In Pakistan, there is no role for former combatants and victims in the narrative-building process, which could facilitate in understanding the factors that led them towards extremism.

In Indonesia, the National Counter Terrorism Agency has sought the help of religious clerics, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and NGOs in its counterterrorism strategy. It launched the Afghan Veterans Programme for those who participated in the Afghan jihad; each participant received a monthly stipend of about \$155. For enhanced political ownership, the country's vice president was tasked with oversight of CT coordination efforts. The Indonesian model also believes that convicted terrorists have an effective role to play in promoting counter-narratives.

Since 2005, in the Malaysian CT strategy, CT police visit educational institutions and share their knowledge about radicalisation. From the Malaysian strategy, one learns that deradicalisation cannot be achieved quickly but requires patience. This approach focuses on building rapport with detainees and promoting their dependence on government institutions instead of their former networks. It is a three-pronged strategy, including an indirect, gradual approach instead of direct efforts for counter-radicalisation.

The Singapore approach is clinical, with regular psychological testing and risk assessments. The Terrorist Rehabilitation Programme 2010 has three components: psychological, social, and religious. It employed the services of government officials, social workers and the clergy. Religious counselling is an important part of the programme.

To counter extremism within the Somali-American community in the US, the Young Somali American Advisory Council was established. Inclination towards tribalism and clannishness attracted many young Somalis to join Al Shabaab. Homeland Security emphasised the need to tackle the 'grievance narrative' to show the community how to redress its grievances.

Dreams of a 'gre-ater Somalia' within the ethnic Somalis in Somalia, Somali-land, Erit-r--ea, Dji-bo-uti, Kenya and Ethiopia is a potent factor in strengthening radicalisation among Somalis. Al Shabaab capitalised on the disparity faced by ethnic Somalis in Kenya in order to radicalise and recruit. Somali refugees fleeing Kenya compromise Kenya's internal security. In 2012, camps in Dadaab housed 450,000 refugees, and many believe it was a breeding ground for terrorism and a support base for Al Shabaab.

Despite constraints, Pakistan has been hosting refugees for decades. Their repatriation has been included in National Action Plans I and II, but diplomatic efforts to repatriate them have yet to become a reality.

While dealing with extremism, developing states usually focus more on external factors; consequently, internal push and pull factors leading to radicalisation are often overlooked. The effectiveness of a narrative depends on the redressal of the target audience's needs; ideally, it should be a combination of both generic and targeted interventions.

The flaw with our CT strategy is that fashioning a counter-narrative is usually considered a separate component, thereby giving an advantage to the savages. To bridge such gaps, we must make the counter-narrative part of our CT strategy and adopt a whole-of-nation approach.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 15, 2023

Terrorist killed, 3 soldiers martyred in Balochistan gun battle



A combination photo of soldiers martyred during an exchange of fire with militants in Balochistan.

A terrorist was killed and three soldiers were martyred when security forces retaliated to an attack on one of their posts in the Zarghoon area of Balochistan , the military’s media affairs wing said.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the early-morning attack by a group of terrorists was launched at a post that was established recently to “help check extortion efforts targeting coal mines in the area”.

Security forces “retaliated readily to the fire raid”, pushing back terrorists, the ISPR said, adding that three soldiers embraced martyrdom and “one terrorist was sent to hell” in the heavy exchange of fire.

“Based on follow-up ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) effort, the likely hideout of fleeing terrorists has been identified in nearby mountains and a deliberate blocking and sanitisation operation has been launched,” the ISPR statement read.

It added that the operation was progressing well and security forces were maintaining pressure to deny terrorists escape from the area.

“Security forces, in step with the nation, remain determined to thwart attempts at sabotaging peace, stability and progress of Balochistan,” the statement said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the attack and paid tributes to the martyred soldiers.



The attack comes amid a surge in terrorist activities across the country, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, since the outlawed militant group Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan ended its ceasefire with the government in November.

Earlier this month, six Pakistan Army soldiers were martyred during an exchange of fire with militants in the Dir Duni area of KP’s North Waziristan district.

In his maiden press briefing last month, ISPR Director General Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said that at least 293 people were martyred and 521 were injured in 436 terrorist incidents over the past year.

In KP, 192 people were martyred in 219 terror activities, while 80 people lost lives in 206 incidents in Balochistan, 14 people in five attacks in Punjab, and seven in six terrorism incidents across Sindh.

He had said that the army and law enforcement agencies carried out 8,269 intelligence-based operations during the previous year in which 1,378 suspected terrorists were apprehended and 157 were killed.

The DG ISPR had also said that overall 137 security personnel were martyred and 117 injured in anti-terror operations in the ongoing year.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 20, 2023

2 soldiers martyred, 3 terrorists killed in Tank IBO



Pakistan Army soldiers Muhammad Atiq and Rajab Ali embraced martyrdom.

Two soldiers embraced martyrdom and three terrorists were killed during an intelligence-based operation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Tank district, the army's media wing said.

According to a press release issued by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the killed terrorists remained actively involved in "numerous terrorist activities against security forces as well as innocent citizens".

The statement said the martyred soldiers, identified as 39-year-old Naik Muhammad Atiq from the Chakwal district and 36-year-old Naik Rajab Ali hailing from Attock, fought gallantly.

"Sanitisation of the area is being carried out to eliminate any terrorists found in the area," the ISPR said.

"Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve," it added.

A day earlier, a terrorist was killed and three soldiers were martyred when security forces retaliated to an attack on one of their posts in the Zarghoon area of Balochistan.

Pakistan has seen an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan, after the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) ended its ceasefire with the government in November.

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SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 21, 2023

Minority reports

TWO recent American reports paint an unflattering picture where the state of religious freedom in Pakistan is concerned. The US State Department's 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom's section on Pakistan presents an extensive list of incidents of religious persecution in the country. It observes that in 2022, at least 52 people "were accused of blasphemy or related religious-based criminal charges". Most of the accused were Ahmadi. It also highlights the issues of forced conversion and targeted killings on religious grounds. Meanwhile, the annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom also has few good things to say about freedom of belief in Pakistan. Highlighting many of the same issues the State Department report mentioned, the USCIRF document recommends re-designating Pakistan as a "country of particular concern", while advocating targeted sanctions against Pakistan. Reacting to the State Department report, the Foreign Office has termed it "ill-informed ... irresponsible and counterproductive", while claiming that Pakistan's Constitution offers a "robust framework" for religious freedom.

While the US does tend to use such reports as political tools, there can be little argument with the findings. Even if these reports had not been compiled, the grim fact is that the state of religious freedom in Pakistan is far from ideal. The public lynchings over accusations of blasphemy, misuse of the blasphemy law, and the marginalisation of minority communities are all stark realities in today's Pakistan. This is so because, whereas the country's founders had envisaged a pluralistic state where all denominations would be free to profess their beliefs, over the decades, rabid extremists have hijacked the discourse – often encouraged by the establishment – bringing us to where we stand today. Instead of living in denial, the state must work to roll back the tide of extremism that threatens to take Pakistan under. This must be done not to please any external powers, but to make Pakistan a more liveable place for all its citizens.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 22, 2023

6 terrorists killed in South Waziristan IBO

Six terrorists were killed during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in the Kot Azam area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's South Waziristan district, the military's media affairs wing said.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), an intense exchange of fire took place between security personnel and terrorists during the operation conducted on May 23.

"Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed terrorists who remained actively involved in terrorist activities against security forces as well as extortion and targeted killing of innocent citizens," it said.

The ISPR further stated that sanitisation of the area was being carried out to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area.

"Locals of the area appreciated the operation and expressed their full support to eliminate the menace of terrorism," the military's statement added.

On May 21, two soldiers were martyred and three terrorists were killed during an operation in the Tank district.

Pakistan has seen an uptick in terror activities, especially in KP and Balochistan, after the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) ended its ceasefire with the government in November. In his maiden press briefing last month, ISPR Director General Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said that at least 293 people were martyred and 521 were injured in 436 terrorist incidents over the past year.

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SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 24, 2023

Policeman martyred in gunfire during raid in Balochistan's Sohbatpur

A police officer was martyred during a raid at the “residence of three brothers”, allegedly involved in criminal activities, in Balochistan’s Sohbatpur district, the police said.

Sajad Tarin, the district police officer (DPO) of Sohbatpur, told Dawn.com that Ameer Muhammad Khossa – the station house officer (SHO) of Adilpur police station – along with his team raided a house for the arrest of three brothers allegedly involved in robbery and theft.

“However, when they reached there, suspects present inside the house opened fire at Khossa and his team, resulting in the SHO’s death,” the police official said.

Tarin added that the remaining policemen stayed safe, but the suspects managed to flee from the crime scene.

He further stated that the SHO’s body was initially moved to Civil Hospital and has now been shifted to the police headquarter. “The body will be handed over to Khosa’s family after the funeral prayers.”

On the other hand, the police have blocked major routes in Sohbatpur to arrest the suspects.

SOURCE: DAWN, MAY 25, 2023