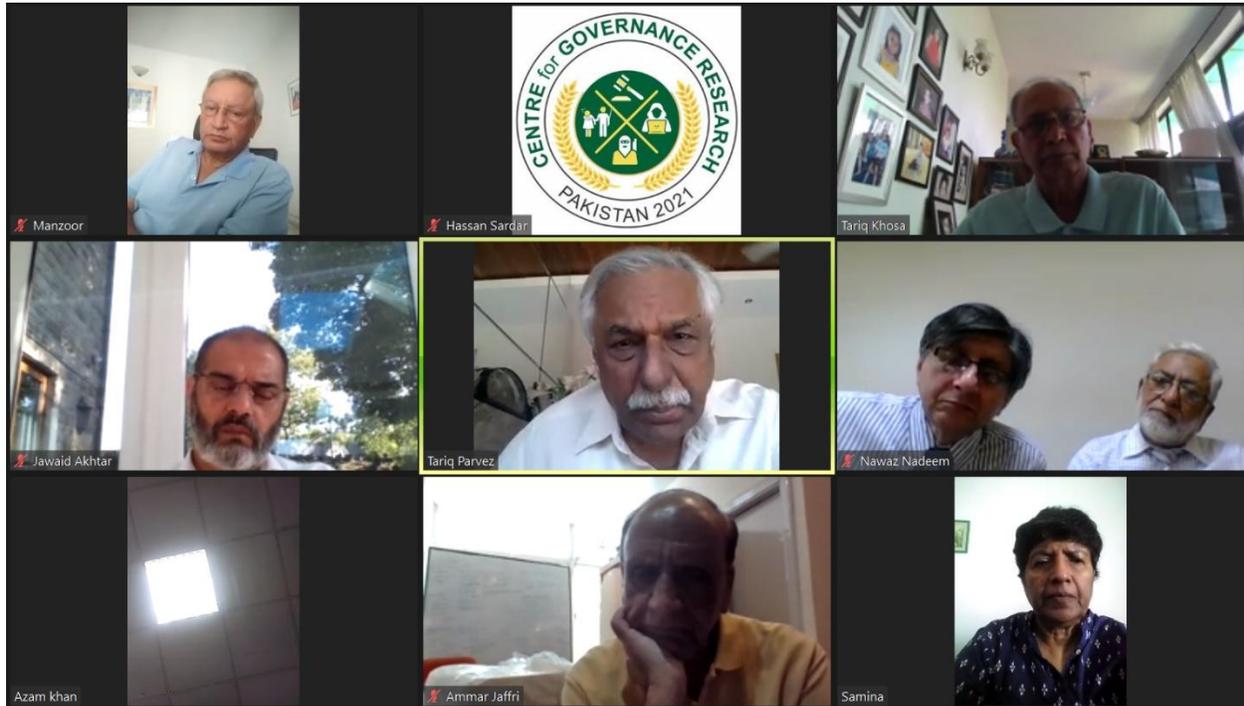


In This Issue

- Minutes of the NIOC 44th Advisory Board Meeting
- UNTOC Constructive Dialogue on International Cooperation: 13 September 2023
- Bannu Ambush
- MoU signed to counter terror in key districts
- Darkness to light
- Haunting Extremism: Setting Ablaze Others' Houses in the Name of Religion!
- 4 soldiers martyred during operation to repulse terrorists in Chitral's Kalash area
- Balochistan CTD guns down 5 'TTP terrorists' in operation in Quetta's Aghberg
- Persecuted people
- Soldier martyred, 6 injured in IED blast on Peshawar's Warsak Road
- 3 terrorists killed, soldier martyred in exchange of fire in Quetta
- Terrorist killed during intelligence-based operation in Dera Ismail Khan
- 8 terrorists killed in intelligence-based operations in KP
- No closure
- 3 terrorists killed in 'intelligence-based operation' in Khyber district
- Soldier martyred, terrorist ringleader killed in 2 KP military engagements
- At least 53 killed, scores injured in suicide blast near 12th Rabiul Awwal procession in Mastung: officials
- At least 5 killed, 12 wounded in 'twin blasts' targeting mosque inside police station in KP's Hangu
- Massacre again
- 16 'beggars' offloaded from Saudi Arabia-bound flight
- Policeman martyred, 2 terrorists killed in attack on patrolling post in Mianwali



NIOC's 44th Advisory Board Meeting



The 44th Advisory Board Meeting of NIOC was held online on Tuesday 5 September 2023. The following AB Members participated: Tariq Parvez, Samina Ahmed, Manzoor Ahmed and Jawaid Akhtar, Zahid Hussain and Zubair Habib could not attend due to their prior commitments. NIOC Directorate was represented by the following: Tariq Khosa, Azam Khan, Nawaz Nadeem, Ammar Jaffri and Hassan Sardar.

At the outset, Director NIOC conveyed heartfelt condolences on behalf of the entire team to Tariq Parvez on the sad and untimely demise of his wife. May God bless her soul. Amen.

The following agenda items came under discussion:

- 1) CGR-NIOC released a Position Paper on the recently established AML and CFT Authority in Pakistan. The paper was authored by Syed Kaleem Imam, NIOC Consultant. It has been shared with all the key stakeholders within the Government of Pakistan.
- 2) CGR-NIOC is in the process of drafting a CVE National Action Plan under the leadership of Tariq Parvez, who was part of the working group that came up with CT NAP in 2014. The action plan will support and promote the objectives of CVE National Strategy drafted by NACTA in 2021.

- 3) Director CGR-NIOC will participate in person in the UNTOC Constructive Dialogue on International Cooperation in Vienna on 12-13 September 2023 and represent the Civil Society Alliance of Pakistan on the UNTOC Review Mechanism so successfully being carried out under the supervision of National Focal Person, Dr Ehsan Sadiq, DG National Police Bureau.
- 4) The three Working Groups of the Civil Society Alliance on UNTOC: Legal Experts, TOC Experts. and Gender and Human Rights Experts will soon come up with Position Papers for consideration by the key GOP Stakeholders, including NFP Ehsan Sadiq.

UNTOC Constructive Dialogue on Int'l Cooperation: 13 September 2023

CGR PAKISTAN STATEMENT: TARIQ KHOSA: DIRECTOR/CEO

Civil society can play a crucial role by fostering a meaningful engagement strategy with the Pakistan UNTOC Review Mechanism National Focal Person and key state stakeholders involved in the process. It has been a journey of significant contribution by civil society through a proactive partnership with the Government and state stakeholders. A solid foundation has been laid for a long-term mechanism under different Review clusters.

In the context of international cooperation, especially amongst the law enforcement agencies, the role of civil society was recognized today to be part of the WG on IC for meaningful interactions. We thank you, chair, for including that in your report.

The following are salient points:

- 1) Rule of law, due process, and human rights must be recognized as a sine qua non of international cooperation.
- 2) Expertise and technical assistance are needed to bridge the gap in mutual legal assistance regimes.
- 3) InterContinental Dialogues are needed to share experiences.

The Way Forward:

- 1) South-South Dialogue along with North-South Dialogue.
- 2) Institutional Implementation Framework.

Bannu ambush

TERRORIST violence continues to take a heavy toll on our security personnel. At least nine troops were martyred when a suicide bomber targeted a military convoy in Bannu's Janikhel area on Thursday. Only a few days earlier, militants had ambushed a police vehicle in neighbouring Lakki Marwat district, resulting in the martyrdom of two police personnel. According to reports on social media, a little-known group calling itself Lashkar-i-Sufyan Karvan has claimed responsibility for the Bannu attack. Though this group may not be a known entity in the murky world of terrorism, it is said to be linked to the Hafiz Gul Bahadur outfit, which has a well-earned reputation for militant violence, and is part of the TTP conglomerate. In a related development, two militants reportedly associated with the Lashkar-i-Islam outfit were eliminated in Peshawar's outskirts by KP's Counter Terrorism Department in an intelligence-based operation. This outfit was at one time headed by dreaded militant Mangal Bagh, now dead, and is also linked to the TTP.

After analysing the latest acts of violence, two major concerns need to be addressed by the state. Firstly, terrorists have a wide footprint across KP and northern Balochistan, and have, in fact, indulged in acts of violence within the KP capital. Their freedom to act across an extensive geographic space needs to be curtailed. Secondly, the recent acts of violence are nearly all linked to the banned TTP. While the terrorist group owns some attacks and keeps quiet about others, there is little doubt that it retains its penchant for lethality, and neutralising it should be the security establishment top priority. In the world of militancy, it is not unusual for fighters to adopt new names for their groups. Therefore, the authorities should not get caught up in nomenclatures, but go after key individuals and dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. More also needs to be done to protect the security forces – both military and police personnel. Militants have reportedly had access to sophisticated American gear abandoned in Afghanistan; these supply lines need to be choked, and our forces equipped with gear to defend themselves. And while the state should turn up the heat on the Afghan Taliban to shut down terrorist sanctuaries on their soil, protecting Pakistani territory and ejecting and/ or eliminating militants operating here is the responsibility of our military.

Source: **DAWN, SEPTEMBER 2, 2023**

MoU signed to counter terror in key districts

A pivotal step towards countering violent extremism and fostering peace has been taken with the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Centre of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism (KPCECVE) and the Society for the Advancement of Nature, Justice, and Health (SANJH) Pakistan.

This collaborative endeavor seeks to craft context-specific strategies aimed at curbing violent extremism, empowering youth, and nurturing resilience within the targeted districts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The signing ceremony, conducted in Peshawar, brought together key figures from both entities. Dr. Ayaz Khan, Chief Coordination Officer of KPCECVE, and Abbas Mehar, Chief Executive Officer of SANJH, formally sealed the agreement in the presence of senior officials from both organizations.

In his address, Dr. Ayaz Khan spotlighted the profound role KPCECVE plays in promoting peace and tolerance within society. He delineated the forthcoming collaboration's cornerstone, a comprehensive programmatic strategy titled 'Roadmap to Resilience'. This strategy hinges on localized data and insights, strategically targeting the root causes of violent extremism in the designated districts while fostering inclusivity and diversity among the youth.

Under the auspices of this MoU, a series of fellowship programs will be launched to engage students and faculty from various universities including FATA University, Kohat University of Science and Technology, University of Karak, University of Bannu, Gomal University Dera Ismail Khan, and University of Peshawar.

These programs will concentrate on bolstering research skills, delving into the fundamentals of countering violent extremism (CVE), and devising evidence-based strategies to tackle this issue head-on. Geared towards postgraduate students and faculty members, the fellowship programs' eligibility and selection criteria will be fashioned through mutual accord and aligned with KPCECVE's fundamental tenets.

As an integral aspect of the initiative, workshops and community engagements will be organized to encourage peaceful coexistence and foster consensus within communities. The interactive platform will enable stakeholders and participants to openly exchange ideas, constructively channeling efforts towards preventing violent extremism.

Abbas Mehar, CEO of SANJH, lauded the commendable endeavors of KPCECVE.

SOURCE: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, SEPTEMBER 1, 2023.

Darkness to light

MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

GROWING violence on educational campuses has debunked the myth that extremism is somehow confined to religious seminaries. It is true that, along with other factors, a lack of education is a potential driver for radicalisation. However, education is also one of the most effective mediums for extremists to penetrate youthful minds. Repeated incidents in our educational spaces reflect the disquieting fact that they are now confronted with both physical and psychological insecurity.

After the Brussels attacks of 2016, radicalisation in schools has become a priority area for policymakers and educators. Tackling violent extremism (VE) through interventions in education is part of a broader shift towards countering extremism with efforts that address environments favourable for the spread of hateful ideologies. Through such interventions, schools are expected to create a secure environment for their students, promote tolerance and social inclusion, discourage discrimination, and prevent violence.

Building the faculty's capacity to resolve conflicts and understand the push and pull factors leading to VE is equally important. At school, young people should be taught how to tackle polarisation and respect diversity. Children should be introduced to logic, critical thinking, problem-solving and negotiation skills. Empowering students to think critically, teaching them to challenge ideas, construct rational thoughts, and engage in meaningful debate proves helpful in preventing violent extremism (PVE).

A few societies have focused their activities on the psycho-social theory of Fathali M. Moghaddam in *The Staircase to Terrorism*. This explores psychological factors that lead an individual to commit a terrorist act. Among the factors are the psychological injustice of material conditions, perceived options to fight unfair treatment, displacement and aggression, moral engagement and polarisation. To apprehend any adverse situation, training teachers to detect early signs of radicalisation is critical. However, for their best interests, teachers should not be viewed as informants, which can undermine their relations with students' families and their community. Community engagement in children's education and building trust between schools and communities should be clear aims of counter violent extremism (CVE) programmes.

Teachers should be on the front line of teaching students how to save themselves from extremists' influence. Discussion meetings between parents, teachers, psychologists, and social workers on the role of psychosocial services for students and breaking of taboos in the individual-psychologist relationship are important. Reintegration of children from conflict areas through

special educational programmes delivered via public schools is another neglected area that requires the policymakers' attention.

While dealing with P/CVE, teachers should be equipped to raise students' awareness of the risks of extremism and encourage critical thinking. They should educate students about democratic values, and political, religious and ethnic tolerance. They must create a safe environment for dialogue about controversial topics in class. Ideally, teachers should also provide alternative narratives to extremist propaganda, and teach students how to build a safe online culture.

Social media provides a fertile ground for extremists to recruit new talent. Teachers should be aware of online platforms used by young people and their potential dangers. They should have knowledge about the threats on the internet, especially when it comes to the recruitment of young people by extremists, and about how extremists disseminate propaganda online. They should educate students about the dynamics of hate speech and fake news, as students may be unaware of the messages behind provocative content that is being disseminated in virtual spaces.

If a student disseminates extremist ideologies and distributes hate material among classmates, educationists should be trained on how to deal with such situations. They should be trained on how to work with parents, social services, and police. Responding to the threat of extremism warrants the creation of an appropriate classroom atmosphere and a democratic school culture. Students should be trained on how to identify bias, and teachers should provide a safe space where students feel comfortable expressing their opinions.

Our teachers can perform an immense national service if they help students enhance their awareness and build resilience against radicalisation. Knowing how to identify and respond to signs of radicalisation, engaging constructively in conflict resolution, and facilitating communication can help many vulnerable souls make the journey from darkness to light.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 5, 2023

Haunting Extremism: Setting Ablaze Others' Houses in the Name of Religion

SYED KALEEM IMAM

Misguided interpretations of religion again stifled enlightenment. Sadly, Pakistan ranks 140 out of 180 countries in terms of corruption and 130th out of 139 in terms of adherence to the rule of law.

In terms of honour killing and blasphemy, we would rank first if a comparison were to be made. The incident of Jaranwala where hundreds of Christians had to abandon their houses only to be burnt by their fellow countrymen, is a grim echo of the past. To save the honour of their holy book, the “devout and pious” burnt the sacred books of others and set ablaze their worship places.

The law-enforcement agents who held legal authority chose to stand idle amid this chaos, adding fuel to wrongdoings and evil practices.

Law-enforcement paralysis arises from unpreparedness, expediency, weak governance, gaps in training, and the lure of false narratives. The incidence was followed by exactly what was expected – the promises of solidarity. Do we have the courage to acknowledge that we failed to protect those who are too weak to defend themselves?

In Pakistan, the issue of blasphemy is not merely a subject of religious doctrine but a tinderbox that has ignited controversy and violence, casting a pall over the nation's quest for social harmony. Pakistan stands as one of the few nations where blasphemy is a criminal offense, carrying the terrifying specter of the death penalty. A weapon that can be unsheathed with a mere accusation, it casts a shadow of fear and suspicion, silencing voices, and breeding mistrust.

Religion- which is supposed to teach love and respect, is used by the miscreants to incite hatred for worldly gains. Regrettably, the extremism is not only limited to religion, even so-called liberals and in particular the politicians play this card maliciously too.

The people, or to be specific, the youth of Pakistan have always been carried away with the captivating slogans and this started pre partition: Pakistan ka matlab kia” still resounds in the religious rallies. Then follows the incredible narrative that Divinity not only created this nation exclusively, but He governs it too-an ultimate mortification of Omniscient.

A few years ago, we were fooled by “roti kapra aur makan”; recently, we played with purana, naya, and hamara Pakistan. A religious slogan labaik ya Rasool Allah is the best way for those with vested interests to play their favorite game here.

In my college days, the whole generation of Karachi came under the trap of “fight for your rights.” Sindh resounded with Mohajirs and Sindhu Desh slogans. We witnessed a dramatic transformation as the local lads playing cricket suddenly brandished TT pistols and their minds poisoned with the notions of marginalization and injustices. On November 21, 1979, in a blaze of turmoil sparked by propaganda about Mecca seizure, usual fury razed the U.S. embassy in Islamabad.

When joined the service, I was taken aback to find the landscape marred by hatred and disgust for different clans or beliefs, a toxic environment advanced by events like the Iranian Revolution and Afghan wars. I heard derogatory names for Punjabis, Urdu-speaking, Pathans, Sindhis, Baloch’s, Shias, and Sunnis and of lately Barelvi’s and Deobandi’s.

With the emergence of Taliban in our Western Neighbors, a big portion of the country became inaccessible and incapacitated. The toll it took and still takes, perhaps hard to measure. They will continue to haunt our future generations.

Will we look inward? Our social contract has been diluted. State institutions and citizens have grown apart, exploitation reigns. The decision to choose sides in other conflicts deceitfully has led to disaster, along with power-driven politics. Pseudo-knowledge overshadows our education, aimed at personal advancement rather than illumination.

The only way forward is to stop remaining silent on evil-doing and accountability at all costs. But who will bell the cat when it is too sharp and healthy now? The answer lies in the courage to confront our past, acknowledge our failures, and take decisive action. The time for appropriate response is now, for the seeds we sow today will determine the harvest of tomorrow.

We are a nation that often works on a day-to-day basis, reacting to problems rather than proactively addressing them. While we cast blame upon the illiterate, unemployed, and the poor for being extremists, we must not turn a blind eye to those at the pinnacle of power; indeed, they may be the root of all zealotry.

The pivotal doctrines of NAP, NISP, and NSP remained estranged from the training academy, their wisdom lost in transformation, never reaching the crucible of tactical application. Urgently sought though, now is a counter-extremism strategy that delves beyond grassroots, piercing the heart of leadership and stakeholder echelons, for within those tiers lie fervor equally entrenched and radicalized.

A twig bends, so does a tree, and this is true for our society, which has been shaped by those who substitute eccentricities and radicalizations. To achieve their control goals, they are willing to play with fire, even if it means nightmares for others.

The path to healing our nation and bridging the deep divides requires confronting uncomfortable truths. Extremism, I reiterate far from solely a tool of the oppressed, emerges also as the weapon wielded by the powerful – the elites who reign.

If we continue to ignore the elephant in the room, we risk becoming a house divided against itself. The clock is ticking, and the time has come to seize the reins of our destiny.

Let's not let our past haunt our future. For a nation without a moral compass is doomed to wander in darkness. Let us forge a new path based on justice, accountability, and unity, lit the lamp of wisdom, and chart a course towards a brighter future.

If the shadow of blasphemy laws looms large in our corridors of opportunist sinew and misguided notions of honor persist on our streets, then a harmonious nation remains but a dream, forever elusive and just beyond our reach.

SOURCE: EN.WENEWS.PK

4 soldiers martyred during operation to repulse terrorists in Chitral's Kalash area

Four soldiers were martyred and 12 terrorists killed in an operation to repulse militants from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Chitral district, according to the military's media wing.

The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) press release said that a "large group of terrorists equipped with latest weapons" attacked two military posts located close to the Afghanistan border in Chitral district's general area of Kalash.

"Terrorists' movement and concentration in Gawardesh, Pitigal, Barg-i-Matal and Batash areas of Nuristan and Kunar provinces of Afghanistan had already been picked up and were timely shared with Interim Afghan Government.

"Owing to heightened threat environment, own posts were already on high alert. The valiant soldiers fought bravely and repulsed the attacks inflicting heavy casualties to the terrorists. During the fire exchange, twelve terrorists were sent to hell, while a large number has been critically injured," the ISPR said.

It added that four soldiers "fought gallantly" during the exchange of fire and were martyred.

The military's media wing said the area was being sanitised to eliminate any other terrorists found in the vicinity.

"Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our soldiers further strengthen our resolve. The brave people of Chitral also stand firmly with the security forces in not allowing the terrorists to ruin the peace of the area," the ISPR said.

The ISPR also said that the interim Afghan government was "expected to fulfil its obligations and deny the use of Afghan soil by terrorists for perpetuating acts of terrorism against Pakistan".

Meanwhile, Lower Chitral Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Ali told Dawn.com that seven soldiers and over 40 terrorists were injured in the skirmish.

He told AFP the attackers "were in hundreds and were armed with light and heavy weapons. We were ready to face the attack and exchange of fire continued for some four hours".

"We were monitoring their movements in areas close to the border for two or three days," Ali was quoted as saying.

Police official Karim Khan told AFP that security forces had sealed entry to Chitral while another official said troops and paramilitary forces were rushed in to reinforce the district.

The banned militant Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group claimed responsibility for the attacks on the military posts.

Earlier today, reports on social media suggested that villages in Chitral district had allegedly come under the TTP's control in the early hours of Wednesday. No such development was mentioned by the government or the ISPR.

The Khorasan Diary, however, in the morning quoted a senior security official as saying there was "no truth of area being taken".

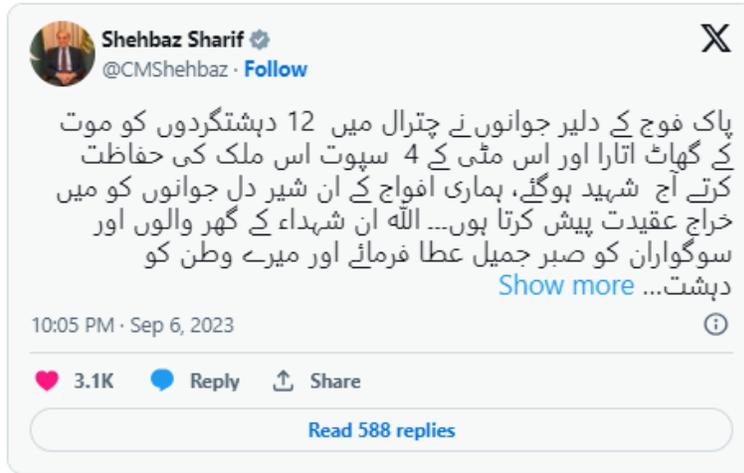


Meanwhile, former North Waziristan MNA Mohsin Dawar termed the reports as "very concerning".

Interim Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti saluted the valour of the soldiers involved in the operation.



Former prime minister and PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif paid tribute to the martyred soldiers and prayed for the country to be rid of the menace of terrorism.



Jamaat-i-Islami Emir Sirajul Haq said the attacks on the military posts were concerning. “The government should take effective measures to ensure the safety of life and property of the people,” he said on social media platform X and appreciated the sacrifice of the martyrs.



Uptick in terrorist attacks

Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in recent months, especially in KP and Balochistan, after the outlawed TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

On August 22, six soldiers embraced martyrdom in an exchange of fire in South Waziristan district, the military’s media wing said last week. At least four terrorists were killed in the gun battle.

Last month, as many as 12 soldiers of the Pakistan Army embraced martyrdom in separate military operations in the Zhob and Sui areas of Balochistan.

That was the military's highest single-day death toll from terrorist attacks reported this year. Before this, 10 personnel were martyred in a 'fire raid' in Balochistan's Kech district in February 2022.

A report released in July by the think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies said the first half of the current year witnessed a steady and alarming rise in terror and suicide attacks, claiming the lives of 389 people across the country.

Amid the rise in militancy is a backdrop of growing concerns regarding cross-border terrorism by elements based in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's military leadership and former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif, whose tenure ended last month, both raised concerns over the availability of "safe havens" and "liberty of action" available to militants in Afghanistan, saying there was also involvement of Afghan citizens in terror attacks in Pakistan. They had also urged Kabul for action.

In the initial response to these allegations, Taliban spokesperson in Qatar Suhail Shaheen had told Dawn that Kabul was committed not to allow anyone to use the soil of Afghanistan against any other country.

But in a separate interview with BBC Pashto, another spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, Zabiullah Mujahid, took a harsher line – ostensibly in a bid to play to the Afghan galleries – advising Pakistan to resolve its internal problems itself, instead of pointing fingers at others.

More recently, Afghanistan's supreme leader had warned Taliban members against carrying out attacks abroad. But merely days later, the Afghan authorities had alleged that dozens of banned Islamic State militants from Pakistan were killed or captured in Afghanistan in the past year.

A Dawn report last month had quoted an official from the KP Counter-Terrorism Department as saying that Islamabad and Kabul were in contact with each other to address the issue of militancy.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 6, 2023

Balochistan CTD guns down 5 'TTP terrorists' in operation in Quetta's Aghberg

Five alleged terrorists of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed during an operation by the Balochistan Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) in the Aghberg area of Quetta, police said.

According to a statement released by the CTD, an operation was planned over information provided by an alleged TTP terrorist, identified as Naseebullah, who was in custody.

The CTD added that during the course of an investigation, he revealed the presence of his associates in Quetta and divulged that they were "in advance planning of carrying out a terrorist activity in Quetta soon".

"An operation was planned and terrorists were identified over the information provided by the arrested accused person who was nominated in FIR number 84-2023," the statement said.

Elaborating on the details of the operation, the CTD statement said when police were setting up a security cordon outside the TTP hideout, terrorists opened indiscriminate fire and tried to escape.

"Two terrorists tried to escape on a motorcycle but the raiding party took precautionary measures and retaliated," it added. "Additional force was called and the fleeing terrorists were contained."

As a result, the CTD said, four TTP militants were killed, while the "arrested accused person" was severely injured by the firing of his associates.

"He was rushed to the hospital but he succumbed to his injuries," it said, adding that a sizeable quantity of ammunition and explosives were recovered from the crime scene including one suicide jacket, five hand grenades, two pistols, one rifle, two motorcycles, and explosive material.

The statement highlighted that the slain alleged terrorists were involved in the killing of officials of the Eagle Squad and CTD in Kuchlak and Frontier Corps personnel at the Kuchlak Bypass.

"This is a huge success for the CTD and law enforcement agencies as their efforts have prevented terrorists from carrying out another terror activity in Quetta," it further said.

The statement concluded that further investigation was under way.

On Sep 2, the CTD said it had killed eight TTP and IS members in two intelligence-based operations conducted in Balochistan's Quetta and Washuk districts on Saturday.

The counter-terror police had said the first operation was conducted in a mountainous area near Kurragi village of Basima tehsil in Washuk, a district bordering Iran.

As soon as counterterrorism officials cordoned off the area and launched the operation, the armed militants opened fire and lobbed hand grenades, prompting the raiding party to take positions and return fire.

“A heavy gun battle continued for an hour, resulting in the killing of five armed terrorists,” the CTD spokesperson had said, adding that the killed militants belonged to the outlawed TTP and had previously launched attacks on forces and citizens.

However, three militants had managed to escape under the cover of darkness.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 7, 2023

Persecuted people

THE hate spread is fast and furious. A spate of attacks on minority settlements and worship places came complete with the usual allegations of blasphemy and denial of the right to practise beliefs freely.

From the arson attack in Faisalabad's Jaranwala area that targeted the Christian community, leaving charred homes, churches and defaced graveyards to the broken arches of an Ahmadi worship place in Lahore and encroachment of gurdwaras and surrounding lands, all lay bare the ineptitude of administrative forces.

Once again, law enforcers failed to fathom the urgency of frenzied circumstances; either controlling faith-based mob fury is not their forte or there is a criminal lack of will to arbitrate. Whatever the reason, the all too frequent collapse of the police machinery is beginning to reek of complicity. But what makes matters even more frightening is Friday's shocker: the apex court was taken aback when it learnt of an alleged 'monitoring agreement' between the Sargodha DC and a far right organisation, which says that Christian-dominated areas will be monitored for blasphemous content.

Clearly, when the past is left unsettled in the form of Joseph colony, the routine persecution of Ahmadis and desecration of religious spaces, it sets the agenda for future attacks. Therefore, regardless of whether the alleged collusion exists or not, the mere notion of such a possibility threatens to aggravate vigilantism, taking it from its sporadic present to an organised, endorsed prospect.

In a climate of worsening militancy, elements that support violence and bigotry should be overpowered, not appeased with 'agreements'. These menacing assaults strike at the vitals of society, leaving no choice to the victims but to flee or wait for their turn.

It's time officialdom moved to thwart the weaponisation of laws to settle personal scores, perpetrate loot and plunder and usurp land as is evident in abandoned Ahmadi and Jaranwala homes. Moreover, any policing activity that impinges on the right to life, liberty, property and worship sanctions an obscurantism-driven majoritarian culture that will turn Pakistan into an outcast in a multicultural region.

Finally, Sikhs, a community overtly supported by the state, are also scathed in this scenario, indicating that failed state policies can spawn narratives focused on hurting any 'errant' threshold. Hence, as we mark the 75th death anniversary of the Quaid tomorrow, Pakistan is a sad reflection of his ideals.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 10, 2023

Soldier martyred, 6 injured in IED blast on Peshawar's Warsak Road



Rescue and LEA officials arrive at the site of a blast that occurred in Peshawar on September 11.

A soldier was martyred and six others, including three civilians, were injured in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast on a security forces vehicle in Peshawar's Warsak district, according to the military's media affairs wing.

Initially in the morning, Warsak Superintendent of Police (SP) Mohammad Arshad Khan said a Frontier Constabulary (FC) soldier was martyred and eight people, including two civilians, were injured in the incident. He said a vehicle of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa FC's Mohmand Rifles regiment was targeted in the attack at around 10:30am.

The vehicle was headed towards Peshawar from Machni when the blast occurred, he added.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) later said in a statement that the martyred soldier, 29-year-old Lance Naik Abdur Rehman, was a resident of Bannu.

"Sanitisation of the area is being carried out in the area to eliminate the terrorists and their facilitators," the statement read, adding that security forces were "determined to eliminate the

menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers, as well as valiant civilian brethren, further strengthen our resolve”.

Probe ensues

After the incident was reported, SP Khan said there was “no prior threat”, he said.

The SP said that further investigation was under way and that a report by the Bomb Disposal Unit would further clarify the nature of the blast.

In the afternoon, Peshawar Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Syed Ashfar Anwar visited the site of the incident, where possible evidence was collected.

He further announced that “strict checking” has been initiated at all entry and exit routes to the city and asserted that the government would “not let anti-state elements succeed in their nefarious designs”.

CCPO Anwar said all security institutions were working together to combat terrorism and establish peace.

Condemnations

Meanwhile, Caretaker KP Chief Minister Mohammad Azam Khan condemned the incident and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured.

In his statement, he directed hospital authorities to provide the injured with the best possible medical aid. The chief minister added, “Such incidents will not demoralise the security forces. The entire nation is standing with the security forces.”

Interim Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti also strongly condemned the blast, saying that he was grieved by the FC official’s martyrdom.

The minister said that the security forces could not be demoralised by the “cowardly attacks of miscreants” and vowed to end the menace of terrorism.



Former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif also condemned the “cowardly attack”.

“The sacrifices of our valiant soldiers and resilient people will not go in vain and such terrorist attacks cannot stop us from completely getting rid of the militants,” he said, as he prayed for the injured and the deceased.



The incident comes a day after interim Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti downplayed the increase in militancy in the country, saying there was no need for alarm as “a little surge [in terrorism] is not so big as to make us panic”.

His statement came amid reports of almost daily skirmishes between the security forces and terrorists – the most recent being the infiltration attempt in Chitral in which over a dozen attackers were killed while several troops embraced martyrdom.

Last week, a convoy of security forces narrowly escaped a suicide attack on Miramshah road in Bannu.

Last month, police and security forces repulsed three midnight militant attacks at as many locations in an area bordering the Kohat district. No casualties were reported.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 11, 2023

3 terrorists killed, soldier martyred in exchange of fire in Quetta

Three terrorists were killed while a Pakistan Army soldier was martyred in an exchange of fire between security forces and militants in Quetta, the military's media affairs wing said.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), militants had attacked a security forces' post near Wali Tangi on Thursday evening.

"During fire exchange, three terrorists were sent to hell," the statement said.

It said that Subedar Qaiser Raheem had embraced martyrdom while "fighting valiantly in the line of duty", adding that one other soldier had been seriously injured.

"Security forces of Pakistan will continue to thwart the efforts of the enemies of peace and prosperity in the country," the statement said.

Interim Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti "strongly condemned the attack" and said the entire nation saluted the martyr.



Praying for the speedy recovery of the injured soldier, he said that "terrorists do not deserve any concession" and vowed to eliminate them from the country.

National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf condemned the attack and paid tribute to the martyred soldier.



“The people of Pakistan and all institutions are determined to root out the menace of terrorism,” the speaker said in a statement.

Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in recent months, especially in KP and Balochistan, after the TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

A report released in July by the think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies said the first half of the current year witnessed a steady and alarming rise in terror and suicide attacks, claiming the lives of 389 people across the country.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 15, 2023

Terrorist killed during intelligence-based operation in Dera Ismail Khan

A terrorist was killed and another injured during an intelligence-based operation by security forces in the Kulachi area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan district, according to the military's media affairs wing.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement an "intense fire exchange" took place between security forces and militants during the operation and consequently, "one terrorist was sent to hell while one got injured".

According to the ISPR, weapons and ammunition were found in custody of the slain terrorist, who "remained actively involved in terrorist activities against security forces and killing of innocent civilians".

"Locals of the area appreciated the operation. Sanitisation of the area is being carried out to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area," it added.

In a similar incident on September 14, three terrorists were killed while a Pakistan Army soldier was martyred in an exchange of fire in Quetta.

The gun battle had taken place after militants attacked a security forces' post near Wali Tangi, the ISPR had said.

Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in recent months, especially in KP and Balochistan, after the banned militant outfit Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

A report released in July by the think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies said the first half of the current year witnessed a steady and alarming rise in terror and suicide attacks, claiming the lives of 389 people across the country.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 20, 2023

8 terrorists killed in intelligence-based operations in KP

Eight terrorists were killed by security forces during two separate intelligence-based operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the military's media affairs wing said.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the first operation was conducted in the Jani Khel general area of Bannu district.

"An intense fire exchange took place between own troops and terrorists. Resultantly, six terrorists were sent to hell while five were apprehended," it stated.

The ISPR said the terrorists were involved in numerous terrorist activities against security forces, including facilitation of motorcycle borne suicide attack on a military convoy in Jani Khel on August 31, during which "nine brave sons of soil laid their lives".

The second operation was conducted in the general area Datta Khel, North Waziristan District.

"Two terrorists were sent to hell in a fierce encounter between security forces and terrorists," the ISPR said.

It added that weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the slain terrorists and sanitisation of the surrounding areas was being carried out in the area.

"Locals of the area appreciated the operation. Security forces of Pakistan remain determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism," the military's media wing added.

Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in recent months, especially in KP and Balochistan, after the TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

A report released in July by the think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies said the first half of the current year witnessed a steady and alarming rise in terror and suicide attacks, claiming the lives of 389 people across the country.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 21, 2023

No closure

WHAT is a Pakistani life worth in the eyes of the state? Clearly not enough, if one were to draw a comparison with Canada, which has thought nothing of jeopardising its relations with New Delhi as it takes a stand for the rights of an adopted citizen.

Soon after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly held India responsible for orchestrating the assassination of Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, opposition leader Pierre Poilievre quickly voiced his support, saying, “We must be united for our home and for each other.

Let us all lock arms and join hands in condemning this murder, standing with the family and friends of its victim.” It is difficult to overlook their response while confronting the apparent lack of energy in our own authorities’ efforts to investigate or prosecute the murder of Pakistani journalist Arshad Sharif in Kenya last year.

It has been 11 months since Sharif was killed in highly suspicious circumstances by a Kenyan paramilitary outfit, but despite the incident being described by a Pakistani fact-finding committee as a “planned, targeted assassination” perpetrated by “transnational characters”, we still know very little about the individuals involved and their motives.

This week, a case filed on behalf of the state against Sharif’s murder was shelved due to the prosecution’s ‘disinterest’ in pursuing it. The Sharif family had persistently refused to join the case proceedings, as they felt the state had disregarded their ‘right’ to file the FIR as the slain journalist’s heirs.

While the state must respect the family’s wishes, the case’s shelving should not put an end to efforts to trace Sharif’s killers and hold them to account. According to Sharif’s family, the journalist, whose departure from the country was sudden, had said that his life was under threat from certain elements.

It remains to be determined if these same elements eventually became involved in his killing. It is disappointing also to note the seeming lack of interest from international media rights organisations in pursuing Mr Sharif’s case.

Sustained pressure from them could have pushed the authorities of both countries to pursue their investigations matter more vigorously and make a clear determination of the facts of the case – it is a course they can still pursue. This high-profile assassination cannot be brushed under the carpet, nor should its perpetrators be allowed to walk free.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 23, 2023

3 terrorists killed in ‘intelligence-based operation’ in Khyber district

Three terrorists were killed by security forces in an operation carried out in the Khyber district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the military’s media affairs wing said.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), on the night of September 25/26, security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in the general area of Tirah, Khyber district, on the reported presence of terrorists.

During the operation, the ISPR said, an intense exchange of fire took place between the Pakistani troops and terrorists, which resulted in the killing of three terrorists, including commander Kifayat, also known as Tor Adnan, “who was actively involved in multiple terrorist activities against law enforcement agencies as well as the killing of innocent civilians”.

It added that “sanitisation” of the area is being carried out to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area. “Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism,” the ISPR said.

The development comes as security forces continue counter-terror operations across Pakistan.

A soldier was martyred during an exchange of fire with terrorists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s North Waziristan district on Saturday.

On Thursday last week, eight terrorists were killed by security forces during two separate IBOs in the Jani Khel general area of Bannu district and North Waziristan’s general area of Datta Khel.

Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in recent months, especially in KP and Balochistan, after the TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

A report released in July by the think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies said the first half of the current year witnessed a steady and alarming rise in terror and suicide attacks, claiming the lives of 389 people across the country.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 26, 2023

Soldier martyred, terrorist ringleader killed in 2 KP military engagements

A soldier was martyred while a wanted terrorist was killed in separate military operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Kurram and Mardan districts, according to a press release from the military's media wing.

The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) press release said two engagements took place between security forces and terrorists in the province on the night between Thursday and Friday.

An intelligence-based operation was conducted in Mardan district's general area of Katlang, resulting in the killing of a "high-value target, terrorist ringleader Faisal".

The ISPR added he was actively involved in numerous terrorist activities and was "highly wanted by law enforcement agencies". It said weapons and ammunition were also recovered from him.

Separately, 33-year-old Lance Naik Ghairat Khan, resident of Kurram district, was martyred in an encounter with terrorists in the district's general area Parachinar.

"Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism from the country and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve," the ISPR said.

Earlier in the day, terrorist attacks in Balochistan's Mastung district and KP's Hangu collectively claimed the lives of at least 58 people.

Separately, four Pakistan Army soldiers were also martyred during an operation in Zhob – which is located at a five-hour distance from Mastung – as security forces thwarted an infiltration attempt of banned militant Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists from Afghanistan.

Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in recent months, especially in KP and Balochistan, after the TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

A report released in July by the think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies said the first half of the current year witnessed a steady and alarming rise in terror and suicide attacks, claiming the lives of 389 people across the country.

SOURCE: SEPTEMBER 29, 2023

At least 53 killed, scores injured in suicide blast near 12th Rabiul Awwal procession in Mastung



People gather outside a Mastung hospital, following a deadly suicide attack on a religious gathering in Balochistan on September 29.

At least 53 people, including a police officer, were killed while dozens were injured in what officials believe was a suicide blast near a 12th Rabiul Awwal procession in Balochistan's Mastung district. Mastung District Headquarter Hospital Medical Superintendent Dr Nisar Ahmed told Dawn.com that 16 bodies were brought to the facility while Shaheed Naqab Ghous Bakhsh Raisani Memorial Hospital CEO Dr Saeed Mirwani confirmed they received 32 bodies.

Five bodies were brought to the Civil Hospital Quetta, the facility's spokesperson, Dr Wasim Baig, said. Speaking to Dawn.com, Dr Mirwani said over 100 wounded persons were brought to the hospital of which those in critical condition were referred to Quetta.

Meanwhile, Dr Nisar said 20 people were receiving treatment at the Mastung DHQ.

Unverified images and videos emerging afterward depicted bloodied corpses and severed limbs strewn about as bystanders assessed the extent of the damage.

Mastung Assistant Commissioner (AC) Atta-ul-Munim told Dawn.com that the explosion took place when people were gathering for an Eid-i-Miladun Nabi procession near Madina Masjid at Alfalah Road. "The bomber detonated himself near the vehicle of the deputy superintendent of police (DSP)," Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Munir Ahmed told Reuters, adding that the blast took place near the mosque where people were gathering for a procession to mark Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) birthday, which is a public holiday.

The Mastung AC had identified the martyred DSP as Nawaz Gishkori. SHO Lehri also confirmed that the explosion was a "suicide blast".



Victims are treated at a Mastung hospital, following a deadly suicide attack on a religious gathering in Balochistan on September 29.

"A procession of hundreds of people came out of the Madina mosque and as it reached Al Falah road a suicide bomber targeted it," said Mastung Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq Sasoli.

No one has so far claimed responsibility; however, the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan has denied its involvement.

Balochistan interim Information Minister Jan Achakzai said rescue teams had been dispatched to Mastung.

"The enemy wants to destroy religious tolerance and peace in Balochistan with foreign blessings," Achakzai said. "The explosion is unbearable," he said, appealing urgently for blood donors to help treat the wounded.

Later in a press conference, the minister said the death toll in the blast "is immensely unfortunate". He revealed that a number of families had buried their loved ones without bringing them to the hospital, adding that the government had not included these people in the official death toll.

“As far as the injuries are concerned, a number of people are in critical condition and they are being moved to intensive care units and trauma centres,” Achakzai stated, adding that if their condition further deteriorated, the wounded may be air lifted to Karachi from Quetta.

Actions being taken to prevent terror incidents: Balochistan police chief

In a media talk, Balochistan Inspector General (IG) Abdul Khaliq Sheikh said authorities had initiated action to prevent such incidents of terror in the future.

“Some groups were active in Mastung earlier and operations are under way to counter them,” he stated, adding that the outlawed Daesh had previously claimed responsibility for such attacks in the past.

Talking about today’s attack, he a police official sacrificed his life while attempting to stop a suicide bomber while three other personnel, including a DSP, sustained injuries in the blast.

“The aim of terrorism is to create chaos and instability in Balochistan,” he said. “Police have been ordered to take strong action against the elements involved in the bombing and those providing them shelter.”

Hand grenade defused

Between 2pm and 3pm later in the day, SHO Lehri said another loud bang was heard near the blast site for a second time. He said it was a controlled hand grenade blast near a bus stop by Counter Terrorism Department officials who were defusing it. The official went on to say that the area was cordoned off to avoid any mishap.

‘Perpetrators don’t deserve any leniency’



Victims are treated at a Mastung hospital, following a deadly suicide attack on a religious gathering in Balochistan on September 29. — Shaheed Nawab Ghous Bakhsh Raisani Memorial Hospital Mastung/Handout via Reuters

Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar strongly denounced the explosion in Mastung, stating that the government was determined to root out terrorism from the country, Radio Pakistan reported.

In their separate statements, the premier and President Dr Arif Alvi expressed deep grief and sorrow over the death of people and directed the authorities concerned to provide the best possible medical treatment to the injured.

Separately, in a tweet the PM said Pakistan's war against terrorism would not end until the last of the terrorist was eliminated.



Interim Interior Minister Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti strongly condemned the blast as well and expressed his grief at the loss of lives.

Stating that "terrorists have no faith or religion", Bugti asserted that all resources were being put to use during the rescue operation. He added that no effort would be spared in treating the injured and that terrorist elements did not deserve any concession.



Caretaker Information Minister Murtaza Solangi said such cowardly terrorist acts cannot shake the nation's resolve, state-run Radio Pakistan said.

He reaffirmed the government's commitment to root out the menace of terrorism with the cooperation of security forces and the people.

Interim Balochistan Chief Minister Ali Mardan Domki condemned the incident and ordered an inquiry into the blast, directing authorities to submit a report in this regard at the earliest.

"The perpetrators of the destruction do not deserve any leniency," he said. "Those who target peaceful processions will be dealt with firmly."

CM Domki urged the people to unite against terrorism, adding that Islam was a religion of peace and "those who commit such heinous acts cannot be called Muslims".

Expressing solidarity with the families of the martyrs, CM Domki said the best facilities should be provided to all the injured persons.

The caretaker CM also announced three days of mourning throughout the province over the tragic incident.

The information minister stated that the purpose of mourning was to express solidarity with the families of the martyrs. "National flags will remain at half-mast on government buildings during the three days of mourning."

Former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif said he was "deeply saddened by the cowardly attack on innocent people" and that such heinous acts had "no place in our country". "May justice be swift for those responsible," he added.

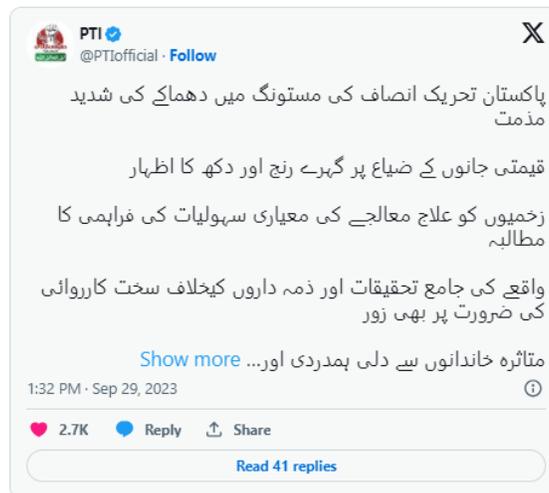


In its condemnation, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said it was "unacceptable that the residents of Balochistan are compelled to live in constant fear amid deteriorating law and order".

"Those responsible for this heinous attack must be brought to justice. HRCP believes, however, that hyper-securitisation will not resolve the security problem in the province," it added.



The PTI also condemned the incident and demanded that the injured be provided with quality treatment facilities.



It further demanded that the “federal and provincial governments give up political revenge and oppression and fascism against innocent citizens”, and instead “focus on dealing with a real threat like terrorism”.

PPP Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said the scenes of Mastung blast were tragic and prayed for the families of the martyred.

“Human life is sacred, and the terrorists should know that we as a nation will not stand idly by as they try return us to a era of bloodshed,” he said in a social media post.



PPP leader Sherry Rehman, while condemning the incident, extended sympathy and solidarity with the grieving families and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured.

She also requested PPP workers to reach hospitals in Balochistan for assistance in relief operations and blood donations.



“The growing incidence of terrorism in Mustang is a matter of concern. Strict action should be taken against the terrorists involved in the attack,” she added.

The attack was also condemned by Iran. In a statement, the neighbouring country’s spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Naseer Kan’ani, said today’s attack was a “clear example” of terrorists’ distance from the teachings of the prophet.

Kanani expressed his condolences to the government and people of Pakistan, especially the survivors of the victims, and wished the injured good health and speedy recovery.

4 Pakistan Army soldiers martyred in Zhob operation

Separately, the military’s media affairs wing said in a statement today that four Pakistan Army soldiers were martyred during an operation in Zhob – which is located at a five-hour distance from Mastung.

“On September 28, at 1745 hours, own security forces thwarted an attempt of TTP terrorists to infiltrate from Afghanistan into Pakistan near Sambaza in district Zhob close to the Pak-Afghan border,” the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said.

In the ensuing operation, Havildar Sattar, Lance Naik Sher Azam, Lance Naik Adnan and Sepoy Nadeem fought valiantly and embraced martyrdom, it said.

“During fire exchange, three terrorists were also sent to hell and few got injured,” the ISPR stated.

It added that the security forces of Pakistan would continue to thwart efforts of the enemies of peace and prosperity in the country.

Heightened security across country

Soon after the explosion, the Punjab police also said that its “diligent officials” were performing security duties for Friday prayers at mosques across the province.



In another post on social media site X (formerly Twitter), it said more than 46,000 policemen were deployed at “1,281 mehfiles and 2,510 processions and mehfiles” across Punjab.

It added that all processions and events were being monitored through the Safe City Authority security cameras, while the provincial police chief ordered the senior officers to monitor the events themselves.



Meanwhile, the Karachi police said that Additional Inspector General Khadim Husain Rind has directed the police to remain “completely on high alert” in view of the Mastung blast.

He was quoted as directing the policemen to tighten security arrangements regarding Eid-i-Miladun Nabi processions and Friday prayers across the city, as well as to monitor any unusual activities.



In a social media post, the Islamabad police said a security alert was in place in the capital city. It stated Dr Akbar Nasir Khan, the capital city police chief, had issued orders to all officers to remain alert in their respective areas.

“The security of Eid Milad-ul-Nabi processions should be made more effective,” it said, adding that the Islamabad police were always ready to deal with any possible emergency situation.



Rise in terror incidents

Earlier this month, at least 11 people, including Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) leader Hafiz Hamdullah, were injured in a blast in the same district.

A week prior to that, a Levies official was gunned down at a bus stand by unidentified men, while two others who were passing by were injured.

In May this year, unidentified attackers targeted a polio vaccination team in the Killi Sour Karez area on the outskirts of Mastung, resulting in a policeman being martyred.

In October last year, three people were killed and six others were injured in a bomb attack targeting two vehicles in the mountainous area of Qabu in Mastung.

In July 2018, at least 128 people, including politician Nawabzada Siraj Raisani, were killed and more than 200 were injured in a deadly suicide blast in the same district.

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 29, 2023

At least 5 killed, 12 wounded in ‘twin blasts’ targeting mosque inside police station in KP’s Hangu



A rescue operation is underway in KP’s Hangu where two blasts were reported.

At least five people were killed while 12 sustained injuries when two suicide blasts rocked a mosque located inside the premises of the Doaba police station in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Hangu, according to KP interim Information Minister Feroze Jamal.

In a statement, the minister said that two suicide bombers, traveling in a vehicle, managed to reach the mosque but were met with resistance by the police officers stationed at the mosque entrance.

He explained, “One of the attackers was killed in a shootout with the police outside the mosque, while the other managed to penetrate the worship place.”

Jamal went on to mention that two officers were also injured during the exchange of fire, adding that the prompt response of the police led to the evacuation of worshippers upon hearing gunfire.

He emphasised that the damage could have been significantly worse if strong resistance was not shown by the police.

Separately, Hangu District Police Officer Nisar Ahmed confirmed the casualties and injuries to Dawn.com.

He said the first blast took place at the entrance of the police station after which a number of people gathered at the site. "A few minutes later, another blast occurred inside a mosque situated in the premises of the police station."

DPO Ahmed said the second blast took place during the Friday sermon. "The roof of the mosque caved in due to the impact of the explosion," the official stated, adding that nearly 30 to 40 people were reported to be stuck under the rubble.

The official further said that heavy machinery had been called to retrieve the bodies and wounded persons.

Rescue 1122 spokesperson Bilal Faizi told Dawn.com that six of the injured individuals were in critical condition and were currently receiving treatment.

Dawn.com's correspondent present at the site said Rescue 1122 teams and locals in the area are leading the rescue operation.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack yet.

An eyewitness, Shahid Khan Zaman, told Dawn.com that at the time of the explosion, there were approximately 60 to 70 people inside the mosque.

According to him, the suspected suicide bomber tried to enter through the mosque's gate, but the resistance from the police allowed most of the people to leave the premises. He added that the second suicide bomber detonated himself inside the mosque.

Peshawar corps commander visits blast site

Peshawar Corps Commander Lieutenant General Hassan Azhar Hayat visited the blast site and expressed the nation's pride in its martyrs.

He commended the officers for their bravery, acknowledging their role in averting significant destruction.

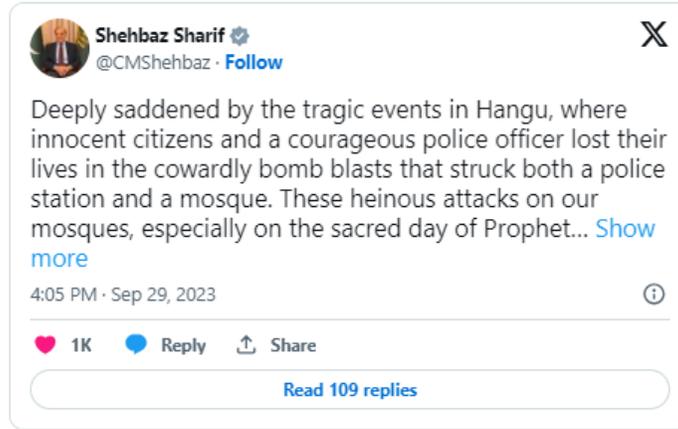
He also stated, "These individuals (attackers) cannot be regarded as Muslims, let alone humans," while deeming the attack a regrettable incident.

Meanwhile, in a statement, KP caretaker Chief Minister Azam Khan sought a report on the incident from the police and instructed authorities to expedite the rescue operation.

He further directed the concerned commissioner and deputy commissioner to supervise the rescue activities and assure that best medical treatment was provided to the wounded. The CM also imposed an emergency in hospitals across Hangu.

Separately, former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed his grief at the loss of lives in Hangu blasts, saying such attacks on the sacred day showed "the malevolent intentions of terrorists".

In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Shehbaz stated that the nation stood united with the law enforcement agencies dedicated to safeguarding the country.



National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf also strongly denounced the twin blasts, saying that targeting the lives of innocent citizens was an abhorrent and cowardly act that warrants the harshest condemnation.

He further noted that such tactics by anti-state elements were aimed at disrupting peace within the country.



KP security situation

Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in recent months, especially in KP, after the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

On September 6, four security personnel embraced martyrdom and over 16 militants were killed in an operation to repulse militants from the Chitral district.

The pre-dawn attack had targeted check posts in Astui Pass and Jinjiret Koh situated in the south of Lower Chitral, bordering the Afghan province of Nuristan.

Earlier this month, data compiled by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) said the number of militant attacks in August was the highest tally for monthly strikes in almost nine years.

There were 99 attacks across the country, the highest number in a single month since November 2014, the report had said.

Addressing the KP Provincial Apex Committee meeting earlier this week, Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir had vowed that the Pakistan Army would continue to play its role in upholding peace and stability in KP and facilitating a “secure environment for economic development”.

During the meeting, the army chief was briefed about the overall security situation in the province, including initiatives against smuggling, hoarding and drug trafficking, according to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

SOURCE: DAWN, SEPTEMBER 29, 2023

Pakistan vows to hit terrorists in wake of Mastung carnage



QUETTA: Relatives mourn the death of their loved ones in the blast targeting a 12 Rabiul Awwal procession in Mastung, on Friday. The death toll has increased to 59, including a local religious leader and a police officer.

- Suicide attack on religious procession claims 59 lives, death toll likely to rise further; four soldiers martyred in Zhob
- No outfit claims responsibility; TTP denies role; minister sees RAW hand behind bombing
- Army chief says militants to face full might of state, terms them 'proxies of enemies'
- Four of six abducted Dera Bugti footballers recovered

QUETTA: In the wake of a deadly bombing in Mastung, which claimed at least 59 lives – including several children – Pakistan has vowed to strike at the bases of terror groups, including the militant Islamic State (IS) group and the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

On Friday, a suicide bomber ripped through a procession celebrating the birth of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) on 12 Rabiul Awwal in Mastung, a town about 60km southeast of the provincial capital, killing a police officer, religious leaders, and children among dozens.

Two days on, however, no militant group has come forward to claim responsibility for the bombing, prompting claims from the government that the Indian intelligence agency, RAW, was involved.

The banned TTP, in fact, distanced itself from the carnage in a statement. The Counter-Terrorism Department registered a case against unidentified persons.

Before the bomber struck the peaceful yet spirited gathering, hundreds of faithful, including kids, were present in front of Madina Mosque, carrying flags. The procession was supposed to start at 11am, and people were ready to kick start the march. But before this could happen, a suicide bomber entered the procession and exploded his vest next to the vehicle of the Mastung DSP.

“The suicide bomber reached the site by foot and waited for the arrival of clerics who were leading the procession and blew up his vest after their arrival,” a senior official of the local administration said. As a result, dozens were killed on the spot.

Eyewitnesses likened the scene of the bombing to “doomsday”. Bodies with severed heads and limbs littered the blast site, with the wounded lying in pools of blood crying for help, said Munir Ahmed Shahwani, a resident of Mastung who reached the spot soon after the explosion.

The Mastung district health officer confirmed 52 deaths on Friday, while seven injured people died during treatment at various hospitals in Quetta. “The death toll has reached 59,” Dr Wasim Baig, spokesman for the health department, told Dawn on Saturday.

Several gravely wounded were moved to the CMH Quetta.

According to Balochistan Inspector General Abdul Khaliq Sheikh, DSP Gish-kori tried to stop the bomber when he detonated himself.

The heroic action of the police officer averted an even bigger tragedy, he added.

Families perished

According to locals, the death toll could rise further because several dead bodies were not brought to hospitals.

Authorities said they were facing difficulties in identifying the remains of the suicide bomber, as a large number of bodies were mutilated due to the powerful blast.

Four members of a family also perished in the bombing; two brothers Sadullah, and Abdul Bari and their cousins Allah Bakhsh and Samiullah. “The slain men were the breadwinners for their families,” their kin Ali Bakhsh said between sobs.

A father and his two sons were also among the slain. Teenage Ali Hassan and his brother Salman – students at a middle school – came to attend the procession with their father and cousin Zubair, unaware of what fate had in store for them.

RAW blamed

At a press conference following a key meeting at Corps Headquarters, Care-taker Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti said the government would conduct an operation “as big as needed” to restore the writ of the state.

Mr Bugti blamed the Indian intelligence agency, RAW, for involvement in terrorist activities in Balochistan. “It was decided we will strike...terrorists and would not even spare their facilitators and supporters,” the caretaker minister said.

He claimed the Islamic State had no organised presence in Balochistan in the past, however, the government will crush the banned TTP, the Islamic State, or any other group.

‘Proxies of enemies’

Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir also visited Quetta on Saturday, where he was briefed on recent terrorist attacks in Mastung and Zhob.

“These terrorists and their facilitators, having no link to religion and ideology, are proxies of the enemies of Pakistan and its people,” the army chief said in a statement.

“These forces of evil will continue to face the full might of the state and security forces... and the armed forces, intelligence and law enforcement agencies shall not rest till the menace of terrorism is rooted out from the country,” he added.

The army chief said the public has rejected the ideology of militants and is “fully committed to peace, economic progress and human development which indeed is causing a lot of distress to forces of evil in and outside of Pakistan”.

He also visited the CMH Quetta to meet the blast victims.

Meanwhile, Caretaker Chief Minister Ali Mardan Domki announced compensation for the families of the martyrs.

He also directed the postponement of the football match that was supposed to be held in Mastung.

Health Secretary Asfand Yar told the meeting that the treatment of the injured was ongoing at multiple hospitals. He mentioned that at least eight people were in critical condition.

Zhob encounter

Earlier, four security personnel were martyred and three terrorists killed in an exchange of fire between security forces and terrorists who attempted to enter Pakistan through Samba border area from Afghanistan in Zhob.

The ISPR said that security forces on Sept 28 thwarted an attempt of TTP terrorists to infiltrate from Afghanistan into Pakistan.

In the ensuing operation, Havildar Sattar, Lance Naik Sher Azam, Lance Naik Adnan and Sepoy Naadeem fought valiantly and earned martyrdom.

During the exchange of fire, three terrorists were killed and a few others were wounded.

Footballers

Separately, four out of six footballers, who were abducted at the start of September in Dera Bugti, have been released.

The local administration claimed that four foot-ballers who belonged to the Bugti tribe were freed and handed over to their families.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 1, 2023

Massacre again

A DAY of celebration turned into a bloodbath in Mastung and Hangu, as terrorists attacked an Eid Miladun Nabi event in the Balochistan town and Friday prayers in the KP city.

At the time these lines were being written, no group had claimed responsibility, while the interim interior minister had claimed that Indian intelligence was involved.

Over 55 victims perished as a suicide bomber struck the Milad event in Mastung, while five victims were reported dead in the Hangu incident, also believed to be a suicide attack.

Up till a decade ago, Balochistan, specifically Quetta and Mastung, was in the grip of intense sectarian militancy carried out by Lashkar-i-Jhangvi. Mass casualty attacks occurred in the provincial capital, while buses carrying Shia pilgrims were raided by LJ terrorists in Mastung on multiple occasions.

Earlier, in 2006, LJ militants had bombed a Milad gathering in Karachi's Nishtar Park, wiping out much of the Sunni Tehreek leadership. However, where Balochistan is concerned, LJ's activities have come down considerably, and there's a strong possibility of other militant groups, such as the IS-K, being involved.

In fact, many experts believe that many of LJ's cadres have been absorbed by IS-K, which is active across the region. It was only last month that the authorities had claimed they had gunned down an IS-K 'commander' in Mastung.

This individual had reportedly been involved in several terrorist acts in Balochistan. As for Hangu, while the area has also witnessed sectarian bloodshed in the past, this time the mosque that was attacked was inside a police station.

Other parts of KP have also been experiencing militant violence carried out by the TTP – which has distanced itself from the latest attacks – and its offshoots, as well as IS-K.

Balochistan's security situation over the past few decades has ignited apprehension, with the presence of both separatist and religiously inspired militancy.

A return to the bloodletting of old, despite the massive security footprint in the province, should be a matter of great concern. The state needs to deploy all the resources at its disposal to neutralise terrorists in Balochistan and, indeed, the rest of the country.

If this monster is not vanquished at this stage, it will create a security nightmare of significant proportions. KP and the former tribal districts also need to be protected from the blood-soaked assaults of the TTP and like-minded terrorist groups.

Instead of indulging in extracurricular activities, the security establishment must focus on an effective counterterrorism strategy to uproot militant networks in the country.

Peace is essential for free and fair elections, and militant actors will try to derail a smooth transition from a caretaker set-up to an elected government. Therefore, the caretaker administration must devote all its energies to ensuring peaceful polls, and checking the militant menace.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 1, 2023

16 'beggars' offloaded from Saudi Arabia-bound flight



FIA offloads 16 passengers at Multan airport.

LAHORE: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has got offloaded 16 alleged beggars in the disguise of Umrah pilgrims from Kingdom of Saudi Arabia-bound flight at Multan airport.

According to the FIA, the group, consisting of 16 persons, including a child, 11 women and four men, was initially traveling on Umrah visas. The FIA officials during the immigration process questioned the passengers who confessed that they were going to visit the KSA to seek alms.

They also revealed that they would have to give half of their earnings from begging to the agents involved in their travel arrangements. They were to return to Pakistan after the expiry of their Umrah visas. The FIA Multan circle arrested the passengers for further interrogation and legal action. The arrests came a day after the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development disclosed to the Senate Committee on Overseas Pakistanis that a significant proportion of beggars are trafficked abroad through illegal channels.

The ministry's secretary revealed to the Senate panel that a staggering 90 percent of beggars apprehended in foreign countries belong to Pakistan.

"Both the Iraqi and Saudi ambassadors have reported overcrowded jails due to these arrests," he had said.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 1, 2023

Policeman martyred, 2 terrorists killed in attack on patrolling post in Mianwali

A policeman was martyred while two terrorists were killed during an attack on the Kundal patrolling post in Mianwali, Punjab police chief Usman Anwar said in a statement.

“Kundal Punjab Highway Patrolling Post, in a daring operation assisted by the Counter Terrorism Department Punjab, successfully thwarted an attack by 12 to 15 terrorists” it stated.

According to the statement, Head Constable Haroon embraced martyrdom during the operation – which concluded after 7am – while multiple terrorists sustained injuries. “Following a thorough area search conducted by the CTD personnel, two terrorist bodies were discovered,” it added.

“One of the terrorists has been positively identified as Zubair Nawaz, brother of Arshad Nawaz, the Ameer of the Tehreek-Taliban Tipu Group of Lakki Marwat, with the aid of a comprehensive database and local intelligence,” the statement said.

It added that Nawaz was a “high priority individual on the most wanted lists in both Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces due to his involvement in the killing of police officers, Shia community member, dacoities and extortion activities”.

The second terrorist, the statement highlighted, was identified as Muhammad Khan who was a “dedicated member of the group” and “proved to be more dangerous than Zubair”.

“His identification was achieved through exhaustive efforts, including assistance from Nadra, various intelligence agencies, and advanced software utilized by the Counter Terrorism Department,” it stated.

“Inspector General of Police Dr Usman Anwar have told that this operation is a testament to the unwavering commitment and bravery of our security forces and reaffirms our collective determination to ensure the safety and security of our citizens.

“We remain resolute in our fight against terrorism, and such acts of terror will not deter our pursuit of peace and justice,” the statement concluded.

Separately in an interview with Geo News today, IG Anwar promised to continue and expedite operations against terrorists in the province.

“Our counter-terrorism department and intelligence agencies keep giving us information and we knew that they could attack a border post in Punjab to spread panic,” he said.

Talking about today's attack, the Punjab police chief detailed that the patrolling post was one kilometre inside the KP border and forces had been alerted about the attack. "They were prepared and stood on rooftops with light machine guns as the terrorists attacked with heavy weapons from two different sides."

According to the IG, the response from the forces forced the terrorists to flee but the "CTD, elite forces, DPO and SHO" all immediately reached the location.

He further said that a search operation was under way to clear the area of any further attacks.

Condemnations

Punjab caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, in a statement, commended the provincial police force for foiling the "impure intentions" of terrorists.

"Haroon, the martyred officer, is a national hero," he said, vowing to provide all the possible assistance to the slain cop's family.



Former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the attack in a post on social media platform X. He paid tribute to the martyred officer and extended condolences with his family.

“In the war against terrorism, Punjab Police is playing the role of vanguard, whose officers and men have foiled several terrorist attacks by risking their lives ... salute your bravery and commitment,” he said.



Interim Interior Minister Safaraz Bugti also strongly condemned the attack, asserting that the “cowardly acts” of terrorists could not weaken the morale of the security forces.

“Enemies of the country are trying to sabotage peace and development in Pakistan, the sacrifices of police and law enforcement agencies in the war against terrorism are unforgettable,” he added.



Terror attacks

Today’s attack comes a day after a grisly blast rocked Balochistan, claiming the lives of more than 50 people.

On Friday, a suicide bomber ripped through a procession celebrating the birth of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) on 12 Rabiul Awwal in Mastung, a town about 60km southeast of the provincial capital, killing a police officer, religious leaders, and children among dozens.

No militant group has come forward to claim responsibility for the bombing, prompting claims from the government that the Indian intelligence agency, RAW, was involved.

The same day, at least five people were killed in twin bombing at a mosque inside a police station in KP's Hangu.

Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in recent months, especially in KP, after the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

Earlier this month, data compiled by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) said the number of militant attacks in August was the highest tally for monthly strikes in almost nine years.

There were 99 attacks across the country, the highest number in a single month since November 2014, the report had said.

A day earlier, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Asim Munir had asserted that the law enforcement agencies won't rest until the menace of terrorist was rooted out from the country.

"These terrorists and their facilitators, having no link to religion and ideology, are proxies of the enemies of Pakistan and its people," the army chief had said in a statement.

SOURCE: DAWN, OCTOBER 1, 2023